

## Windsurfing ace gathers aesthetics for trip to L.A.

York's Karen Morch works out at home and with dance class to improve chances of striking Olympic gold

By MARK ZWOLINSKI

There is nothing average about Karen Morch and her love for the sport of windsurfing.

For starters, the 24-year-old Toronto native practices her craft right in the comforts of her living room, and, while she moonlights as a dance student at York University, her future in the sport could carry her toward the Olympics as well as the establishment of a professional women's windsurfing circuit in Canada.

After her first exposure to windsurfing—back in 1980 at the national championships regatta in Quebec where she placed 26th amongst a field of 36 in the "open" competition—Morch "turned on" to the sport, juggling her timetable at York to accommodate global travel to various world class meets, with summertime stints as an instructor at the Cherry Beach Windsurfing School.

Despite her hectic schedule though, Morch, along with 1983 world freestyle champion Derek Wulff, is putting the finishing touches on a book, tentatively titled *Learn to Boardsail*, which will be included in the Canadian Yachting Association's "how to" series on sailing.

"It's basically pioneer stuff," Morch says of her proposed publication. "Windsurfing has enjoyed a surge in popularity recently but there are so many technical aspects to the sport that are really quite hidden to the public eye, so we hope the book will be appropriate, especially with the Olympics just around the corner."

This year, the year of the 23 Olympiad, also marks the first time the Olympic Games will host the sport of windsurfing, both in the medal events and demonstration categories.

While only one athlete (male and female) will represent Canada in the medal rounds, there will be a total of five women, from Canada and the U.S., who will get the opportunity to demonstrate their skills over a series of three events—freestyle, a three-minute routine choreographed to music, slalom, which Morch likens to its Alpine skiing counterpart, and long-distance, a jaunt through a 12-15 nautical mile course.

"I'm really very excited about the whole thing," she says. "The Olympics are a wonderful and prestigious event and the chance to compete in them would be more than just a dream come true. It couldn't have come at a better time for the sport."

Morch's list of credentials was long and impressive enough to prompt *Yacht Racing/Cruising* magazine into naming her the Canadian Sailor of the Year, an award she shares with the Canada "1" sailing team.

Her most recent rung on the climb to the Olympic Games was a third-place finish at the International Yacht Racing Union's women's world sailing championships, staged in December in New Zealand.

As a "carded athlete"—a Sport Canada program designating financial aid to an athlete ranked in the top four in his/her

sport—Morch is placed in some heady company as far as windsurfing goes.

Her team sailing partners Derek Wulff and Raines Koby will be vying for the single spot on the men's national team while Anick Graveline, who bettered Morch with a second in New Zealand, will duel her for the honor of being the first Canadian woman to boardsail in an Olympic competition.

"There's a definite pressure that goes along with all these pre-Olympic competitions," Morch says. "It's not like I've never been to the nationals before but you've got to place well to get financed."

"People want to beat you. You just have to make a little pact with yourself to do the best you can and that's all you can ask of yourself."

Both Wulff and Koby accompanied Morch at the Cherry Beach school, but it was American Rhonda Smith, a four-time world windsurfer pentathlon champion, who sparked her into the teaching end of the sport.

While attending a regatta in Puerto Rico back in 1981, Smith familiarized Morch with the promotional ideas she had to "get women going" in the sport with the establishment of professional women's windsurfing circuits in California and Florida.

Morch, meanwhile, having taught sailing for eight years previously, returned to Canada where she began conducting boardsailing classes at Cherry Beach while setting out guidelines for women's coaching clinics.

"Women don't really make headlines in this sport," Morch commented. "But that's only because there are no harnesses allowed on the type of boards used at all these international regattas. Strength becomes a big factor, especially when the wind gets up around 20 or 30 miles per hour (32 to 48 km/hour) and a harness helps out in some of the more technical moves. Consequently, the guys are beating us in that respect, but we're catching on."

The aesthetics of dancing, learned in a Dance Therapy class at York have filtered over into the teaching methods Morch employs.

"Anyone can make a series of moves look easy on the board," she says. "But to make them into an aesthetic form, what you might call dramatically nice to look at, requires a lot of subtle transitional moves and this element comes from dance training."

"It's almost like a second language. By assimilating the medium of the art with the body movements, it is possible to synchronize the entire series of moves on the board into a form of expression."

While the right breeze at the coming "region America" Olympic trials in Long Beach could carry her to Los Angeles, Morch will be diligently practicing her aesthetics and technique—in her living room.

With the aid of an actual sailor's boom, fastened to the hinges of a double-door doorway in her living room, Morch is able to duplicate most of the maneuvers she uses out on the open water.

"I don't think I invented it," she muses. "To be effective in windsurfing it helps to be as close to the real thing as possible at all times. It's obvious that's not possible in this climate, but with the boom I can build up certain muscular reflexes and gain muscular endurance strength. Hey, you always have to be ready, and this way my muscles will be tuned for the water."

### Surfin' Surfari

Karen Morch can handle herself on the water, and with the aid of tips from a York dance class and her trusty living room boom, she could become the first woman to win an Olympic gold for windsurfing.

