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PENTATHLON PERSONALITIES: TWINNING AND WINNING - MEET THE JURTS



In the latest in our 'Pentathlon Personalities' series, Swiss sisters Katharina and Florina Jurt talk 2028, Obstacle and a remarkable family...

Some twins finish each other's sentences. Florina and Katharina Jurt finish each other's races.

As it happens, the 18-year-olds from Switzerland also do the sentence thing and they do it a lot. That's what happens when you spend 24 hours a day with the person you've pretty much never been separated from — ever. The only time that the Jurt twins would appear to be apart is when they're competing in Relay events.

Take Istanbul last July for example. When it came time for the decisive Laser Run in the Women's Relay on the opening day of the UIPM 2023 U19 Pentathlon World Championships, Florina had to stand and watch as Katharina ran away from her. They reconnected briefly at the changeover and by the time Florina came back to the finishing line, there was her technically older sister waiting with open arms.

By finishing one another's race so brilliantly on that day, the Jurt twins became world champions. Even for a family as remarkably sporting and successful as theirs it was a big, big moment. Victory is always sweet. But it would appear that winning while twinning is sweetest of all.

"It is still kind of hard to realise what we have achieved in this year but we're really happy to achieve what we have, especially in Istanbul," Katharina says. "It was the highlight because we could start together and come together on the finish line and celebrate together."

"It's always better together!" interjects Florina, before her sister jumps back in.

"Especially because we train together, live together and we're 24 hours a day together ... so to win together is so special."



Anna, Marlena, Florina and Katharina Jurt

Over 30 minutes of lively conversation between the Jurts and UIPM News, there was precious little silence. They talked about a hunger to defend their world title, dreams of the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games, their potent prowess in the new Obstacle discipline and what their brief down time looks like. While the twins often jump in to agree or expand or emphasise something the other

is saying, they never talk over one another. That part surely comes when they leave the calm of the bedroom which they share.

Because though they may be world champions, once they step into their home the twins are just two-ninths of a big and raucous Jurt family. Sixteen years separate the oldest of their seven siblings and the youngest, with the twins landing right in the middle of the nine children. Eldest sister Anna is an elite pentathlete ranked inside the world's top 40. Marlena was also on that track until serious injury intervened.

The full family list goes a little like this: Christian (24), Anna (22), Marlena (21), the twins (18), Ueli (13), Giulietta (12), Marisa (11) and Tom (8). You ask Florina and Katharina if there are more Jurt pentathletes in the pipeline after them and both nod vigorously and smile. "There definitely are!"

At least part of the sports influence comes from mother Barbara, a marathon runner. With Anna hunting a place at the Olympics in Paris and the twins having put in the best season of their young careers, you wonder how much Pentathlon talk there was when the family all gathered in Bern over the festive period when Florina and Katharina also celebrated their 18th birthdays. "Actually when we have family time it's more family talk rather than Pentathlon talk," smiles Katharina. "All of us are of course very sports-focused but with family it's more about relax and games time."

"Our birthday gift was to relax in a hotel and there was a jumping room where you could do challenges and so we of course had to be the best," adds Florina.

"At Christmas we had challenges with groups, a team event because we were I think 20 people with boyfriends and grandparents, everybody. We did a lot of games together and it was very cool but very competitive."

It would be natural for some level of competition between the twins too. As well as their Relay excellence they put in brilliant individual performances at the UIPM 2023 Laser Run World Championships in Bath (GBR), where they took home Biathle silver and bronze.

"We don't see each other much as competition, it's more of a push for each other," insists Florina. "It's not 'oh no, she's got one more point than me, I'm sad'. Instead we push each other."

Katharina agrees: "For the World Cup in Fencing, she qualified but I did not because I didn't perform good. But I was so grateful and happy for her because of what she achieved so I think I can handle a situation like that, where she is succeeding and I am not."

Their Laser Run prowess — Katharina also teamed up with Paris-bound Alexandre Dallenbach for a Mixed Relay gold at the Laser Run Worlds last year — is to be expected. Anna is also a formidable talent in the combined discipline. But where the twins already have a head start on their sister, and much of the wider sport, is in Obstacle.



The entire Jurt family enjoy a gathering over Christmas

When they soared to Relay gold in Istanbul (TUR) it was a blistering performance in the newest discipline which helped catapult them into contention.

“It was a big surprise,” insists Florina. “We did many sports disciplines when we were younger apart from Pentathlon and one of those was gymnastics. So we had a connection to that kind of challenge: we knew that the strength and the grip in our hands was good. It’s a lot of upper body but also feeling your body. The rhythm is so important. You really have to feel the movements on the Obstacles and I think that’s a big plus point for us.”

In the euphoria of that winning moment last July both twins spoke of dreams of the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics. But it was only later in October that the IOC, thanks in part to UIPM’s successful integration of Obstacle, confirmed that Modern Pentathlon would indeed be on the programme in Tinseltown.

“Los Angeles was always a goal, 2028, but now with Obstacle in we really know that we can target it,” says Katharina. “It’s also a motivation with Obstacle, it’s a new discipline and we’re good at it.”

But first there is a Jurt chasing Olympic dreams in 2024. “If Anna manages to qualify for Paris, every single one of us in the family will go — for sure,” smiles Florina. And there is also a World Championship for the twins to defend? They nod in perfect unison.

“We’re looking forward to that probably the most,” says Florina, as Katharina smiles. “We’re so proud to be there as world champions but it also puts a little bit of pressure on you. If you know that you achieved that, there are then maybe people who think that we’ll do it again. That puts a kind of pressure but it’s a good pressure.”

Twice the pressure but twice the fun. The Jurts can finish each other’s sentences, races and more. They’re just getting started.

By Joe Callaghan