

## An English project: Sports Star (EN)

We have recently interviewed an extraordinary sportsman who became a professor of Physical Education on our France Prešeren Gymnasium in 2021. This man is Miha Podgornik.

We caught him off guard or should we rather say he wasn't expecting us, but he still gladly told us a lot about his experiences and what he has learned so far. He gave us a good piece of advice and broadened our horizon. He made our day better!

Many of us have heard of him and his adventures before and we were happily to hear even more about his experiences, but those who hadn't known him before discovered an exceptional sportsman in great physical as well as mental shape, with vast mileage despite being of young age. This is one of the people that really inspires you and shows you what everything you are potentially able to do if you're determined to do it and devote enough time, energy, will... to it.

As we know, you have loved for sports since you were young. When did you first notice your passion for sports?

*Having been involved in sports since I was little, it is hard to say when I initially noticed this passion. We are all athletes in our family, and my parents were the ones that pushed me into sports, as they are skiers themselves.*

Were you involved in biathlon from the very beginning or did you like any other sports when you were younger?

*In my varied sporting career, I have also trained in alpine skiing, cross-country skiing, Nordic combined and biathlon.*

You also attended the Gymnasium of France Prešeren. How did you experience your high school years at our school?

*High school represents very sentimental years of my life. The France Prešeren Gymnasium has always listened to athletes, and I actually attended the first sports department in the school. My classmates were all top athletes themselves. For me, school was not difficult, it was easy, you just had to sit down and learn the material. I have only positive feelings about this period of my life.*

Given that you were already a good athlete at the time, do you feel that our school helped you enough in balancing school and sport?

*The school was very flexible. I had a lot of preparations and trainings, and of course missing out was not punished.*

You've been an athlete all your life, you've trained biathlon, and then you even became a coach, do you think that prepared you physically and mentally for such extreme, strenuous expeditions?

*Yes, of course, biathlon is an endurance sport. I have had longer training sessions of hill running, cycling and I have also done all kinds of fitness training. I have been training especially hard and specifically for the marathon and the Spartathlon. Preparations took several months.*

These expeditions and marathons are very demanding, can you tell us how you prepared mentally and physically for them, did you have a specific workout plan, was there a lot of cardio and autogenic training?

*I had very specific trainings at the Faculty of Sport, from aerobic exercises to strength trainings. I have also been preparing mentally, which I think is more important than physical preparation, which of course has to be there.*

You've run some extremely tough marathons (including the 246 km Greek Spartathlon and the 260 km Brazilian Jungle Marathon). How did you prepare for such a difficult challenge? How did you decide to undertake such a venture in the first place?

*Basically, I was inspired by my mother, who completed it 3 years before me. She passed away due to a landslide at that time. This motivated me to take up the challenge myself. I was driven by motivation of the race 250 km long, as I wanted to do the challenge in one go, rather than having to do it over and over again.*

What is the diet before and during the Spartathlon? Does a lot of time go into food preparation? What is the most important nutrient in the diet before and during running, maybe protein, fat, etc. ?

*Nutrition is very important for an athlete. The body becomes exhausted very quickly. During the race I consumed a lot of glycogen and various mixtures of simple complexes. I had to study my body a lot for ultra marathons. I have also ingested a lot of isotonic.*

We would like to know what thoughts were going through your head, how and what were you thinking during the run, as it took quite some time?

*I was most focused on how much I drank, ate, and where the refreshment station was. When my running technique fell I had to be aware and try to switch off my brain and try to run in hibernation. When you come to the realisation of a difficult situation, you simply have to trick your mind a little.*

We wonder if the thoughts of quitting have crossed your mind during the marathon? If so, we would like to know how you dealt with them?

*You always think about this in a crisis. You think that if it goes on like this, it's going to be really hard. I have always told to myself that I would not give up, not until it's over. I have used visual tricks with stations and imagined the pluses of the end.*

How did your family react to you participating in the run from Athens to Sparta or Spartathlon?

*My wife and dad have always been very supportive. That project was a huge success right because of that.*

Have you ever thought about taking part in IronMan which includes cycling and swimming? Do you think this would represent a new challenge for you?

*I completed it in the previous year, but we did it unofficially. It was very interesting. It was a huge task in three sports. I had problems going from one sport to another where I had trouble breathing, but I managed to finish it.*

You and Ivica Kastelić completed two exceptional accomplishments. First in 2016, when you crossed Iceland on skis, and then a year later when you crossed Greenland. You two did it in very difficult and extreme winter conditions. How did you prepare for these two experiences? What did you pack for them and what did you even eat on the course?

*Yes, in fact, that was completely his idea, first crossing Iceland and then Greenland. He was looking for a partner in Croatia, but with no luck. We got to know each other on the internet and met for 30 minutes and later left. We had a good relationship.*

*There was no time to prepare, Iceland was the preparation for Greenland. We had some trouble in Iceland, but it was easier than in Greenland. The food was dehydrated, therefore easier. Fire represented life as you could prepare food only with fire. A hard task was setting up camp and the tent.*

There was no fear, but there was homesickness which we had to disregard by distracting ourselves, doing certain tasks.

We detected that you experienced severe consequences of frostbite while traveling across Greenland. The photo you posted with a frostbitten finger on social media was quite shocking. Were you afraid for your health at any point at that time? How did you outlast this experience?

*It was frightening as we didn't know what to do. We had 2 days left to our objective and tried to speed up to get proper care. I was let off pretty well, some fingers are a little shorter, but it's not even noticeable.*



Do you have any interesting encounters or stories with the locals from these extremely fascinating trips of yours?

*Yes, by the goal of our expedition in Greenland. We were awaited by some Inuits (Eskimos), they gave us a place to sleep, and pretended as if we didn't have to pay for anything. We were deceived, they wanted 300 euro a day. That's why we ended up sleeping in the tent on the last night. I was surprised at how some pretend to be nice and friendly just so they can rip you off.*

How does your family support you in all this? Are they sometimes worried about all these crazy ideas of yours, or do they stand by your side completely?

*They support me, that's for sure.*

*Of course, it is normal that they are worried, but they stand by my side and it is expected that there won't be any problems, especially when you have or are about to have kids. You don't push it too hard, but go when you feel it.*

Finally, do you have any advice for our students, or young people in general, about sports and maintaining a healthy lifestyle? Maybe you have a life motto that accompanies and encourages you in achieving your goals?

*Oh yes, you must do something that keeps you going forward, something you love doing, so you don't need to be forced into it and you work for yourself. It's good to be physically well prepared in case of a disease. On top of that, this is a part of a healthy lifestyle, as an unhealthy lifestyle leads to many diseases and problems. Therefore one must not strive fully towards the west. But this school is directed to sport to a big extent.*



In the photo:

Mark Ažman, Jakob Balkovec, Miha Podgornik, Nace Komovec, Mark Stanković, Zala Zorko  
(absent student Ana Zveršen Sever)

*Project »Sports Star« was completed by the students of class 4.B*

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