

Sildaru has a car sponsor at age 10. The future is now, or something like that.
PHOTO: DAVID MALACRIDA



DAVID MALACRIDA

Kelly Sildaru

Age: 10
Hometown: Tallinn, Estonia
Home ski hill: Nõmme Lumepark
Career highlights: 1st place, 2012 Polish Freeskiing Open; 1st place, 2012 Mayrhofen Freeski Open; landing a switch 900 mute; viral edits

Tween Dream

ESTONIAN 10-YEAR-OLD **KELLY SILDARU** IS ALREADY ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL SKIERS IN THE WORLD

Kelly Sildaru is one of the most famous skiers in the world. Not just because she's all over the Internet, where her video edits have been viewed nearly two million times. Or because she went undefeated in professional slopestyle contests last year at age 9, winning three events in three countries.

The best measurement of Sildaru's fame is the almost mythical distinction she carries among those who have seen her ski, including the same pros she idolizes.

"We were in Tignes, France, during Winter X Europe last spring, and Kelly was going to forerun the course," says Nike Ski Team Manager Jake Largess. "Kelly and I were walking to the snowmobiles to catch a ride up, and all the competitors were waiting for a ride, too. Right when they saw us, they just stopped and looked. You could hear some of the pros whispering: 'No way—that's Kelly.' Some of the biggest names in the sport were saying that."

Sildaru, who lives in Tallinn, Estonia, on the banks of the Gulf of Finland, already wears a customized Red Bull helmet and has been on K2's global team since she was 7. Now 10, she is the only member of the Estonian National Freeskiing Team and receives a travel budget from four companies—Red Bull, K2, Nike, and Spy—that totals \$14,000, more than most adult pros. When she won the Polish Freeskiing Open last winter, she did so in a bib that hung down to her shins. When she registered for the Mayrhofen Freeski Open in Austria, event organizers posted a "breaking news" update on their website a la Paul Revere: Kelly Sildaru is coming! She later won the contest with a switch 900 mute, something only a handful of women are landing on the pro circuit.

"She's the one skier, other than [Sean] Pettit, who seems to blow the athletes' minds when they see the content she puts out," says K2 Marketing Director Mike Powell.

And she has been doing that since she was 6. Back then, before she began throwing switch rodeo 540s off backcountry kickers for the French film company PVS, Sildaru was jumping off stone hut roofs and learning new park tricks on airbags. She'd already learned to spin both ways at age 7, the same year she landed her first 720. She is a model of style on rails, too, as evidenced by her "Best Jib" award at the 2011 Nine Queens big-air contest in Switzerland, where she participated as a special guest since the jump was too big for her to hit.

Most of her skiing heritage can be traced to her father, Tõnis, a diehard skier who sells roofing materials when he's not filming and editing Kelly's footage. Since their home resort is only 250 feet high (Estonia, a former Soviet territory, is best known for its cross-country racers), the Sildarus do much of their skiing elsewhere in Europe, including a resort in Finland that requires a three-hour ferry ride. If she can't ski, Kelly practices tricks on her trampoline until she can land them "with my eyes closed," she says—the required level of mastery before she tries them on snow.

"She will probably dominate women's freeskiing in a few years," says 2009 F.I.S. Halfpipe World Champion Virginie Faivre, who has skied with Sildaru a handful of times.

"She's obviously very talented," adds three-time Winter X Games slopestyle champ Kaya Turski.

Some of the pros' comments under a recent edit—"Wanted"—speak to her promise in the years to come. "You are definitely the best female park skier I've ever seen," wrote Collin Collins. Torin Yater-Wallace called the same edit "the sickest video I have ever seen."

All of which makes it easy to forget she's only four-foot-seven and 66 pounds. She still plays with dolls and likes to paint her nails and wears makeup, her dad says. But she and her brother Henry, who is 5 and an impressive skier in his own right, also practice interviewing each other as if they've just won the Winter X Games. "That is my biggest dream and goal," says Kelly. Looking beyond that, if you were to make a list of the 2018 Olympic slopestyle favorites, Sildaru's name would probably be at the top. At the rate she's going, she'll be a seasoned veteran by then—all of 16 years old. —DEVON O'NEIL

Grom Watch

Daniel Tisi

Age: 14
Hometown: Jackson, Wyoming

Jake Mageau

Age: 14
Hometown: Bend, Oregon

Birk Irving

Age: 13
Hometown: Winter Park, Colorado

