

MICHAEL LANDERS EVER UPWARD

The State Motto of New York is Excelsior, a Latin term meaning “Ever Upward”. This expression of the idea of reaching upward to attain higher goals fits fifteen year old Michael Landers perfectly. A product of the New York City table tennis scene, Michael travels almost daily from his home in Long Island to play at Spin NY in Manhattan.

In early June, the Metropolitan Youth Orchestra of New York performed a concert at Carnegie Hall, one of the most famous musical venues in the world. Joining the hundred or so performers on stage was Michael Landers — first chair bassoonist, and a soloist for the evening. As the concert concluded, most of the participants turned their attention back to practicing their art with thoughts toward the next big concert. Michael, however, had to quickly shift focus to his other endeavor; table tennis. He had just four weeks to prepare for the US Open.

Later that summer, Michael spent a short time as part of the Nassau Suffolk Performing Arts Wind Symphony. But with increasing demands on his schedule (which included music and sports and his education) he realized he had to prioritize and cut back on something. Ultimately, Michael chose to drop out of the Symphony to have more time to focus on his table tennis. “Music is a wonderful thing... I don’t think I’ll ever permanently quit... I’m just taking a break right now.”

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Michael just turned fifteen. His commitment to table tennis includes a commute into Manhattan to train with coach Ernesto Ebuén at SPiN New York. Coach Ebuén works with him ten hours each week. They do multiball drills; work on Michael’s shortgame, his footwork and reactions; develop physical stamina and strength; and, of course, play matches. Training at SPiN offers Michael and his coach a great environment (from the tables to the barriers to the lighting and even to the loud music and constant flow of people). “It’s a great place to play,” he says.

Michael is quite serious about his physical preparation and development. His family has hired a fitness trainer, Goran Milonovich, who specializes in training athletes for Olympic sports. His physical regime is personalized and designed specifically for table tennis — and for building the strength and endurance necessary for him to reach the next level.

Overall, Michael plays five to six times a week for three or four hours each session. He says he is working hard to be more consistent. He is dedicated: he plans to work more on his counterdrives, his footwork, and especially his

physical condition. In matches, he is always thinking offense: “I am definitely offensive minded — I just try to find a way to use my forehand.”

Michael would like to see some younger players on the Men’s National and Olympic teams. His goal is to be ready to compete for the US Olympic team in three years.

Over the Thanksgiving holiday, Michael competed in the North American Teams Championship. He was a part of a three-man , all juniors team (along with Grant Li and Alex Yao). The team finished first in the Second Division.

Earlier in November, Michael won the Nate Wasserman Cadet Championships and was awarded a \$500 scholarship. Michael is one of the most active players in the country — he competed in 16 tournaments in 2009.

When asked about how he stays motivated for matches, he responded that “listening to music helps.” Bach? Hummel? Or some famous bassoon concerto? — Nope. Before matches Michael listens to classic rock and he prefers Aerosmith.

Michael arrived in Las Vegas for the US Nationals on a hot streak. He didn’t begin perfectly — losing to Alexander Yao and Peter Li in the Junior Boys Team Trials (and finishing as runner-up in the event).

In the Men’s event, however, Michael was perfect — defeating Marcus Jackson and 2008 runner-up Shao Yu on the way to the quarterfinals. Due to the default of several players, Michael and 2009 US Team member Samson Dubina were advanced to the finals. Michael defeated Dubina 4-3 and became the youngest player to ever win the title of National Champion.

Michael Landers

Age: 15

Hometown: Long Island, New York

Current/Highest Rating: 2420 / 2420

Under 16 Boys Ranking: No. 2

Under 18 Boys Ranking: No. 7