

Written by John Crumlish
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*IG Online's tradition of holiday-related features continues with this profile on **Kasper Holopainen**, the 2012 Finnish national all-around champion and Northern European all-around bronze medalist, who reflects on his 2012 successes despite knee problems.*

"It feels excellent, because I've had a lot of trouble with my knee," said the 19-year-old Holopainen, who trains under coach **Timo Holopainen** (no relation) at the Voimisteluseura VSH club in Helsinki. "It's been bothering me for the past year but I had a lot of trouble with it this fall. I had knee surgery a few weeks ago, but still, I could compete. I had competitions for five or six weekends in a row."



Kasper Holopainen (Finland)

Holopainen said he his victory at October's Finnish championships, his final meet of 2012, capped a year that tested his knee as well as his determination.

"At Finnish nationals my knee hurt so much during warm-up that I was thinking of doing only three or four apparatuses," he said. "But I made up my mind to do all-around. I did floor and vault a little easier than usual, but everything else was OK."

Holopainen said his relative youth did not intimidate him at the Northern Europeans in Glasgow in October, where he placed third all-around behind gold medalist **Helge Vammen** of Denmark (age 26) and silver medalist

Clinton Purnell
of Wales (age 23).

"I don't put much pressure on myself," he said. "I just do what I can and hope everything will be OK. I'm not very scared of competing. I don't think about the other guys. I just do my own thing."

Holopainen started gymnastics with his brother, who quit the sport at age 13 and began playing ice hockey. Kasper was coached by **Samir Daruish** at the club for seven years, and began training under Timo Holopainen in 2009.

Holopainen's goal is to qualify for the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, and thereby inspire future generations of Finnish gymnasts.

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"We haven't had a lot of success," he said. "It would be nice to show the young gymnasts that we can still do it. That's why I'm trying to get to the 2016 Olympic Games, so that we will get more gymnasts. At the moment the national team is very small, and we have only a few elite gymnasts from whom to choose for competitions."

Although the Finnish team has not factored in major international competitions recently, Holopainen is confident that it is progressing.

"We're on a good track," he said. "We're concentrating more on getting to the Olympics, and we have strong all-around gymnasts, which is important because it's very hard for specialists to make it. We're trying to get three or four good all-around gymnasts for the next world championships (in fall 2013), where we can (start to) qualify for the Olympic Games. I think that, if we have four strong all-around gymnasts, it will be much easier to get there."

Holopainen said he looks forward to a two-week holiday break from gymnastics, during which he will spend time with family and friends in Helsinki.

"Usually we just stay home," he said. "If we have time, we visit our grandparents, who live about 400 kilometers away, My mother has five brothers and five sisters, and usually it's very crowded when everybody goes there. We go there every few years, but usually we just stay home and relax. For the past couple of years, we have gone skiing in the Laplands, with a group of gymnasts. This year we're not going."

Holopainen said he has not made a New Year's resolution since he was a young child, but he has specific gymnastics goals for 2013.

"I'll try to get my knee as good as possible and get the same scores as I did this fall, and even better," he told IG. "The main competition is the European Championships (in April), where I hope to make the all-around final. If my knee is fine, I can train for that, so it will be possible."

Read more on IG's recent visit to Helsinki in the January/February 2013 issue of International Gymnast magazine. To subscribe or order back issues, [click here](#) .