

From Elite Sailing to Chiropractic: Meet HSU Student Nils Theuninck



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Nils Theuninck is a third-year Master of Chiropractic student at Health Sciences University with an impressive background in elite sailing. He has competed internationally as part of the Swiss National Sailing Team and has earned several podium finishes at major events. Most recently, Nils sailed with Alinghi Red Bull Racing in their challenge for the 37th America's Cup. His dedication to both sport and chiropractic has been recognised with a 2025 International Sports Chiropractic Federation (FICS) Student Scholarship.

We spoke to him about his sailing journey, how this influenced his decision to study chiropractic, and his goals for the future.

Could you tell us about your sailing career and share some of the defining moments that have shaped it?

Sailing has been part of my life for over 20 years. I started when I was six years old in Switzerland at my local club. I wasn't particularly good at first, but I enjoyed it, so I kept pushing. My first big victory came when I became Junior World Champion in 2011 at 14 years old. This was a big moment for me, as it meant I could start contacting sponsors and funding my sailing ambitions.

From the moment I started sailing, I wanted to go to the Olympics. During my Olympic campaign, I spent around 250 days a year away from home, training and competing around the world. I came very close to qualifying, but unfortunately, I didn't make it. This will probably remain one of my biggest regrets, but it also opened the door to amazing opportunities in professional sailing. I have competed at the European Championships and the Youth America's Cup, placing on podiums on a European and World level.

Most recently, I was part of Alinghi Red Bull Racing for three years, as we challenged for the 37th America's Cup in Barcelona. Being part of an America's Cup team is a big deal in sailing. So, although I didn't reach my first dream of the Olympics, joining an America's Cup team became a second dream come true.

What made you pursue studying chiropractic? And what drew you to studying at HSU specifically?

I always knew I wanted to work in the medical field. My parents are osteopaths, so I grew up around manual therapy and healthcare. I met a friend through sailing who studied here at the AECC School of Chiropractic at HSU, and that conversation opened my eyes to chiropractic. I realised it was something I really wanted to pursue, so I applied, and I have had no regrets.

The university has been very supportive of my sailing career, even allowing me to take a two-year break to compete in the America's Cup.

Athletes often have a unique perspective on health and performance. How has your experience as a high-level sailor influenced your interest in chiropractic care?

Athletes place a huge emphasis on their bodies. As I mentioned, my parents are osteopaths, and throughout my career I've been treated by physios, osteopaths, and chiropractors. In elite sport, injuries are the biggest challenge. If you can avoid injury, you have a much higher chance of performing well. Manual therapy plays a key role in injury prevention, which is something I believe is extremely important.

Do you see parallels between the physical demands of sailing and the principles you're learning in chiropractic?

Absolutely. In chiropractic, it's important to connect with your body and understand what you're feeling through your hands. Sailing has similar demands as it's a sensation-based sport, and you need to become very in tune with what you feel. That sensitivity is probably the biggest transferable skill that has helped me in chiropractic.

Do you see yourself combining your sailing experience with chiropractic in the future, for example, working with athletes or performance teams?

Sport is a big passion of mine, and I'm currently involved with HSU Sport Chiropractic Club, where we aim to bring sport and chiropractic together.

My dream is to take part in the Olympic Games as a chiropractor, either representing the International Federation of Sports Chiropractic (FICS) or the Swiss Olympic team. I want to help athletes achieve their own Olympic dreams.

What would you say to other athletes considering transitioning into a healthcare profession?

If you're passionate about it, go for it. I think healthcare and elite sport complement each other really well. I actually wish I had started my studies earlier, because it would have helped me understand my body even better as an athlete. I would definitely recommend chiropractic as a pathway.



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