

1907: the first (very international) year of Sixes in France

I. Before the International Rule¹

The adoption of the British “Thames Measurement” by the Yacht Club of France in 1870 may mark the beginning of international rating rules.² In 1893, the Germano-Scandinavian Union was formed and it developed its “Union Rule”.^{3, 4} Starting in 1902⁵, under the leadership of the New York Y.C., U.S. yacht clubs agreed to a “Universal Rule” in 1905⁶ which was based on a formula developed by Nathanael Herreshoff.⁷

The first rating rules were first expressed as the weighted sum of various speed factors such as length and sail area. Later rules included resistance factors, such as draught or freeboard. These resistance factors could either be subtracted from the speed factors or used as divisors of the speed factors. Some rules thus took the form of fractions - some “trivial”, where the divisor was merely a constant, and others “non-trivial”, where the divisor was a resistance factor.

The Union Rule was a trivial fraction (the divisor being “150”)⁸ and the Universal Rule non-trivial (the divisor being $5^3\sqrt{\text{draught}}$).⁹

It was the illustrious architect, Dixon Kemp, who began the tradition of expressing British rules as trivial fractions with a divisor of “2”,¹⁰ thus starting the tradition of the age old question:

¹ For access to source documents related to the London Conferences, the author expresses his thanks Mr Patrice Lenoir and Mr Stefan O'Reilly-Hyland of the Yacht Club de France and to Mr Rees Martin of the British International Six Metre Association. For access to Le Yacht and other French publications, the author extends his thanks to Mr Jean-Philippe Lamy, Conservateur des Bibliothèques, and his very helpful staff at the Musée National de la Marine. For guidance in navigating within the rich resources of the German FKY Web site, the author thanks Mr Ingo List, Managing Director of Antares Project GmbH, in Kiel.

Numerous photos and scans of documents are available as complements to this text. The following footnotes provide links to the underlying historical source documents. They can be removed for publication. If an extract of the article is published and/or if the article is published without footnotes, please add something at the end to the effect: “A more extensive version of this article, with footnotes, is available from the author.” The references in square brackets [] are to documents in my archives within the **6 metre Central Catalogue**.

² Pierre Gutelle, “La renaissance de la Jauge Internationale », Chasse Marée, n° 19, septembre 1985, p. 37 [6mCC D0050]

³ Louis Dyèvre, « Rapport sur les travaux de la Conférence Internationale de Londres du 15 - 18 janvier 1906, présenté au conseil du Yacht Club de France », Yacht Club de France, 30 janvier 1906, p. 5 [6mCC D0184]

⁴ C. Busley, “50 Jahre deutsche Meßverfahren” (1927) accessible at <<http://www.yachtsportarchiv.de/adw/busley.htm>> [6mCC D0259]

⁵ Pierre Gutelle, *op cit*, p. 39

⁶ Letter of 11 January 1906 from W.B. Duncan, Jr, chairman of the New York Yacht Club and G.A. Cormack, Secretary of the New York Y.C., to Brooke Heckstall-Smith, Secretary of the Yacht Racing Association, declining the latter's invitation to attend the London Conference [6mCC D0256]

⁷ Pierre Gutelle, *op cit*, p. 39

⁸ Deutscher Segler-Verband, Jahrbuch 1897, p. 121, accessible at <http://www.fky.org/prestodata/documents.php4?document=DSV-1897_JAHRBUCH&atit> [6mCC D0308]

⁹ Pierre Gutelle, *op cit*, p. 39

“Since your boat is a Six metre, why is it 12 metres long?”

II. The 1906 London conferences

In 1905, the Yacht Racing Association invited over eleven countries to send delegates to an international conference to be held in London in 1906.^{11,12} The most notable absence was that of the U.S.¹³ The New York Yacht Club didn't wish to compromise its newly established Universal Rule.

Since the thread of this article concerns Sixes in France, we will only comment on the role of the French delegates to the First Conference and the reactions to it in France.

The chief delegate to the first meeting was Louis Dyèvre, a graduate of the prestigious Ecole Polytechnique and a former artillery officer (thus doubly good at maths). The second delegate, Franck Blanchy, was an expert and dedicated racer, the practical counterpart to Dyèvre the theoretician.¹⁴

To his dismay, Dyèvre discovered that the final decisions of the conference had been pretty much decided ahead of time and that the International Rule would resemble the Union Rule, saying later:

“The hypocrisy of our excellent neighbours [the British] was that they knew ahead of time that they agreed with the Germano-Scandinavian group, which permitted them to play the role of liberals, disposing of no more than a mere two votes like all the other Powers”.¹⁵

“Nevertheless, we saved our honour, capitulating only after having mounted a vigorous resistance.”¹⁶

The “trivial” fraction form of the proposed rule offended Dyèvre's sense of well formulated mathematical equations. He wanted a “non-trivial” fraction with the cross-section of the hull as the divisor.¹⁷ Twice during the conference, he went to the blackboard and made a passionate appeal for the French position, but ... in French!¹⁸ The majority of the delegates didn't understand a word he said. Later, the editor of the German yachting magazine,

¹⁰ Pierre Gutelle, *op. cit.* p. 37

¹¹ Letter from Brooke Heckstall Smith, secretary of the Yacht Racing Association dated 22 April 1905 sent to: 1.) Deutscher Segler Verband (Berlin), 2.) Yacht Club de France (Paris), 3.) Dansk Yacht Club (Copenhagen), 4.) Kungl Svenska Segel Sällskapet (Stockholm), 5.) Norsk Forening for Lystesejlade (Christiania), 6.) K.U.K. Yacht Geschwader (Pola) and 7.) Regio Yacht Club Italiano (Gênes). In his reply of 5 May 1905, E. Gras of the Yacht Club de France suggested that Russian, Belgian, Dutch, Spanish and Portugese delegates should also be invited. [6mCC D0183] Eventually, someone must have remembered the Swiss. The 11 countries attending were: Belgium, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Norway, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. (L. Dyèvre *supra*)

¹² NYYC letter, *supra*, explains the reasons for declining the invitation [6mCC D0256]. (This is of memory. I can't find the reference.)

¹³ In fact, Mr George A. Cormack, Secretary of the New York Y.C., attended the conference as a non-voting observer. (See the Excel table “Countries Participation in the IR conference” communicated to the author by Rees Martin on 20 February 2005 [6mCC D0307])

¹⁴ Le Yacht, n° 1454, 20 January 1906, p. 44 [6mCC D0257]

¹⁵ Louis Dyèvre quoted in Le Yacht, n° 1456, 3 March 1906, p. 65

¹⁶ Dyèvre, *supra*, p. 5

¹⁷ Dyèvre, *supra*, p. 8 ff.

¹⁸ Dyèvre, *supra*, p. 14

Wassersport, commented wryly that the French decision to send the monolingual Dyèvre was equivalent to sending someone who was “deaf and dumb”.¹⁹

Later, longingly, a French delegate to the second London Conference, bemoaned the absence of the Americans, saying:

“It is to be regretted that the yacht clubs on the other side of the Atlantic declined the invitation to participate in the London Conference, for if they had, Herreshoff would have upheld our comrade Dyèvre with all his authority and perhaps a rule reflecting the latest knowledge would have won out over the Anglo-Germano-Scandinavian compromise.”²⁰

Whether of Baltic or British origin, the fix was in. The resistance parameters were to be subtracted and not divided. The second French delegate, Franck Blanchy, sensing a willingness on the part of the other delegates to help Dyèvre save face, asked if it might be still be possible to have an innocuous constant divisor like “2”.²¹ The suggestion was adopted and, ever since, owners of Sixes have had to explain to puzzled strangers that 6 metres doesn’t really mean what it says.

In the end, the French delegates, despite their defeats, decided not

“... like Achilles, to retire to our tent”,²²

but joined the other delegates in a unanimous vote in favour of the new International Rule. In reporting to his French colleagues, Dyèvre wryly remarked:

“One cannot, however, deny that the International Rule has one great advantage that of being international. I vaguely fear that it may have no other.”²³

III. Why Sixes - and not Fives or Sevens?

If the French lost the battle of the First Conference, their honour was restored in the months that followed.

The Conference had explicitly approved 5, 6 and 7, metre classes, with only a statement of general support for focusing on Sixes in the beginning.

Within weeks after the close of the First Conference, there was a widespread uproar throughout French yachting circles against the new International Rule. Louis Doubs, a founder member of the Yacht Club of France, exhorted,

“Yachtsmen, my Brothers, believe me! Let’s keep a good French rule”²⁴

As early as March 1906, Dyèvre remarked,

“Everywhere in France, an outcry is raising against the new rule. Protestations are arriving from all the ports: Bordeaux, Paris, Le Havre, and Vannes. No one wants it.”²⁵

Luckily, calmer heads prevailed. The French delegates had voted for the rule and they couldn’t be disowned.

¹⁹ Le Yacht, n° 1472, 26 May 1906, p. 337 [6mCC D0257]

²⁰ Le Yacht, n° 1473, 2 June 1906, p. 353 [6mCC D0257]

²¹ Le Yacht, n° 1454, 20 January 1906, p. 58 [6mCC D0257]

²² Louis Dyèvre, *supra*, p. 10

²³ Louis Dyèvre, *supra*, p. 21

²⁴ Le Yacht, n° 1458, 17 February 1906, [6mCC D00257]

²⁵ Le Yacht, n° 1460, 3 March 1906, p. 132 [6mCC D00257]

For several years prior to 1907, the French, or more specifically the Cercle de Voile de Paris (CVP), had been inviting different countries to send boats to Paris to race on the widest section of the Seine close to Paris at Meulan to compete for their Coupe Internationale. During the summer of 1906, the Norddeutscher Regatta Verein (NRV) of Hamburg was one of the yacht clubs to have entered a boat, but the French boat had won and the cup had stayed in France.²⁶

In late 1906, the NRV contacted the CVP to indicate their interest in competing again in 1907, enquiring as to which class of boat would be used and suggesting that perhaps Sixes might be a good choice.²⁷²⁸

At a CVP board meeting, one of the members, Mr Potheau, declared,

“It seems that it would be a task worthy of the CVP to take the initiative of promoting new yachts and of organising the first international regatta under the reign of the new rule.”

Not only were Sixes chosen for the 1907 regatta, but the CVP voted overwhelmingly to permanently link its Coupe Internationale to Sixes.

This may have been the definitive event which established Sixes as the pre-eminent class among the smaller metric yachts.

IV. The 1907 Coupe Internationale

By March 1907, four French boats were already under construction: *Yvonne*, *Pouf*, *Marotte* and *Atout*.²⁹ Their owners were Parisians and they were designed to race on a wide section of the Seine near Meulan, about 40 km downstream from Paris, where the CVP had its clubhouse. The course layout, which was never more than 250 m. wide, ran northwest from a buoy at Triel-sur-Seine to another at Vaux-sur-Seine, 5 nm. downstream. There was also a halfway buoy, with a typical race being once around the full course and twice around the half course.³⁰

The first boats were very different from today's Sixes. The French magazine **Le Yacht** organised a competition for plans of Sixes in 1907. The winning plans, for a boat to be named *Aiolti*, were typical of the first Sixes: gaff-rigged, equipped with spinnakers, short bowsprit, long keel, loa. 8,15 m., lwl. 5,5 m., beam 1,8 m., draught 90 cm., ballast 850 kg. and hull 830 kg.³¹

Probably because of their course on the Seine, the French had obtained from the London Conference that Sixes could have centreboards.³² One of the entries for the competition organised by **Le Yacht** was for a centreboard Six to be named *Mahdrah*.³³

²⁶ *Le Yacht*, 1 June 1907, p. 343 [6mCC D00068]

²⁷ *Le Yacht*, n° 1500, 1 December 1906, p. 778 [6mCC D00257]

²⁸ *Idem*

²⁹ *Le Yacht*, 16 March 1907, p. 44 [6mCC D0060]

³⁰ *Le Yacht*, 8 June 1907, p. 360 [6mCC D0075]

³¹ *Le Yacht*, 27 April 1907, p. 262-263 [6mCC D0091]

³² Louis Dyèvre, *supra*, p. 14 [6mCC D0184]

³³ The results of the competition were announced in *Le Yacht*, 20 April 1907, p. 244 [6mCC D0090]. *Mahdrah*'s plans were published in *Le Yacht*, 29 June 1907, p. 404-405 [6mCC D0073] and its scantlings in *Le Yacht*, 13 July 1907, p. 445-446 [6mCC D0076]

The delegates to the first London conference had been unanimous in the wish that the future boats built to the Rule should be solid, seaworthy and built to last.³⁴ A Permanent International Committee created by the London conference accredited the British and German Lloyds, the French Bureau Veritas and possibly the Norsk Veritas to issue scantlings.³⁵ The Bureau Veritas issued its scantlings for Sixes in December 1906.³⁶

Pouf, with a partly movable ballast in its bilges, was the first to race (31 March), but against non Sixes.³⁷

The first race in France between Sixes occurred on Sunday 28 April with the four boats finishing in the order in which they are listed above.³⁸

On Ascension Thursday, a week and a half later, the start was downwind, running against a strong current. The boats hugged the river bank to avoid the current, to the point that both *Yvonne* and *Poufran* temporarily aground.³⁹ On windward legs, when tacking across the current, it was not unusual for the boats to drop anchor when the wind dropped.⁴⁰

This race was the first of five to select the French entry for the Coupe Internationale.⁴¹ The results were close, with barely five minutes separating the four boats after 2-1/2 hours. *Yvonne*, designed by Méran, built by Conninck at Maisons-Lafitte and commissioned by an eight-man syndicate led by the Duke Decazes, was selected.⁴²

Four foreign challengers were present for the first race for the Coupe Internationale on June 1st.⁴³

- *Onkel Adolph*, entered by the NRV, commissioned by a syndicate, designed and built by W. von Hacht and crewed by Fredrich Kirsten, H. von Eiken and W. Tietjens.
- *Hinemoa*, entered by the Cowes-based Island Sailing Club, commissioned by Cooper Robinson, designed by Linton Hope, built by Hart and crewed by (the same) Robinson, Williams and Spooner.
- *Princess Marie-José*, entered by the Ostende Yacht Club, commissioned by Maurice de Bal, designed by J. de Catus, built by P. Roeiss & Son in Antwerp and crewed by M. Valcke, Cornellie and L. Depière.

³⁴ Louis Dyèvre, *supra*, p. 5

³⁵ *Le Yacht*, 24 August 1907, p. 535 [6mCC D0085]

³⁶ *Le Yacht*, n° 1503, 29 December 1906 [6mCC D0257]

³⁷ Its opponent was named *Clairette*. To date, *Clairette*'s origins have not been researched. *Le Yacht*, 6 April 1907, p. 211 [6mCC D0062]

³⁸ This is the first race documented in the 6mCC/BTCe archive, but the article in *Le Yacht* refers indirectly to previous races, saying, "This race again confirms the superiority of *Yvonne* in a fresh breeze." *Le Yacht*, 28 April 1907, p. 295 [6mCC D0062]

³⁹ *Le Yacht*, 18 May 1907, p. 306-307 [6mCC D0095] For the dates of religious holidays, see <http://www.smart.net/mmontes-cgi-bin/cal-form.cgi>

⁴⁰ *Le Yacht*, 25 May 1907, p. 322 [6mCC D0097]

⁴¹ *Le Yacht*, 18 May 1907, p. 314 [6mCC D0067]

⁴² *Le Yacht*, 16 March 1907, p. 168 [6mCC D0060]

⁴³ *Le Yacht*, 1 June 1907, p. 343-345 [6mCC D0068]

- *Sogalinda III*, entered by the Sporting Club de Bilbao, commissioned by its president, Tomas de Zubirias, designed by Araujo, built by Guédon at Bordeaux and crewed by Monasterio, de Arena and Carreaga.⁴⁴

As an innovation, the numbers 1 – 5 were sewn on the sails of the five contenders, in the order in which they are listed above, with *Yvonne* numbered “5”.⁴⁵

Onkel Adolph, having won three of the first four races (1 – 5 June), automatically won the Coupe Internationale. The French and British boats generally finished among the top three boats, with the Belgian and Spanish boats following.⁴⁶

After the first race, the British lodged a protest against *Onkel Adolph* because of errors in its rating certificate, but it was disallowed since its overall rating respected the 6 metre limit.⁴⁷ They renewed their attacks a month later, in the British yachting press, criticising *Onkel Adolph* for having a metal rudder and a highly tapered sternpost which gave it an unfair advantage over the other contenders. The editors of **Le Yacht** and **Wassersport** dismissed these attacks as sour grapes.⁴⁸

V. The Coupe du Cinquantenaire and the remainder of the season

In March 1907, the CVP created its “Grand Prize of the 50th anniversary of the CVP” and endowed it with 2.300 Frs of prize money to be shared between Sixes and the local Monotypes de Chatou (6.000 € today!).⁴⁹ Shortly thereafter, two German clubs, the NRV and the Kaiserliche Yacht Club, proposed to provide a tall, beautifully engraved, sterling silver cup to be associated with the prize for Sixes and it arrived in Paris in early June.^{50 51}

The race was essentially a continuation of the Coupe Internationale regatta, but this time with the three other French Sixes participating. *Onkel Adolph* again won hands down, graciously declining the new silver cup with the wish that the CVP use it for another race of similar importance.⁵² It did, however, accept its cash prize equivalent to 1.500 €.

The remainder of the 1907 season followed its usual (non-international) course, with races down the Seine to Le Havre, followed by regattas there and also at Deauville, Trouville and Ouistreham. In September, the sailing week of Arcachon, near Bordeaux, saw the appearance of two new Sixes, *Myrto* and *Madame Poulet*, marking the beginning of what was to become one of the most active centres for the design and construction of new Sixes in France.⁵³

⁴⁴ *Le Yacht*, n° 1494, 27 October 1906, p. 168 [6mCC D0257] Built in the summer of 1906, I don’t know if it is the first Six built to the International Rule or if it was designed independently of the Rule and coincidentally measured as a Six for the Coupe Internationale.

⁴⁵ *Le Yacht*, 1 June 1907, p. 344 [6mCC D0068]

⁴⁶ *Le Yacht*, 8 June 1907, p. 359-361 [6mCC D0075]

⁴⁷ *Idem*, p. 362 [6mCC D0078]

⁴⁸ *Le Yacht*, 20 July 1907, p. 460-461 [6mCC D0092]

⁴⁹ *Le Yacht*, 16 March 1907, p. 168 [6mCC D0060]

⁵⁰ *Le Yacht*, 1 June 1907, p. 345 [6mCC D0068]

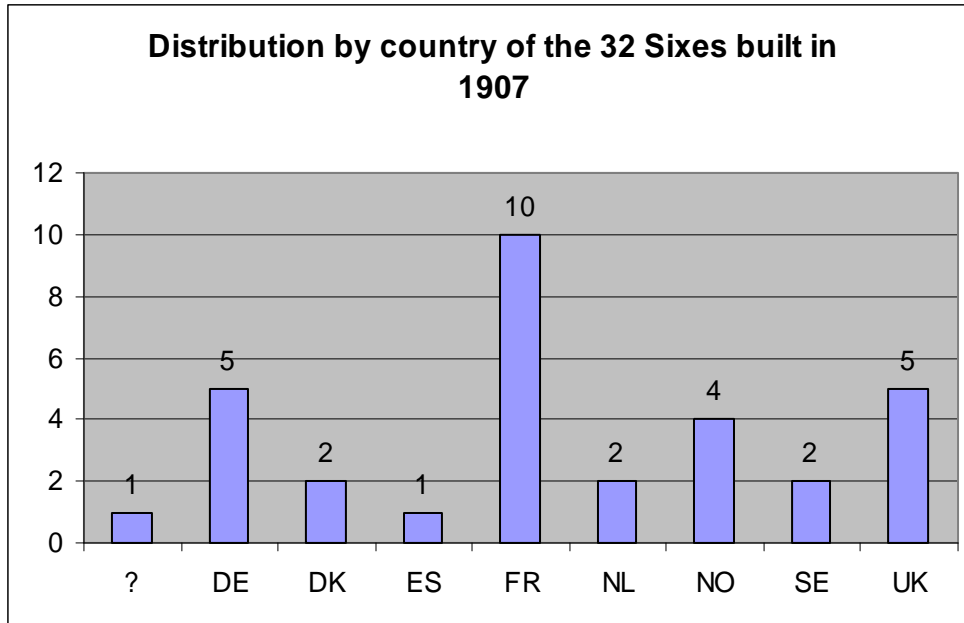
⁵¹ *Le Yacht*, 8 June 1907, p. 362 [6mCC D0078]

⁵² *Le Yacht*, 15 June 1907, p. 375-377 [6mCC D0099]

⁵³ *Le Yacht*, 14 September 1907, p. 581-583 [6mCC D0099]

VI. Other Sixes of 1907

The principal census of Sixes indicates that, in all, 32 were built in 1907.⁵⁴ France was by far the lead builder (see table below). Marking the complete victory of Sixes in France, each of the French delegates to the second London conference of 1906 (12-13 June), Messrs J. Le Bret and J. Valton, commissioned his own Six in 1907.⁵⁵



Basil Carmody

1 April 2005

⁵⁴ McMeekin/Street census (unpublished)

⁵⁵ Valton's boat, *Punch*, appears as a Six in the various censuses, but *Le Yacht*, 15 June 1907, p. 376 [6mCC D0099] comments "All admired greatly the elegant hull of Mr Valton's yacht, *Punch*, of the British series of the 30 footers which has experienced a great deal of success over the past few years." In the results of the 9 June 1907 races, which included the Coupe du Cinquantenaire, *Punch* is listed in a separate category from the Sixes, viz. that of boats "Over 1 Ton".