

Within the International Federations

International Yacht Racing Union

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Almost everyone knows something about sailing, for the waters cover three-quarters of the earth and since time immemorial man has ventured on the water. It is a challenge and an abiding interest for millions of yachtsmen and indeed millions of others who do not sail. Although the IYRU looks after the sport of yachting as a whole, whether cruising, fun sailing, day boat racing or racing offshore, it has to be realised that competitive sailing draws the publicity and needs the administration and this occupies a great deal of time.

Each International Federation is different and although so many people know about sailing, they may not know in any detail what the task of the IYRU is. It is hoped that you will find this article as interesting as I find the "Union", for it very truly is a Union of sailors from 74 member-national authorities who come together annually to do their best to further the sport of yachting.

Yachting has often been called a rich man's sport and undoubtedly this was true some years ago when the yachts were large and were crewed by "paid hands" (those we now call "professionals") but it is no longer true. The masses wanted to try out the sport and in harbours, ports, creeks and estuaries, boats were soon being built and raced. Each port or creek had its own "one-design" which would race on level terms, or as we say "boat for boat" in a given local area. When they sailed away from home waters, there had to be either a rule for handicapping or a rule

for similar construction, or both and indeed it was for this very purpose that the IYRU came into existence in 1907.

Yachting was always a sport for participants, not for spectators. The boats raced most of the time out of sight for spectators and under handicap rules that were so complicated, it was said only the yachts themselves understood them. An international conference of yachting authorities was held in 1906 which led to the "1908 Rule" to measure the effective sailing length of a yacht instead of her length touching the water whilst at anchor. This led to class racing, or racing boat against boat without handicap.

It was during the Second World War that some ardent sailors unable to participate in

their sport gave it much thought and planned to bring in a new evolution by bringing the price of boats within the possibilities of everybody.

The IYRU had only stopped working during the World War and it was soon reformed with the major task of trying to formulate a set of racing rules which would be used throughout the world. It might seem that this would be a rather simple task, but the amount of international competition was limited to countries which were close together. Thus, the major international competition was in European waters and the Europeans and the Americans did not often race together. There were, therefore, real problems in bringing the differing sets of rules together but it was achieved in 1958 by the IYRU and there has been one uniform rule since that time. Although the rules are annually under revision they are in fact changed only in every fourth year, after the Olympic Games.

The IYRU gave "international status" to certain types of yachts. Whereas pole vaulters use the same length of pole, footballers use the same size of football and many sports have standardised equipment, this is not so in yachting. In fact it is a little like rowing where you can have a boat for one, two, four or eight persons. The IYRU granted its International status to "classes" which it wished to see used for international racing. The International 12 metre used for the America's Cup is one of the "classes" of yacht which were produced and still are produced under the rules of the IYRU. Indeed it is not so very long ago, in 1968 to be precise, that the International 5.5 metre class was used in the Olympic Games. Nowadays, however, the IYRU grants international status either to classes which have already proved their popularity and are actively sailing in many countries in large numbers, or, if it believes there is a real requirement for a new type of boat, it grants international status to a boat which it thinks will become popular. Indeed the International Tornado Catamaran, encouraged by the IYRU, was granted international status and it is now an Olympic Class. The IYRU has now given international status to 33 different classes and it is responsible for the building plans and construction rules from which these boats are built.

It is interesting to see how the evolution is demonstrated in the Olympic classes where, at the start of the century, only the rich could

participate in their big yachts. Slowly, slowly the yachts have changed to the less expensive, smaller classes. The emphasis is now on the younger people who have to be more acrobatic and fit in every sense of the word. Yachtsmen are very proud that sailing is a sport which lasts all one's life. You can start sailing at around the age of eight or even younger, and it is not uncommon to find men in their late 60s or early 70s still winning important events. However, so far as the Olympic Games are concerned, ages have been going down steadily since Noverraz, in his sixties, won the silver medal in the International 5.5 metre class in 1968, the guile and skill of the experienced being more and more matched and overcome by the athletic techniques of the young. This is why in the modern Games, the winners in the sailing events are all extremely fit and have had to prepare themselves athletically for a long time before the Games.

As yachts have changed, so has the IYRU. Although, its racing rules cater to all yacht racing throughout the world, irrespective of the sizes of the yachts, it sees the future of the young as being very important. For eight years it has run world championships for youth sailing which are held in inexpensive- single handers and double handers. In 1978, the first IYRU women's sailing world championships were held with 21 nations sending teams and this is to be an annual event, again being held in inexpensive singlehanded and doublehanded classes.

The IYRU has to keep itself young so that it can react quickly and actively to the situations which occur. About seven years ago a sailing board was designed which quickly became popular in the USA and then spread like a bush fire. So it was in 1977 that the IYRU appointed a board sailing committee to look after "windsurfing" to take charge of the administration of the sport, to help-with the formation of rules of construction and competition and to give its advice and experience to the new classes.

In brief, the IYRU works by the goodwill of its member national authorities for the furtherance of the sport. Each authority is entitled to appoint a representative to the General Assembly of the IYRU which meets every fourth year to advise and to set the course for the following four years. The managing body is the Permanent Committee which is formed by 13 groups of nations,

each group sending one, two or three delegates to the Committee meetings depending upon the size of yachting in its group. The Permanent Committee in its turn is advised by 11 committees each specialising in specific areas of the Union's work. These are the Constitution Committee, the Class Policy and Organisation Committee, the Racing Rules Committee, the Measurement Committee, the Keel Boat Technical Committee, the Centreboard Boat Technical Committee, the Multihull Technical Committee, the Youth Sailing Committee, the Women's Sailing Committee, the International Regulations Committee and the Board Sailing Committee.

The Union is served by a professional secretariat of 5 full-time employees working from its office in London. The task of the Secretariat is not only to serve the committees but also to ensure that there is good communication between the office and the member national authorities to keep the communications running smoothly with the international class associations. Such contact extends to the representatives of the owners of the international classes as well, so as to liaise closely with the hundreds of builders spread throughout the world who are licensed to build one or more of the international classes.

We have experienced nearly 300 years of sailing for pleasure and if one looks at the evolution, one can see that it started with a very few big yachts being sailed by a very few people. Now big boats are in the minority when compared with the small inexpensive boats sailed all over the world. Professionals have virtually disappeared from the crews. Finally, the majority of serious yacht races are conducted on a boat against boat basis not boat against handicap.

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