

The America's Cup

As a young man, John Stevens loved to build, sail and race boats across the harbour of New York. He was not alone in his passion for sailing, and when he had the idea to start a club John had no difficulty in persuading eight of his friends to help him set it up. They would call it the New York Yacht Club and John would be its first commodore. It is 1844.

At that time, everyone acknowledged that Britain had the best sailors and the finest and fastest yachts. John Stevens thought differently. He would build a new yacht, sail it across the Atlantic and beat the British. When he arrived in England in 1851, he challenged any yacht chosen by Britain's most famous club, the Royal Yacht Squadron, to a race over 20 to 70 miles. The Royal Yacht Squadron agreed to a challenge cup.

On August 22nd 1851, with Queen Victoria watching, and to the great surprise of the whole world, John Stevens's yacht was the winner. This yacht of Stevens and the New York Yacht Club that makes history is called America. Before long, the challenge they established is known as the America's Cup and it is the oldest trophy in international sport.

Not surprisingly, Britain tried to win back the America's Cup. It wasn't just a race or a trophy, but a matter of national pride and honour. In 1899, Sir Thomas Lipton, the grocer who was not a part of the sailing establishment, would take up the America's Cup challenge. To honour his parents and his Irish heritage and to demonstrate that his challenge would be different, he chose to do so through the Royal Ulster Yacht Club, calling his yacht Shamrock.

