

Sailing Team Finland's young challengers to race

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Merenneito II (Image by Studio

Kukka).] Åbo Båtvarf's 91-year-old Classic Six Metre yacht, *Merenneito II*, will be sailed by the young challengers of Sailing Team Finland during the season 2019. This opportunity also gives the youth team a slot in the Six Metre World Cup fleet in Hanko in August. Åbo Båtvarf built over 5000 wooden boats during the boatyard's active years 1889-1954. Recent years have seen the historically unique boatyard area going through a remarkable comeback thanks to the efforts by Alfons Håkans Group. At the same time **MD Joakim Håkans** has collected a number of classic yachts built by Åbo Båtvarf, **Zaké Westin** designed *Merenneito II* from 1928 being one of them. Now the grand old lady will be raced by the skilful young talents as a result of the co-operation between Åbo Båtvarf & Sailing Team Finland. The youth national team sailing coaches, **Vili Kaijansinkko** and **Thomas Hacklin**, will be co-ordinating the team's calendars to allow *Merenneito II* to attend a full national ranking program as well as to present Finland and the boat's home club, Airisto Segelsällskap, at the Six Metre World Cup. Åbo Båtvarf marketing manager and the man behind the idea, **Eero Lehtinen**, is smiling: "The classic classes are under serious threat from not only the Baltic Sea pollution issues but a rapidly ageing sailor squad. The Sixes urgently need some young power to the race courses and here we are getting a whole team of it. The unique collection of classic yachts at the historical Åbo Båtvarf venue in Ruissalo is a valuable source of opportunities that we are now making available to these young sailors. It is a rare combination of history, traditions, experience plus young skills and eagerness that we are putting together in this project. Vili and "Hacke" have responded greatly to our offer, the Åbo Båtvarf shore team will be taking care of the technical support and service." Coach Kaijansinkko is not trying to hide his enthusiasm: "*Merenneito II* is a beautiful boat and the initiative by Åbo Båtvarf is a once in a lifetime opportunity not to be missed. The Young Challengers' Team together with a few recent youth national team dropouts are facing an amazing challenge together. While they are mainly used to compete on their own, now they will be forming a team of five on board and even rotating some of the positions as the sailing programs will be overlapping to some extent. Our sailors have always had a fantastic team spirit among themselves and now we will be able to further strengthen it while also using it as one of our assets against the more experienced keel boat crews. This project will also offer the hard-working young sailors some warmly welcome change and balance in their routines." Read more about Merenneito II: <https://ruissalontelakka.fi/en/sail/our-classic-boats-and-yachts/merenneito-ii/> Race schedule world cup: <https://www.6mrworlds2019.com/regatta/program>