



RULE REVIEW

As serialised in Scuttlebutt in 2025, by Paul Hutton-Ashkenny.

Disclaimer: *This discussion of the RRS is not meant to be all encompassing and is no substitute for reading the racing rules. The interpretations are mine and mine alone. I'm fallible. Sometimes, I make mistakes. Sometimes, I'm just wrong. If you think that I've erred, please politely say something so that it can be put right. You can reach out on the All Sailors' Chat in the WhatsApp Community.*

01

So here's a factoid about the Racing Rules of Sailing (RRS). They are 'owned' and copyrighted by World Sailing, the body recognised as being responsible for the sport of sailing worldwide. World Sailing provides a licence to use the RRS to their member organisations, which in Cyprus is the Cyprus Sailing Federation (CySaF). That licence filters down to local clubs, like PISC. So, were we not affiliated to CySaF, we wouldn't be able to use the RRS.

One of the unsung sections of the RRS lies in the Basic Principles which are right at the beginning. Rather like the sport of golf, sailors are expected to embrace sportsmanship and enforce rules upon themselves. When a sailor breaks a rule, he or she should take a penalty.

For example, breaking rule 31 by hitting a mark warrants taking a penalty turn under rules 44.1 & 44.2. Breaking other rules, most notably those involving right of way, involves taking two penalty turns. Penalty turns must be done in the same direction and each should include one tack and one gybe. After getting well clear of other boats, penalty turns should be done as soon after the incident as possible.

It's worth practising penalty turns so that when needed they can be done very quickly.

Perhaps Paul Elvstrom epitomised sportsmanship in sailing. He is famously quoted as saying, "You haven't won the race if in winning the race you have lost the respect of your competitors".

A great example was shown by Peter Burling of New Zealand in the Youth Americas' Cup at San Francisco in 2013. In one race team NZL was involved in a marginal situation at a mark with another boat. No protest was filed by the other team and no penalty was signaled. Despite being under no obligation to do so, Burling voluntarily resigned from the race citing a possible rules breach.

02

It's inevitable that sometimes situations arise on the water where there is a difference of opinion. That's where protests come in. A boat can protest another boat if they feel that there was an incident whilst racing. This gives the protested boat a chance to do the penalty turns that they've been practicing, if they feel that it's warranted.

There are strict rules in RRS 60.2 that must be followed for a boat to file a protest. For small dinghies it generally means hailing 'Protest', or if that is not possible, advising the boat being protested at the first reasonable opportunity.

If the matter is not resolved on the water then a formal protest can be filed ashore. If a protest committee has to hear a protest they will first establish whether it is valid. There is no wiggle room here. For example, if the protestor didn't hail 'Protest' on the water, or they didn't file their paperwork ashore within the time in rule 60.3 or as amended by the Sailing Instructions, or they weren't involved in or did not see the incident, then the protest will not even be heard.

But we are a friendly club. Involving a protest committee is really a last resort. We always want sportsmanship to prevail and incidents to be amicably resolved.



03

It's often said in the briefings at our sailing venue that members sail at their own risk. This is enshrined in RRS 3, decision to race, which says that the "responsibility for a boat's decision to participate in a race or to continue racing is hers alone".

RRS 3 is reflective of the maritime principle that the Master (Captain) is formally responsible for the safety of crew and passengers, navigation and seamanship, decision making, proper seaworthiness of the vessel and adherence to SOLAS (Safety of Life at Sea) and COLREGS (Collision Regulations).

Note that RRS 3 refers to a boat and not a person. Under RRS 75 it is a boat that enters an event, not an individual. However, in general a boat must be entered by 'a member of a club affiliated to a World Sailing National Authority'. So, for a boat to enter a regatta at PISC, it must be registered by someone who belongs to a club that is a member of CySaF, or another national authority, such as the RYA in the UK. If, as a member of PISC, you choose to enter a regatta anywhere in the world you can do so because our club is affiliated to CySaF.

Although it is a boat that enters an event, under RRS 46 that boat must have a 'person in charge' who is designated by the individual entering the boat under RRS 75. That person in charge then assumes the responsibility for decision making and ensuring that they and their crew are aware of their responsibilities.

Why so confusing? In club dinghy races it will nearly always be the person entering the boat who is the person in charge. But think about yacht racing. It might readily happen that an owner enters his boat in an event but is not even on board, designating a professional skipper to be responsible. The racing rules have to accommodate every situation.

04

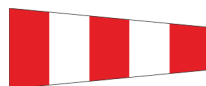
The standard racing start sequence is 5 minutes, as shown in RRS 26. Raising the class flag at 5 minutes is a warning signal that the class preparatory flag will be raised in one minute. A boat is considered to be racing from the moment that her preparatory flag is raised.

Many events adhere to the recommendation that the Sailing Instructions state that an orange starting line flag will be raised to alert competitors that a sequence will begin in no less than 5 minutes. We don't implement this in our series races at PISC (note that we have previously done so in regattas) for two reasons. Firstly, our committee boat is not anchored so the start line marked by the displayed orange flag would be constantly moving(!), and secondly because we simply don't have enough room for another flag on the RIB to be clearly displayed and the line properly monitored.

So instead, we make an attention signal no more than one minute before the class flag will be raised by making multiple sounds on the horn. We don't make this signal when:

The start has been interrupted and any of the following is flying:

- a) an AP postponement flag



- b) a First Substitute general recall flag



- c) a November abandon flag



In such cases the warning signal will follow exactly one minute after the respective flag is removed.

There are multiple races in the schedule, because in such cases the next sequence will begin as soon as practicable after the previous race has finished.

The race committee is responsible for scoring under RRS 90.3.

05

Before we dive into the rules governing when boats meet, it's important to understand how the RRS work within the framework of the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (IRPCAS), also more commonly known as the COLREGS.

Critically, the COLREGS always apply. However, the RRS governs the actions of boats 'that are sailing in or near the racing area and intend to race, are racing, or have been racing' (RRS Part 2, When Boats Meet, preamble). Some RRS mirror the COLREGS, for example port/starboard (RRS 10 & COLREGS 12(1)) and windward/leeward (RRS 11 & COLREGS 12(2)). Others, such as mark-room (RRS 18), are specific to racing and have the effect of overriding, or adding to, the COLREGS.

The preamble to Part 2 of the RRS also states as follows: 'When a boat sailing under these rules meets a vessel that is not, she shall comply with the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (IRPCAS) or government right-of-way rules. If the notice of race so states, the rules of Part 2 are replaced by the right-of-way rules of the IRPCAS or by government right-of-way rules.'

There are two important points to highlight here: If a boat racing meets a boat that is not, for example a dive boat coming through the racing area, the COLREGS apply between those boats and the RRS do not.

The notice of race can replace the rules of Part 2 with the COLREGS or government right-of-way rules. This is commonplace in yacht races that involve night passages or navigation in restricted waters, and may be subject to specific times and/or places.

Where COLREGS apply, then boats must carry the appropriate equipment, such as fog signals and lights.

06

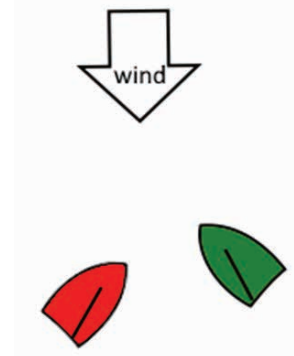
Part II of the Racing Rules is always the most well thumbed since it refers to 'When Two Boats Meet', section A of which is 'Right of Way'.

RRS 10 is the most well known.

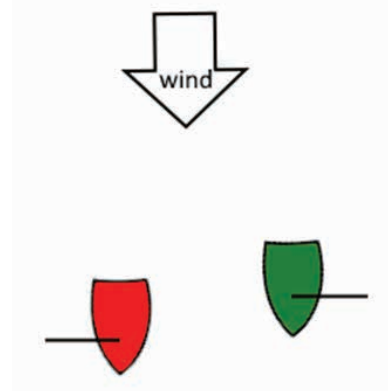
10 On Opposite Tacks - 'When boats are on opposite tacks, a port-tack boat shall keep clear of a starboard-tack boat'.

The italics are meaningful because they refer to a defined term within the Definitions section of the rules. The tack which a boat is on is defined as being its windward side. Windward itself is a defined word, and is not as straightforward as you might think.

This is clear enough (green is on starboard tack, red is on port tack)



But what about this?



The definition of leeward and windward helps us out. "A boat's leeward side is the side that is, or when she is head to wind, was away from the wind. However, when sailing by the lee or directly downwind, her leeward side is the side on which her mainsail lies. The other side is her windward side.

The easy way to think of it is that downwind a boat is on the tack that is opposite to the side that the boom is on.

In case you were wondering, sailing by the lee is when a boat is sailing downwind with the mainsail on the windward side of the boat.

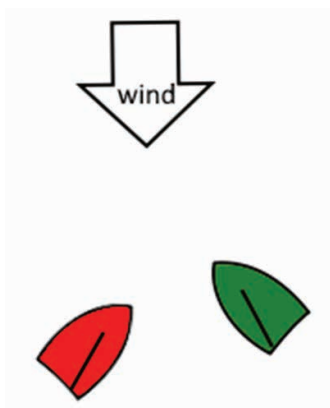
07

We know that a port tack boat must keep clear of a starboard tack boat under RRS 10. But what does keep clear mean? It's a defined term:

Keep Clear A boat keeps clear of a right-of-way boat

- (a) if the right-of-way boat can sail her course with no need to take avoiding action and,
- (b) when the boats are overlapped, if the right-of-way boat can also change course in both directions without immediately making contact.

What can the port tack boat do in this situation?



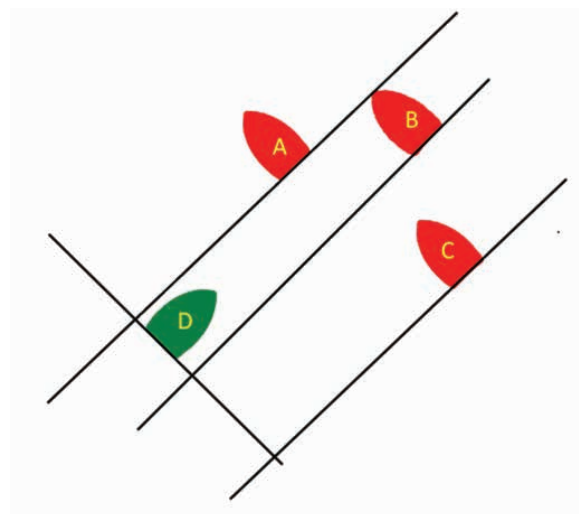
She can either tack to leeward of the boat on starboard tack, ensuring that as she tacks she does not impede it in any way, or she can stay on port tack and duck behind the starboard tack boat.

Note the reference to overlap in the definition of keep clear. Again it's a defined term:

Clear Astern and Clear Ahead; Overlap One boat is clear astern of another when her hull and equipment in normal position are behind a line abeam from the aftermost point of the other boat's hull and equipment in normal position. The other boat is clear ahead. They overlap when neither is clear astern. However, they also overlap when a boat between them overlaps both. These terms always apply to boats on the same tack. They apply to boats on opposite tacks only when rule 18 applies between them or when both boats are sailing more than ninety degrees from the true wind.

The concept of overlap is widely used in the racing rules so we'll keep coming back to it. It is also perhaps the most widely misunderstood term.

Consider the following:



C is behind a line abeam from the aftermost point of both A & B, so she is clear astern of them both. A & B are both clear ahead of C. A line abeam from A's aftermost point crosses B's bow, so B is not clear astern of A. They are overlapped.

None of A, B or C is behind a line abeam from D's aftermost point, so none of them is clear astern of D.

D is behind and clear astern of a line abeam from the aftermost point of A, who is clear ahead of D.

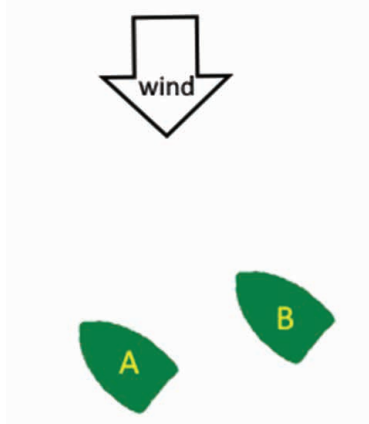
D is not behind lines abeam from the aftermost point of B or C, so she is not clear astern of either of them. D is therefore overlapped with both B & C.

08

RRS 11 is another of the commonplace right of way rules that most sailors will be familiar with.

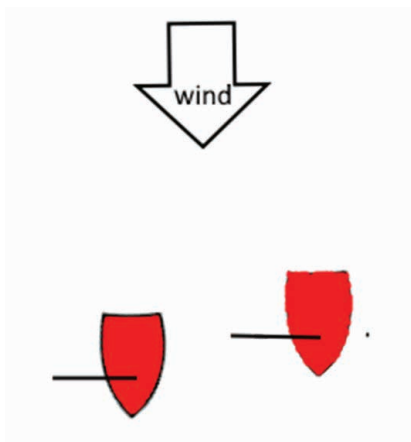
11 On the same tack, Overlapped - 'When boats are on the same tack and overlapped, a windward boat shall keep clear of a leeward boat'.

Now that we know the definitions, this is all very straightforward.



A and B are both on starboard tack and are overlapped. B is the windward boat so under RRS 11 she must keep clear of A.

Downwind is no different.



The boat closest to the wind must keep clear.

Where things become a little more complicated is in establishing what rights the leeward boat has to turn towards the windward boat, commonly known as 'luffing her up'. A common situation is prior to the starting signal where A might be holding her station and wanting to protect a position she has pinpointed on the start line. B might be attempting to barge in at the starboard end of the line. A is perfectly entitled to head closer to the wind and force B to keep clear of her.

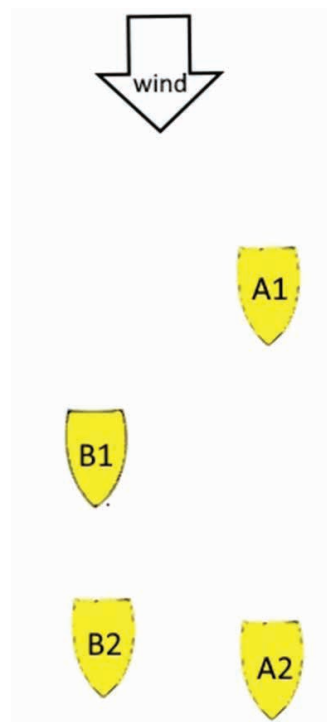
In certain situations there are limitations on the luffing up that a leeward boat can do. We'll cover some of those when we look at RRS 16 & 17.

09

In the Collision Regulations, COLREG 13(a) states that 'any vessel overtaking any other shall keep out of the way of the vessel being overtaken.'

RRS 12 applies a twist to the COLREGS rule.

12 On the same tack, not overlapped - 'When boats are on the same tack and not overlapped, a boat clear astern shall keep clear of a boat clear ahead'.



In the diagram at position 1, boat A is clear astern of boat B and must keep clear of her.

At position 2, the right of way has changed. Boats A and B are now overlapped so RRS 12 no longer applies. There are now two boats on the same tack and overlapped, so RRS 11 applies. Boat B as the windward boat must now keep clear of boat A, subject to obligations placed upon boat A under RRS 17. More on that when we cover that rule.

Note that there is a crucial factor at play here. RRS 12 applies when boats are on the same tack. So, if a starboard tack boat was overtaking a port tack boat, RRS 12 would not apply. Under RRS 10, the port tack boat - in this case the boat being overtaken - would be obliged to keep clear.

That sounds pretty dangerous. Does it mean that a starboard tack boat can simply drive up the stern of a port tack boat when overtaking her? No, it does not. Even though she has right of way, the starboard tack boat has obligations under RRS 14 and RRS 16. We'll talk about those obligations when we cover those rules.



10

When boats tack, the right of way may change, so it's important that in that moment the obligations and rights of the boats are properly understood.

RRS 13 provides some clarity.

13 While Tacking - 'After a boat passes head to wind, she shall keep clear of other boats until she is on a close-hauled course. During that time, rules 10, 11 and 12 do not apply. If two boats are subject to this rule at the same time, the one on the other's port side or the one astern shall keep clear.'

Let's think about when this situation might arise.

Consider the case of a port tack boat and a starboard tack boat coming together on a beat to windward. In taking avoiding action, the port tack boat may choose to tack just ahead (1 - 3 boat lengths) and to leeward of the starboard tack boat. Known as a lee bow position, when executed well it is not only perfectly reasonable but also tactically advantageous, because the starboard tack boat would now be sailing in the disturbed wake and airflow of the boat that tacked below her. She may well be forced to tack away to gain clear air.

It's a maneuver that requires exact positioning and timing. The port tack boat needs to turn through the wind and be sailing on her new tack at pace so that she is ahead of the starboard tack boat. Tack too late or too close, or take too long in the tack and the advantage lies with the boat on starboard tack.

Until the port tack boat has passed head to wind, she is governed by RRS 10. She must keep clear of the starboard tack boat. After she passes head to wind, she is governed by RRS 13 until she is on a close-hauled course. She must keep clear of all boats.

Remember the definition of keep clear. The right-of-way boat must be able to sail her course with no need to take avoiding action and, when the boats are overlapped, if the right-of-way boat can also change course in both directions without immediately making contact.

Tack too late, or too close, and the starboard tack boat might very well have to take avoiding action and, perhaps worse, an overlap might occur. A breach of RRS 13 can only be avoided by being sufficiently ahead and to leeward.

This situation could equally apply at a windward mark rounding, but we'll cover that later because RRS 18.3 also applies.

11

Collisions at sea are never OK, and every boat has an obligation to avoid contact. The COLREGS and the RRS are aligned. Safety trumps racing rules. In the case of the latter, RRS 14 applies.

14 Avoiding Contact -

If reasonably possible, a boat shall avoid contact with another boat, not cause contact between boats, and not cause contact between a boat and an object that should be avoided.

However, a right-of-way boat, or one sailing within the room or mark-room to which she is entitled, need not act to avoid contact until it is clear that the other boat is not keeping clear or giving room or mark-room.

An straightforward example would be a port tack boat required to keep clear of a starboard tack boat on a beat to windward. The port tack boat doesn't see the starboard tack boat. The starboard tack boat realises that the port tack boat isn't going to keep clear and attempts to avoid her at the last minute. It's too late and contact occurs. For a dramatic example, see https://youtu.be/r1lCwi-axyo?si=13ku_AKOldYSx4Rf. In this case the port tack boat broke rules 14(a) and 14(b). The starboard tack boat could not reasonably have avoided contact and therefore did not break 14(a).

Let's also think back to the case of a starboard tack boat overtaking a port tack boat downwind, but deliberately sailing up her stern. She would clearly be in breach of RRS 14(a) and 14(b) were contact to occur. In extreme circumstances, it might also be considered whether she would be in breach of RRS 2 which states that 'A boat and her owner shall compete in compliance with recognized principles of sportsmanship and fair play'. If that were adjudged to be so, then her penalty would be disqualification that is not excludable from the series race scores.

Note that there is also another rule in play here, RRS 43.1(c).

'A right-of-way boat, or one sailing within the room or mark-room to which she is entitled, is exonerated for breaking rule 14 if the contact does not cause damage or injury'. RRS 43.2 goes on to say further that 'A boat exonerated for breaking a rule need not take a penalty and shall not be penalized for breaking that rule'.

In summary:

It is the responsibility of both boats to avoid collisions

If a collision occurs a boat will be in breach of rule 14 if it was reasonably possible for her to avoid it

Under RRS 43.1(c) a boat with rights may be exonerated from her breach of RRS 14 if there was no injury or damage, in which case she need take no penalty

If a rule of Part 2 (RRS 10-20) has been broken, a boat may take a two-turn penalty but only if there was no injury or serious damage, otherwise she shall retire under RRS 44.1(b)



12

RRS 15 covers situations where right-of-way changes between two boats.

15 Acquiring Right Of Way - 'When a boat acquires right of way, she shall initially give the other boat room to keep clear, unless she acquires right of way because of the other boat's actions.'

It is quite common for boats to acquire right of way when changing course, to which RRS 16 applies.

16 Changing Course -

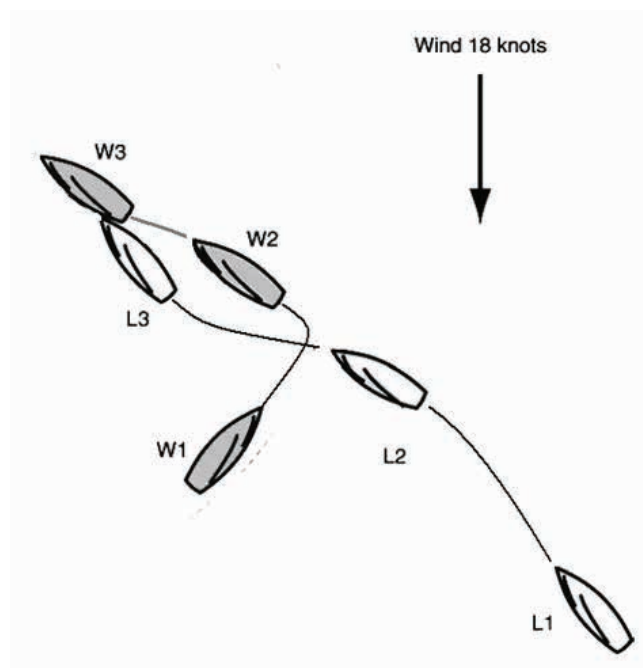
16.1 When a right-of-way boat changes course, she shall give the other boat room to keep clear.

16.2 In addition, on a beat to windward when a port-tack boat is keeping clear by sailing to pass to leeward of a starboard-tack boat, the starboard-tack boat shall not bear away if as a result the port-tack boat must change course immediately to continue keeping clear.

Now that we've got a number of rules under our belts, let's look at an example and see how they all tie together. The following is adapted from case 93 in the World Sailing case book:

If a boat luffs immediately after she becomes overlapped to leeward of another boat and there is no seamanlike action that would enable the other boat to keep clear, the boat that luffs breaks rules 15 and 16.1. The other boat breaks rule 11, but is exonerated.

At position 1, W and L were on opposite tacks on a beat to windward. After W passed head to wind and was on her new close-hauled course (rule 13), L was directly astern of her. W's course was such to allow L to pass to leeward of W. In position 2, L had borne off from a point close astern of W and was about to overlap W to leeward. When the overlap began, L immediately luffed and struck W's port side.



At position 1, L has right-of-way over W under rule 10. At position 2, W had right-of-way over L under rule 12. A short time later, between positions 2 and 3, the boats became overlapped at which time L acquired right of way under rule 11, and initially rule 15 required L to give W room to keep clear. At all times after the boats became overlapped, rule 16.1 applied. L's luff, which was made immediately after the overlap began, deprived W of room to keep clear. No seamanlike action was available to her to do so. L thus broke rules 15 & 16.1.

When L luffed, W broke rule 11, but she was exonerated by rule 43.1(b) because she was sailing within the room to which she was entitled under rules 15 & 16.1.

L also broke rule 14(a). W did not, because she could not reasonably have avoided contact.

It is also possible that L broke rule 17, but we'll look at RRS 17 in more detail later.

13

You might remember that we referred to limitations that are imposed on boats when they are overtaking. RRS 17 covers such a situation when a boat overtakes to leeward of another boat on the same tack and is within two boat lengths distance from that boat.

On the Same Tack; Proper Course - 'If a boat clear astern becomes overlapped within two of her hull lengths to leeward of a boat on the same tack, she shall not sail above her proper course while they remain on the same tack and overlapped within that distance, unless in doing so she promptly sails astern of the other boat'.

Note the definition of Proper Course: "A course a boat would choose in order to sail the course as quickly as possible in the absence of the other boats referred to in the rule using the term. A boat has no proper course before her starting signal".

Now that we have covered so many of the rules, the best way of properly understanding rule 17 is by way of an example. The following is case 7 of the World Sailing case book:

When, after having been clear astern, a boat becomes overlapped to leeward within two of her hull lengths of the other boat, the windward boat must keep clear, but the leeward boat must initially give the windward boat room to keep clear and must not sail above her proper course. The proper course of the windward boat is not relevant.

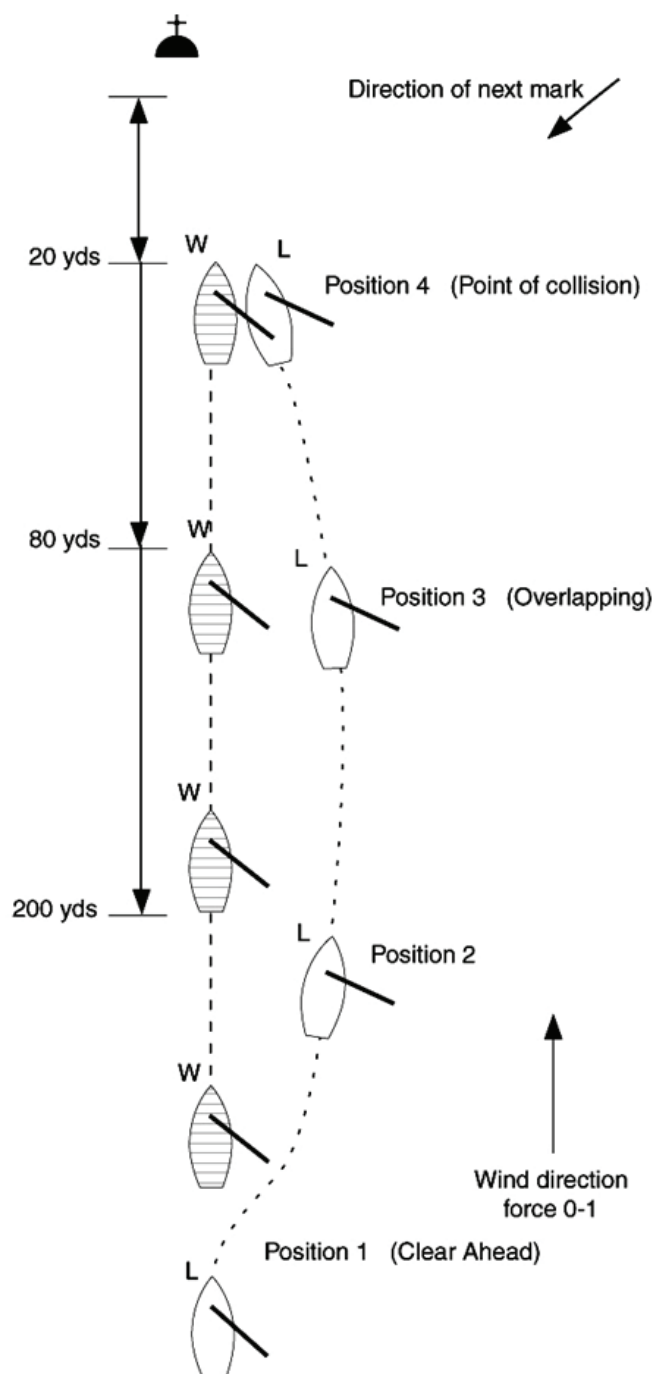
Boats L and W are dinghies, 5m in length. About 200m from the mark, L became overlapped to leeward of W from clear astern. L was less than two of her hull lengths from W. The two boats then sailed alongside each other, about one-and-a-half hull lengths apart, until they were 80m from the mark. At this point, L luffed slightly to sail directly to the mark, a luff that did not affect W. W maintained a steady course. L never became clear ahead. W's boom touched L's shroud, without damage or injury.

From the moment L became overlapped to leeward (note: when sailing downwind, leeward is side on which the mainsail lies) of W, rule 11 required W to keep clear of L. At that moment, L was required by rule 15 to give W room to keep clear, but that obligation was not a continuing one, and, at the time of the contact, the overlap had been in existence for a considerable period during which W certainly had room to keep clear.

Rule 17 applied to L because, as the diagram shows, she had been clear astern before the boats became overlapped and was within two of her hull lengths of W when the overlap began. L was justified in changing course to sail directly to the mark, provided that she did not sail above her proper course. It is L's proper course that is the criterion for deciding whether she broke rule 17; W's proper course is not relevant. According to the agreed diagram, L at no time sailed above her proper course. Therefore L did not break rule 17.

Just after position 3 L luffed slightly. Clearly there was room for W to keep clear, and so L did not break rule 16.1. L broke rule 14(a) because she could have avoided contact with W, but she was exonerated by rule 43.1(c) because there was no damage or injury. W broke rule 11 because she failed to keep clear of L. W could have avoided contact and so she also broke rule 14(a); and, as she was not sailing within the room to which she was entitled under rule 16.1, she was not exonerated by rule 43.1(c).

W was disqualified under rules 11 and 14(a).



14

Rule 18 of Section C is the most complicated and misunderstood of all the rules of Part 2 of the Racing Rules of Sailing. Any rule where it takes more words to explain it than to write it might be described as a bad rule, and the former certainly applies to RRS 18.

But firstly, let's look at when rule 18 applies.

In the first place, note that the preamble to Section C, states that Section C rules do not apply to a starting mark, so rule 18 does not apply at either end of the start line.

When does it apply? RRS 18.1(a) says:

Rule 18 applies between boats when they are required to leave a mark on the same side and at least one of them is in the zone.

Zone means "The area around a mark within a distance of three hull lengths of the boat nearer to it. A boat is in the zone when any part of her hull is in the zone".

So, if we imagine a three boat length circle around a mark, that is the zone and rule 18 applies between two boats whenever one of them is in it. Well, not exactly, because RRS 18.1 goes on to say that it does not apply:

between boats on opposite tacks on a beat to windward,
between boats on opposite tacks when the proper course at the mark for one but not both of them is to tack
between a boat approaching a mark and one leaving it, or
if the mark is a continuing obstruction, in which case rule 19 applies.

OK, so now we know when rule 18 applies, let's look at what it means. RRS 18.2 states:

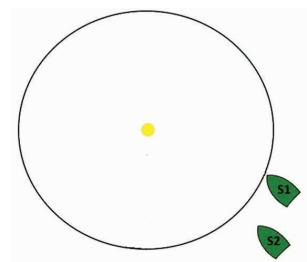
18.2 Giving Mark-Room

When the first of two boats reaches the zone,
if the boats are overlapped, the outside boat at that moment shall give the inside boat mark-room;

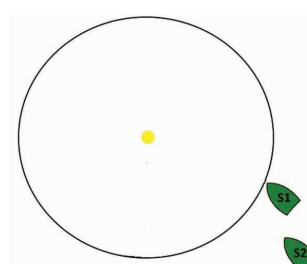
If the boats are not overlapped, the boat that has not reached the zone at that moment shall give the other boat mark-room.

When a boat is required to give mark-room by this rule, she shall continue to do so for as long as this rule applies, even if later an overlap is broken or a new overlap begins.

OK, that's not so bad. In the first diagram, below, the boats are overlapped when the first boat, S1, enters the zone, so 18.2(a)(1) applies; as the outside boat, S1 must give S2 mark-room.



In the second diagram, the boats are not overlapped when S1 enters the zone, so 18.2(a)(2) applies; S2 must give S1 mark-room.



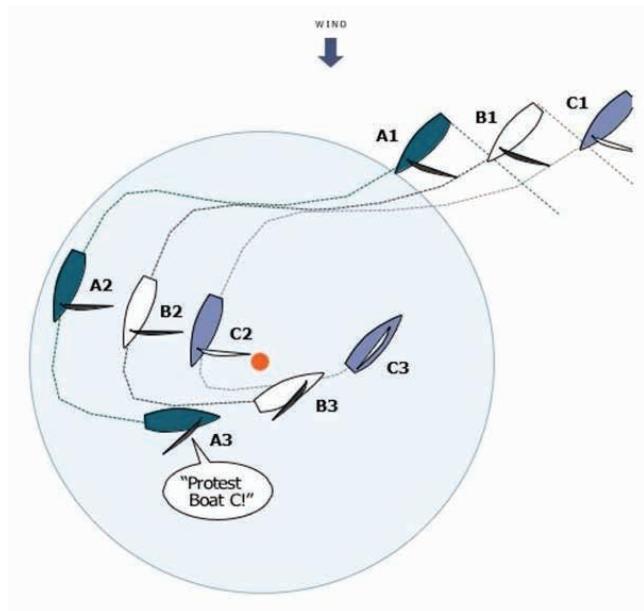
Note that the sentence at the end of 18.2(a) says that this continues to apply even if S2 goes on to establish an overlap to leeward of S1. This is particularly relevant in handicap racing. Picture a situation where S2 is a much faster boat than S1, such that by the time the two boats are, say, a boat length from the mark S2 is overlapped with S1 and maybe ahead of her. Even in such circumstances, S2 is not relieved of her obligation to give mark-room to S1.

What does mark-room actually mean? The definition is as follows:
Room for a boat
to sail to the mark when her proper course is to sail close to it,
to round or pass the mark on the required side, and
to leave it astern.

Consider our second example, above. The proper course of S1 does not mean that she must sail close to the mark. Remember, wide in and tight out is a proper tactical course, so S2 must allow S1 to sail wide on the approach and turn tight on the mark.

Mark-room no longer applies when a boat entitled to it has left the mark astern.

Let's look at an example where multiple boats are overlapped. Boats A, B, and C, all on starboard tack, are approaching a leeward mark to be left to port. When two lengths from the zone, A is clear ahead of B, and C is overlapped with B. When A reaches the zone (position 1), B is overlapped with A and C is still overlapped with B. C rounds the mark inside boat A and B. A protests C.



A's protest should be dismissed. When A reached the zone, the rights and obligations in rule 18.2(a), Giving Mark-Room, depend on whether the boats are "overlapped" at that time. The definition Clear Astern and Clear Ahead; Overlap states: "One boat is clear astern of another when her hull and equipment in normal position are behind a line abeam from the aftermost point of the other boat's hull and equipment in normal position. The other boat is clear ahead. They overlap when neither is clear astern. However, they also overlap when a boat between them overlaps both."

Because C was overlapped with B, and B was overlapped with A when A reached the zone, by definition, C was "overlapped" with A. Therefore, A was required to give both B and C mark-room under rule 18.2(a)(1), which she did.

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Rule 18 has a fearsome reputation for being complicated. We know enough about it now to cover straightforward situations, but let's now take a look at when it becomes a bit more challenging.

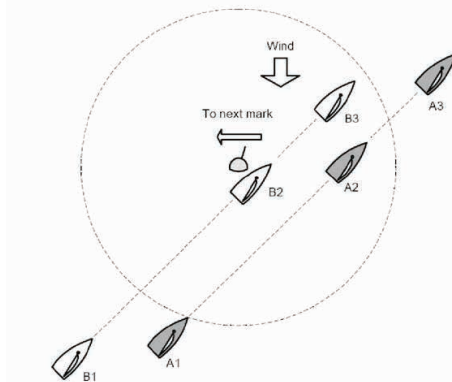
There's a lot more to RRS 18.2(a) than what we have already covered. Here's the rest:

18.2 Giving Mark-Room

- (a) See last week's newsletter!
- (b) Rule 18.2(a) no longer applies if a boat entitled to mark-room passes head to wind or leaves the zone.
- (c) When rule 18.2(a) does not apply and the boats are overlapped, the outside boat shall give the inside boat mark-room.
- (d) If a boat obtained an inside overlap from clear astern or by tacking to windward of the other boat and, from the time the overlap began, the outside boat has been unable to give mark-room, rules 18.2(a) and 18.2(c) for not apply between them.
- (e) If there is reasonable doubt that a boat obtained or broke an overlap in time, it shall be presumed that she did not

Let's look at an example.

A and B are approaching the windward mark which they are required to leave to port. They are close-hauled on parallel courses with A clear ahead. A expects B, when she can tack and fetch the mark, to tack to round it and head for the next mark. Instead, B holds her course as shown in the diagram and sails on well past the mark.



Question: Has B the right to hold her course in this way and, thereby, prevent A from Tacking?

Answer: Yes. While A remains on port tack, B is required to keep clear by rule 12 and, as A was clear ahead when she reached the zone, B is required by rule 18.2(a)(2) to give A mark-room as well. Provided B keeps clear of A and gives A mark-room if A luffs (even if A luffs as high as head to wind), B is entitled to sail any course she chooses, including holding her course. However, B is no longer required to give A mark-room after A leaves the zone (see rule 18.2(b)). If A were to pass head to wind, then at that moment rule 18.2(a) would no longer apply (see rule 18.2(b)), and all other parts of rule 18 would cease to apply because the boats would be on opposite tacks on a beat to windward (see rule 18.1(a)(1)). In addition, A would no longer have right of way under rule 12, and B would become the right-of-way boat under rule 13.

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As if we haven't had enough of Rule 18, there's still more. RRS 18.3 covers situations where a boat tacks in the zone.

18.3 Tacking in the Zone

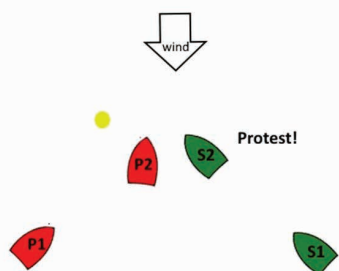
If a boat passes head to wind from port to starboard tack in the zone of a mark to be left to port, rule 18.2 does not apply between her and another boat on starboard tack that is fetching the mark. If the other boat has been on starboard tack since entering the zone, the boat that passed head to wind

- (a) shall not cause the other boat to sail above close hauled to avoid contact, and
- (b) shall give mark-room if the other boat becomes overlapped inside her

Remember, RRS 18.1(a)(1) says that rule 18 does not apply to boats on opposite tacks on a beat to windward. If there are two boats approaching a mark on opposite tacks then of course RRS 10 applies. RRS 18.3 applies when the port tack boat passes head to wind in the zone. Even if the port tack boat passes head to wind and is now on starboard tack, RRS 18.3 says that RRS 18.2 does not apply between her and another starboard tack boat that is fetching the mark.

RRS 18.3 makes life extremely difficult for a port tack boat in the zone of a mark if there are any boats fetching the mark on starboard tack. Note that the definition of fetching does not even mean that the starboard tack boat has to be close hauled, she is 'fetching a mark when she is in a position to pass to windward of it and leave it on the required side without changing tack'.

What can the port tack boat do? For her to tack below the starboard tack boat in an effort to round the mark, RRS 13 (keeping clear while tacking) & RRS 15 (acquiring right of way) would both apply, in a case where the starboard tack boat's course is to round the mark. In such a case, paragraph (b) of the definition of keep clear requires that in the event of an overlap the right of way boat must be able to change course in both directions without immediately making contact. In close quarters such as a mark rounding, to fulfil her obligation to keep clear the port tack boat must therefore complete her tack by becoming close hauled on starboard tack without there being an overlap.



In the diagram above, at position 2 there is an overlap and the starboard tack boat would not be able to turn to port, her course at the mark, without immediate contact.

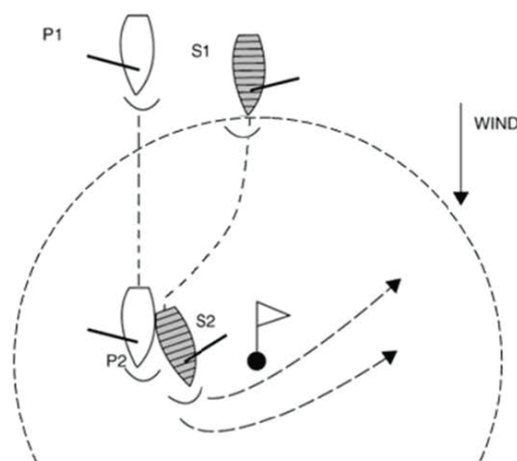
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You're probably fed up with rule 18 by now, but there's just one more thing that we should look at. RRS 18.4 applies when boats Gybe in the zone.

18.4 Gybing in the Zone

When an inside overlapped right-of-way boat must gybe at a mark to sail her proper course, until she gybes she shall sail no further from the mark than is needed to sail that course. Rule 18.4 does not apply at a gate mark.

Here's an example. Two boats, S and P, were sailing directly downwind towards a leeward mark to be left to port. They had been overlapped for several lengths with S inside and slightly ahead. As S entered the zone, she luffed. As her bow came abreast of the mark she bore away to gybe, and there was contact, but no damage or injury.



At position 1, when S's hull reached the zone, S and P were overlapped, and P was required by rule 18.2(a)(1) to give S mark-room. In addition, until S gybed P was required by rule 10 to keep clear of S. When S changed course, she was required by rule 16.1 to give P room to keep clear, and until she gybed S was also required by rule 18.4 to sail no farther from the mark than needed to sail her proper course. The mark-room that P was required to give S was the space S needed in the existing conditions to sail promptly in a seamanlike way to the mark. P gave S that room. However, because S had right of way she was permitted to sail any course provided that she complied with rules 16.1 and 18.4.

After position 1, S luffed gradually through approximately 45 degrees while sailing about three lengths forward. If P had acted promptly there was space for her to have manoeuvred in a seamanlike way to keep clear of S; however, P made no effort to keep clear. Therefore, S did not break rule 16.1 when she luffed. Shortly before position 2, S needed to act to avoid P. At that moment P broke rule 10. In trying to avoid P, S bore away and there was contact. Because P was not keeping clear at that time, S could not give her 'room to keep clear' under rule 16.1; therefore, S did not break rule 16.1 when she bore away.



When S gybed just after position 2, she had not sailed farther from the mark than needed to sail her proper course. Indeed, in the absence of P (the boat 'referred to' in the definition Proper Course), S's proper course might well have been to sail even farther from the mark and higher than she did, so as to make a smoother, faster rounding, to avoid interference with her wind by being backwinded or blanketed by other boats ahead, and to be far enough upwind after leaving the mark astern that she could tack without breaking rule 13. Therefore, S did not break rule 18.4.

Concerning rule 14(a), both boats broke the rule because there was contact, and it was 'reasonably possible' for each of them to avoid it. P is therefore disqualified under rule 14(a) as well as rule 10. However, S is exonerated for breaking rule 14(a) because she was the right-of-way boat when the contact occurred and there was no damage or injury (see rule 43.1(c)).

The Racing Rules of Sailing are available for you to read and download from the PISC website, Resources Page. It is in the best interests of all sailors who race (and even those that don't) to read and understand them, in both the interests of fairness and safety.

