

Racing Rules of Sailing

Definition Mark Room, Preamble to Section C, Rule 18

A submission from the Chair of the Racing Rules Committee

Purpose or Objective

To make changes to rule 18 in order to achieve the following principles:

- Rule 18 should reflect the way the average sailor perceives and interprets the rules and minimize changes to the way the 'game' is currently played, should be simpler than the current rule and use clear and unambiguous language with terms and phrases sailors and race officials commonly use.
- Whenever two boats meet, it should be clear whether rule 18 applies between them and, if so, how it applies.
- The rules should discourage contact by encouraging orderly behaviour and discouraging last-minute claims.

Proposal 1

To change definition Mark-Room as follows:

Definition Mark-Room *Room for a boat to **do the following as necessary to sail the course: sail to the mark, round or pass the mark** on the required side, **and then leave the mark astern**.* ~~Also,~~

- ~~(a) room to sail to the mark when her proper course is to sail close to it, and~~
~~(b) room to round or pass the mark as necessary to sail the course without touching the mark.~~

~~However, mark-room for a boat does not include room to tack unless she is overlapped inside and to windward of the boat required to give mark-room and she would be fetching the mark after her tack.~~

Current Position

See above

Reasons

1. The new definition puts the sequence of requirements in the chronological order in which they occur at the mark: First the boat sails "to the mark", then the boat rounds or passes the mark as necessary to sail the course and finally, the boat leaves the mark astern after rounding or passing it. It makes it clear that when a boat has done all three things in that order, she has been "given mark-room."

2. Makes it clear that mark-room includes room to leave the mark astern. This resolves the long debate on when has a boat been “given mark-room.” This allows rule 18.1 to keep its current last sentence (see Proposal 3).
3. Makes it clear that if a boat leaves the mark astern before she has rounded or passed the mark as necessary to sail the course, she is still entitled to mark-room. This could happen when there is strong adverse current, and the boat entitled to mark-room has to sail well past the mark before gybing to round it. The boat is still entitled to mark-room.
4. Removes the confusing reference to a boat’s “proper course” in the definition Mark-Room (a).
5. Removes the unnecessary phrase ‘without touching the mark’. *Room* is the space a boat needs to comply with rule 31 (see the definition *Room*); and even if rule 31 is not in effect, ‘room’ is the space a boat needs when manoeuvring in a seamanlike way, and touching a mark is not ‘seamanlike’ (see Case 114).
6. Removes the last sentence of the current definition (about room to tack). This resolves the debate among rules experts as to whether a boat is entitled to complete a tack after rule 18 ceases to apply; i.e., is she eligible or not for “exoneration” if she breaks rule 13 or 10 after passing head to wind.

Proposal 2

Preamble to Section C

*Section C rules do not apply **between boats** at a starting **mark** surrounded by navigable water or at its anchor line from ~~the time boats are approaching them to start~~ **their preparatory signal** until they have ~~passed~~ **started and left** them **astern**.*

Current Position

See above

Reasons

1. Eliminates the vague, ambiguous, and undefined phrase “from the time boats are approaching them to start.” Vague, ambiguous, and undefined phrases make the rules more complex and difficult to teach, read, remember and comply with.
 2. Creates a clear beginning and end point for when the rules of Section C do not apply, which coincides with when boats begin “racing” and when they have “started.” The preparatory signal is a clear, unambiguous and familiar signal, and is made with a sound.
 3. With rule 19 turned off at the preparatory signal, windward boats will know not to try to force themselves in between leeward boats and expensive race committee boats before the starting signal, which will reduce the chance of an expensive collision involving boats who disagree on whether they are “approaching the race committee boat to start” or not. When the rules of Section C do not apply, the rules of Part 2, Sections A and B govern the actions of the boats, including rules 14 and 16.1.
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4. Clarifies that when two OCS boats are reaching back towards the starting line near the starting vessel, the Section C rules do not apply and the rules of Part 2, Section A and B apply.

Proposal 3

Change the structure of current rule 18.1 into 18.1(a) and (b)

Option A

18.1 When Rule 18 Applies

- (a) 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*. However, it does not apply
 - ~~(1)~~ between boats on opposite *tacks* on a beat to windward,
 - ~~(2)~~ between boats on opposite *tacks* when the *proper course* at the *mark* for one but not both of them is to tack,
 - ~~(3)~~ between a boat approaching a *mark* and one leaving it, or
 - ~~(4)~~ if the *mark* is a continuing *obstruction*, in which case rule 19 applies.
- (b) Rule 18 no longer applies between boats when *mark-room* has been given.

Current Position

See above

Reasons

1. The proposed 18.1(b) is an important rule and should have a number so sailors and race officials can refer to it in their discussions and decisions.
2. Under the current rule, rules experts argue over *when* mark-room has been given. At the center of the debate is whether mark-room has been given *before* or *after* a boat has left the mark astern. That is now clearly resolved in the proposed definition Mark-Room (see Proposal 1). With the proposed definition Mark-Room, the current wording in rule 18.1 works just fine.

Proposal 4

- (a) Re-number current rule 18.2(b) as 18.2(a), make the following changes to current rule 18.2(a), and move current rule 18.2(c)(1) to the end of 18.2(a) edited as follows:

18.2 Giving Mark-Room

- ~~(a)~~ **When the first of two boats reaches the zone,**

(1) if the boats are *overlapped* ~~when the first of them reaches the zone~~, the outside boat at that moment shall ~~thereafter~~ give the inside boat *mark-room*.₁

(2) if ~~a~~ the boats are not overlapped, the boat that has not reached ~~is clear ahead when she reaches the zone~~, at that moment shall give the other boat ~~clear astern at that moment shall thereafter give her~~ *mark-room*.

When a boat is required to give *mark-room* by this rule ~~18.2(b)~~, 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.

(b) Delete current rule 18.2(c)(2)

~~18.2(c) When a boat is required to give mark-room by rule 18.2(b),~~

~~(1) she shall continue to do so even if later an overlap is broken or a new overlap begins;~~

~~(2) if she becomes overlapped inside the boat entitled to mark-room, she shall also give that boat room to sail her proper course while they remain overlapped.~~

Reasons

1. Renumbering current 18.2(b) to 18.2(a) puts the most used part of the rule first and moves the confusing current rule 18.2(a) to the end of rule 18.2.
 2. The recommended rule 18.2(a) uses the simple symmetry of whether the boats are overlapped or not overlapped when the first of them gets to the zone; and separates them into two sub-rules, which will be clearer to the reader. Appendix C and F currently use this format.
 3. 18.2(a) makes it clear that rule 18 applies to pairs of boats (two boats at a time) and completes the picture for who gives mark-room when the first boat reaches the zone. The current rule 18.2 doesn't apply when the boat clear astern reaches the zone and the other boat is clear ahead but not in the zone. This situation is not resolved until the boat ahead turns and heads for the mark and the boats become overlapped, and it needs current rule 18.2(a) to assign the rights (which can subsequently change mid-rounding if the overlaps change – see Cases 2 and 59). The recommended rule 18.2(a) fixes that situation, and locks in the rights and obligations of the two boats when one of them reaches the zone.
 4. Removes the vague and ambiguous term “thereafter” and uses language that is clear and unambiguous.
 5. Moving the current 18.2(c)(1) to the last paragraph of 18.2(a) where it belongs will make it easier to read and to understand, and makes it so only rule 18.2(a) needs to be referenced in other parts of the rule.
 6. Current 18.2(c)(2) is deleted as it is relatively unknown, complex, not necessary, and confuses some sailors and race officials into thinking mark-room includes room for a boat to sail a proper course.
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7. A boat entitled to mark-room at a leeward mark going onto a beat to windward can change her course promptly up to a close-hauled course with the “protection” of rule 18.2. Case 118 states this. If the boat required to give her mark-room sails inside of her, and if the boat entitled to mark-room breaks rule 16.1 in the process of rounding the mark up to a close-hauled course, the boat entitled to mark-room is exonerated by rule 43.1(b). She does not need rule 18.2(c)(2) to “protect” her, so there is no game change in deleting this rule.
8. Leaving rule 18.2(c)(2) in rule 18.2 would create at least two highly undesirable game changes if the proposed definition Mark-Room is adopted (see Proposal 1).

Proposal 5

Renumber rule 18.2(e) as 18.2(b) and change it as follows:

- 18.2(~~be~~) If there is reasonable doubt that a boat obtained or broke an *overlap* **before the first of two boats referred to in rule 18.2(a) reached the zone** ~~in time~~, it shall be presumed that she did not.

Current Position

See above

Reasons

Remove the vague and ambiguous phrase “in time,” and replace it with what it means.

Proposal 6

Renumber rule 18.2(d) as 18.2(c) and change it as follows:

- 18.2(~~dc~~) Rules 18.2(~~ab~~) and (~~e~~) ~~cease to apply~~ **no longer applies** if the boat entitled to *mark-room* passes head to wind or leaves the zone.

Current Position

See above

Reasons

1. This is the same “turn-off” rule as current rule 18.2(d).
 2. Current rule 18 uses three phrases to describe when rule 18 does not apply: “no longer applies,” “does not apply” and “ceases to apply.” “No longer applies” is consistent with the same phrase in proposed rule 18.1 (see Proposal 3).
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Proposal 7

Renumber rule 18.2(a) as 18.2(d) with the following changes:

18.2(d) When **rule 18.2(a) does not apply and the** boats are *overlapped*, the outside boat shall give the inside boat *mark-room*, ~~unless rule 18.2(b) applies.~~

Current Position

See above

Reasons

1. This is a needed “catch-all rule” for the few times when boats are overlapped but current 18.2(b) does not apply.
2. In proposed rule 18.3(a) (see Proposal 9), rule 18.2 does not apply when one boat tacks inside the zone when the other boat is fetching the mark. That eliminates many of the scenarios where the current rule 18.2(a) applies, further justifying moving it to the end of proposed rule 18.2.
3. Putting it directly after recommended rule 18.2(c) makes it easier for the reader to understand its purpose.

Proposal 8

Option A

Delete rule 18.2(f)

~~18.2(f) 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*, she is not required to give it.~~

Option B

Renumber rule 18.2(f) as 18.2(e) and change it as follows:

18.2(e) 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*, ~~she is not required to give it,~~ **rule 18.2 does not apply between them.**

Current Position

See above

Reasons

Option A

1. This rule was added to the rule book when the zone was only two lengths. It is exceedingly rare for a boat to get an inside overlap on another boat that is outside the three-length zone when the outside boat is physically unable to give the inside boat mark-room, so the complexity and length of current rule 18.2(f) is not justified.
2. If changes proposed for rule 18.3 are approved (see proposal 9), many of the scenarios where the current rule 18.2(f) applies will be eliminated.
3. Current rule 18.2(f) applies a criterion about giving mark-room to boats before rule 18 applies to them. This is confusing to readers, and difficult for sailors to apply on the water.

Option B

4. The current rules create a conflict where rules 18.2(a) and (b) may require a boat to give mark-room at the same time rule 18.2(f) says she does not need to do so. Furthermore, because rule 18.2(f) does not "turn off" rules 18.2(a) or (b), a boat entitled to mark-room under those rules remains eligible for exoneration by rule 43.1(b), even if rule 18.2(f) tells the outside boat she does not need to give the inside boat mark-room. This conflict can be easily resolved by having rule 18.2(f) "turn off" rule 18.2.

Proposal 9

Change rule 18.3 as follows:

18.3 ~~Passing Head to Wind~~ Tacking in the Zone

If a boat **passes head to wind** in the *zone* ~~of a mark to be left to port~~ **passes head to wind from port to starboard tack** and is then **on the same tack as a boat that is fetching the mark**, ~~she shall not cause a boat that has been on starboard tack since entering the zone to sail above close-hauled to avoid contact and she shall give mark-room if that boat becomes overlapped inside her. When this rule applies between boats, rule 18.2 does not apply between them.~~

- rule 18.2 does not apply between them; and**
- at a mark to be left to port, if the other boat has been on starboard tack since entering the zone, the boat that passed head to wind**
 - shall not cause the other boat to sail above close-hauled to avoid contact, and**
 - shall give mark-room if the other boat becomes overlapped inside her.**

Clean version**18.3 Tacking in the Zone**

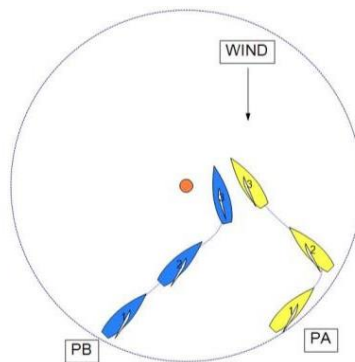
If a boat passes head to wind in the *zone* and is then on the same tack as a boat that is fetching the mark,

- (a) Rule 18.2 does not apply between them; and
- (b) at a *mark* to be left to port, if the other boat has been on *starboard tack* since entering the *zone*, the boat that passed head to wind
 - (1) shall not cause the other boat to sail above close-hauled to avoid contact, and
 - (2) shall give *mark-room* if the other boat becomes *overlapped* inside her.

Current Position

See above

Reasons



1. The title more clearly tells the reader what the rule is about, and makes the reader feel the rules are written in plain language, and in the language they use. It is parallel with the title of rule 13, While Tacking. The titles of rules are not “rules;” they are intended to tell the reader what is in the rule.
2. From the 1997-2000 RRS through the 2013-2016 RRS, rule 18.3 stated, in effect, that rule 18.2 did not apply anytime a boat tacked in the zone when a boat on the other tack was fetching the mark. It mattered not whether the other boat had been on that tack since entering the zone.

In the 2017-2020 RRS, rule 18.3 was changed in a significant way. It now only applied when the other boat had been on starboard tack since entering the zone. That change created the situation in the diagram below where, in some rules experts’ opinions, a boat could merely pass head to wind and become entitled to mark-room under rule 18.2(a), even while breaking rule 13, While Tacking; and she is therefore exonerated by rule 43.1(b) if she breaks rule 13, 15, 16 or 31. This could happen at a starboard-hand windward mark as well.

Proposed rule 18.3(a) resolves the debate among rules experts on whether PB, in the diagram above, is entitled to mark-room. Under proposed rule 18.3(a), she is not.

3. Rule 18.3, introduced in 1997, was designed to discourage boats from tacking in the zone of a windward mark. The proposed rule 18.3(a) returns rule 18.3 to its original condition of turning rule 18.2 off between a boat that tacks in the zone and one that is fetching the mark at that time at both port-hand and starboard-hand marks.
4. If two boats enter the zone on the same tack and both tack approximately at the same time, it matters not which boat passes head to wind first. In most cases, the first boat to tack will be “fetching” the mark when the other boat passes head to wind, so rule 18.2 does not apply between them.

5. Proposed rule 18.3(a) means that the rules of Part 2, Sections A and B will apply between a boat that tacks in the zone and one that is fetching the mark at that time.
6. In current rule 18.3, the fact that when rule 18.3 applies, rule 18.2 does not is almost a footnote. Moving that statement to the beginning of the rule gives it more prominence.
7. Rule 18.3 moves the “fetching” criterion back to the boat that has been on a tack since entering the zone, as in rule 18.3 before 2017. It is this boat that should not be affected by the tacking boat.
8. The formatting makes this long rule easier to read, understand and remember.
9. Rule 18.3(b) is the same as the current rule 18.3, in that the requirements that the boat that tacked cannot cause the other boat to sail above close-hauled to avoid her, etc., only applies at a port-hand mark, which has been the same in the 2017-2020 and 2021-2024 RRS.

Proposal 10

Change the title of rule 18.4 as follows:

18.4 Gybing in the Zone

Current Position

See above

Reasons

1. The title parallels the title of proposed rule 18.3 (see Proposal 9), which helps make the rules easier to read, understand and remember for the sailors and race officials.
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