

The New Racing Rules of Sailing

Every four years, ISAF updates the Racing Rules of Sailing (RRS). Rule changes arise from problems identified with the current rules, changes in the way the sport is run and, believe it or not, a desire to make the rules as easy to understand as possible.

The most recent version of the RRS came into effect on January 1, 2009. This new edition should be immune from changes until 2013. As before, team racing, match racing, windsurfing and radio controlled boats have their own special rules contained in appendices to the main rulebook. John Doerr, member of the ISAF Racing Rules Committee, looks at changes to the main body of the rules.

In general, it would seem as if the new version brings very few changes to the

way the game is played, but there are some significant differences. The rules governing mark rounding and passing obstructions have been re-structured so that different rules can be applied to each. Rule 18 is now solely concerned with rounding or passing marks, while rule 19 covers passing obstructions. The following rules, up to 23, have had to be re-numbered to account for this.

There are many changes of wording, but most of these simply clarify the existing rules.

Key changes

- There is no longer a rule that prohibits a boat from sailing below a proper course.
- The zone around a mark has been increased from two hull lengths to three hull lengths, but the sailing instructions may change this back to two hull lengths, or

even increase the zone to four hull lengths, providing this can be applied to all boats using the marks.

Rule 18 now applies from the time the first boat enters the zone as opposed to (the much more problematic) 'when the boats are about to round', under the old rule. The basic concept of the rule remains the same: give room to boats overlapped inside you, unless you were clear ahead as you entered the three length zone or were unable to give room from the time the overlap was established.

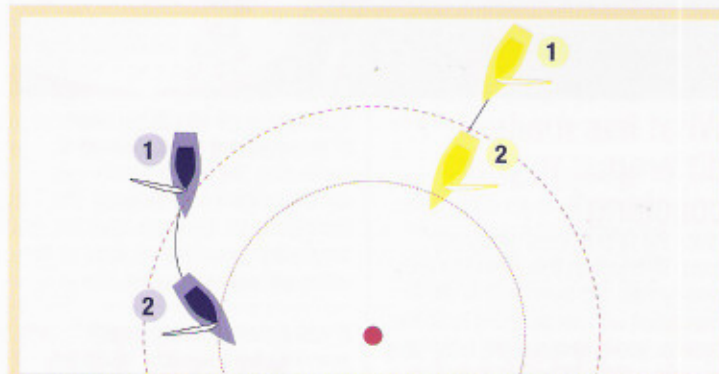
- The separation of the rules has enabled the 'zone' around obstructions that are not marks to be removed. The rule may simply now be summarised that an outside boat must give an inside boat room to pass the obstruction,

provided that, at the time the overlap is established, she is able to do so and, in the case of a continuing obstruction, that there is room to pass between the obstruction and the outside boat at that time, without the outside boat having to take any action.

- Two new definitions have been introduced to help clarify some previously difficult situations.

Fetching A boat 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.

Mark-Room Room for a boat to sail to the mark, and then room to sail her proper course while at the mark. However, *mark-room* does not include room to tack unless the boat is overlapped to windward and on the inside of the boat required to give *mark-room*.



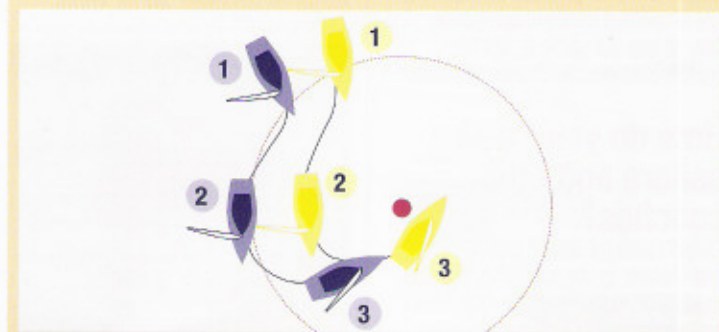
Some situations

Here we can see a significant effect of the change of the zone from two to three hull lengths.

Position 2 shows the position just as Blue entered the two-length zone. Her change of course outside the zone 'gave' Yellow an overlap in time for her to be entitled to room.

However, Yellow is still clear astern as Blue enters the larger three-length zone. It is Yellow that will now have to give mark-room for Blue to round the mark.

This is especially helpful for Blue when she has a couple of other boats inside her around the mark. If she can get to the three-length zone before she has to luff for the mark, her position should be protected.

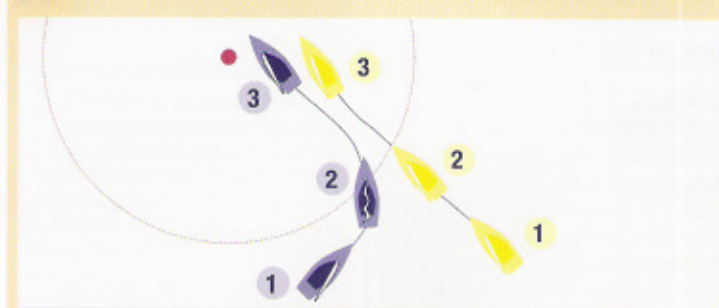


Think of 'mark room' in two sections.

First, the room a boat needs to sail to the mark (in a seamanlike manner in the prevailing condition).

Then, the room to sail her proper course while at the mark and so includes the room to make her turn.

Here Yellow has borne away to sail the course she would like to sail. If this is because Blue elected to bear away and Yellow took advantage of the opportunity, then no rule is broken. However, if Yellow bore away and caused Blue to alter course avoid her, then Yellow has failed to keep clear under rule 11 and, as she has taken room to which she is not entitled, she cannot be exonerated under rule 18.5.



Approaching the windward mark, Blue passes head-to-wind inside the (3 hull length) zone and completes her tack while keeping clear of Yellow.

However, as Blue approaches the mark she has to luff a little to clear the mark and Yellow has to sail above close hauled to keep clear of Blue.

Blue now breaks rule 18.3 as she changed tack inside the zone and then caused Yellow to sail above close hauled.

Judging three hull lengths is going to be quite difficult in this situation.