

Racing Rules of Sailing

Rule 18.2(c)

A submission from US SAILING

Proposal

Change the text of rule 18.2(c) to read as follows:

- (c) When a boat is required to give *mark-room* by rule 18.2(b), she shall continue to do so even if later an *overlap* is broken or a new *overlap* begins. However, ~~if either boat passes head to wind or~~ if the boat entitled to *mark-room* **passes head to wind or** leaves the *zone*, rule 18.2(b) ceases to apply

Current Position

See above.

Reason

It has become clear that the second sentence of rule 18.2(c) allows a manoeuvre that is potentially dangerous and contrary to the intent of rule 18. At an offwind mark, a boat required to give mark-room under rule 18.2(b) can avoid that obligation by turning past head-to-wind. She may then become entitled to mark-room at the last minute, under rule 18.2(a).

In fleet racing, consider the following common situation at a leeward mark. A group of overlapped, slow-moving boats has just entered the zone. Boat T is initially clear astern of them all, and moving faster. Instead of sailing outside the other boats and rounding behind them in an orderly fashion, Boat T can sail directly toward the mark, luff quickly past head to wind and bear away. She is now overlapped inside at least some of the other boats. T's obligation to give all the boats in the group mark-room under rule 18.2(b) no longer applies, but as inside boat she is now entitled to mark-room herself, under rule 18.2(a). Furthermore, she may be entitled to mark-room even if the other boats are unable to give it, because rule 18.2(e) may not apply. Finally, Boat T does not even have to be in the zone when she turns past head to wind, provided the other boats are in the zone at that time.

This is also a problem in team racing, where boats congregate at marks as part of normal strategy (to set a 'mark trap'), changing the game in a way contrary to what most team racers want. Many team racers also participate in fleet races, and this tactic will inevitably migrate to fleet racing.

Rule 18.2(c) correctly turns off 18.2(b) when the boat that was clear ahead or inside at the zone turns past head to wind. That boat is entitled to mark-room and has the choice of whether she wants to give up her entitlement. But a boat which is required to provide mark-room should not be permitted to avoid her obligation simply by turning past head to wind. That would negate a key principle of both the new rule 18 and its predecessors – namely, that a boat's obligation to give mark-room is "locked-in" when the first boat enters the zone.

This feature in rule 18 is new in 2009 and is unintended. It is inconsistent with the purpose of rule 18, which is to provide fair, orderly, and stable assignments of mark-room. The main reason why the zone was extended to three lengths is so that boats would have enough time and space to sort out their mark-rounding rights and responsibilities. If a boat can enter the zone and later take action to void her obligation to give mark-room, that could lead to disorderly and potentially dangerous mark roundings.