

Racing Rules of Sailing

Rule 20 and the Preamble to Section C

A submission from US SAILING

Proposal

Delete rule 20 and replace with:

20 ROOM TO TACK AT AN OBSTRUCTION

20.1 Hailing

When approaching an *obstruction*, a boat may hail for *room* to tack and avoid a boat on the same *tack*, but she shall not hail if

- (a) she is sailing below close-hauled,
- (b) she can avoid the *obstruction* safely without making a substantial course change, or
- (c) the *obstruction* is a *mark* and a boat that is *fetching* it would be required by rule 20.2(b) to change course as a result of the hail.

A boat that has been hailed for *room* to tack may always hail for *room* to tack and avoid a third boat.

20.2 Responding

- (a) After a boat hails, she shall give the hailed boat time to respond.
- (b) The hailed boat shall respond by giving the hailing boat *room* to tack and avoid her, either by tacking as soon as possible, or by immediately replying ‘You tack’ and then giving the hailing boat that *room*.
- (c) When the hailed boat responds, the hailing boat shall tack as soon as possible.

The hailed boat shall respond even if the hail breaks rule 20.1.

20.3 Exoneration

When a boat is taking *room* to which she is entitled under rule 20.2(b), she shall be exonerated if she breaks a rule of Section A or rule 15, 16 or 18.2 with respect to the hailed boat.

Preamble to Section C

*Section C rules do not apply at a starting **mark** surrounded by navigable water or at its anchor line from the time boats are approaching them to **start** until they have passed them. ~~When rule 20 applies, rules 18 and 19 do not.~~*

Current Position

Rule 20 is new.

Preamble to Section C: as above.

Reason

Introduction

Rule 20 has in the past received less attention than the other rules of Section C. This proposal is the end result of extensive discussion, suggestions from the Section C Working Party and several drafts. As far as possible, it retains the language used in current rule 20. The objectives of the proposal are:

- To organize the rule into a logical structure similar to that used in rules 18 and 19. This will make the rule easier to learn and use and more straightforward to cite in decisions. The reorganization of material in the proposed rule groups the requirements and restrictions for a boat hailing for room to tack into one section. The requirements for responding to the hail are together in the next section. The current rule, by contrast, mixes hailing and responding rules into one section, goes on to give rules about exoneration, and then returns to give more restrictions on hailing in its final section.
- To handle a number of multiple-boat situations that are not covered by the current rule. These changes enhance safety and are reinforced by clarifications of when a boat may hail and when she must respond to a hail.
- To simplify how rule 20 interacts with other rules. The 2009 changes to Section C, in particular the separation of obstructions from marks and the introduction of exoneration, allow simplifications in rule 20. The current rule does not take full advantage of these possibilities. One result is that the obscure final sentence of the Section C preamble is no longer needed.

Proposed Rule 20.1

As in the current rule, the proposed rule 20 comes into play when a boat hails for room to tack and avoid another boat on the same tack. Rule 20.1 sets out the conditions under which a boat may hail and brings together the circumstances under which she shall not. The proposed rule adds some important features.

- It makes it clear that a boat may always hail when she has herself been hailed for room to tack by a third boat. She may do so even if she would not otherwise meet the conditions of rule 20.1. This is essential in multiple boat situations so that an intervening boat can always 'pass on' the hail to the boat to windward of her without being penalized for an improper hail.
- Proposed rule 20.1(c) extends the application of the last sentence of current rule 20.3, concerning hailing when a hailed boat can fetch a mark that is also an obstruction. Again, the change is to address multiple boat situations.

Proposed Rule 20.2

Proposed rule 20.2 takes the reader step-by-step through the sequence of events following a hail. It follows the structure of current rules 20.1 (a), (b), and (c), with almost unchanged wording. This proposed rule also adds important features.

- Rule 20.2(b) clarifies that the hailed boat's basic responsibility is to give the hailing boat room to tack and avoid her, whether she does so by tacking immediately or by using the 'You tack' option. This is not explicit in the current rule.
 - The final sentence of rule 20.2 adds an important safety feature by making it clear that the hailed boat must respond even if the hailing boat's hail breaks rule 20.1. This avoids
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dangerous disagreements on the water in situations where delay can easily result in damage or injury.

Proposed Rule 20.3

Proposed rule 20.3, Exoneration, is a simple sentence very similar to current rule 20.2. It adds the words 'with respect to the hailed boat' at the end. This restriction limits exoneration so that it is only available for interactions between the hailing boat and the hailed boat. The current rule can be read as permitting exoneration for breaking a rule with respect to a third boat that just happens to be close by but is not involved in the rule 20 interaction.

Proposed rule 20.3 adds rule 18.2 to the list of rules for which exoneration is available. This handles some relatively rare situations. For instance: two overlapped boats on port tack enter the zone at a windward mark to be left to port and encounter a starboard-tack boat. The leeward port-tack boat hails the windward port-tack boat for room to tack under rule 20. However, under rule 18.2, she owes the windward port-tack boat mark-room. The proposed rule resolves this conflict in favour of rule 20, allowing the leeward boat to hail and tack without penalty.

Section C Preamble and Rule Conflicts

In the current preamble to section C, the final sentence is intended to resolve conflicts between rule 20 and rules 18 and 19 in favour of rule 20. However, this wholesale dis-application of rules 18 and 19 can have unintended effects that are well beyond what is desirable. The sentence is also poorly understood and remote from the rules to which it applies. As part of this proposal, it is proposed to delete the sentence, as explained below.

Careful analysis indicates that a much less intrusive approach is sufficient and will not change the game. The only true conflict with rule 18 is the one described in the paragraph above on proposed rule 20.3. Examination of rule 19.2(a) shows that it handles any possible conflicts with rule 19. When approaching an obstruction, a boat that hails for room to tack under rule 20 is always either a leeward boat or a boat clear ahead and thus always has right of way over the hailed boat. Rule 19.2(a) gives the right-of-way boat the right to choose which side of the obstruction she will pass. This typically arises when two overlapped port-tack boats approach a starboard-tack boat. If the windward port-tack boat wants to pass astern of the starboard-tack boat and the leeward port-tack boat wants to tack, the leeward port-tack boat, under rule 19.2(a), has the right to choose. By hailing for room to tack, the hailing boat is exercising that right – immediately the hail is made, the hailed boat loses her claim to room to pass between the obstruction and the hailing boat.

Multiple-Boat Application of Rule 20

In analysing rule 20 situations involving three or more boats, it quickly becomes clear that current rule 20 is inadequate. Here are some examples of the numerous situations which are not well resolved by the current rule but would be handled by the proposed rule.

- Three boats are overlapped approaching an obstruction. The middle and windward boats can fetch the obstruction. The leeward boat hails the middle boat for room to tack. Under current rule 20, if the middle boat hails the windward boat for room to tack in order to comply with her obligation to the leeward boat, she would break rule 20.3.
 - As above but this time the obstruction is a mark that only the windward boat can fetch. The leeward boat hails the middle boat for room to tack. Under current rule 20, if the middle boat hails the windward boat for room to tack in order to comply with her obligation to the leeward boat, she would break rule 20.3.
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- Three boats are overlapped approaching an obstruction. The leeward boat hails for room to tack. The middle boat is sailing below close-hauled. Again, if she passes on the hail to the windward boat, she will break current rule 20 - the first sentence.

Note that the proposed rule does not change the conclusions of a recent Case (Case 113), that all boats that can hear a hail of room to tack and that need to respond must do so, but that does not relieve intervening boats of the obligation to pass on the hail. Although this Case shows and resolves a three-boat rule 20 situation, it is carefully described to avoid any of the questions raised by the examples above, and is in fact probably the only three-boat situation that the current rule does cover.