Racing Rules of Sailing

Rule 20.1

A submission from US Sailing

Purpose or Objective

To make it clear that, after a boat hails for room to tack, the hailed boat must always respond as required by rule 20.2 even if the hailing boat is not approaching an obstruction. In addition, to make it clear that a boat that hails for room to tack at an obstruction sooner than is necessary has broken a rule.

Proposal

20 ROOM TO TACK AT AN OBSTRUCTION

20.1 Hailing

When approaching an obstruction, a boat may hail a boat on the same tack for room to tack and avoid her. However, she shall not hail unless:

(a) she is approaching an obstruction and will soon need to make a substantial course change to avoid it safely, and she can avoid the obstruction safely without making a substantial course change,

(b) she is sailing below close-hauled or above.

(c) the obstruction is a mark and a boat that is fetching it would be required to respond and change course.

In addition, she shall not hail if the obstruction is a mark and a boat that is fetching it would be required to change course as a result of the hail.

Clean Copy of Proposal

20 ROOM TO TACK AT AN OBSTRUCTION

20.1 Hailing

A boat may hail a boat on the same tack for room to tack and avoid her. However, she shall not hail unless

(a) she is approaching an obstruction and will soon need to make a substantial course change to avoid it safely, and

(b) she is sailing close-hauled or above.

In addition, she shall not hail if the obstruction is a mark and a boat that is fetching it would be required to change course as a result of the hail.
Current Position

As above.

Reasons

1. When rule 20 applies, rule 20.2(b) requires a boat that has been hailed for room to tack to respond even if the hail breaks rule 20.1. There are situations in which a boat that is not approaching an obstruction hails for room to tack. Case 10, which was in The Case Book from 1964 until 2012, provides an example. Case 10 was withdrawn for revision in 2013 because the Case Book Working Party could not agree on the answer to this question:

   If a boat hails for room to tack when she is not approaching an obstruction, is the hailed boat required by rule 20.2(b) to respond?

   In March of this year, each member of the ISAF Racing Rules Committee was asked the same question. The committee members definitely did not agree on the answer. The number who answered ‘Yes’ was 12; the number who answered ‘No’ was 6; and 4 stated that they could not answer either ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ because rule 20 was not clear. This lack of agreement among persons selected for their expert knowledge of the rules certainly indicates that the current rule should be revised so that it clearly implies either a ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ answer to the question.

   The members of the Racing Rules Committee were also asked:

   If rule 20 is changed for 2017, should the 2017 version of rule 20 require a hailed boat to respond (as required by rule 20.2(b)) even if the boat that hails for room to tack is not approaching an obstruction?

   There were 15 ‘Yes’ and 5 ‘No’ answers to this question. The proposed rule will do what the majority favours – it will require a boat hailed for room to tack to respond, even if the hailing boat is not approaching an obstruction.

2. The proposed rule promotes safety, which has always been one of the primary purposes of rule 20. The application of the proposed rule to the following situation illustrates this point. Boats A and B are sailing close-hauled on the same tack, with A ahead and to leeward of B. The crew of A sees what they believe are waves breaking over a rock immediately ahead of their boat; the crew of B does not see those waves. A hails B for room to tack. Under the proposed rule, B is required to respond by giving A room to tack and later, if B believes that A was not approaching an obstruction when she hailed, B can protest A under rule 20.1. Under the current rule, B might believe A was not approaching an obstruction and therefore deny A room to tack; if B's belief was wrong she would be subject to protest and disqualification. The proposed rule requires B to respond yet still penalizes A if in hindsight A's hail was inappropriate.

3. The words ‘soon’ and ‘need’ in proposed rule 20.1(a) are new. Those words address the problem of an early hail for room to tack. Under the current rule, a boat can hail for room to tack before it has become necessary for her to hail in order to avoid the obstruction safely. Such an early hail will often give the hailing boat a tactical advantage. Case 33 provides an example of such a situation. The wording of proposed rule 20.1(a) makes it clear that a boat that hails for room to tack at an obstruction sooner than is necessary breaks rule 20.1. With those two new words the proposed rule puts a time limit on how early a boat may hail. It permits a boat to hail when, if she were to delay her hail, there would not be time for the hailed boat to respond and for the hailing boat to tack and avoid the obstruction safely. If a boat hails for room to tack before that time, she will break proposed rule 20.1(a).

4. The proposed rule also differs from the current rule in these ways:
• In the first sentence of the proposed rule, the phrase, ‘a boat on the same tack’ is moved forward and appears after ‘hail’. This makes it clear that the hail is intended to be heard by the boat from which the hailing boat needs room. The first sentence of the current rule does not make that clear.

• The change from ‘if’ to ‘unless’ in rule 20.1’s second sentence allows much more direct wording for rule 20.1(a), and it avoids having to use a double negative in the wording of that rule.

• Almost all the situations in which a boat is permitted to hail under rule 20.1 are described by the conditions in proposed rules 20.1(a) and 20.1(b). The prohibition against hailing for room to tack and clear a boat that is fetching an obstruction that is also a mark has been moved to the bottom of the rule. This is a rarely applied restriction that disrupts the flow of the other restrictions and is not easy to phrase succinctly after ‘unless’.

• The change in the last sentence from ‘respond and change course’ to ‘change course’ simplifies the sentence without changing the rule because a hailed boat is always required by rule 20.2(b) to respond to a hail for room to tack.