

Racing Rules of Sailing

Definitions Clear and Mark-Room, Rules 18.2(d) and 18.5

A submission from US Sailing

Purpose

To fix a problem caused by an unintended consequence of rule 18.2(d) and to clearly establish when rule 18 no longer applies.

Proposal

Change Definition Mark-Room, rules 18.1 and 18.2(d) as follows:

Mark-Room *Room* for a boat to leave a *mark* on the required side. 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, *[no further changes]*

18.1 When Rule 18 Applies

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

- (a) between boats on opposite *tacks* on a beat to windward,
- (b) between boats on opposite *tacks* when the *proper course* at the *mark* for one but not both of them is to tack,
- (c) between a boat approaching a *mark* and one leaving it, or
- (d) if the *mark* is a continuing *obstruction*, in which case rule 19 applies.

Rule 18 no longer applies between boats when the boat entitled to *mark-room* has been given that *mark-room*.

18.2 Giving Mark-Room

- (d) Rules 18.2(b) and (c) cease to apply **if** ~~when~~ the boat entitled to *mark-room* ~~has been given that *mark-room*, or if she~~ passes head to wind or leaves the *zone*.

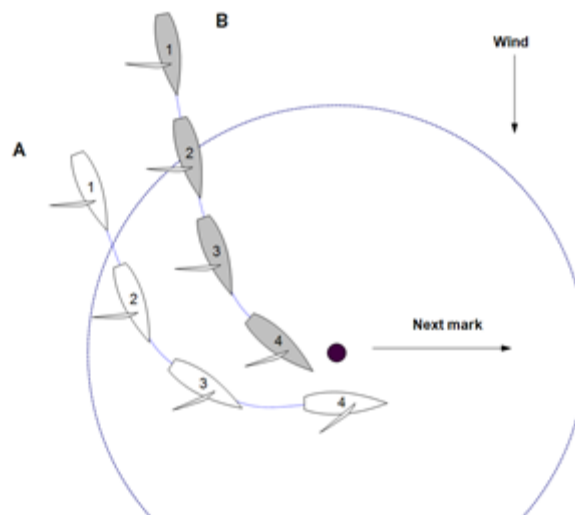
Current Position

As above.

Reasons

From 1997-2008, rule 18.1 stated that rule 18 applied between boats until they had ‘passed [the mark]’. In 2009, that statement was removed, so from 2009 to 2016 rule 18 did not contain wording that told readers when rule 18 ceased to apply, and sailors frequently asked, ‘When does rule 18 turn off?’ In 2017, in an attempt to answer that question, rule 18.2(d) was changed by adding the phrase ‘has been given that *mark-room*.’ As a result of that 2017 change, rules 18.2(b) and (c) now cease to apply ‘when the boat entitled to *mark-room* has been given that *mark-room*.’

Unfortunately, rule 18.2(d), combined with the current definition *Mark-Room*, results in an unintended consequence that introduces an undesirable game change. Consider the diagram below. A is clear ahead of B when she enters the zone, so rule 18.2(b) applies and A is entitled to mark-room from B. At position 4, A has been given room to sail to the mark, room to round the mark as necessary to sail the course, and room to leave it on the required side. According to rule 18.2(d), she is no longer entitled to mark-room from B. At that point, 18.2(b) no longer applies, so B is entitled to mark-room under rule 18.2(a) because she is overlapped inside A. This result was not intended by the writers of rule 18, nor is it how the game has been played for many years.



The intent behind adding the words ‘has been given that mark-room’ to rule 18.2(d) was that once a boat has been given mark-room, rule 18 should no longer apply. It was not intended that the boat that was entitled to mark-room under rule 18.2(b) would suddenly be required by rule 18.2(a) to give mark-room to the other boat. This problem is solved by removing the new wording from 18.2(d) and adding a new sentence at the end of rule 18.1. The new sentence in rule 18.1 turns off all of rule 18 rather than just rules 18.2(b) and (c).

A problem with the words ‘has been given mark-room’, as shown in the discussion above, is the imprecision of the definition *Mark-Room* with respect to exactly when all the conditions of that definition have been met. A diagram similar to the diagram above was circulated to the World Sailing RRC with a simple question: At what point had the boat entitled to mark-room been given that mark-room? There was no consensus on the correct answer to that question.

One possible answer might be that a boat entitled to mark-room has been given that room when she has left the mark on the required side and it is astern of her – that is, the mark is behind a line abeam from the boat's aftermost point. However, this criterion does not work. Consider two boats, IW and OL, overlapped during the last part of a leeward-mark rounding, with IW entitled to mark-

room from OL. The wind is from the north, and the next leg is upwind. There is a current from just east of northeast. After IW has passed the mark close-hauled on port tack but is still in the zone, it becomes clear to her that she is still at risk of being swept into the mark by the current. Clearly in this situation the mark is still 'in play' and IW should still be protected by rule 18.

Some members of the RRC suggested that the criterion for when rule 18 no longer applies should be that the boat entitled to mark-room has sailed to a position where no action by the boat required to give mark-room that is permitted by the rules will result in the boat entitled to mark-room touching the mark. The proposed addition to paragraph (b) in the definition *Mark-Room* extends the time during which mark-room must be given until the boat has rounded or passed the mark as necessary to sail the course without touching mark. This means that, in the OL-IW situation just described, OL must continue to give IW room to avoid touching the mark even if that room must be given after IW has rounded and passed the mark and made the course change necessary to sail to the next mark. Those added words give IW room to avoid being swept by the current into the mark, even if this must be done after IW has left the mark astern.
