Racing Rules of Sailing

Rule 20

A submission from US SAILING

Purpose or Objective

To organize the rule into a logical structure similar to that used in rules 18 and 19. For reasons of safety and fairness, to extend the rule to improve the treatment of situations involving three or more boats. To incorporate constructive suggestions from the Racing Rules Committee responding to a similar proposal from US SAILING made in 2010.

Proposal

Delete rule 20 and replace it 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. However, she shall not hail if

(a) she can avoid the obstruction safely without making a substantial course change,
(b) she is sailing below close-hauled, or
(c) the obstruction is a mark and a boat that is fetching it would be required to respond and change course.

20.2 Responding

(a) After a boat hails, she shall give the hailed boat time to respond.
(b) The hailed boat shall respond even if the hail breaks rule 20.1.
(c) The hailed boat shall respond either by tacking as soon as possible, or by immediately replying ‘You tack’ and then giving the hailing boat room to tack and avoid her.
(d) When the hailed boat responds, the hailing boat shall tack as soon as possible.

20.3 Passing a Hail to an Additional Boat

When a boat has been hailed for room to tack and she intends to respond by tacking, she may hail another boat on the same tack for room to tack and avoid her. She may hail even if her hail does not meet the conditions of rule 20.1. Rule 20.2 applies between her and the boat she hails.
20.4 Exoneration

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

Current Position

Current rule 20.

Reasons

Rule 20 has received less attention in previous rules cycles than the other rules of Section C. This proposal is the result of an extensive discussion and submissions in 2010, followed by revisions in 2011 to respond to input from the Racing Rules Committee, the Section C Working Party, and others.

The current rule mixes hailing and responding rules into one section, goes on to exoneration, and then returns to restrictions on hailing in its final section.

The proposed rule has been reorganized into a more logical structure. The first section brings together the requirements and restrictions for a boat hailing for room to tack. The requirements for responding to the hail are together in the next section. Passing on a hail to a third boat is covered in its own section, and the rule concludes with a section on exoneration. This structure will make the rule easier to learn and use and more straightforward to cite in decisions.

The proposed rule largely and as far as possible retains the wording used in current rule 20. It also adds language to clarify the hailed boat’s obligation to respond and covers multiple-boat situations much more comprehensively than the current rule.

There are three ways in which the proposed rule differs from the submission made by US SAILING in 2010:

1. Rule 20.1(c), which deals with hailing a boat that can fetch an obstruction which is also a mark, has been reworded to be simpler. The 2010 version was over-complicated in an attempt to cover multiple boat situations where, for instance, only the windward boat can fetch. After extensive discussion it was decided that this feature is important, so better wording has been developed.

   As a side benefit, the new wording improves the fairness of the rule in two-boat situations: when two boats, L and W, approach an obstruction that is also a mark which W is fetching, if L hails for room to tack and W replies “You tack”, L does not break rule 20.1(c) unless W needs to make a course change to give L the room she has requested. Under the current rule, L would be penalized even if W has to make no change of course.

2. Rule 20.2(b), requiring response to a hail, was, in the 2010 proposal, less logically located at the end of rule 20.2.

3. The 2010 proposal contained a stand-alone sentence at the end of rule 20.1 permitting a boat, once she has been hailed for room to tack, to “pass on” the hail to another boat when she herself needs room to tack. In this proposal this issue is handled in a separate new section, rule 20.3. This change was made for two reasons. First, these situations are less common; moving them out of rule 20.1 simplifies the narrative of the rule, making it easier to understand and learn. Second, it is important for safety that such a “middle” boat is free to hail without risking a penalty for violating the normal restrictions on hailing contained in
rule 20.1. It is easier to give relief from these restrictions in a separate sub-rule than in the rule containing the restrictions.

Relationships between the Proposed Rule and the Current Rule

Proposed rule 20.1 is constructed from parts of current rules 20.1 and 20.3, using almost identical wording. It makes clear when a boat may hail.

Proposed rule 20.2 follows current rules 20.1 (a), (b), and (c), with virtually unchanged wording. It takes the reader step-by-step through the sequence of events following a hail.

Rule 20.2(b) has no equivalent in the current rule. It adds an important safety feature by making it clear that the hailed boat must respond when she has been hailed under either rule 20.1 or rule 20.3, even if the hailing boat does not qualify to hail under those rules. This avoids dangerous disagreements on the water, in situations where delay can result in damage or injury. The hailed boat must respond; her remedy for an improper hail is to protest. This change embodies a principle expressed in Match Race Call MR 38 and in Team Race Call B7.

Proposed rule 20.3 handles hailing in multiple-boat rule 20 situations, as described above in the section on changes from the 2010 submission.

Proposed rule 20.4, Exoneration, is 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.

Here are some examples of the numerous multiple-boat situations which are not well resolved by the current rule but would be handled by the proposed rule. In each, the middle boat is in an impossible situation, with no safe option that complies with the current rule.

- Three boats are overlapped approaching an obstruction. The middle and windward boats can fetch the obstruction, but the leeward boat cannot 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.

- 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 the first sentence of current rule 20.

- Three boats are overlapped approaching an 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 breaks current rule 20.3. However, under proposed rule 20.3’s second and third sentences the middle boat’s hail does not break rule 20 and the windward boat is required to respond. The leeward boat breaks rule 20.1(c) and she is not exonerated.

Note that the proposed rule is consistent with the conclusions of a recent Case (Case 113); all boats that can hear a hail of room to tack and need to respond must do so, but that does not relieve intervening boats of the obligation to pass on the hail.