Racing Rules of Sailing

Definition Proper Course

A submission from US SAILING

Proposal

Proper Course  A course a boat would sail to finish the race and clear the finishing line and marks as soon as possible in the absence of the other boats referred to in the rule using the term. A boat has no proper course before her starting signal.

Current Position

As above.

Reason

The proposed change solves two problems in the current definition.

The first is a technical problem. The current definition does not define Proper Course in the way that competitors use the term. The proposal aligns the wording with what competitors think the definition currently says – that is, a proper course is one a boat would take to sail the remainder of the course and then cross the finishing line as soon as possible, in the absence of other boats referred to in the rule. The problem with the current definition is that ‘finish’ is a defined term that makes no reference to sailing the course, only to crossing the finishing line from the direction of the last mark. Strictly speaking, a boat’s proper course may well be to head for the finishing line without completing the course. By replacing the defined term ‘finish’ (in italics) with the phrase ‘finish the race’ (‘finish’ not in italics), the proposed definition eliminates the problem.

The second problem is with the term Proper Course at the finish. For example, the definition Mark-Room depends on Proper Course for its application. Without the added words ‘and clear the finishing line and marks’ a keep-clear boat entitled to mark-room at a finishing mark would lose her right to room as soon as her bow crosses the finishing line. After a boat finishes she continues to be racing, as that term is defined, until she ‘clears the finishing line and marks’, and therefore the rules of Parts 2, 3 and 4 still apply to her. The current definition Proper Course implies that a boat does not have a proper course after she finishes. This causes problems with the application of rules 17, 18 and 23, all of which refer to a boat’s proper course and clearly presume that, after the starting signal, such a course exists. The proposal fixes that problem by extending the definition to include the time after she finishes and before she clears the finishing line and marks.