Racing Rules of Sailing

Rule 47.2

A submission from the Chairman of the Racing Rules Committee

Purpose

To address questions involving a boat that loses a crew member overboard and then either continues to sail the race or finishes before that person is back in contact with the boat.

Proposal

Change rule 47.2 as follows:

47.2 No person on board shall intentionally leave, except when ill or injured, or to help a person or vessel in danger, or to swim. A person leaving the boat by accident or to swim shall be back in contact with the boat before the crew resumes sailing the boat to the next mark or finishes on board before the boat continues in the race.

Current Position

As above.

Reason

The second sentence of rule 47.2 has been in the racing rules, essentially unchanged, since 1965. The intent of that sentence is that, if a crew member accidentally or while swimming, is separated from the boat, that person must be recovered before the boat continues in the race. This rule was intended to avoid the following tactic used in courses with one windward leg followed by one downwind leg: Boats would start with a crew of, say, eight persons so that they had ample weight to keep the boat flat on the windward leg. Then, after rounding the windward mark, five persons would swim away from the boat (and not be recovered by the boat), thereby lightening the boat for the downwind run to the finish.

Problems of interpretation of the rule have arisen in situations in which a boat capsizes and a person becomes separated from the boat when boats are on a downwind leg and windblown or there is current setting the boats toward the next mark or the finishing line. Under today’s wording of rule 47.2’s second sentence, three questions have arisen: (1) If the current carries the boat across the finishing line before the person is recovered, should the boat be scored as having finished? (2) If, between the time the boat capsizes and the time the person is reunited with the boat, the boat has moved closer to the finishing line, has the boat ‘continued in the race’ during that time interval? (3) If the answer to Question 2 is ‘Yes’, is the boat required to sail back to the point at which the person became separated from the boat before the boat ‘continues in the race’? Under the current wording of rule 47.2’s second sentence, these three questions have no clear answer.
Under the proposal, the answers are clear. (1) The boat that is swept across the line by the current does not finish unless the person who was separated from the boat is back in contact with it. (Also, note: When a boat is capsized, a crew member in the water but in contact with the boat would surely be considered to be ‘in normal position’. ) (2) Question (2) will be moot under the proposal. Provided the person is back in contact with the boat when the boat resumes sailing the course, the boat will not break rule 47.2. (3) The proposed wording clearly would not require the boat to sail back to the place where the person became separated from the boat before continuing in the race.