

Summary Description of Changes to 2025-2028 Racing Rules

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These rule changes are listed in the order in which they appear in the rulebook. The impact of each change is Dave's rough guess at how much it will affect racing at the local/regional level, based on a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is a very minimal impact and 10 is a big impact.

Definition: Continuing Obstruction Impact: 1

This is a completely new definition. This term was mentioned (but not defined very well) in the previous definition Obstruction, but now the rule is much more specific. A continuing obstruction is an object the boats will pass alongside for at least three hull lengths. This won't change racing very much because objects that were considered continuing obstructions in the past were usually at least three boatlengths long. As in the old rules, boats that are passing a continuing obstruction must comply with rule 19.2(c), which is a special rule for continuing obstructions that is essentially unchanged in the new rulebook. One new thing that is not a continuing obstruction is a long race committee vessel that is also a mark.

Definition: Finish Impact: 1

There are two changes to this definition. The first is that a boat finishes when she crosses the finish line 'after her starting signal' (not 'after starting'). This is a very minor change that will not affect 99.9% of racing. The second change is that the 'sailing instructions may change the direction in which boats are required to cross the finishing line to finish.' Previously, you always had to cross the finish line 'from the course side' in accordance with the Definition – now the sailing instructions can change this, so be sure to check them before each race/regatta.

Definition: Mark-Room Impact: 3

There are four changes in this definition:

First, mark-room now includes room for a boat to leave the mark astern. This means the boat entitled to mark-room is protected a little longer than in the past; it also gives us a clearer point at which rule 18 no longer applies (which is important so a boat knows when she loses the protection of mark-room).

The **second** change is that a boat entitled to mark-room no longer gets 'room to round or pass the mark as necessary to sail the course.' The jury is still out on exactly what this deletion means, but it could be that gybing at a windward mark, offset mark or jibe mark, for example, is no longer included in mark-room, even when this maneuver is

'necessary' to sail the course (i.e. after the gybe you are heading right at the next mark). Until we find out more, I recommend conservative gybing around marks.

Third, the definition Mark-Room no longer includes the words 'room to round or pass the mark . . . without touching the mark.' This is not a change since, in both the old and new rules, mark-room includes 'room' to round or pass the mark. The definition Room includes 'space to comply with her obligations under the rules of Part 2 and rule 31 [Touching a Mark].' In other words, a boat giving mark-room had (and has) to give enough room so the other boat is not at risk of breaking rule 31 (i.e. touching the mark).

The **fourth** change in the definition Mark-Room is the deletion of the sentence about tacking at a mark, but this is not really a change. Mark-room did not (and does not) include room to 'tack' (i.e. pass from closehaunched on one tack to close-hauled on the other tack). That's because once a boat turns past head to wind she is on the other tack; at that point the boats are probably on opposite tacks (on a beat to windward), so rule 18 does not apply between them. However, if turning up toward the wind (in preparation for a tack) is part of a boat's normal rounding, then this part of the tack would be included in mark-room (until the boat passes head to wind or leaves the mark astern).

Definition: Obstruction Impact 1

This definition is almost exactly the same as in the old rules except for one slight change. In the old rules, an object, area or line could be designated as an obstruction by the sailing instructions. Now, any rule can designate an object, area or line as an obstruction. For example, the notice of race could say that a 'closed' start/finish line is an obstruction, or it might say that a specific government area is designated as an obstruction.

Basic Principle – Sportsmanship and the Rules Impact 1

The wording of this Basic Principle stays exactly the same. What's changed is the status of the Basic Principles in the definition Rule. This definition makes it clear that the Basic Principles are not rules you can break – rather they are broad guidelines for acceptable behavior. 'Sportsmanship and the Rules' describes a fundamental principle of sportsmanship: when a boat breaks a rule and is not exonerated, she will promptly take an appropriate penalty. If a boat does not promptly take a penalty, she has failed to follow this fundamental principle of sportsmanship, and she may break Rule 2 (Fair Sailing) or Rule 69 (Misconduct). If you think a boat has not competed in a 'sportsmanlike' manner, you can protest them under Rule 2 (but not under the Basic Principle), or you can file a report with the protest committee for a possible hearing under Rule 69.

Rule 14 Avoiding Contact Impact 3

Rule 14 has said for a long time that a boat 'shall avoid contact' with another boat, and it still does. What's different now is that the new rule 14 adds two more requirements for a boat: • 'not cause contact between boats, and • not cause contact between a boat and an object that should be avoided.' In terms of complying with rule 14, it is no longer enough for a boat simply to avoid hitting another boat – there may be times when a boat is required to take additional action to avoid other contact. However, it's not yet clear what exactly the rules mean by 'cause.' Until there is more clarity on the interpretation of this word, give other boats a slightly wider berth, especially when you are near multiple boats or 'an object that should be avoided.'

Rule 17 On the Same Tack; Proper Course Impact 2

What's missing in the new Rule 17 is the last sentence of the old rule: 'This rule does not apply if the overlap begins while the windward boat is required by rule 13 to keep clear.' That sentence was included a while back to discourage boats from doing a 'slam dunk' (where the starboard tacker just crosses a port tacker and then tacks right to windward of her). But this tactical move does not happen very often in fleet racing, and the presence of this sentence complicated an otherwise straightforward and important rule. So it was deleted. The tactical implication is that it's now a little easier (from a rules perspective) for the starboard tacker to do a slam dunk.

Preamble to Section C Impact 1

In the old rulebook, the Section C preamble said rules 18, 19 and 20 did not apply 'AT' a starting mark when boats were starting. We know this meant boats were not entitled to mark-room or room at the committee vessel when they were approaching it to start. But it wasn't completely clear if, for example, rule 19 (Room to Pass an Obstruction) applied between boats when they were approaching another obstruction (e.g. a right-of-way boat) that was at, or very close to, the committee vessel. That is clear now. Rules 18, 19 and 20 are turned off only 'when the mark or obstruction referred to in those rules is a starting mark surrounded by navigable water . . .' That means they (at least rules 19 and 20) could apply when the obstruction is a right-of-way boat.

Rule 18.2(a) Giving Mark-Room Impact 3

This is the nuts-and-bolts part of rule 18 that tells boats how to behave while they are rounding marks. Most of this rule stays the same, except for one part: When the first of two boats reaches the zone, the rule now depends on whether they are overlapped, or not overlapped. If they are overlapped, the outside boat has to give the inside boat mark-room, as before. But if they are not overlapped (i.e. one is clear ahead and the

other is clear astern), the boat that has not yet reached the zone must give mark-room to the boat that reached the zone first. This changes the situation where the boat that reaches the zone first is clear astern of the other boat. In the old rules, neither boat was entitled to mark-room (yet). In the new rules, when boats are not overlapped, the one that reaches the zone first gets mark-room. Now we always know which boat gets mark-room at the moment the first boat reaches the zone.

18.3 Tacking in the Zone Impact 2

Rule 18.3 has been revised so the rule easier to read, but its meaning hasn't changed much. A boat that tacks inside the zone at a windward mark still has to be careful not to cause a boat that entered the zone on starboard tack to sail above closehauled to avoid her. However, there is a slight change to the situation where a boat (let's call it X) tacks inside the zone near a starboard tacker (Z) that also just tacked in the zone. Under the old rules, once X passed head to wind (so that she and Z were both on starboard tack), rule 18 began to apply between them and rule 18.2 said Z had to give X mark-room (even if X broke rule 13 while tacking, she was exonerated as long as she was sailing within the mark-room to which she was entitled). That is no longer the case. Whenever a boat tacks in the zone, rule 18.2 (Giving Mark-Room) does not apply between her and a boat on starboard tack that is fetching the mark (even if that boat also tacked in the zone). This adds even more risk for a port-tacker that tacks in the zone.

Rule 19.2(a) Giving Room at an Obstruction Impact 1

Rule 19 (Room to Pass an Obstruction) stays pretty much the same in the new rulebook. When two boats approach an obstruction, the right-of-way boat still gets to choose on which side to pass the obstruction, and if the boats are overlapped, the outside boat still has to give the inside boat room to pass the obstruction. But one sentence has been added to the new rule 19.2(a): 'If a right-of-way boat changes course when choosing on which side to pass the obstruction, she shall give the other boat room to keep clear.' This rule says almost the exact same thing as rule 16.1 (Changing Course), but unlike rule 16, a boat can't be exonerated for breaking rule 19.2(a). So this addition puts more of a burden on a right-of-way boat that changes her course at the last moment to pass an obstruction.

Rule 20.1: Hailing for Room to Tack Impact 3

The old rule 20, like the new one, allows a boat to hail for room to tack when she is headed toward an obstruction and needs room from another boat to tack and avoid it. The old rule did not specify a particular hail, so a boat could yell, 'Room to Tack' or 'I need water,' for example. But there were times when it was not clear whether a boat

was making a hail to initiate Rule 20. What if a boat said, 'There's a big rock ahead!' Did the windward boat have to respond to this? The rulemakers have tried to make this clearer in the new rule by modifying rule 20.1 as follows, 'A boat may hail for room to tack and avoid a boat on the same tack by hailing 'Room to tack. . .' There is currently some doubt about whether these words are mandatory. For the near future, I strongly suggest using the specific words 'Room to Tack' when you are the hailing boat. And when another boat hails you for room to tack, I recommend responding even if they don't use the exact words 'Room to Tack.'

Rule 60.2 Intention to Protest Impact 1

When a boat that is longer than 6 meters intends to protest for an incident in the racing area, she must hail 'Protest' and display a red flag, at the first reasonable opportunity for each. However, if she is 'not within hailing distance at the time of the incident,' her only requirement is to 'inform the protestee of its intention to protest at the first reasonable opportunity.' So if you see a boat hit a mark, or if you see two boats have contact, and you're too far away for them to hear your hail, you don't have to fly a protest flag. This is a change from the old rules.

Rule 60.3 Delivering a Protest Impact 1

In the old rules the requirements for a written protest were a bit complex. Rule 61.2 listed a number of things that had to be included, but then said you didn't actually have to include some of them as long as you met those requirements at other specific times. Now the rule (new rule 60.3a) is clear and simple. You still have to file a written protest by the protest time limit, but the written protest has to include only three things: the protestor, the protestee, and a description of the incident. You can (and usually should) file a written protest that looks more thoughtful and argues your case better, but if you're at risk of missing the protest time limit, go simple and quick.

Race Signals: Abandonment Impact 1

In the Race Signals section at the beginning of the rulebook, there are three entries under 'Abandonment Signals,' each of which involves flying Flag N. The descriptions of all three signals used to begin with 'All races are abandoned' (and ended with further instructions for boats). Now all three signals begin with 'All races in progress are abandoned.' This makes it clear that the abandonment signal does not apply to races held on that day that are no longer in progress.