

“Overtaking Boat Keep Clear”

I occasionally hear this called, but there is no such rule. Well actually there is a rule but only in the “International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea” which do not apply to our racing. There are rules which do apply to the situations where one boat ‘overtakes’ another but which boat is required to keep clear depends on several factors.

If the boats are of **different tacks**, which is quite possible on a downwind run, then the ones on port tack are required to keep clear of those on starboard regardless of whether they are the leading or the overtaking boat.

When the two boats are on the **same tack and not overlapped** then the boat clear astern must keep clear of the other. As soon as there is **an overlap** then the rule that applies changes and the windward boat must keep clear. If the boat astern establishes an overlap to weather then it must continue to keep clear. If it establishes **an overlap to leeward** of the boat ahead then it is the latter that must keep clear. As this is a change of rights due to the action of the boat astern then the overlap must be established in a manner that allows the boat ahead the opportunity and time to keep clear. In practical terms this means at least that the overlap must be established at a distance sufficient to allow the other’s stern to swing as the boat steers.

There is also a requirement that a boat establishing an overlap to leeward of a boat ahead (within two lengths to leeward) **must not sail above its proper course**, the course that it would sail in the absence of other boats. This will prevent a boat overtaking and then luffing another. To re-establish luffing rights it must sail past the other until it is clear ahead which then releases it from the proper course requirement.

Note also that a boat overtaking to leeward with both on the same tack when the overlap is established is the only time when proper course is a requirement. If the boats are on different tacks when the overlap is established and then one gybes; or the boats are more than two boat lengths apart when the overlap is made and they then converge; or the overtaking boat is to windward; then there is no requirement for proper course, the leeward boat can luff.

Another aspect of overtaking is that of a **third boat sailing between two** that are side-by-side. One of the two is an obstruction to the other because it must keep clear of it. A rule states that it is illegal to pass between a boat and an obstruction to it unless there is initially sufficient room to clearly pass. If the two boats are close enough together that either would need to change course for the third to pass between them then the third must not go there.

Overtaking to leeward.



Rule 12 has: *When boats are on the same tack and not overlapped, a boat clear astern shall keep clear of a boat clear ahead.*

Rule 15 has: *When a boat acquires right of way, she shall initially give the other boat room to keep clear.*

An overtaking boat that progresses from being clear astern to overlapped to leeward (photo above) must do so in a way that allows the other boat to keep clear. As boats steer from the stern they can only change direction by swinging their stern. This means that overtaking boat must only start to overtake at a distance to leeward that is sufficient for the now windward boat to be able to keep clear.

Rule 17 has: *If a boat clear astern becomes overlapped within two of her hull lengths to leeward of a boat on the same tack, she shall not sail above her proper course while they remain on the same tack and overlapped within that distance.*

This means that when a boat overtakes to leeward, within two boat lengths to leeward, it cannot luff the now windward boat by sailing above ‘proper course’, which is the course that the boat would sail in the absence of other boats.

Rule 19 applies to obstructions. A boat that has right of way is an obstruction to a boat that has to keep clear.

Rule 19.2(c) has: *While boats are passing a continuing obstruction, if a boat that was clear astern and required to keep clear becomes overlapped between the other boat and the obstruction and, at the moment the overlap begins, **there is not room for her to pass between them**, she is not entitled to room under rule 19.2(b). While the boats remain overlapped, she shall keep clear and rules 10 and 11 do not apply.*



In the photo (left) 6 is an obstruction to 30 and 5 should not attempt to go between them as there is insufficient room to pass between them if an overlap is established.

Case 23 clarifies that if 5 was on starboard then the two port tack boats would have to keep clear.

Guidelines for small boat sailors

- Don't hit other boats. Collisions are slow and arguments are slower.
- Keep out of the way of boats in front of you.
- Port tack boats usually have to stay out of the way of everyone else.
- Windward boats must stay away from leeward boats.
- The inside boat gets to go round the mark first.
- Don't hit marks. Doing circles is slow.
- Don't hit the committee boat. First, it is a mark and second, it really makes them mad.
- Nothing good ever happens on a layline.
- The port tack layline is a very ugly place.
- Control your own destiny: stay out of the protest room. Protest committees are uncontrollable: with a 100% solid case, you have a 50% chance of being DSQ.



Collisions cost races.



Match racing always has starboard roundings!

Rule 18 - Mark-Room:



This was a match race between Bruce (33) and Terry (12) so the downwind mark had to be rounded to starboard. At the 4 boat length zone Terry was clear ahead, as shown by the photo at about 3-3.5 lengths to the mark.



In rounding the mark the two boats collide. Both are still on port gybe. Nominally Terry is the windward boat. Rule 18 applies at marks. In this case the last sentence of 18.2(b) applies:

"If a boat is clear ahead when she reaches the zone, the boat clear astern at that moment shall thereafter give her mark-room".

The new 2013-2016 Rules add an additional paragraph which would have applied in this case:

"18.2(c) When a boat is required to give mark-room by rule 18.2(b),

"(2) if she becomes overlapped inside the boat entitled to mark-room, she shall also give that boat room to sail her proper course, while they remain overlapped."

In this case 12's proper course was to round the mark and 33 had obtained and remained overlapped inside.



Incident: Rules 18, 19 and 62



This incident occurred recently soon after the start of a handicap race. The blue buoy is a windward mark. 58 is the leading boat and is on starboard. **Rule 18**, mark-room, applies between

18 and 82 as they are on the same tack but **rule 18.1(a)** states that “it does not apply between boats on opposite tacks on a beat to windward”. **Rule 10** gives 58 the right of way and the other two should have kept clear.

Because they have to keep clear of 58 that boat is, by definition, an obstruction to 18 and 82. This means that **rule 19**, Room at an Obstruction, applies between these two boats. While 18 appears to clear behind 58 it is required by **rule 19.2(b)** to give 82 room to also clear 58, which it has not done.

A penalty should have been given to 18. One was given to 82.

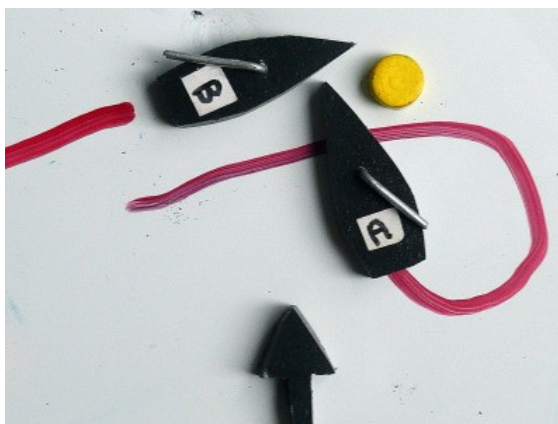


As a result of the collision 58 was pushed the wrong side of the blue buoy and also caught her keel on it while the other two sailed off and several others passed by.

Rule 62 allows a protest to the race officials to ask for redress. **Rule 64.2** allows a protest committee to give redress in various ways, including adjusting the scoring of the boats in the race. Examples of changing the score are given in **Rule A10**, such as giving the disadvantaged boat her average score in the other races in a series. In this case it could have been the average of the other handicap races. Or 58 could have been given a score ahead of the finishing position of both the other two boats in the incident.

Another Rule 18 incident

Another incident occurred at the previous mark. The wind was such that a windward start was not able to be made so a reaching start was set with a long first leg on starboard tack to a buoy which then gave a windward leg.



A boat (**A**) had missed the mark and circled around to approach the mark on port tack and collided with a boat (**B**) that was on starboard tack. **Rule 18.1(a)** did not apply because it wasn't a windward mark. **A** claimed that he should have been given room at the mark because he was ahead of **B** and/or overlapped inside.

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

As **A** had circled around onto port tack this had her pass head to wind so she was no longer entitled to mark-room.



These two boats collided rounding a mark and were still locked together some way down the leg. Because the boats steer by swinging their stern they found it difficult to separate.

Rule 11 should have applied with the windward boat (right) keeping clear.