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Rules We Sail By

Simplified Sailing Rules for R/C Sailboats

This set of rules is based on the “Rules in Brief” published by the US Sailing Association. The actual Rule Numbers from “The Racing Rules of Sailing” are used here because people often use them as a kind of short-hand when talking about the rules.

Right of Way Rules

Rule 10 - Port-Starboard

A port tack boat must keep clear of a starboard-tack boat. You are on “port tack” if the wind is coming over your port, or left, side. You are on “starboard tack” if the wind is coming over your starboard, or right, side. You are “keeping clear” of another boat if she doesn’t have to maneuver to avoid you.

Rule 11 – Windward-Leeward

When boats are overlapped and on the same tack, the windward boat must keep clear. Boats are “overlapped” when the trailing boat’s bow is in front of a line through the lead boat’s aft most point and perpendicular to its centerline.

Rule 12 – On Same Tack, Astern-Ahead

When boats are on the same tack and not overlapped, the boat clear astern must keep clear.

Rule 13 – Tacking Too Close

Before you tack, make sure your tack will keep you clear of all other boats.

Limitations on the Right-of-Way Boat

Rule 14 – Avoid Contact

You must avoid contact with other boats if you can. However, if you have the right of way, and there is contact with no damage, you will be exonerated, and won’t be penalized.

Rule 15 – Acquiring Right of Way

When you do something to become the right of way boat, you must give the other boat a chance to keep clear of you.

Rule 16 – Changing Course

When you change course, you must give the other boat a chance to keep clear of you.

Rule 17 – On the Same Tack: Proper Course

If you are overlapped to leeward of a boat on the same tack, and, if just before the overlap began, you were clear astern of her, i. e. you caught up with her, you cannot sail above your proper course. “Proper course” is the course that will take you to the next mark fastest. If the situation occurred for any other reason, for example she caught up with you, you have “luffing rights” and you can sail above your proper course. Luffing rights means you can exercise your rights under Rule 11.

At Marks and Obstructions

These rules apply to all marks except the starting marks, or when boats are on opposite tacks on a beat to windward.

Rule 18.2 – Inside the Zone

The zone is an area within four boat lengths of a mark. “Mark Room” is room to sail to the mark, round it, and sail to the next mark. Rights to mark room are frozen when the first of the two boats enter the zone. A boat has the right to mark room if, at that time, she was overlapped inside the other boat, or if she was clear ahead of the other boat.

Rule 18.3 – Tacking Near a Mark

Don’t tack in the zone if you will cause another boat to maneuver to avoid you.

Penalties

Rule 44, Rule E4.3 – Penalty Turns

If you break a rule while racing, (Rules 10 through 17), or hit a mark, get clear of other boats and do a 360 degree turn.

Rule 22.1 – Over Early

If you cross the start line before the bell, keep clear of other boats and sail around either end of the start line and restart.

Hailing

Rule E2.1 – Hailing Requirements

You should communicate with the other sailors, as a courtesy, so that they aren’t surprised by violating the Rules.

If you have the right of way by Rule 10, you should say their sail number and “starboard!”

If you are the leeward boat and there is a conflict, you should say their sail number and “leeward!” or “come up!” so they can keep clear according to Rule 11.

If you are entitled to room, for instance at a mark, by rule 18.3, you should say their number and “room”.

When entering the zone and you expect mark room by virtue of being overlapped, or clear ahead by Rule 18.2, you can call that to the other boat’s attention by saying “overlapped”, or “clear ahead”.

When you are the victim of someone violating a rule, you should say “XX protests YY, XX protests YY”. YY then needs to do a 360 degree turn, or explain why he didn’t to you, or the protest committee, after the race.

Protesting someone who violates a rule is your duty to the rest of the competitors, since it also effects their position with respect to the perpetrator. Not protesting is not being polite; it is not playing the game according to the rules.

After completing a penalty turn, you should announce “penalty complete” or “360 complete”.