

Tactical rounding at a downwind mark and the new definition of Mark Room

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Part 1- Tactical mark roundings

Someone asked the question “May I do a tactical rounding at a downwind mark under the new 2013-2016 RRS?” Unfortunately, the simple answer is “It depends!” The good news is that for a downwind mark, there are no major rule changes from the previous version of The Racing Rules of Sailing (the RRS). The main difference is the new wording on the definition of Mark room.

The rules for who has to give room and who is entitled to room at a mark, is contained in R 18 of the RRS. When you read the rule, you will notice that a number of words, like *overlap* and *room* and *mark-room* appear in italics.

In the RRS, when a word appears in *italics*, it has a definition in the Definition section of the rule book. In the prior versions of the Rule book, the definitions were stuck away at the back – sort of an afterthought. But in the RRS 2013 – 2016 version, the Definitions have been moved up to the front of the book! Here is an extract of the new definitions of *Mark-room* and *Room*. Note that the use of the word *room* within the definition of *Mark-room* is also in italics and refers to the definition of *room*.

Definitions

Mark-Room - *Room* for a boat to leave a mark on the required side. Also,

- (a) *room* to sail to the mark when her proper course is to sail close to it, and
- (b) *room* to round the mark as necessary to sail the course.

However, *mark-room* for a boat does not include *room* to tack unless she is overlapped inside and to windward of the boat required to give *mark-room* and she would be fetching the mark after her tack.

Room -The space a boat needs in the existing conditions, including space to comply with her obligations under the rules of Part 2 and rule 31, while manoeuvring promptly in a seamanlike way.

Now back to the question about tactical rounding, and to answer it, we need to look at several items.

1. What is a tactical rounding?
2. The definitions that may apply – especially ‘Mark room’ and ‘Clear ahead/Clear astern/Overlapped’
3. The right of way rules that apply, usually Port/Stbd (R 10) windward/leeward (R 11), in conjunction with or modified by R 18.

Also we need to look at the various combinations that can arise as this can change the answer:

1. Marks to port, or marks to stbd?
2. clear ahead/clear astern or overlapped?
3. If overlapped, is the inside boat on stbd or port, and is the outside boat on stbd or port?

What is a tactical rounding?

This term is usually used to describe the ‘wide in- close out’ method of rounding the leeward mark. It is the course you would like to sail, in the absence of other boats to go into the mark fast, and come out close hauled, with minimum distance lost to leeward. Hence the underlying question of this article – how does the presence of other boats affect my ability to make the perfect tactical rounding?

The definitions and Mark Room

The only significant change in the new RRS 2013 - 2016 as they relate to downwind (leeward) marks is the new wording in the definition of Mark Room. Basically, the old version said “room to sail to the mark and while at the mark, room to sail your proper course”. The new version removes some awkward interpretations that had to be made about what was ‘at the mark’. The key piece of the new version basically says ‘Room to sail to the mark if your proper course would be to sail close to the mark. What that means to me, is that if a boat has mark room, they have the right to sail as close to the mark as their proper course allows. So once they are in the zone, don’t get between them and the mark – or you may be guilty of denying them mark room and thereby, break some part of R 18.

Tactical Rounding and the Rules

The answer to the question of tactical rounding is that you MAY do a tactical rounding if you are the Right of Way (ROW) boat and the rules do not place a restriction on your course (see **Part 2** below). You MAY NOT do be able to do a tactical rounding if you have mark room but the other boat has ROW.

It is important to note that while the defined term ‘overlap’ does not apply to boats on opposite tacks at a weather mark, it does apply to boats on opposite tacks at a leeward mark. This is contained in the definition of Clear Ahead/clear astern/Overlapped which says in part:

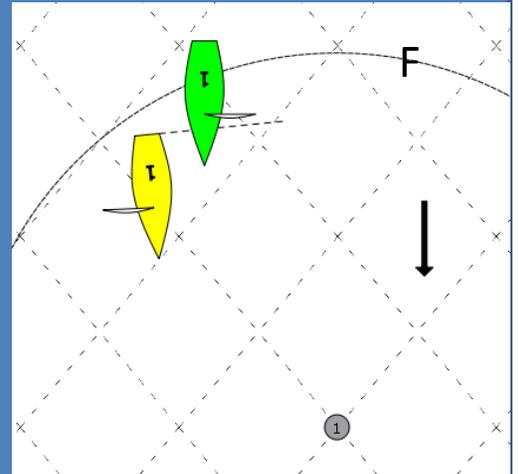
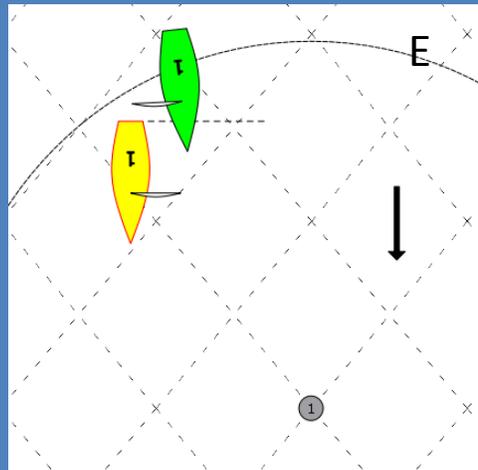
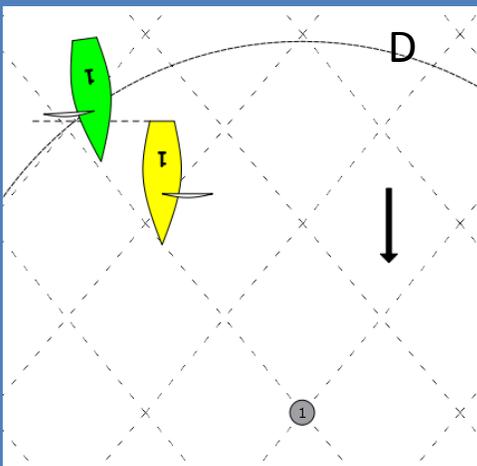
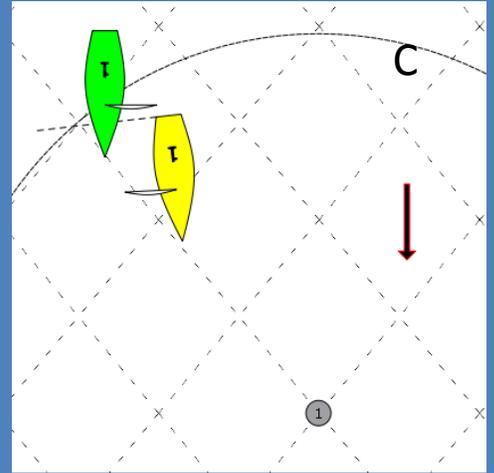
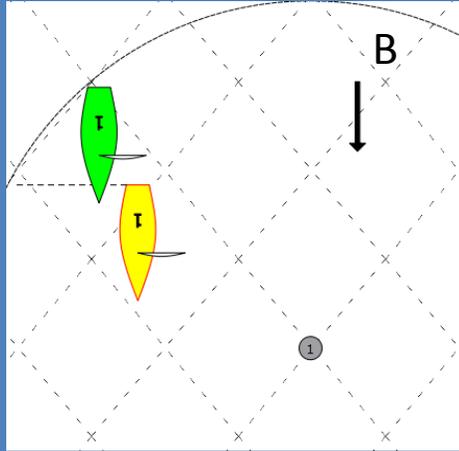
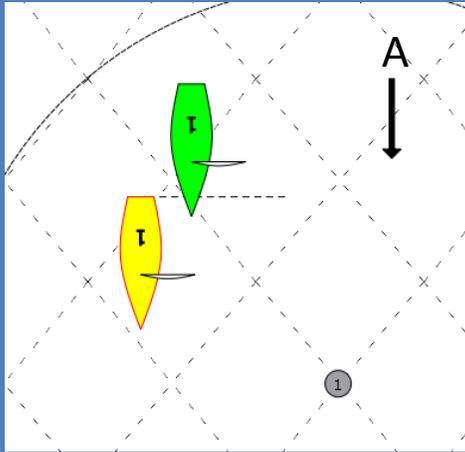
These terms always apply to boats on the same tack. They do not apply to boats on opposite tacks unless rule 18 applies or both boats are sailing more than ninety degrees from the true wind.

If you are clear ahead approaching the zone and at the zone, then you can choose how wide you want to sail, approaching the mark, and the other boats will have to give you mark room even if an overlap is obtained later. R 18.2.b.

If you are inside overlapped boat at the zone and are entitled to mark room but the other boat is ROW then they can push you close to the mark (preventing the wide in – close out), so long as they give you mark room. For example if you are on port and they are on stbd, or you are windward and they are leeward, then they control how wide (or close) they will allow you to sail as you approach the mark.

So now a brief quiz. For each diagram, may Yellow make a tactical rounding, and if not, why not and under which rule?

Marks to Port



Spoiler Alert - My answers –

A. No. Both boats are on Stbd and overlapped at the zone. Yellow does not have mark room – Green has mark room as inside overlapped boat. R 18.2.b (Green may do a tactical rounding and Yellow has to allow room for Green, including room to gybe).

B. Yes. Both boats are on Stbd and overlapped at the zone Yellow is inside boat and has mark room. R 18.2.b. Yellow is also ROW boat under R 11.

C. No. Green is on Stbd, Yellow is on Port. R10. Yellow has mark room. R 18.2.b. Green can force Yellow close to the mark.

D. Yes. Yellow is on Stbd, Green is on Port. R10. Yellow has mark room, R 18.2.b.

E. No. Yellow is on stbd, Green is on Port, R10, but Green is inside overlapped boat at the zone and has mark room. R 18.2.b.

F. No. Yellow is on Port, Green is on Stbd, R10, but Green is inside overlapped boat at the zone and has mark room. R 18.2.b. (Green may do a tactical rounding and Yellow has to allow room for Green, including room to gybe).

Part 2 - Downwind Mark Roundings and Proper Course.

There is a subtle but important change in the definition of Mark Room in the new 2013 – 2016 rules compared to the prior version. As a reminder, the RRS 2009 - 2012 version said, in essence, that with Mark Room, you had the right to sail to the mark, and the right to sail your proper course while at the mark. The new version says that with Mark Room, you have the right to sail to the mark when your proper course is to sail close to the mark.

To see the effect of this change, take a look at the two diagrams below. Diagram A shows two boats sailing to a downwind mark, and the next mark is back up to windward. In Diagram B the same two boats are sailing to a downwind mark and then to an offset mark, before sailing back up wind.

In both diagrams, Yellow is clear ahead when she reaches the zone (Position 1). Yellow sails a bit deep, past the mark and turns at position three, creating an overlap with Green. Yellow luffs up to close hauled towards the mark, 'closing the door' on Green – Position 4.

Question 1 – In diagram A, under the new RRS 2013-2016, who has right of way and who should keep clear? Which boat would be DSQ in a protest hearing and under which rule(s)?

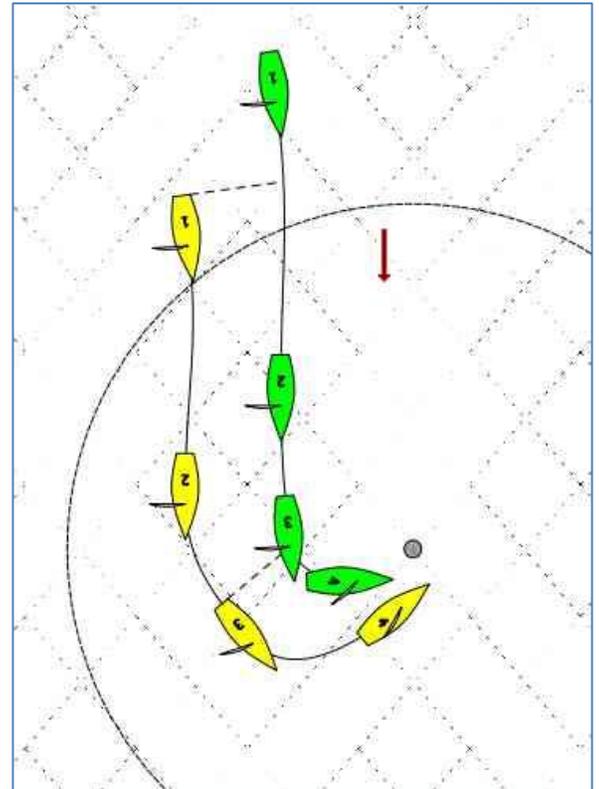


Diagram A. Downwind Mark and next mark is up wind.

Question 2 – In diagram B, under the new RRS 2013-2016, who has right of way and who should keep clear? Which boat would be DSQ in a protest hearing and under which rule(s)?

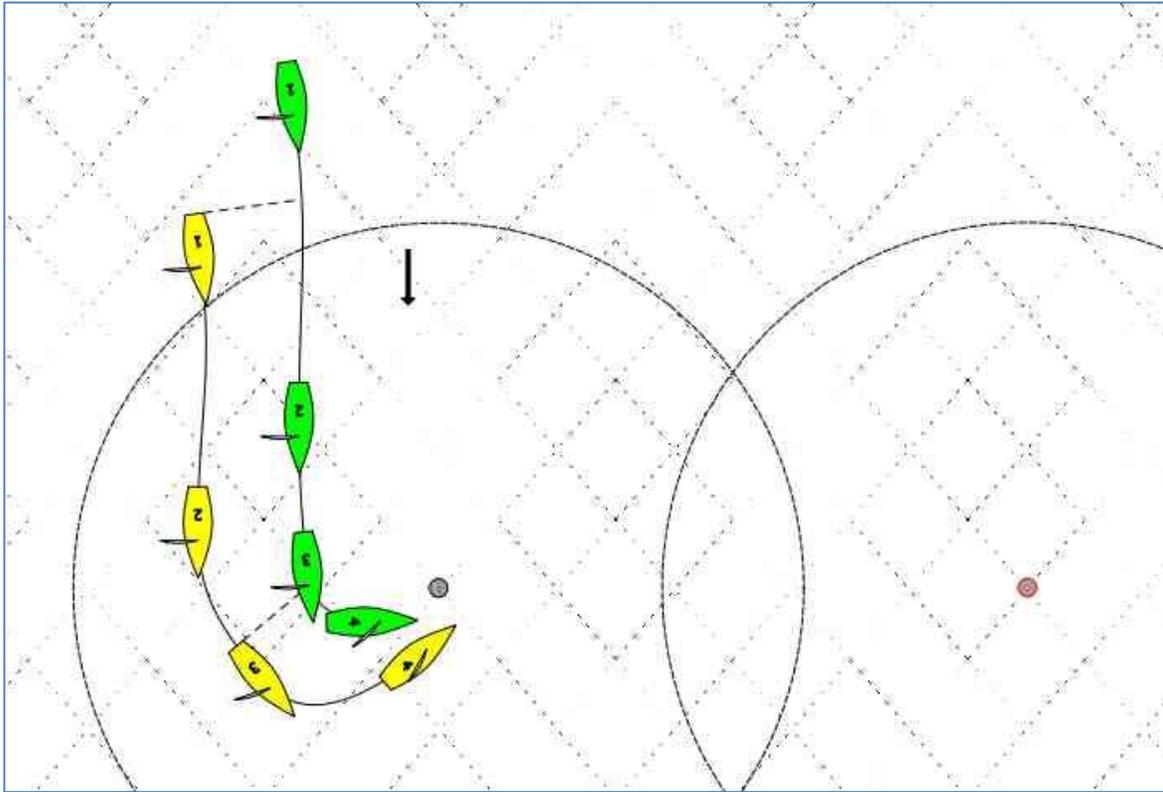


Diagram B. Downwind mark with offset mark

Both diagrams involve questions relating to RRS R 18.2 and the definition of *Mark-room*.

In Diagram A, the boats have to sail around a downwind mark and then sail back up wind to the weather mark. Under both the old rulebook and the new version, Yellow has mark room under R 18.2.b. and Green risks DSQ for getting between Yellow and the mark. This is because it is clear that a ‘proper course’ for Yellow is to sail close hauled and as close to the mark as possible. When Yellow turns up at position 3, an overlap is created inside the zone and Green is obligated to keep clear of Yellow. So if Green prevents Yellow from sailing close to the mark, then Green will be DSQ under R 18.2.c.2. If there were contact then Yellow would be exonerated under (the new) R 21 (That replaced the old R 18.5)

However, now look at Diagram B. In this diagram, there is a downwind offset mark. As Yellow is clear ahead at the zone, she is entitled to *Mark-room* from Green under R 18.2.b. When Yellow turns up at position 3, an overlap is created inside the zone and Green is obligated to give Yellow mark room under R 18.2.c.2.

Now for the difference - Under the old rules, at position 3, Yellow would have the right to sail to the downwind mark (closing the door on Green), and then sail to the offset mark. However under the new rules, the proper course for Yellow at position 3 now is to sail towards the offset mark. Now it gets more complicated. Yellow’s rights under proper course are limited to sailing towards the offset mark, but Yellow is still leeward boat to Green and right of way boat under R 11. So Yellow is allowed to luff up but if she

wants to luff up above her proper course, she is subject to R 16. (Changing course). When Yellow luffs up (position 4), she has to give Green room to keep clear. So, why not penalize Green under rule 11? Well, rule 16.1 says, "When a right-of-way boat changes course, she shall give the other boat *room* to keep clear. Now we look at the definition *Room* which says that room includes "**space to comply with her obligations under the rules of Part 2 and rule 31 ...**". Because Yellow's change of course forces Green to hit the mark, Yellow did not give Green room to comply with her obligations under rule 31. Therefore Yellow breaks rule 16.1 and is penalized and Green is exonerated under R 14 for breaking rules 11 and 31 because Yellow's improper change of course.