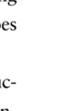


RULE 18 — MARK-ROOM**RULE 18.1 — WHEN RULE 18 APPLIES**

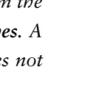
Rule 18 applies between boats when they are required to leave a *mark* on the same side and at least one of them is in the *zone*.

This is the rule that governs boats when they are near *marks*. Though rule 18 is the longest rule in Part 2, it is very clearly written and fits very sensibly with the basic right-of-way rules in Section A. Again, the key to understanding it is not to try to memorize its every detail, but to stand back and see how the rule is trying to create orderly sailing when boats converge at *marks*.

“How do I know on which side the mark is to be left?” 

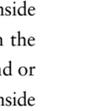
Good question. First of all, “side” in rule 18.1 refers to the boat’s side, not the *mark*’s side. Therefore, when two boats are rounding or passing a *mark* going in the opposite direction (as they might when they are in different races using the same *mark* but leaving it on opposite sides, as in Case 26), rule 18 does not apply, and the rules of Section A and B apply.

As for which side to “leave” a *mark* on, the notice of race or sailing instructions tell us which side the *marks* must be passed on, but only the sailing instructions can specify the rounding *marks* (i.e., the *marks* that the boat’s string must touch) (see the definition *Sail the Course (b)* and rule J2.1(4), Sailing Instruction Contents).

“Am I always required to leave all marks on a certain side?” 

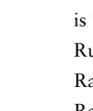
No. Rule 28.1 (Sailing the Course) only requires you to “sail the course” as that term is defined in the definition *Sail the Course*. The definition *Sail the Course* says, “A boat *sails the course* when (a) she starts; (b) a string representing her track until she finishes, when drawn taut, (1) passes each *mark* of the course for the race on the required side and in the correct order (including the starting marks), (2) touches each *mark* designated in the sailing instructions to be a rounding mark, and (3) passes between the marks of a gate from the direction of the course from the previous mark; and then (c) she finishes. A *mark* that does not begin, bound or end the leg the boat is sailing does not have a required side.”

Therefore, when there are still two minutes to the starting signal, you can pass a starting *mark* on either side you wish; and because you and other boats are not “required” to leave the *mark* on the same side, rule 18 does not apply. The same is true for other racing *marks* that are on your leg but that you are not required to round or pass. So if you are on the final leg to a finishing line that is set to leeward of the leeward *mark*, the leeward *mark* does not define your leg such that you can pass it on either side. Again, rule 18 does not apply at that *mark*.

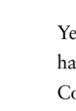
“To whom is rule 18 talking?” 

Rule 18 is “talking” to all the boats involved in the rounding or passing maneuver, but fundamentally it is talking to the outside or *clear astern* boats. When rule 18 applies, outside and *clear astern* boats, whether on *port tack* or *starboard tack* and whether *leeward* or *windward* boats, must give *mark-room* to inside or *clear ahead* boats. Rule 18 also tells inside or *clear ahead* boats how much *room* they are entitled to.

Remember, rule 18 is a rule of exception. In some situations at *marks*, an outside boat otherwise holding right of way must nonetheless yield to an inside keep-clear boat and even change course to move far enough away from the *mark* to give the inside keep-clear boat the *mark-room* she needs to round or pass it. At a downwind *mark*, a *starboard-tack* boat with a *port-tack* boat inside of her and a *leeward* boat with a *windward* boat inside of her are examples of this sort of situation that put a “limit” on the right-of-way boat. So, even though you are the right-of-way boat approaching a *mark* or *obstruction*, when rule 18 begins to apply, your right of way may be temporarily “limited.”

“As I approach a mark, when does rule 18 begin to apply to me?” 

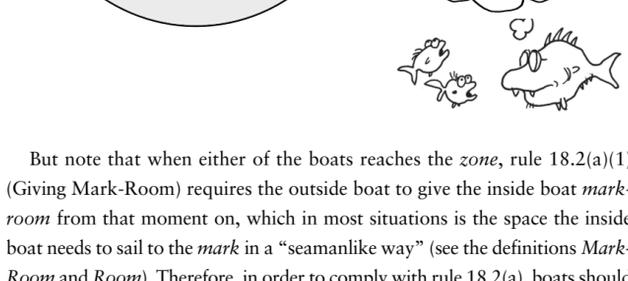
Rule 18 begins to apply between boats when at least one of them has reached the “zone.” The “zone” is the area around the *mark* within a distance of three (3) hull lengths of the boat nearer to it; and a boat is “in the zone” when any part of her hull (not her sails or equipment) first is in the zone (see the discussion of the definition *Zone* in chapter 5).

“Will the zone always be three hull lengths in every race?” 

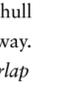
Normally the zone will be three lengths. But the zone in team and match racing is “two lengths” (rules C2.4, Match Racing Rules, and D1.1(a), Team Racing Rules), in radio sailing racing it is “four lengths” (rule E1.1, Radio Sailing Racing Rules) and in kiteboard racing it is 30 meters (Appendix F, Kiteboard Racing Rules, Changes to the Definitions). There is no zone in windsurfing fleet racing (Appendix B, Changes to the Definitions).

“So does that mean that rule 18 does not apply between boats if none of them have reached the zone yet?” 

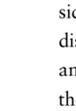
Yes, that’s right! A *leeward* boat that may be an outside boat at the *mark* that has luffing rights may luff a *windward* boat, subject to rule 16.1 (Changing Course), right up until the point either of them first reaches the zone. Note, this could be during or after the boats have taken their spinnakers down, etc. in preparation for the *mark* rounding.



But note that when either of the boats reaches the zone, rule 18.2(a)(1) (Giving Mark-Room) requires the outside boat to give the inside boat *mark-room* from that moment on, which in most situations is the space the inside boat needs to sail to the *mark* in a “seamanlike way” (see the definitions *Mark-Room* and *Room*). Therefore, in order to comply with rule 18.2(a), boats should anticipate this by sailing a course prior to reaching the zone so that they will be in compliance with the rule at the moment the first one reaches the zone.

“I understand now about the significance of the ‘zone,’ but how do I know where the ‘zone’ actually is on the water?” 

Well, at first it’s difficult, and then after you’ve raced more and more it becomes easier to judge. Let’s say you race a 30-foot boat. Three lengths is 90 feet. That’s the distance from home plate to first base on a baseball diamond, or approximately a third of a football field. Doing 6 knots (about 10 feet per second) you’ll cover three lengths in just under 10 seconds. Measure it out and mark it with two orange poles or something at your club so everyone will learn to “guesstimate” it better. And remember that when the first part of your hull is three lengths from the *mark*, the helmsman will be almost four lengths away.

“Okay, but what if two boats simply can’t agree on whether an overlap was obtained or broken before reaching the zone?” 

Competitors and protest committees should try their hardest to remember and determine the facts. However, realizing that there will be disputes, the rule writers built in some “guidance” to help resolve such disputes. Rule 18.2(e) reads, “If there is reasonable doubt that a boat obtained or broke an overlap in time, it shall be presumed that she did not.”

In other words, if you come up from behind and claim that you got the inside overlap before the outside boat reached the zone, but the outside boat disagrees saying that you were still *clear astern* when she arrived at the zone and that you subsequently obtained the overlap, rule 18.2(e) states that if there is “reasonable doubt,” it shall be presumed by the sailors that the overlap was not obtained in time. Similarly, if it goes to the sailing hearing and the protest committee has “reasonable doubt,” it shall presume that the overlap was not obtained in time. In other words, in a protest you will have to satisfy the protest committee that there is no doubt that you obtained the overlap in time (see Appeal 92).

By the same token, if you have an overlap on an outside boat at say five and then four lengths away, she will be required to give you *mark-room* under rule 18.2(a)(1) unless she pulls *clear ahead* before reaching the zone. If she claims to have “broken” the overlap just before she reached the zone, but you disagree saying that you were still overlapped when she reached the zone, then it is she who must satisfy the protest committee that there is no doubt that the overlap was broken in time.

Satisfying the protest committee is generally very tough to do as it is usually one person’s word against the other’s. Hails to each other regarding the overlap situation as the boats near the zone are very helpful to the point that they are almost expected by good protest committees. Also, witnesses can be very useful, particularly independent witnesses who were positioned exactly at the zone and in a position to determine overlaps. But the bottom line is that boats that will have the “burden of proof” under rule 18.2(e) should yield on the water to be safe.

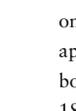
WHEN THE BOATS ARE OVERLAPPED

“When rule 18 applies between two or more overlapped boats, what rights and requirements do the inside and outside boats have?” 

RULE 18.1 — WHEN RULE 18 APPLIES

(a) Rule 18 applies between boats when they are required to leave a *mark* on the same side and at least one of them is in the zone. However, it does not apply

- (1) between boats on opposite tacks on a beat to windward,
- (2) between boats on opposite tacks when the proper course at the mark for one but not both of them is to tack,
- (3) between a boat approaching a mark and one leaving it, or
- (4) if the mark is a continuing obstruction, in which case rule 19 applies.

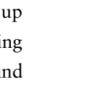
“Does rule 18.1(a)(1) mean that ‘mark-room’ doesn’t apply at the windward mark?” 

No; rule 18.1(a)(1) means that if two boats are coming into a windward mark on opposite tacks (including a finishing mark when the finish is at the end of a beat), rule 18 (Mark-Room) doesn’t apply. But if the boats are coming into a windward mark on the same tack, then rule 18 applies just like at any other mark.

Case 132 says in effect that “two boats on opposite tacks are considered to be ‘on a beat to windward’ (1) when the proper course for each of them is close-hauled or above, or (2) when one or both of them have overstood the close-hauled layline to the mark and are sailing below close-hauled.”

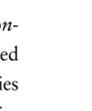
Picture a windward mark to be left to port or the left end of an upwind finishing line, looking upwind. It would be chaos if suddenly a *port-tack* boat could come in and call for *mark-room* from a *starboard-tack* boat while still on *port tack*. While the boats are on opposite tacks, rule 10 (*port/starboard*) applies; and if the *port-tack* boat (PI) tacks to leeward of the *starboard-tack* boat (SO) within the zone, she is subject to rule 13 (While Tacking) and rule 18.3 (Tacking in the Zone).

Notice that the exception in rule 18.1(a)(1) applies only when opposite-tack boats are approaching a mark on a beat to windward. The reasoning is that at all the other marks (offwind marks), even though the boats may be on opposite tacks, they are going in more or less the same direction, or at least generally converging at much smaller angles. Therefore, at leeward marks, inside/*port-tack* boats are entitled to room under rule 18.2 (Giving Mark-Room) from outside/*starboard-tack* boats.

“What does rule 18.1(a)(2) refer to?” 

This is a bit of a “loophole closer.” It covers situations that rarely arise, but can. For instance, on a windward leg the wind shifts 60 degrees to the right. Boats that were near the starboard-tack layline are now reaching on the leg. They are no longer “beating” to windward or “on a beat to windward.” However, the boats on the left are beating up to the mark, so they are still “on a beat to windward.” When a *port-tack* boat (P) from the left meets a *starboard-tack* boat (S) from the right at the mark, the exception in 18.1(a)(1) doesn’t apply because both boats are not “on a beat to windward.” But because P’s proper course is to tack at the mark, and because S does not have to tack, the exception in rule 18.1(a)(2) applies, meaning that rule 18 does not apply, P is not entitled to *mark-room*, and she needs to keep clear of S under rule 10 (Opposite Tacks).

The same is true when two boats are sailing to an offset or a gybe mark and a boat finds herself below the mark (due to current or a windshift or strong wind carrying her lower than she wanted to be), and she has to tack to get up to the mark. Now she will be on the opposite tack from boats approaching the mark, and because she will have to tack to sail her proper course around the mark, she is not entitled to *mark-room*.

“Can you explain what the terms “approaching” and “leaving” mean in rule 18.1(a)(3)?” 

Sure. The rule writers wanted to make it clear that rule 18 does not apply to boats that aren’t rounding the mark at essentially the same time. The rule clarifies that if one boat is just completing her rounding maneuver and is “leaving” the mark and she meets a boat that is just “approaching” the mark to begin her rounding maneuver, neither boat needs to give each other *mark-room*. The rules in Section A and B apply, including rule 16 (Changing Course) which requires a right-of-way boat to give the keep-clear boat room to keep clear when she changes course. This commonly comes up at port-hand windward mark roundings when the boat rounding the mark will be on *starboard tack*. She must watch for nearby *port-tackers* when she bears away around the mark. Note that the exoneration from breaking rule 16 in rule 43.1(b) (Exoneration) does not apply, because rule 18 does not apply due to the exception in rule 18.1(a)(3).

Finally, the exception in rule 18.1(a)(4) clarifies that if the mark is a continuing obstruction, such as an island the boats will be passing on a required side, rule 18 does not apply and rule 19 (Room to Pass an Obstruction) applies (see rule 19.1). This is primarily because it is an undesirable situation to require a boat that was astern or overlapped on the outside when first arriving at the island or long obstruction to continue to give the other boat(s) room even if she gets ahead of them while passing the obstruction.

But remember, a race committee vessel is never a continuing obstruction (see the definition *Continuing Obstruction*). Therefore, no matter how long a race committee vessel is at the finishing line, rule 18 applies at that mark.

We’ve discussed thoroughly how rule 18 applies slightly differently in certain situations, primarily at windward marks (including windward finishing marks), leeward marks where inside boats need to gybe to sail their proper course, starting marks and continuing obstructions. These are its only exceptions. Otherwise, the rules for “mark-room” are exactly the same at every other mark on the course, including the finishing marks.