

**RULE 18.3 — TACKING IN THE ZONE**

If a boat passes head to wind from *port* to *starboard tack* in the *zone* of a *mark* to be left to port, rule 18.2 does not apply between her and another boat on *starboard tack* that is *fetching* the *mark*. If the other boat has been on *starboard tack* since entering the *zone*, the boat that passes head to wind

- (a) shall not cause the other boat to sail above close-hauled to avoid contact, and
- (b) shall give *mark-room* if the other boat becomes *overlapped* inside her.

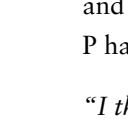
The concept in this rule is to improve the racing by trying to minimize the frustrating and sometimes dangerous congestion that can occur at crowded windward *mark* roundings when the *mark* is to be left to port. Problems are often caused by *port-tack* boats approaching on or near the port layline and trying to squeeze their boats in between the *starboard-tack* boats on the starboard layline and the *mark*. Too often, these *port-tackers* shoot right back up after tacking to try to make it around the *mark*, or they get hung up on the *mark* itself, or worse: they fall back onto *port tack* directly in front of the approaching *starboard-tackers*! Too many otherwise excellent close races have been ruined by these actions; and with the popular trend toward shorter courses and more races, the rule writers put this rule in the book to improve the game.

In a nutshell, rule 18.3 works like this (we'll get into the technicalities below):

If you are approaching a port-hand windward *mark* on *port tack* (which can include the port end of a windward finishing line) and tack in the *zone* near a *starboard-tack* boat (S) that has been on *starboard tack* since entering the *zone*, you must do it in a place that allows S to round or pass the *mark* without ever having to sail above close-hauled to avoid contact with you or another boat.

Furthermore, if S gets an inside *overlap* on you at any time during her rounding or passing maneuver, you must give her *mark-room* (room to round or pass the *mark*). And if you are unable to do so, tough luck on you. Rule 18.2(d) (about not having to give *mark-room* if unable to do so) does not apply because none of rule 18.2 (Giving Mark-Room) applies when rule 18.3 applies. Furthermore if S breaks rules 15 (Acquiring Right of Way) or 16 (Changing Course) while taking *mark-room*, she is exonerated by rule 43.1(b) (Exoneration). In other words, you are more or less a "sitting duck" for S!

The bottom line is: if you are going to come into a crowded windward *mark* on *port tack*, it is better to cross nearby *starboard-tackers* if you can, and tack safely to *windward* of them. And if you can't cross them, then it is better to duck them than to try to tack close to *leeward* of them (lee-bow them). And to be safe, approach the *mark* four or more boat lengths below the *port-tack* layline so your tack to *starboard tack* is outside the *zone*.



"Okay, I'm ready to have you lead me through this rule!"

OK, let's consider just two boats to begin with. First, rule 18.3 only applies at a windward *mark* to be left to port (which can include a finishing *mark*).

Second, one of the boats must have tacked from *port* to *starboard tack* (passed head to wind) inside the *zone*. Third, the other boat must be *fetching* the *mark*. "Fetching" means a boat can pass to windward of a *mark* leaving it on the required side without sailing past head to wind to do so (see the definition *Fetching*). When all three of those conditions exist, rule 18.3 applies and rule 18.2 (Giving Mark-Room) does not apply between those two boats. That means that while one of the boats is tacking, she has to *keep clear* of the other boat until she completes her tack (rule 13, While Tacking). After that the other rules of Part 2, Sections A and B apply.

If P completes her tack in the *zone* without causing S to take avoiding action before P reaches a close-hauled course, then P is the right-of-way boat under rule 11 (*windward/leeward*) or rule 12 (*clear ahead/clear astern*). But if S has been on *starboard tack* since she entered the *zone* and S is *fetching* the *mark*, and S needs to sail above a close-hauled course to avoid P after P's tack, then P has broken rule 18.3(a).

"I thought that if a boat tacked inside the zone, she had no rights; and if she caused me to change course at all, she broke rule 18.3."



No! If P gets to a close-hauled course before you have to take any avoiding action, then she has complied with rule 13 (While Tacking) and she is the right-of-way boat. She breaks rule 18.3 only if she causes you to sail above a close-hauled course to avoid her during or after her tack. If you are overstood (reaching in above the starboard-tack layline) for instance, and avoid contact by luffing up to a close-hauled course, she has not broken rule 18.3.

Note that when P and S are approaching the *mark*, rule 18 doesn't apply at all because the boats are on opposite *tacks* on a beat to windward (rule 18.1(a)(1), When Rule 18 Applies). Furthermore, if P passes head to wind outside the *zone* and then completes her tack inside the *zone*, rule 18.3 does not apply. However, rule 13 (While Tacking) applies, and if S needs to avoid P before she completes her tack (gets to a close-hauled course), P has broken rule 13.

It can be argued that it is difficult to know exactly where the *zone* is, but that is the case when applying the *zone* in any *mark* rounding or passing situation. Sailors approaching port-hand windward *marks* on *port tack* will be well advised to be conservative when the *mark* area is congested and to complete their tacks clearly outside the *zone*.

**LET'S LOOK AT SOME SCENARIOS** that will involve rule 18.3.

**P approaches S at a port-hand windward mark, and passes head to wind in the zone just to leeward of S who has been on starboard tack since entering the zone:**

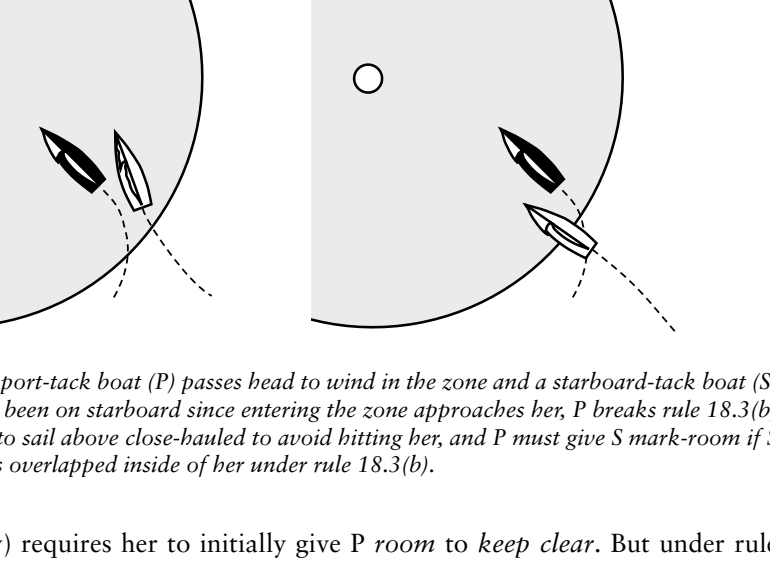
Let's say that when P gets to close-hauled, the boats are now one length from the *mark*. As P (now the *leeward/inside* boat) approaches the *mark*, she realizes she won't make the *mark* unless she luffs above close-hauled. She does so, thereby clearing the *mark*, but as a result of her luff, S sails above close-hauled to avoid hitting her. P has broken rule 18.3. Note that even though she's an inside/right-of-way boat, P is not entitled to *mark-room* under rule 18.2(a) (Giving Mark-Room) because rule 18.3 specifically states that rule 18.2 does not apply. The same would be true if S sailed above close-hauled to avoid P's transom as P bore off around the *mark*.

Had S been able to round or pass the *mark* without having to sail above close-hauled to avoid P, then P would not have broken rule 18.3, and S would simply be required to *keep clear* under rule 11 (On the Same Tack, Overlapped). Note that when P bears away (changes course) to round the *mark*, she is not exonerated if she breaks rule 16.1 because rule 18.2 does not apply, meaning she is not sailing within *mark-room* at that time and she is not "protected" by rule 43.1(b) (Exoneration) (see the discussion of rule 43 in chapter 8).

**P passes head to wind in the zone of a port-hand windward mark directly ahead of S; once P is close-hauled, S must change course either up or down to avoid colliding with her:**

First of all, once P gets to a close-hauled course *clear ahead* of S, S is required to *keep clear* of her under rule 12 (On the Same Tack, Not Overlapped). If, despite her best efforts to avoid P beginning the moment P is close-hauled, S is unable to do so and she hits P on the transom, P has "tacked too close" and has broken rule 15 (Acquiring Right of Way), and S is exonerated by rule 43.1(b) (Exoneration). It is also likely that a protest committee would decide that S was unable to avoid the contact, and therefore did not break rule 14 (Avoiding Contact). If S does have room to *keep clear* of P but hits P on the transom anyway, then S is not exonerated for breaking rule 12, and also breaks rule 14(a).

It could happen that when P gets to a close-hauled course, S can avoid hitting P but is faced with the choice of *overlapping* P to leeward and ending up in



a bad position or not being able to get around the *mark* at all, or sailing above close-hauled to avoid hitting P. In my opinion, choosing to sail above close-hauled to avoid contact with P is S's only reasonable option, and therefore P has "caused" S to sail above close-hauled to avoid hitting her, breaking rule 18.3(a).

However, if P tacks far enough to windward of the layline such that S can clearly *overlap* P to *leeward* and round or pass the *mark*, it could be argued that P has not "caused" S to sail above close-hauled to avoid contact with her, because it would be reasonable to expect S to bear away and round or pass the *mark*. However, if S chooses to sail above close-hauled and protest, it will be the *protest committee* who decides whether S was "caused" by P to sail above close-hauled, and my guess is they will give S the benefit of the doubt. So *port-tack* boats will want to be very conservative with where they choose to tack in the *zone* near opposite-tack boats!

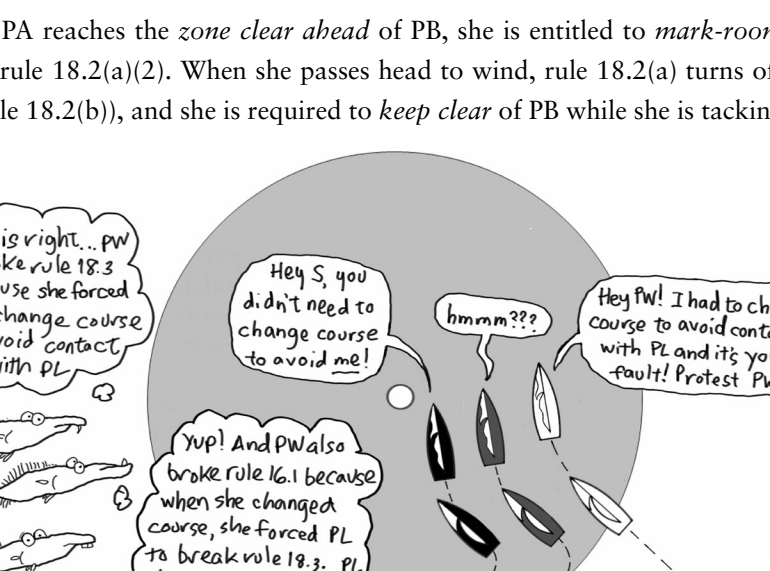
**P passes head to wind in the zone of a port-hand windward mark and S sails in to leeward of her telling P to keep clear and to give her mark-room:**

Note that when S becomes *overlapped* with P she instantly gets the right of way under rule 11 (On the Same Tack, Overlapped), so rule 15 (Acquiring Right



of Way) requires her to initially give P room to *keep clear*. But under rule 18.3(b) she is entitled to *mark-room*. Therefore S is exonerated (freed from penalty) if she happens to break rule 15 (see rule 43.1(b), Exoneration). Note also that if S needs to luff slightly to get up and around the *mark*, or bear away to round the *mark*, that too is part of her rounding or passing maneuver, and if she happens to break rule 16.1 (Changing Course), she is also exonerated by rule 43.1(b). And if P is unable to give S *mark-room*, tough luck on P. Rule 18.2(d) (about not having to give *mark-room* if unable to do so) does not apply because none of rule 18.2 applies when rule 18.3 applies.

The only "limit" on S is that, because she became *overlapped* from *clear astern*, she cannot sail above her *proper course* under rule 17 (On the Same Tack, Proper Course), which means she must bear away to follow her *proper course* around the windward *mark*. And if the boats collide, remember that both boats are subject to rule 14 (Avoiding Contact). Note, once P has tacked within the *zone*, then for the duration of her rounding or passing maneuver, which could take several seconds, a boat *clear astern* (S) is allowed to obtain a *leeward/inside overlap* on P, and P must *keep clear* of her and give her *mark-room* (i.e., room to round or pass the *mark*)!



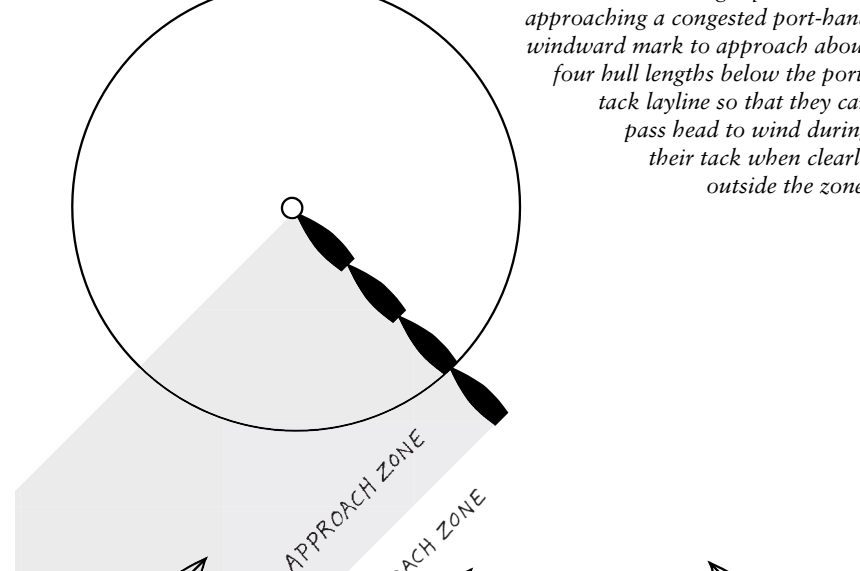
Because P passed head to wind in the zone, P must *keep clear* of S and give S *mark-room* if S gets an inside *overlap*. Furthermore, S can change course in either direction necessary to round the *mark*, and if she breaks rules 15 or 16, she is exonerated (see rule 43.1(b)).

**P passes head to wind in the zone of a port-hand windward mark directly ahead of S, and S is unable to round or pass the mark due to the disturbed air off of P:**

If P tacks sufficiently far ahead of S such that S is not required to take any action to avoid hitting P after the tack and remains *clear astern* of her, and then S fails to make the *mark* due to the disturbed air and water caused by P, P has not broken rule 18.3.

**Two port-tack boats (PA clear ahead and PB clear astern) are approaching a port-hand windward mark in the zone. PA tacks without fouling PB. PB then begins to tack to leeward of PA, but after PB passes head to wind, PA needs to luff to avoid contact:**

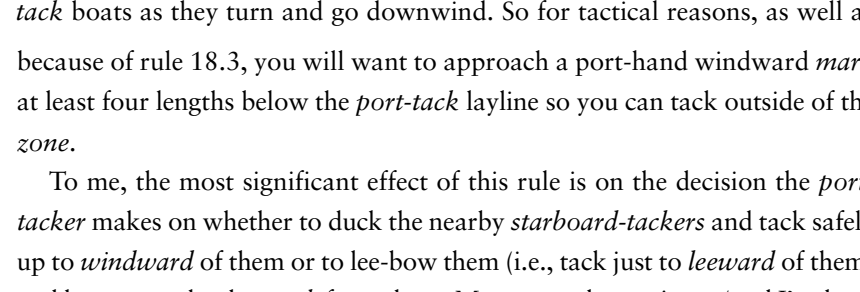
When PA reaches the *zone clear ahead* of PB, she is entitled to *mark-room* under rule 18.2(a)(2). When she passes head to wind, rule 18.2(a) turns off (see rule 18.2(b)), and she is required to *keep clear* of PB while she is tacking



(rule 13, While Tacking), and to initially give her room to *keep clear* when she completes her tack (rule 15, Acquiring Right of Way). PA breaks no rules when she tacks. When PB passes head to wind, she is required to *keep clear* of PB while she is tacking, which she fails to do, so she breaks rule 13. Even though she is on the same *tack* as PA and therefore the boats are *overlapped*, rule 18.2 (Giving Mark-Room) does not apply (see rule 18.3).

**Two overlapped port-tack boats (PL to leeward and PW to windward) are approaching a port-hand windward mark with S approaching as well, and both PL and PW pass head to wind in the zone:**

When PL and PW complete their tacks onto *starboard tack*, S is *overlapped* to *windward* of PL. PW, now on the inside of the three boats, luffs above close-hauled to make the *mark*. PL responds and is able to *keep clear*, but her luff causes S to make luff above close-hauled to avoid contact with PL. Both PW and PL have broken rule 18.3(a) because both of them passed head to wind in the *zone* and both caused S to sail above close-hauled to avoid contact. PL directly caused S to sail above close-hauled; and it was PW's luff that caused PL to luff that caused S to sail above close-hauled to avoid contact with PL.



When PW changed course, rule 16.1 (Changing Course) required her to give PL room to *keep clear*. "Room" includes the space needed to comply with the rules in Part 2 (see definition *Room*). In this case, when she luffed, PW compelled PL to break rule 18.3, so PL is exonerated for that breach by rule 43.1(a) (Exoneration).

"It sounds like this rule eliminates the port-tack layline and a port-tacker's tactic of lee-bowing a starboard tacker right at the mark!"



I don't think the rule dramatically changes the way the top of the beat is sailed. If you are doing well in the race, the windward *mark* rounding won't be that congested, and you will probably approach it as close to the layline as you want. If you are farther down in the pack (out of the top 10, let's say), coming in right on the *port-tack* layline isn't a great look anyway. For at least some of the time, you are sailing more slowly in the disturbed air and water of the boats going downwind, or trying to pick your way through the *starboard-tack* boats as they turn and go downwind. So for tactical reasons, as well as

because of rule 18.3, you will want to approach a port-hand windward *mark* at least four lengths below the *port-tack* layline so you can tack outside of the *zone*.

To me, the most significant effect of this rule is on the decision the *port-tacker* makes on whether to duck the nearby *starboard-tackers* and tack safely up to *windward* of them or to lee-bow them (i.e., tack just to *leeward* of them) and hope to make the *mark* from there. My personal experience (and I've been there many times!) is that too often sailors choose the (dare I say) "greedier" choice (lee-bowing), and end up not only not making the *mark*, but causing a real mess for others at the *mark*. I think the net effect of rule 18.3 is that fewer *port-tackers* tack right at the *mark* in crowds, which is a welcome situation for all.