

PREAMBLE TO SECTION C

Section C rules do not apply between boats when the *mark* or *obstruction* referred to in those rules is a starting *mark* surrounded by navigable water or its anchor line, from the time the boats are approaching it to *start* until they have left it astern.

The preamble makes it clear that none of the rules in Section C (18, 19 and 20) apply when boats are approaching a starting *mark* that is surrounded by navigable water or its anchor line to *start* until they have left them astern.



“So does this having something to do with barging?”

Yes. I will explain what “barging” is. The preamble to Section C “shuts off” the “mark-room” rules at the starting *marks*. The reason is that it would lead to chaotic starts if *windward/inside* boats were entitled to *room* to pass between the committee boat and *leeward/outside* boats at the start (it’s often chaotic enough without them having that right!). When two boats are about to *start* and a *windward* boat tries to sail in between a *leeward* boat and a starting *mark* (often a race committee vessel), and hits the *leeward* boat or causes her to bear away to avoid being hit, we say the *windward* boat is “Barging.” In fact, she is breaking rule 11 (On the Same Tack, Overlapped). (For more discussion on “barging” see the discussion in Chapter 7 entitled “Section A and B Rules in Action.”)

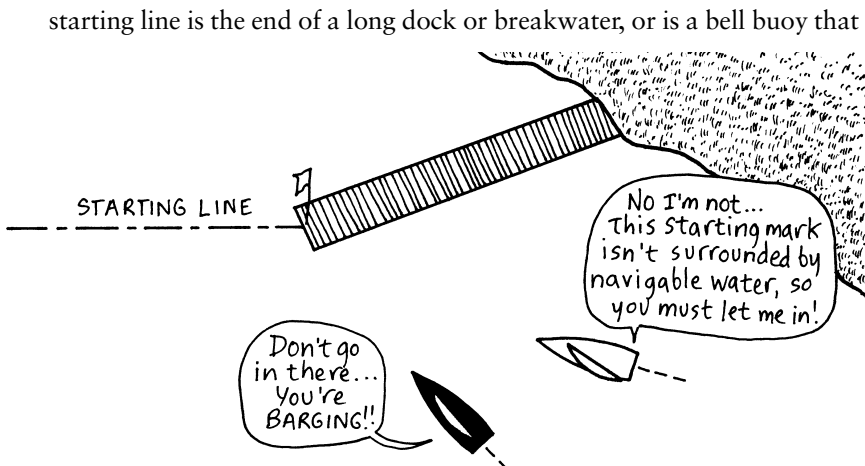
To accurately apply this rule, be sure you understand that an object large enough to satisfy the definition *Obstruction* is always an *obstruction*, even when it is used as a *mark*; i.e., it does not cease being one when it becomes the other. Therefore a race committee vessel used as one end of the starting line is both a starting *mark* and an *obstruction* at the same time.

Now, having said that the preamble “shuts off” rule 18 (Mark-Room) and rule 19 (Room to Pass an Obstruction), there are in fact two narrow situations when, for reasons of safety, the rules do entitle a *windward/inside* boat to *room* at a starting *mark* from a *leeward/outside* boat.

Let’s look at those first.

1) At a starting *mark* not surrounded by navigable water:

Though this situation is not common, it will arise when one end of the starting line is the end of a long dock or breakwater, or is a bell buoy that



marks some shallow rocks or sandbars. “Not surrounded by navigable water” means there isn’t enough water for the inside boat to sail around the *mark* without running aground or hitting a dock or other object. At such a *mark*, an inside *overlapped* boat is entitled to *mark-room* under rule 18.2 (Giving Mark-Room) from an outside boat. And if the starting *mark* is a *continuing obstruction* (such as the end of a long dock), then the inside boat is entitled to *room* under rule 19.2(b) if there was space to pass between the outside boat and the *obstruction* in safety at the moment the *overlap* began (see rules 18.1(a)(4) and 19.2(c)).

2) At a starting *mark* that is also an *obstruction* when the boats are not approaching it to *start*:

Again, when the starting *mark* is large enough to be an *obstruction* (such as most committee boats), rule 19 (Room to Pass an Obstruction) applies before boats are “approaching it to *start*.” Therefore, an inside *overlapped* boat is entitled to *room* at such a *mark* under rule 19.2(b) (Giving Room at an Obstruction) from an outside boat, provided the outside boat has been able to give the *room* since the *overlap* began. If the starting *mark* is a *continuing obstruction*, then the inside boat is entitled to *room* if there was space to pass between the outside boat and the *obstruction* in safety at the moment the *overlap* began (rule 19.2(c)). This is for safety purposes while boats are sailing past the *marks* well before *starting*.

So, if say at three minutes before the starting signal you were sailing along to *leeward* of W and were about to sail to *leeward* of the race committee vessel,



and for whatever reason W wanted to pass to *leeward* of it also, you would have to give her *room* to do so under rule 19.2(b), unless you were unable to do so from the moment the *overlap* began. Now to play this out, because boats aren’t required to pass the starting *mark* on its “required” side yet (rule 28.1, Sailing the Course, and the definition *Sail the Course*), you can choose to pass it on either side (see rule 19.2(a)). You, as the *leeward* boat, have the right to sail where you please provided you make no sudden, fast course changes (rule 11, On the Same Tack, Overlapped, rule 16.1, Changing Course, and rule 19.2(a)); therefore, you can choose to luff and pass to *windward* of the committee boat. If, however, you choose to pass to *leeward* of the committee boat and fail to provide enough *room* for W to do likewise if she wishes to, you have broken rule 19.2(b).

Note that when you break a *rule*, even before the starting signal, you must take your Two-Turns Penalty immediately; you do not have to wait until the starting signal to do so (rule 44, Penalties at the Time of an Incident). If W happens to hit the *mark* (i.e., break rule 31, Touching a Mark) because you didn’t give her enough *room*, she is exonerated by rule 43.1(b) (Exoneration).



“When is a boat considered to be ‘approaching a starting mark to *start*?’”

Though this question has never been discussed in a case or appeal, I would develop my opinion as follows. What is the purpose of the rule? Clearly it is preventing the situation where *windward/inside* (WI) boats can reach in and demand *room* at starting *marks* from *leeward/outside* boats (LO) that are trying to *start* there. And “when approaching the starting *mark* to *start*” is establishing the period of time during which these *windward/inside* boats know that they are not entitled to *room*. Before LO is “approaching the starting *mark* to *start*,” WI is entitled to *room* at the *mark* (provided it is also an *obstruction*); and the rules are consistently clear in providing predictable and specific times when a boat’s rights change. To me, this is no exception. When LO is clearly on her final approach toward the line with the intention of *starting*, i.e., crossing the line after the gun, it will be obvious to WI and she will know to *keep clear*. Furthermore, a boat that is “approaching the starting *mark* to *start*” and is close enough to the starting *mark* to shut out a *windward* boat will clearly be *starting* in close proximity distance-wise to the starting *mark*.

Therefore, in my opinion, a boat that in 15 knots of breeze goes reaching full-speed by the committee boat with one and a half minutes to go before the starting signal, and ends up *starting* halfway down the starting line, was in no way “approaching the starting *mark* to *start*” at the moment she went by the starting *mark*. But a boat that is passing the starting *mark* with ten seconds to go certainly is on her final approach to *start* very near to the starting *mark*. In addition, I feel that a boat that in light air sits nearly wayless behind the race committee boat may be approaching the line to *start* at one minute to go, and it will be more obvious and predictable that she plans to *start* near the *mark*, and the *windward/inside* boats can see this and *keep clear* accordingly.

This is a distinction that in general has caused very few problems, and in general has been very liberally interpreted in the *leeward/outside* boat’s favor. But until it is officially interpreted, the safe move on LO’s part would be to allow WI *room* up to one minute before the starting signal; and the safe move for WI would be not to try to force *room* with much less than two minutes to go. Both boats have the option to protest, and the protest committee can then decide whether LO was “approaching the starting *mark* to *start*” in the particular circumstances.