

Tactical Rounding and Proper Course at a Downwind Mark

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Part 1- Tactical Mark Rounding

Someone asked the question “May I do a tactical rounding at a downwind mark under the new Racing Rules of Sailing (RRS) 2017-2020?” Unfortunately, the simple answer is “It depends!” The good news is that for a downwind mark, there are no major rule changes from the prior version of the RRS. The change in the wording of the definition of Mark Room in the previous version of the Rules is carried forward. What is new for 2017 - 2020 is contained in RRS 18.2.d which covers when Mark Room ends, as underlined.

(d) Rules 18.2(b) and (c) cease to apply when the boat entitled to *mark-room* has been given that *mark-room*, or if she passes head to wind or leaves the *zone*.

The rules for who has to give room and who is entitled to room at a mark, is contained in RRS 18. 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 an entry in the Definition section of the rule book. The Definitions may be found at the front of the book. Here is an extract of the 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. You may do a tactical rounding if you have both Mark Room and are ROW. To explore this in more detail; 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 may apply, usually RRS 10 Port/Stbd, RRS 11 Windward/Leeward, RRS 12 Clear Ahead/Astern, in conjunction with or modified by RRS 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 of Mark Room

The key piece of the definition of Mark Room for this discussion 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 RRS 18.

Tactical Rounding and the Rules

The answer to the question of tactical rounding is that you MAY do a tactical rounding if you have Mark Room AND you are the Right of Way (ROW) boat. You MAY NOT be able to do a tactical rounding if you have Mark Room but the other boat has ROW. You may not do a tactical rounding if the other boat has Mark Room.

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

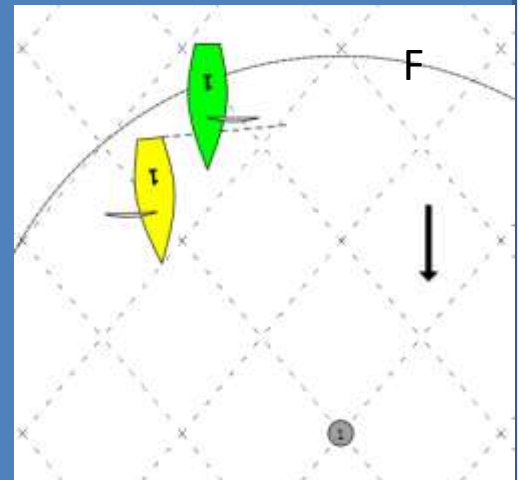
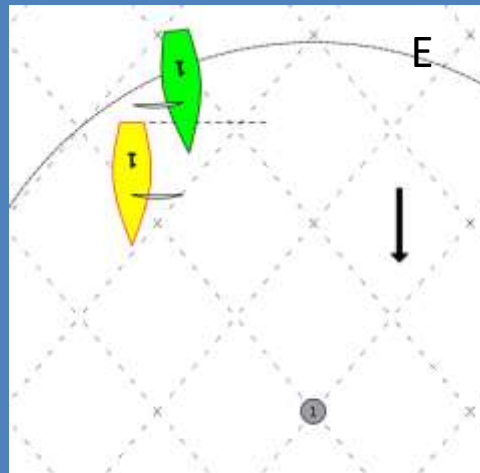
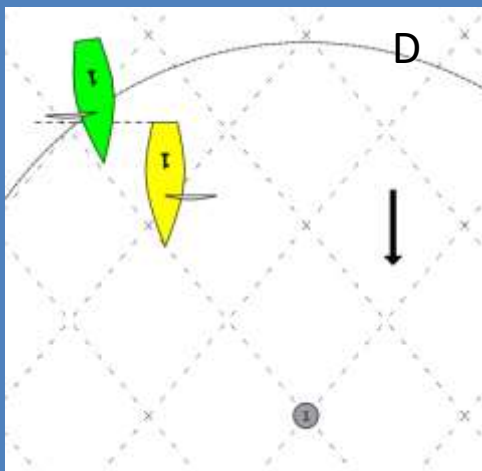
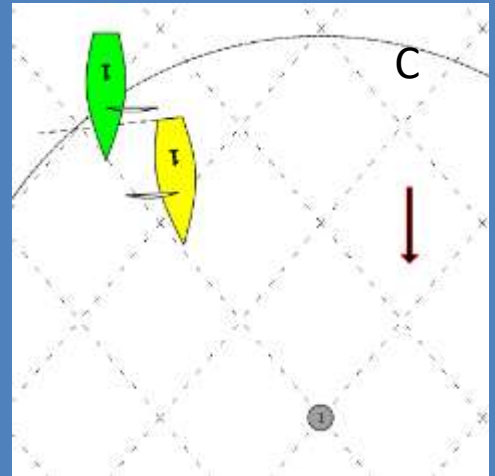
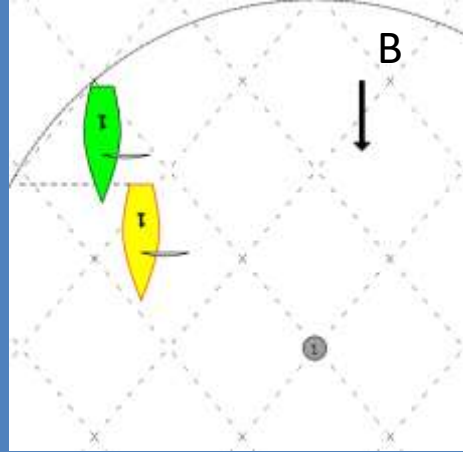
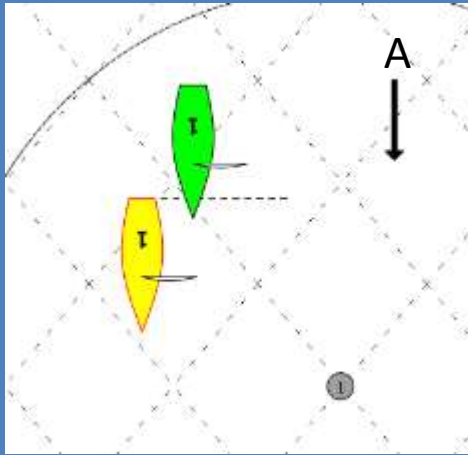
Clear Astern and Clear Ahead; Overlap One boat is *clear astern* of another when her hull and equipment in normal position are behind a line abeam from the aftermost point of the other boat’s hull and equipment in normal position. The other boat is *clear ahead*. They *overlap* when neither is *clear astern*. However, they also *overlap* when a boat between them *overlaps* both. These terms always apply to boats on the same *tack*. They apply to boats on opposite *tacks* only when rule 18 applies between them or when both boats are sailing more than ninety degrees from the true wind

If you are clear ahead at the zone, then you have ROW RRS 12 Clear Ahead, and can choose how wide you want to sail, approaching the mark, and the other boat will have to give you Mark Room even if an overlap is obtained later RRS 18.2.b. and 18.2.c.

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 sufficient Mark Room. For example if you have Mark Room and 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, the question is “May Yellow make a tactical rounding, and if not, why not and which rule applies”?

Marks to Port



Spoiler Alert - My answers –

A. No. Both boats are on Stbd and overlapped at the zone. Green has ROW RRS 11 W/L. Yellow does not have Mark Room – Green has Mark Room as inside overlapped boat. RRS 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 ROW RRS 11 W/L. Yellow is also inside boat and has Mark Room. RRS 18.2.b.

C. No. Green is on Stbd with ROW RRS 10 P/S and Yellow on Port must keep clear. Yellow has Mark Room. R 18.2.b. Green can force Yellow close to the mark.

D. Yes. Yellow is on Stbd with ROW, Green is on Port RRS 10. Yellow has Mark Room, R 18.2.b.

E. No. Yellow is on stbd with ROW RRS 10 P/S, Green is on Port, 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.

The definition of Mark Room 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 this definition in action, take a look at the two diagrams below. Figure 1 shows two boats sailing to a downwind mark, and the next mark is back up to windward. In Figure 2, 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 Figure 1, who has right of way and who should keep clear? Which boat would be DSQ in a protest hearing and under which rule(s)?

Question 2 – In Figure 2, who has right of way and who should keep clear? Which boat would be DSQ in a protest hearing and under which rule(s)?

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

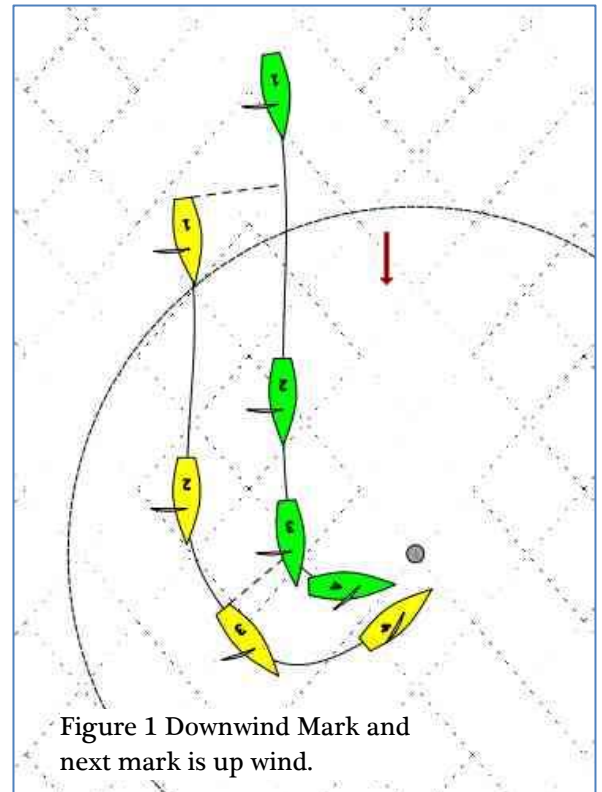


Figure 1 Downwind Mark and next mark is up wind.

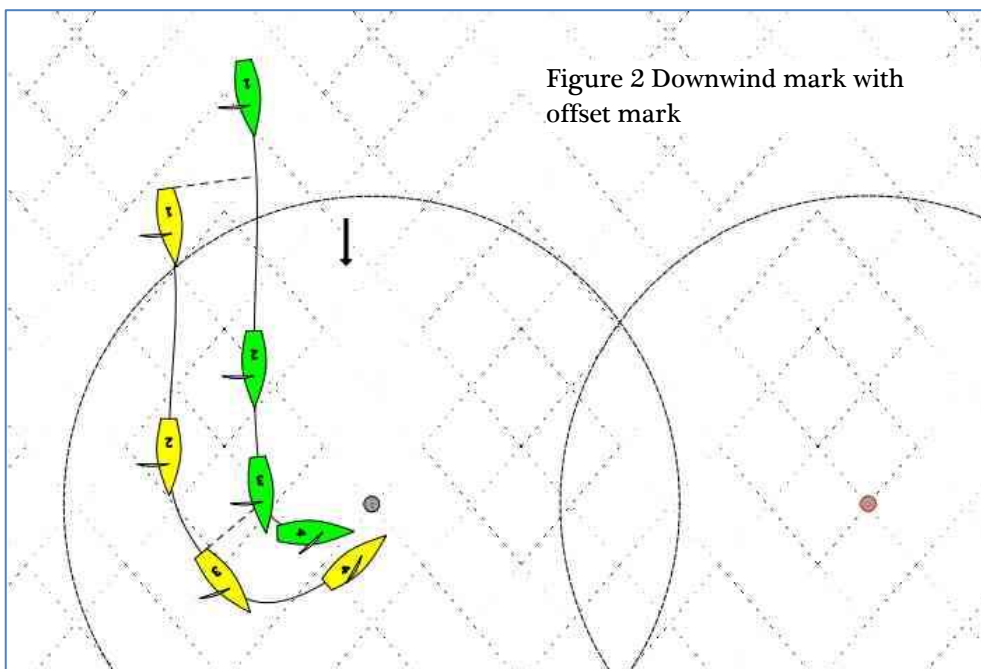


Figure 2 Downwind mark with offset mark

In Figure 1, the boats have to sail around a downwind mark and then sail back up wind to the weather mark. Yellow has Mark Room under RRS 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, a new overlap is created inside the zone and Green is obligated to keep clear of Yellow RRS 18.2.c. So if Green turns inside and prevents Yellow from sailing

close to the mark, then Green will be DSQ under RRS 18.2.c.2. Yellow breaks RRS 16.1 ROW alters course, but is exonerated under RRS 21 Exoneration.

Now look at Figure 2. 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 RRS 18.2.b. When Yellow turns up at position 3, a new overlap is created inside the zone and Green is obligated to give Yellow Mark Room under R 18.2.c.

Now for the difference - 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. (ROW Alters 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.

Yellow breaks RRS 16.1 ROW alters course, and is penalized. Green breaks RRS 11 W/L and 31 Don't hit the mark, but is exonerated under RRS 21 because Yellow's improper change of course. Yellow is NOT exonerated in this case as she was sailing beyond what is permitted under the definition of Mark Room, and thereby is NOT protected by RRS 21 Exoneration.