

WHEN ONE OF TWO OPPOSITE TACK BOATS TACKS WITHIN THE ZONE AT THE WINDWARD MARK

RULE 18.3 — PASSING HEAD TO WIND IN THE ZONE

If a boat in the *zone* of a *mark* to be left to port passes head to wind from *port* to *starboard tack* and is then *fetching* the *mark*, she shall not cause a boat that has been on *starboard tack* since entering the *zone* to sail above close-hauled to avoid contact and she shall give *mark-room* if that boat becomes *overlapped* inside her. When this rule applies between boats, rule 18.2 does not apply between them.

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.

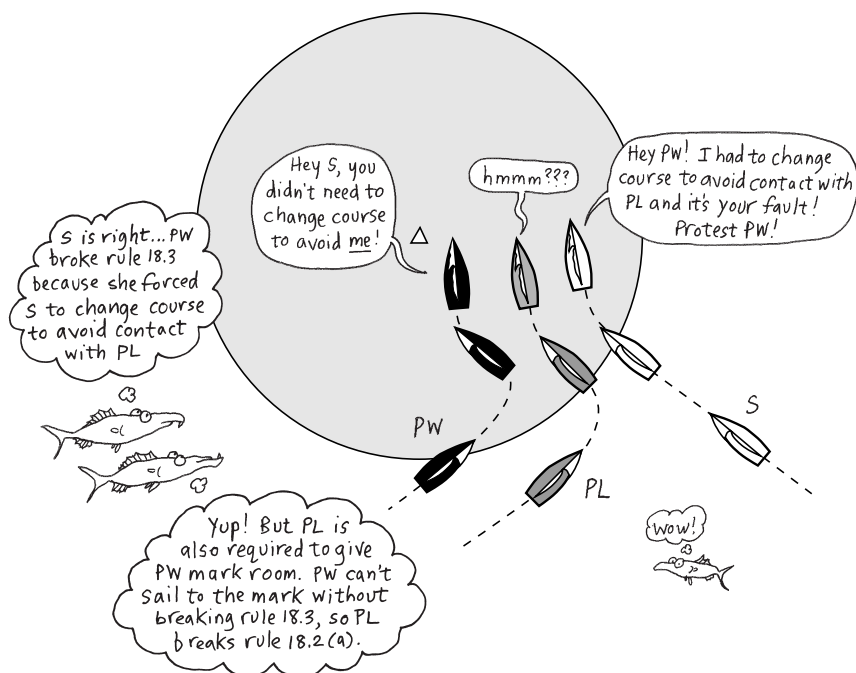
Furthermore, if S gets an inside *overlap* on you at **any time** during her round-
ing or passing maneuver, you must give her *mark-room* (*room* to round or pass the *mark*). And if you are unable to do so, tough luck on you. Rule 18.2(f) (about not having to give *mark-room* if unable to do so) does 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 under rule 43 (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!”

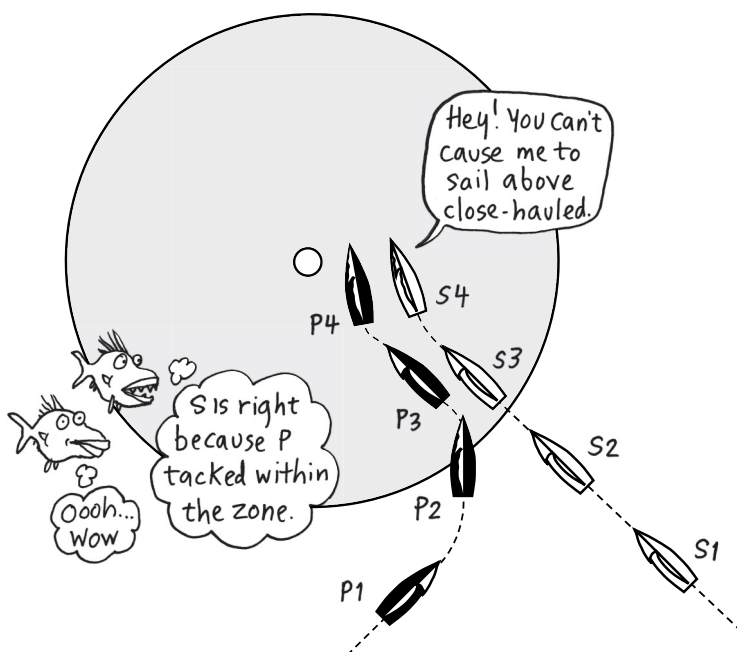
OK, let’s consider just two boats to begin with. First, rule 18.3 only applies at a windward *mark* to be left to port (which can include a finishing mark).



Second, the two boats must have been on opposite *tacks*, and the *port-tack* boat (P) must have tacked to *starboard tack*, passing head to wind in the *zone*. Third, P must be *fetching* the *mark* after her tack. “*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*). Finally, the *starboard-tack* boat (S) must have been on *starboard tack* since she entered the *zone*; if she had entered the *zone* on *port tack* and then tacked to *starboard tack*, rule 18.3 does not apply. And when rule 18.3 applies, rule 18.2 (Giving Mark-Room) does not apply (see 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), 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.



"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.