

# Sportsmanship and the Rules

*“You haven’t won the race if in winning the race you have lost the respect of your competitors.”*

Four-time Olympic Gold Medalist, Paul Elvström

## BASIC PRINCIPLES — SPORTSMANSHIP AND THE RULES

**Competitors in the sport of sailing are governed by a body of *rules* that they are expected to follow and enforce. A fundamental principle of sportsmanship is that when a boat breaks a *rule* and is not exonerated she will promptly take an appropriate penalty or action, which may be to retire.**

This statement of principle is located in the rule book just before Part 1 (Fundamental Rules). It is no coincidence that the subject of “sportsmanship” is given a status above all the rules in our sport. The history of sailboat racing is filled with the tradition of exciting competition played out with respect among the competitors and officials. In keeping with that tradition, when we race we agree to be fair and honest, to be good sports and to attempt to win using our own superior boat speed and racing skills.

At the heart of what makes our sport so fulfilling is the principle that we have a competitor-enforced, “no-referee” rules system; that is we have the responsibility to follow the *rules* on our own, to self-penalize ourselves when we break a *rule*, and to protest (“enforce” the *rules*) when we believe another boat has broken a *rule*. In this regard, our sport is unique compared with most other sports. I am constantly amused watching a pro tennis singles match (two players) when I count at least ten referees: One calling each of the four lines on each side, one calling the net, and an umpire to settle disputes. Even at the highest levels of racing we “call our own lines.”

The *rules* are intended to provide for safe, fair and equitable racing world-wide; and to make competitor enforcement as easy as possible by clearly defining which boat has the right of way and which boat the requirement to *keep clear* when boats meet. When competitors know they have broken a *rule* and it's their fault, they are expected to promptly take a penalty (One- or Two-Turns Penalty or 20% Scoring Penalty or retire). Competitors who "never drop out," even when they know they are in the wrong, because they think the other boat won't go through with a protest or they think they have a chance to "win" the *protest* in the hearing, just waste the time of all the people involved in the *protest* and diminish the quality of the racing for all. Further-more, they break rule 2 (Fair Sailing) which says, "*A boat and her owner shall compete in compliance with recognized principles of sportsmanship and fair play.*" And if they are disqualified under rule 2, they are not allowed to drop the DSQ from their series score (see rules 2 and 90.3(b), Scoring).

Rule 44 (Penalties at the Time of an Incident) provides that the One- (for touching a *mark*) or Two- (for fouling a boat) Turns Penalty or other voluntary penalty will almost always be available to a boat. Given that often a boat does not realize she has broken a rule until returning ashore and consulting with a rules expert, etc., US Sailing has instituted an experimental system where a boat can take a Scoring Penalty on shore before a protest hearing begins, as well as providing for a lesser penalty on the water. These options are in a US Sailing prescription to the racing rules, under Appendix V (Alternative Penalties).

When a competitor believes that another boat may have broken a *rule*, she can protest. A *protest* is merely the means of bringing an incident in which a boat may have broken a *rule* to a hearing after the race where the sailors involved and the members of the protest committee can review the incident and decide how the *rules* apply. *Protests* that are the result of honest differences of opinions on the *rules* or observations of the incident should never have a negative taint to them. Quite the contrary, *protests* are an essential part of our competitor-enforced rule system and are expected, particularly in situations where a boat has gained an advantage in the race or series by breaking a *rule*.

When a boat is forced to break a *rule* through no fault of her own, she is known as the "innocent victim," and in many cases is "exonerated" (meaning freed from having to take a penalty) by rule 43, Exoneration. If a boat feels her score has been made significantly worse through no fault of her own by the

organizing authority, race committee, protest committee or technical committee, or another competitor in certain circumstances, she can request redress under rule 62 (Redress); in this case, rule 64.3 (Decisions on Redress) reminds the protest committee to make as fair an arrangement as possible for all boats affected.

Finally, note that you are responsible for ensuring that your crew, boat owner and *support persons* are aware of the *rules*, and that they know that by your participation in the race, they have agreed to accept the *rules*, and that **you** can be penalized if they break any of the *rules* (see the discussion in the definition *Support Person*).

The rule writers have taken some excellent measures to amplify the message that sailboat racing should be synonymous with good sportsmanship and integrity with regard to fair play. However, in the end of the day it is up to us, the sailors, to use the *rules* as they are written and intended. One problem is that some feel that the rewards from winning justify cheating, such as the “good feeling” of winning, the attention and hype, the benefit to business and sponsors and so on. Obviously, this is a personal decision that all sailors must make for themselves. The hope is that the temptations to cheat can’t possibly overpower the realization that once people start bending or ignoring the *rules*, or develop their own “common law,” the whole exercise of playing the game becomes meaningless for everyone involved.

Rule 2 (Fair Sailing) and rule 69 (Misconduct) provide the external “weight” to encourage strict and voluntary rule observance. However, people who race should want to know that everyone whom they’ve spent the time, money and energy to race against is sailing within the *rules*; and when they know or suspect that someone isn’t, then rather than joining in, they should take action under the *rules* to encourage the others to stop.