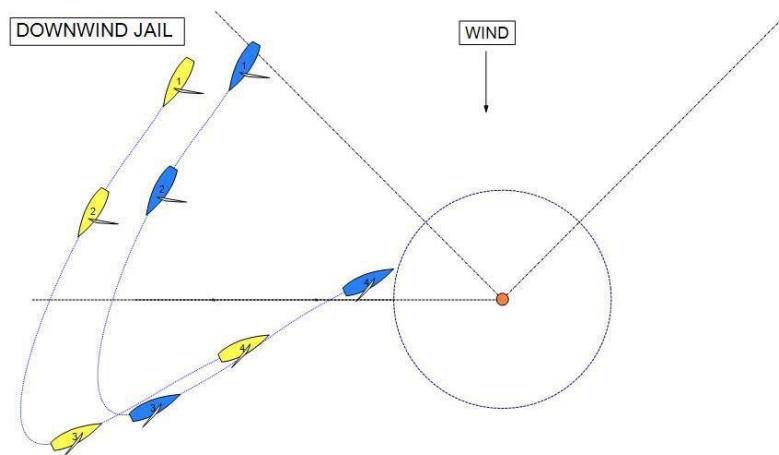


## Downwind Jail

by Dave Perry

With the deletion of rule 17 (proper course rule), it is much easier to find yourself in Downwind Jail. “Downwind Jail” is when you are to the right of your opponent (looking downwind) and you can’t gybe and cross them, and you cannot sail into the zone of the leeward mark/gate or Pin end of the finishing line. From there, on the first run it is likely you will round the leeward mark/gate at least three lengths behind the leader, and in phase with them making it harder to gain on them, and on the second run you will likely lose the race.



The reason you are in “jail” is that even if the boats are overlapped and the leeward boat has come from astern, rule 17 is deleted in match racing (see rule C2.8) meaning there is no rule requiring the leeward boat to not sail above her proper course. Therefore, the leeward boat can sail past the port layline as far as she wants to, or luff towards the windward boat.

### **If your opponent is in Downwind Jail...**

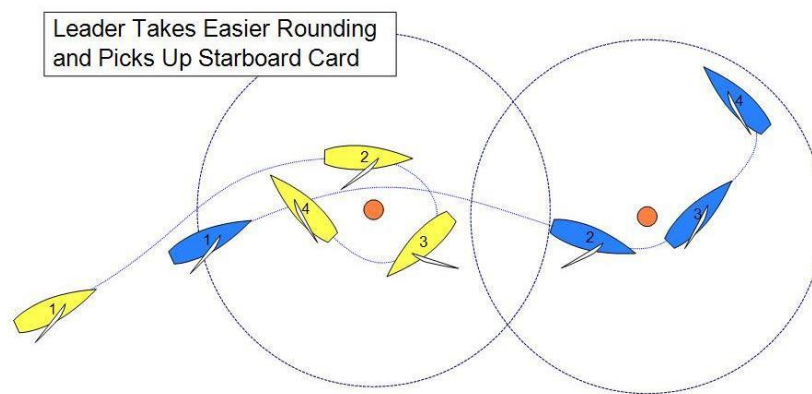
If your opponent is in Downwind Jail, plan to continue sailing well beyond a line drawn perpendicular to the wind through the leeward mark/gate or Pin such that you are sailing back to the mark on a tight reach. As you approach the port layline to the leeward mark/gate or Pin, the jib should be going up and the pole coming down; and as you pass the layline, the spinnaker should be coming down. For sure, you want to match or even be ahead of your opponent in these maneuvers; never behind!

If your opponent luffs and tacks, you should immediately gybe and head for the mark. If your opponent tries to head up and gain separation or slow so she can gybe and pass astern of you, you should either luff and keep her locked in, or gybe away and head for the mark.

Note: if you have a penalty, then this is a perfect opportunity to tack and do your penalty. Just remember you need to bear away to one degree below 90 degrees to kill the penalty, so try to do

your tack a few boat lengths after passing the line drawn perpendicular to the wind through the leeward mark/gate or Pin, and keep bearing away after the tack until you hear the umpire whistle and see your penalty flag come down.

If you are racing through a gate, then when you get to the gate you have the choice of reaching over to the left-hand mark (looking downwind) and having a smooth fast rounding and picking up the starboard card, or doing a button-hook turn around the right-hand mark, which is obviously a slower maneuver but it may be required if that is the favored mark. If you round the left-hand mark and your opponent rounds the right-hand mark, you should tack as your opponent is gybing around the mark. Now you are ahead and in phase with them.



### **If you are in Downwind Jail...**

If you find yourself in Downwind Jail, make a “note to self” on how you got there and try to avoid getting there again! You want to avoid sailing past the line drawn perpendicular to the wind through the leeward mark/gate or Pin, as you will end up losing a couple more lengths on the leader. Therefore, as you arrive at the port layline to the mark, you want to be able to gybe. That means you have to start actively slowing down and/or widening out away from the leeward boat so that you can gybe and take their stern.

You can slow down by luffing or overtrimming your spinnaker, wiggling your tiller, sailing too low, etc. If you can beat your opponent on the gybe and get across their transom, you are in good shape. More likely, once you start to gybe, the leader will gybe also. That’s OK; at least you are right behind them, and if it’s a gate, you can get a split to start the second beat. Worst-case, I think it is better to tack out after passing the perpendicular line, rather than gybing and following the leader to the mark on a tight reach or near a close-hauled course.

## **How to put your opponent in Downwind Jail when you are trailing around the windward mark:**

### **1) If there is a length or less of water between you and the leader, and you are on the first run:**

While both boats are on port tack, try to be to the right of their centerline (looking downwind) after the rounding. If they gybe on or before the “first layline” (meaning the starboard tack layline to the leeward mark; or if a gate, to the right-hand gate mark looking downwind), you do not gybe! Crossover (sail across their centerline), sail for 2 -3 lengths (not an inch more!), and gybe.

If you are racing to a single leeward mark (which is unfortunate – all match racing should use a leeward gate!), then you will be faster coming into the rounding, especially if they have to soak at all, or do two gybes, to get to the mark. Plan on rounding right on their transom and rolling into an immediate tack around the mark. If you are racing to a gate, then you will likely get the left-hand mark (looking downwind), giving you the starboard advantage (“Starboard card”) in the first meeting after the gate.

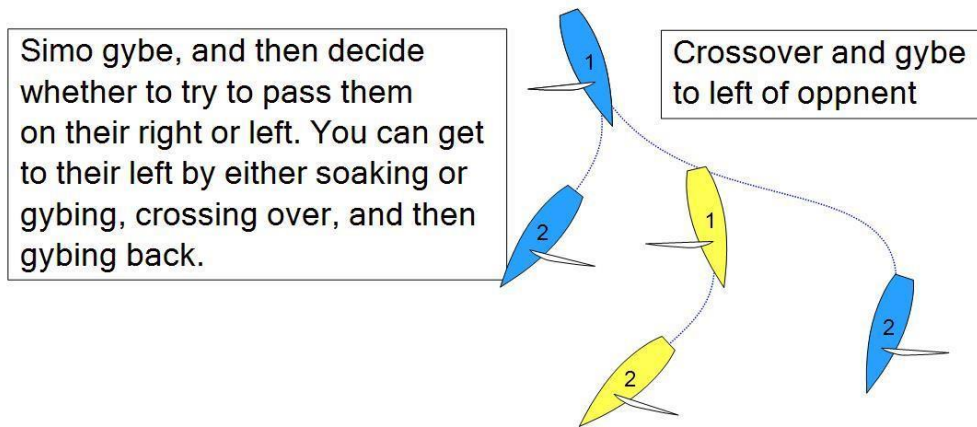
If your opponent can *\*not\** sail into the zone of the leeward mark/right-hand gate mark, then they are in Downwind Jail...and you own them!

If they gybe clearly *\*after\** passing the first layline, you can consider simultaneously gybing (“Simo gybe”), but you have to be 100% sure you can roll them AND sail into the zone of the leeward mark/right-hand gate mark; otherwise you will have just sailed YOURSELF into Downwind Jail!

### **2) If there is a length or less of water between you and the leader, and you are on the second run:**

Again, it is all about the “first layline,” but this time the first layline is the starboard-tack layline to the Pin (starboard end of the finishing line looking downwind). If the leader gybes *\*before\** the layline to the Pin, crossover, sail for 2-3 lengths, and gybe. Your opponent is now in Downwind Jail...and you own them!

If they gybe *\*on or after\** the Pin layline, you have to simo gybe, cause them to sail high (getting them above the Pin layline), and then you will have to decide if you can roll them and get down in front of them, and either sail into the zone of the Pin or gybe and cross them – this is a BIG ASK. Your better option, if you are not locked to windward of them, is to get to their left (looking downwind) by either soaking, or gybing, crossing over 2 lengths and then gybing back to starboard. Once to their left, THEY are in Downwind Jail...and you own them!



### 3) On either run, if there is more than a length of water between you:

Try to get to the right of their centerline (looking downwind) as much as possible without losing too much distance on them. When they gybe, you simo gybe...period. If they have gybed on or before the “first layline”, do NOT get locked to windward of them! They will be sailing hot to try to keep their wind in front of you. Just before you get locked to windward of them, get to their left (looking downwind) by either soaking, or gybing, crossing over 2 lengths and then gybing back to starboard. Once to their left, THEY are in Downwind Jail...and you own them!

If they gybed *after* the first layline, you can decide if you can roll them (pass them on their right) and safely get down to the zone of the leeward mark/gate/Pin. If you are not 100% sure you can, do NOT try it, because YOU will end up you know where!

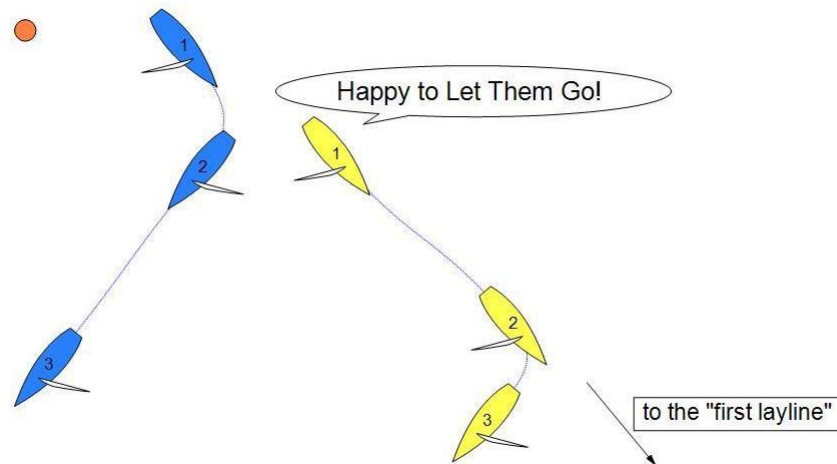
### How to put your opponent in Downwind Jail when you are leading around the windward mark:

#### 1) If the trailer gybes to starboard tack *before* you have reached the “first layline”:

The key to knowing what to do is knowing where the “first layline” is. The “first layline” means, on the first run, the starboard-tack layline to the leeward mark; or if a gate, to the right-hand gate mark (looking downwind). On the second run, the “first layline” is the starboard-tack layline to the Pin end of the finishing line (right-hand end looking downwind).

If you are not at the “first layline” yet and the trailing boat gybes, do not gybe (which is what most inexperienced match racers do)! You are “Happy to Let Them Go!” You sail 2-3 lengths and then gybe with your wind clearly behind them. Your opponent is now close to being in Downwind Jail. At first they may be able to gybe and go behind you...never let them go behind you (called “crossing over”). If they gybe, you may be able to “hunt” them (head up and prevent them from getting behind you, and forcing them to gybe back to starboard). But if you can’t prevent them from going behind you, you have to gybe *before* they get to you, and stay to their left (looking downwind). If they are close to windward of you on starboard, you have to match their gybe simultaneously to defend the left (looking downwind). After both boats are on port tack, eventually you will arrive at the “first layline” (see what to do later in this article)

But if while both boats are on starboard, they get at all advanced on you (either because they are sailing faster, or because you are sailing higher and closing the distance with them), they will get to the point where they can NOT gybe at all, or cannot gybe and get behind you. And if they cannot sail into the zone of the leeward mark/right-hand gate mark or Pin on starboard-tack...they are in Downwind Jail and you own them!



## 2) If the trailer has not gybed and you are nearing the “first layline”:

Your first strategy is to try to sail a little lower than your opponent and move your opponent to windward of your centerline, without any risk of them overlapping you, which would be a problem given that there is no rule 17 in match racing so they can luff you aggressively. Then gybe a couple of lengths before the “first layline.” If your opponent crosses over, you have clear air and as long as you can sail into the zone on starboard tack, you beat them to the mark.

But if your opponent gybes simultaneously with you (“simo gybes”), then you need to Gybe Hot (meaning come out of your gybe on a high angle). This may be enough to keep your wind in front of theirs. But even if they eventually roll you, you will have pushed the game well above the layline to the mark, and now your opponent is in Downwind Jail.

Even better, set up for a “fake gybe” and see if you can get your opponent to gybe first \*before\* you get to the “first layline.” Then you go another 2-3 lengths and gybe with your wind safely behind them. A “fake gybe” (or what I call Flicking Them Off) works best when the trailer is within one (1) length of you. The reason it works is that the skipper of the trailing boat plans to do a “simo gybe” and knows you are nearing the layline where you will gybe, and is in a heightened state of anticipation. Try the “fake gybe” when you are about 8-10 lengths from the layline. You need to time to reaccelerate after the “fake gybe” and still get your real gybe in just before getting to the “first layline.”

To execute the “fake gybe” in a way that slows your boat the least, initiate the fake with a casual “stand by gybe” or some words that might put your opponent on high alert. Have your bow person begin to go through their maneuver to gybe the pole, but even if they take the pole off the mast, be sure they leave the inboard end of the pole at the mast – and do NOT release the guy from the outboard end of the pole! What will send the trailer is seeing you bear away and begin to pull on the mainsheet as if you are gybing the boom. Watch them out of the corner of your eye (don’t

stare at them...it is a dead give-away) and when they “bite” (gybe), you simply head up, build speed, sail 2-3 lengths and gybe with your wind behind the trailer. The trailer is now in Downwind Jail.

If the trailer does not bite, simply head up and build speed. The trailer may even be more to windward of your centerline now. Gybe just before the “first layline” and be ready to Gybe Hot if the trailer simo gybes with you.

