

Rules Specialist Group 2017-2020 Racing Rules of Sailing

Equipment in normal position

Issued 2 November 2020

1. [Question](#)

I see there is a major change in start/finish referring to hulls rather than equipment in normal position, however for overlaps it's the old normal position definition. I've always wondered about skiffs, some of which are prone to throwing spinnaker halyards in the water behind them on downwind legs - adds maybe 15 ft to the boat length (so is significant) and is arguably in "normal position". But can be very difficult to see - at or maybe even just below the surface of the water, maybe dark coloured. Do you reckon it still counts as part of the boat for overlap purposes?

2. [Answer](#)

A halyard is not designed to be trailed so is not in a 'normal' position when being trailed. As stated in the question it will also be very difficult to see.

This type of situation is covered by World Sailing Case number 91 which is summarised as follows:

A boat required to keep clear must keep clear of another boat's equipment out of its normal position when the equipment has been out of its normal position long enough for the equipment to have been seen and avoided.

It is therefore unlikely that a trailed halyard will meet the requirement for a following boat to have to keep clear of it or that it would count for overlap purposes.

Case 91 also refers to case 77.

The cases are shown below.

On behalf of the Rules Specialist Group.

John Standley

Chair

2/11/2020

CASE 91

Definitions, Clear Astern and Clear Ahead; Overlap

Definitions, Keep Clear

Rule 12, On the Same Tack, Not Overlapped

Rule 14, Avoiding Contact

A boat required to keep clear must keep clear of another boat's equipment out of its normal position when the equipment has been out of its normal position long enough for the equipment to have been seen and avoided.

Facts

Boats A and B were reaching on port tack and approaching a leeward mark

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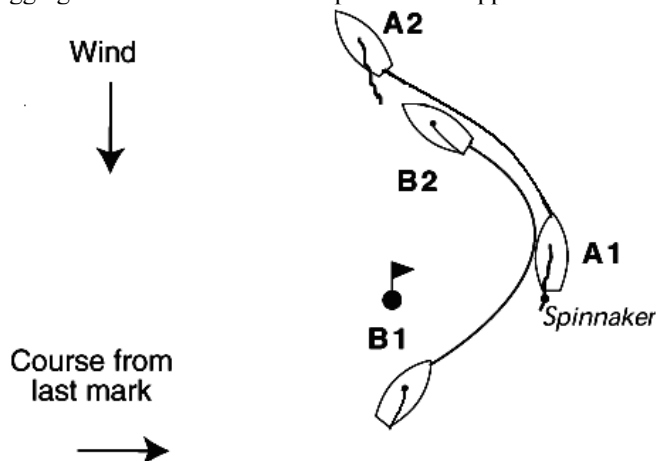


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to be left to port. B was clear astern of A. A's spinnaker had been flying out of control from the top of her mast for the entire leg. Both boats tacked around the mark. After both had tacked, B sailed a short distance closehauled. She then bore away, and her rigging made contact with A's spinnaker, which was still flying from the top of A's mast. The contact did not result in damage. A protested. The protest committee disqualified B for breaking rule 12 when her rigging made contact with A's spinnaker. B appealed.



Decision

The contact was caused by B bearing away. At the time of contact, A's spinnaker was not in its normal position, and B's bow was astern of A's hull and all of her equipment that was in normal position. Therefore, there was no overlap (see the definition Clear Astern and Clear Ahead; Overlap), and rule 12 applied. It required B to keep clear of A's hull, equipment and crew, including her spinnaker.

B broke rule 12 by failing to keep clear, because by sailing towards A's spinnaker she created a need for A to take avoiding action (see the definition Keep Clear). B's crew had been able to see A's spinnaker streaming from the top of her mast for quite some time before the contact, so B's failure to keep clear could not be blamed on the fact that A's spinnaker was not in its normal position.

Case 77 addresses an incident that appears to be similar but is significantly different. There, B passed the mark close astern of A with no knowledge that A would lose control of her spinnaker. B could not have been expected to foresee that A's spinnaker would suddenly trail astern by 20 feet (6 m).

In this case, B also broke rule 14 by causing contact she could have avoided. However, A did not break that rule because, after it became clear that B was not keeping clear, it was not reasonably possible for her to avoid the contact. Even if it had been possible, as a right-of-way boat she would have been exonerated under rule 14(b).

B was properly disqualified for breaking rule 12. She also broke rule 14. Her appeal is dismissed.

USA 1987/271

CASE 77

Definitions, Keep Clear

Rule 12, On the Same Tack, Not Overlapped

Rule 14, Avoiding Contact

Rule 31, Touching a Mark

Contact with a mark by a boat's equipment constitutes touching it. A boat obligated to keep clear does not break a rule when touched by a right-of-way boat's equipment that

moves unexpectedly out of normal position.

Facts

Boats A and B approached the leeward mark with spinnakers set. A rounds the mark clear ahead of B. A has difficulty lowering her spinnaker and, as she assumes a close-hauled course, her spinnaker guy trails astern by some 30 feet (9 m) and drags across part of the mark above the water. Later, when the mark is about five lengths astern of B, the boats are sailing closehauled on port tack and B is 20 feet (6 m) astern of A. A is still having difficulties handling her spinnaker and the head of her spinnaker unexpectedly streams astern and strikes B's headstay.

Question

What rules apply during these incidents and does any boat break a rule?

Answer

When A's spinnaker guy drags across the mark, she breaks rule 31. A boat touches a mark within the meaning of rule 31 when any part of her hull, crew or equipment comes in contact with the mark. The fact that her equipment touches the mark because she has manoeuvring or sail-handling difficulties does not excuse her breach of the rule.

When contact occurs later between the two boats, rule 18 no longer applies. Because A's spinnaker is not in its normal position, the boats are not overlapped and, therefore, rule 12 applies. That rule requires B to keep clear of A, which she is doing because nothing B did or failed to do required A 'to take avoiding action' (see the definition Keep Clear). This is shown by the fact that the contact between them results exclusively from A's equipment moving unexpectedly out of normal position. Therefore, B did not break rule 12.

Rule 14 also applied. A broke rule 14 by causing contact that she could have avoided. However, because there was no damage or injury, A is exonerated (see rule 14(b)). It was not reasonably possible for B to avoid contact with A's spinnaker as it streamed astern, and so B did not break rule 14.

Note that Case 91 also addresses an incident involving equipment out of its normal position.

USA 1980/232