

Racing Rules of Sailing

New Case based on Q&A B002

A submission from the Chairman of the Racing Rules Committee

Purpose or Objective

To propose a new case based on an ISAF Q&A.

Proposal

CASE XXX

Rule 10, On Opposite Tacks Rule 14, Avoiding Contact

When it would be clear to a competent sailor at the helm of a starboard-tack boat that there is substantial risk of contact with a port-tack boat, the starboard-tack boat breaks rule 14 if contact occurs and there was still time for her to change course sufficiently to avoid the contact.

Assumed Facts for Question 1

In a fleet race with 10 knots wind, two one-design dinghies, each 5 metres in length, are approaching each other on close-hauled courses. S is on starboard tack and P is on port tack. P does not change course or speed. S also holds her course and speed. There is contact between S's bow and P's starboard quarter, about 20 centimetres from P's stern, causing damage. Neither boat takes a penalty. S protests P. During the hearing, the representatives of both P and S state that until the contact occurred they thought that, if S held her course and speed, P could cross ahead without contact.

Question 1

How do the rules apply to this incident? In particular, did S break rule 14?

Answer 1

In this situation P made an erroneous judgment that she would cross in front of S. P could have tacked to leeward of S and thereby kept clear of S and avoided the contact. Because P failed to do so, she broke both rule 10 and rule 14 and is disqualified.

Rule 14 requires a boat, including a right-of-way boat, to avoid contact if reasonably possible. However, rule 14(a) also states that a right-of-way boat need not act to avoid contact until it is 'clear' that the other boat is not keeping clear. In the conditions described, when P's bow crossed in front of S's bow it would be clear to a competent, but not necessarily expert, sailor at the helm of S that there was substantial risk of contact and therefore that P was not keeping clear. At that moment there was still time for S to bear away sufficiently to avoid the contact, and therefore S broke rule 14. Because the contact caused damage, S is disqualified and is not exonerated (see rule 14(b)).

Assumed Facts for Question 2

The assumed facts are the same as those for Question 1, except that just before the contact occurs S bears away slightly in an attempt to avoid P. However S misjudges the manoeuvre and there is contact that causes damage.

Question 2

Did S break rule 14?

Answer 2

As noted in Answer 1, at the time it became clear that P was not keeping clear, there was still time for S to bear away sufficiently to avoid the contact. Therefore, it was reasonably possible for S to have done so. She failed either to bear away sufficiently or to begin to bear away early enough, but that does not mean that it was not reasonably possible for her to have avoided the contact. Therefore, S broke rule 14 despite having borne away slightly before the contact occurred. Because the contact caused damage, S is disqualified and is not exonerated.

Current Position

None. The case is new. However, it is based on current ISAF Q&A B002.

Reason

To comply with an item in the minutes of the 2012 Racing Rules Committee meeting in Dublin by proposing a new case based on current ISAF Q&A B002. At that meeting, the Racing Rules Committee recommended that that Q&A was sufficiently helpful and interesting to competitors and officials that it be proposed as a new case.
