

Racing, the Rules and Protests

Tristan Nelson · BDA Magazine 1995 Christmas, p. 11

Summary. Penalty and rule references as of 1995 (the 720° turn penalty then in use). Starting from a crowded leeward mark at a Gold Cup with 80 boats, Tristan Nelson argues that every Dragon racer needs a working knowledge of the basic rules and recommends *The Rules Book* by Eric Twiname, revised by Bryan Willis, as the best starting point. He explains that knowing your rights gives tactical options, but that pushing the rules will sometimes go wrong, and that the right response is to take your penalty turns rather than risk disqualification. He encourages taking genuine grievances to a protest hearing and contrasts the Dragon fleet's relaxed attitude to collisions with the International 14 fleet, where collisions are treated very seriously.

Picture this ... we are approaching the leeward mark at the Gold Cup, you are right up there, only problem is that due to the light wind so is everyone else. To add to the problems there are some boats approaching the mark on starboard, some on port; gusts are bringing the boats from behind quickly and some of the boats that have rounded the mark are coming back on the windward leg through the carnage. With 80 thirty-foot boats on the same piece of water things get crowded FAST! Do you know who has what rights ...?

Anyone who races should have a working knowledge of the basic rules. The best way to learn them is to buy one of the many books written on the subject. Arguably the best for the 'beginner' is probably *The Rules Book* written by Eric Twiname and revised by Bryan Willis. The first major rules section is a chapter dedicated to the "Rules everyone who races should know", giving a clear description of the rules with illustrations. This is essential reading.

Why is this important? The Dragon by its very nature encourages close racing, particularly during mark roundings and starts. With a good knowledge of the rules a whole new avenue of racing is opened up. Even so-called inviolable rules such as Port and Starboard bring in different tactical options. Being able to combine a good knowledge of your rights and slick boat handling can mean the difference between winning and losing.

Pushing the rules does have other ramifications, namely getting it wrong! I've done it, we all have, especially at mark roundings. All of a sudden the gap you thought was going to open up doesn't. You have nowhere to go, you hit the mark and probably other boats as well. It's circle time, one 720 clears you of both infringements. Here the protest raises its ugly head.

We all misjudge manoeuvres and from time to time we have collisions. The difference between a good seaman (as opposed to a sailor) and a bad one is how he deals with those collisions. I know people who happily infringe the rules and literally tell the offended yacht to 'Foxtrot Oscar'. If you are in the

wrong why not do your turns? One person protesting you could land you with a dsq rather than a 1st. Is it worth it?

If you feel that you have been badly influenced by a boat's actions then you have no recourse but to protest and take that protest through to a protest hearing. After all, a protest hearing is no more than a formalised version of the after-sailing bar chat, with approximately the same level of truth; admittedly it has greater ramifications for the loser but it is there for a good reason.

As a nomadic sailor I have seen some of the best and the worst sailors and the rules. At a recent event I watched someone retire because he felt the damage he had caused to another boat was such that to retire was "the only honourable recourse". Others have a different view. The Dragons have a more cavalier approach to the rules than most. In the International 14 fleet we treat all collisions very seriously; the boats are exceedingly fragile and even a gentle bump will cause damage. There are very few collisions and when they do occur there is usually little question who was in the wrong.

Ultimately the rules are there to make racing safer; the idea expressed throughout the rules is to avoid collisions and prevent dangerous situations arising. On the whole they succeed, but there are incidents and individuals who believe they are above the racing rules. The final word lies with the sailors in the class; the class can be as good and bad as you want it to be. **Your choice.**

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