

## The Racing Rules of Sailing - a history

*In 2007 ISAF commissioned Bob Fisher to produce a book to commemorate the centenary of our sport's governing body. Unfortunately it was never published. Here is a chapter on the history of the rules, which Bob delegated to Mark Rushall to write for the book.*

Racing sailors find it difficult to empathise with competitors in other sports who have no need of a close understanding of their rules. But sailors have no fixed starting blocks, there are no lanes painted on the race course and considerable debate over which is the quickest route between two points. Contact between boats can easily turn into a traumatic and expensive event.

Newcomers may initially find the racing rules of sailing difficult to follow; however the current version is substantially simpler than previous incarnations. Incidents in the 19th century, when many of the rules were unwritten and many situations open to interpretation, often resulted in acrimonious disputes and even threats of court action: usually for a local yacht club trophy and a prize which the wealthy yacht owners could easily afford to lose.

### The first rules

Robert C Macarthur quotes rule 14 of The Water Club of Cork Harbour (established in 1720, and the forerunner to the Royal Cork Yacht Club,): "That such members as talk of sailing after dinner shall be fined a bumper." Yacht club bars would be very quiet places if this rule had been universally adopted.

The most significant quoted rule from the Cumberland Fleet in London (which in 1820 became the Coronation Society and ultimately the Royal Thames Yacht Club) appears to be "No booming out of jibs". For early rule makers, issues of performance and etiquette appear to have had a higher priority than the "when boats meet" aspects on which our contemporary racers focus.

Starts were from anchor, and boats were generally of disparate size and speed. Therefore measurement and rating were more important than the right of way: after only 12 years of racing there was already a letter in the Southampton Herald in 1827 complaining that "oversized sails, shifting ballast, and stripped out insides [are] threatening to diminish the great interest in sailing. Already there was pressure on the rule makers to reduce the emphasis on "*cheque book sailing*".

"The Yacht Club" (which became the Royal Yacht Club and eventually the Royal Yacht Squadron) was formed in 1815 in Cowes is generally recognised as the first organiser of yacht racing in a similar form to that we know.

Of the 13 rules of the Royal Yacht Club in 1928, the first described the start:

*"Vessels to start from moorings laid down at a cable's distance, with their sails set, the stations of the respective vessels to be drawn for prior to the race."*

The next three described the entry requirements, that members be bone fide owners of boat and equipment, enter one boat only, and have a representative on board.

The next rule concerns equipment: ballast clearly remained a contentious point, and there is an attempt to prevent owners from adjusting ballast to suit the conditions of the day:

*“No trimming with ballast or shifting of ballast allowed, and all vessels to keep their platforms down and bulkheads standing to prevent the unnecessary expense that has heretofore taken place. That no vessels be allowed to take out, or take in, ballast for 24 hours previous to the time of starting, and that no ballast be thrown overboard or water started.”*

Also included is a limit on the number (4) and type of sails permitted, and size of boat required on board.

There is just one right of way rule:

*“That vessels on the larboard [port] tack must invariably give way for those on the starboard tack, and in all cases where a doubt of the possibility of the vessel on the larboard tack weathering [crossing] the one on the starboard tack shall exist, the vessel on the larboard tack shall give way, or if the other vessel keep her course and run into her, the owner of the vessel on the larboard tack shall be compelled to pay all damages and forfeit his claim to the prize.”*

Vessels are not permitted to touch marks, can use anchors and boats (but not assistance from other vessels) to get off shore after running aground; only the hand lead can be used for sounding (presumably to prevent “sculling” with a solid version).

The final provisions are: “That all and every one of the forgoing rules and regulations shall be strictly complied with, and any deviation shall subject the aggressor to forfeit all claims to the prize.”

*“That if any objection be made with regard to the sailing of any other vessel in the race, such objection must be made to the Stewards within one hour after the vessel making the objection shall arrive at the winning post.”*

Meanwhile, on the Thames, the Royal Thames YC had 17 rules. The main differences were that the boat had to be steered by a member (the original “amateur rule?”), the introduction of a time limit (certain buoys to be rounded by 5 pm or 10pm, or the race to be re-sailed the following day), that no ballast be taken on board or jettisoned during a race (rather than within 24 hours), and the possibility to ask for room to tack at an obstruction:

*“That if two yachts standing for the shore, or towards any vessel, and the yacht to leeward be likely to run aground or afoul of the vessel, and not be able to stay without coming into contact with the windward yacht, the windward yacht must be put about upon being hailed by any member of the club who may be on board the leeward yacht.”*

Oars were not allowed except to shove off if aground, or caught on a moored boat (presumably a common hazard on the Thames), and “skeeting” (use of a specialised bucket) was only allowed to windward (presumably skeeting to leeward had been a previous hidden form of propulsion!)

The final RTYC rule allowed a yacht to signal a protest by raising the club ensign, but did not include any procedure for settling such a protest.

As with the RYS, behind this small number of written rules, were plenty of unwritten ones. The assumption was that where boats met in ways not discussed in the written rules, they would follow the rules of the road for commercial vessels (which were customs rather than regulations at that time, and certainly not internationally universal) How this could work if several boats were about to round a mark is unclear. The starting procedure did not appear in the rules, but was similar to the RYS, except that sails were down at the start gun.

Semi-formalised racing in the USA was a little later to start than in Europe, but by 1846, the New York Yacht Club was ready to publish its version of the racing rules: 22 rules, many based on the RYS version, but with more detail in the “right of way rules” area.

Again, there was no mention of the familiar standing start procedure. General requirements covered time limits, re-sails (next day if the race did not finish within the time limit), yacht ownership, and member representation on board, a 72-hour limit on ballasting, and sail limitations.

The NYYC’s right of way rules began to establish many (but not all) of the principles applied to the modern rules:

- The port starboard rule was identical to the RYS’s, (current rule 10).
- A windward boat was not allowed to bear away to obstruct a boat to leeward (11):
- Except when the windward boat hails for room for the shore (NYYC’s version is much more wordy than this summary Part of our rule 18, though), it shall keep clear.
- There is a clearer version of the RTYC’s room to tack rule (our rule 19), including a very sophisticated sentence that requires the leeward boat to tack at the same time as the windward one, ensuring she gains no advantage.
- A crude mark-rounding rule (18), requiring yachts to give room to the nearest boat to a mark (but no mention of how to deal with more than 2 yachts).

Surprisingly, no anchoring was permitted under NYYC rules, and this remained the case for 20 years.

Objections were to be made within an hour of the finish, in which case two people from each yacht involved would be selected to appear before the committee, whose decision was final.

NYYC also legislated for the first use of independent observers:

*“A competent person shall be placed by the committee on board each station vessel to make observations and who, in the event of further information being required, shall appear before them for examination.”*

In looking at the rules of three early sailing clubs, the overall conclusion is that much is left unwritten, and many situations undefined. As new clubs formed, each developed a variation felt suited to its own sailing water, style of yacht, and social

situation. The rules developed organically as situations arose, which were not previously covered. Protests often turned into long drawn out affairs, clouded by emotion: they were reported in detail by the press (yacht racing at the time being the subject of much betting, press interest appears to have been easier to maintain than for modern yacht racing!) and frequently ended in bad feeling.

One of the enthusiastic reporters of race and protest reports in the 1850's was Hunt's Yachting Magazine, the monthly journal that was published between 1852 and 1887. Hunt's reported on one acrimonious protest, which began with a "water to tack", protest, was followed by an "eligibility" counter protest, and degenerated into an implication of committee bias (the eventual winner of the trophy was the Commodore of the club). Hunts editorial began

*"...To our horror we find it again grating on the ear, and again giving rise to angry feelings and sowing the seeds of discord, mingled with the sounds of lawsuits, and however reluctant we may be, we are bound by our sense of duty to report the following, which has appeared in the sporting journals."*

### **The YRA**

By the 1850's, Hunt's stated that there were more than 20 Royal and other Yacht clubs in the UK (which then included Ireland): additionally there were clubs in Sweden, France, the Netherlands, and Canada, with growing fleets in the USA. Keen owners were beginning to sail round the coast to compete in regattas held by clubs at the various ports: with different rules, different ways to solve disputes, and no mechanism for appeal, this confusing situation had surely to change for the sport of sailing to be able develop.

In 1852, Hunt's proposed the formation of a confederation of commodores, to try to achieve some sort of uniformity, which came to nothing. In 1864, encouraged by some of the newer clubs, Hunt's printed the racing rules of the RTYC in full.

Eventually, the Royal Victoria Yacht club, spurred on by its vice commodore the Marquis of Exeter, organised a Yachting Congress on 1 June 1868 which was attended by 23 representatives of 14 clubs. Its appointed secretary, Captain Mackinnon, produced a summary of the existing rules of all clubs, and a sub committee was formed to draw up a set of universal rules to apply to all regattas.

The following year, the Congress met again and adopted the new rules, but when published in the yachting press they gained little support. A number of clubs disowned the project and continued to use their own versions.

Finally, in 1865, the yacht owners forced the pace. A group led by the

Marquis mailed every owner they could contact, inviting them to join a Yachting Racing Association. The first meeting was on 17 November 1875; a committee (later council to avoid confusion with a club committee) was elected.

Its aim was;

- To codify existing yacht rules, and make such alterations and additions thereto as the committee may deem advisable

- To decide disputed points connected with yacht racing. The decision of the committee to be final.
- To classify yachts as it may deem advisable for racing.

Members were to sign a declaration that they would abide by and sail only under those rules approved by the committee.

After some debate and compromise, the new racing rules were adopted. These rules defined the race committee's responsibilities, introduced sailing instructions, and laid out the starting procedure. There were rules for mark roundings, obstructions, overtaking and luffing. Despite being a great improvement on anything that had gone before, 6 clubs, including the Royal London YC, the RYS and the RTYC, ignored the association and refused to accept its rules.

Politics solved the situation: HRH Albert Edward, Prince of Wales who was commodore of the RLYC and about to become commodore of the RYS, was invited to be President of the YRA. He accepted: problem solved!

Some of the ground breaking rules included the possibility of a flying start, inspired by the Prince of Wales (initially over a 2 minute window but ultimately as now used), a requirement for owners to sign an undertaking not to use moveable ballast, and a ban on the jettisoning of paid crews during a race!

There was now no limit on sails, so long as steam power was not needed to hoist them.

The right of way rules were heavily influenced by the 'Collregs' - the International regulations for preventing collisions at sea - which were adopted in 1863: An offwind starboard tack boat had to give way to a beating port tacker, and the windward boat had to keep clear if boats were on the same tack.

Defensive tactics (current rule 17) were covered: "A yacht may luff as she pleases to prevent another boat from passing to windward, but must never bear away out of her course or hinder her from passing to leeward... The overtaking vessel, if to leeward, must not luff until she has drawn clear of the yacht she has overtaken."

An overtaking boat had to keep clear, and an outside boat had to give room to an inside one at a mark or obstruction. Rather than the 2 boat length zone in our current rule 18, the inside boat needed to establish the overlap before the outside one "altered her helm" to round the mark, or "reached" the obstruction.

The "room to tack rule" now included shoals and buoys.

Anchoring was allowed, mooring was not, and anchors had to be recovered, not slipped. All yachts were required to assist a man overboard and could claim a re-sail if this prevented them winning the race.

With the benefit of hindsight, we can see plenty of contradictions and grey areas in these first unified rules for British sailors, but at least the principle of common rules and the first chapter of rules development had been achieved.

## **The IYRU**

Before the formation of the IYRU, the situation in Europe was similar to that prior to the YRA in the UK: each “National Authority” (in many cases a yacht club) having its own rules. The goal of a common measurement rule was the initial motivation for co-operation, and YRA secretary Major Brooke-Heckstall-Smith managed to convince 11 European countries to meet in London in 1906 with this aim. The result was the first “metre rule” (the first concession the British had to make was to adopt metric units!), and agreement to meet in 1907 to discuss an IYRU constitution, and standardised racing rules.

In preparation, the YRA established a committee to review the existing YRA racing rules in preparation. The revised and improved right of way rules were adopted with few modifications: the process appears to have been far more painless than the British experience.

However, outside the right of way rules there were still many differences of opinions and traditions, mainly concerning race organisation and sailor’s obligations. The differences were overcome by allowing national “prescriptions” to cover these differences. This is still the case, though fortunately the prescriptions are now down to a page or two of mainly administrative detail rather than something to concern travelling yachtsmen during a race.

The 1907 IRYU rules defined requirements for sailing instructions, shortening course, recalling premature starters, protest, sailing committee “protests”, and other organisational aspects which were previously unwritten, and began to tie down some definitions, for example overlap and overtaking.

Most of the right of way section followed the YRA principles, but the committee, for its “meeting, crossing, and converging” section, followed the NYYC’s logical structure:

- A yacht which has the wind free shall keep out of the way of one which is close hauled.
- A yacht which is close hauled on port tack shall keep out of the way of one which is close hauled on starboard tack.
- When both have the wind free on the same side the yacht to windward shall keep out of the way of the yacht to leeward.
- When both yachts which have the wind free on the same side the yacht to windward shall keep out of the way of the yacht to leeward.
- When two yachts, both close hauled on the same tack, are converging...and neither can claim the rights of a yacht being overtaken, the yacht to windward shall keep out of the way.” (The original NYYC rule gave right of way to the windward boat in this situation, but this was reversed after 6 years).
- *“A yacht may not tack so as to involve risk of collision with another yacht before filling on her new tack, nor as to involve risk of collision....”*

The overtaking rule now applied between boats “sailing the same or nearly the same course” when there was “risk of collision”, until one of them had drawn clear. This was obviously going to cause problems for the future but the “Collregs” definition of less than 67.5 degrees would have been even worse!

The luffing rule required the leeward yacht to curtail her luff at the point that “her bowsprit or stem would strike the overtaking yacht abaft her main shrouds.” How the

helmsman of a large yacht was supposed to determine this point without colliding is unclear.

Room at marks and obstructions was clarified, the biggest changes being that other racing boats could count as obstructions, and “room to tack” did not apply at an obstruction that was also a mark that the windward mark could fetch.

Finally, the liability rule stated that any question of damages be governed by the NA’s prescription. The YRA’s prescription was that the owner of a yacht in breach of these rules would be liable for all damages, subject to the limits of the Merchant Shipping act (this would value a racing yacht at well below its cost!). No protest committee today would dare to take on this responsibility.

The meeting also set down the process for changing the rules. NA’s were no longer able to modify them each year as they saw fit: changes had to be submitted to the IYRU permanent committee for its approval. Meanwhile the YRA introduced “footnotes” to the rules, which described how the YRA council interpreted the rules: the equivalent of today’s ISAF casebook.

The IYRU rules were revised in 1912, 1929, 1946, 1959, and 1960, thereafter every four years.

### **To North America**

The unofficial yachting authority in the US at this time was the New York Yacht Club. The NYYC rules continued to develop, generally as a reaction to a specific incident. Sometimes independently (as with the six meeting, crossing, and converging rules adopted by the IYRU) and sometimes by taking on board ideas from over the Atlantic. Discussions between the other major clubs existed, but were informal, and generally once the major clubs instigated a rule change, the others eventually followed. However when racing a regatta, as in the UK prior to the YRA, yachtsmen had to be aware of which yacht club was running the regatta: for example for six years, the Boston Yacht club required a windward boat to keep clear of a higher pointing leeward one upwind, while The NYYC gave right of way to the windward one.

As in the UK, the campaign for a National sailing body for the US and Canada was championed by a journal, the “Forest and Stream”. The NAYRA was formed in 1897, but with no support from the most powerful clubs, in particular the NYYC, which did not wish to be subject to a “Supreme Council with ultimate power,” folded three years later. Its major contribution to the rules was a proposal for the first anti-barging rule, which would allow a leeward boat to deny room at a start mark to an inside windward boat.

In 1912, the NYYC regatta committee met with the six biggest clubs and associations of the US in an attempt to make the rules revision process more systematic. Some minor changes were made, and the right of way rules grew closer to the IYRU version. But clubs still used their own interpretations, and fleets were starting to increase in size. By 1924 there were 38 Stars competing at Larchmont Race week, and again it came to a journal, this time “Yachting”, to report on the lack of rule observance, and call for clear consistent rule interpretations, education, and a national authority as a single body to interpret and administer the rules.

A meeting took place in 1925, and though the NYYC and the Eastern YC failed to send delegates, the NAYRU was reborn. The NAYRU published its own rules, based on the existing rules at the time (including the NYYC), and involved a group of people dedicated to provide advice and help. However there was still resistance from the clubs and associations to moving away from their own versions; transatlantic travellers had yet another variable to contend with!

In 1928, Yachting ran a series of rules quizzes, with a year's subscription as a prize. This highlighted the level of confusion, with the majority of respondents getting the answers wrong, and Yachting itself getting part of the third question wrong by using a NYYC interpretation instead of an NAYRU one. In 1929, the NYYC modified its rules to allow a starboard tack boat to "luff as she pleases to prevent a yacht on port tack from crossing ahead of her" this was not adopted by the NAYRU.

But the big news in 1929 was that the IYRU invited representatives from the NYYC and the NAYRU to attend its annual general meeting, whose main agenda was a revision of the racing rules. Secretary Brooke Heckstall-Smith hoped to achieve world uniformity, and clearly felt that he needed both NYYC and NAYRU to achieve that.

The process used to achieve agreement must have been fascinating, but the end result was that at least the US and IRYU right of way rules (but not the rest of the rules) ended with almost identical wording. However interpretations continued to be made independently, and significant dispute could occur outside the right of way rules. An example occurred in the 1934 America's Cup, when T.O.M. Sopwith's Endeavour attempted to protest Rainbow over a right of way rule. The NYYC protest rule required that a protest flag be hoisted promptly: the IYRU stated "at the first reasonable opportunity and when passing the sailing committee" T.O.M. Sopwith had clearly not read or understood the significance of the different wording and the NYYC refused to hear the protest.

### **The Vanderbilt influence**

Harold S Vanderbilt, who was sailing Rainbow in this incident, was a legend of sailing at this time. He defended the America's cup 4 times, and in 1939 took his 12-Metre Vim to race against the best of British on their home waters, winning 19 races out of 28 starts. He understood the deficiencies in the rules due to inconsistencies and differences in interpretation.

In 1935, he sat down with colleagues to try to solve these problems through amendment, but eventually realised that it was the basic principles that were causing problems. Despite resistance to his first two sets of solutions, Vanderbilt continued with his campaign, producing several versions of his new rule before he found one which local clubs were persuaded to trial during the war years.

One interesting innovation he wrestled with was to give right of way to a yacht carrying a spinnaker over one that is not. Modern asymmetric sailors would have sympathy with a rule that allowed an overpowered boat to bear off in a big gust: in fact some skiffs and catamarans have unsatisfactorily trialled a similar concept, but Vanderbilt was persuaded to keep to his original objective of simplifying the rules and minimising exceptions rather than the opposite.



Vanderbilt's "Suggested revision of the International Yacht Racing Right of way rules" began with the four fundamental rules today's racers will instantly recognise:

- If two yachts are on opposite tacks, the port tack yacht shall keep out of the way.
- If two yachts on the same tack are clear ahead and clear astern, the yacht clear astern shall keep out of the way.
- If two yachts on the same tack overlap, the windward yacht shall keep out of the way.
- A yacht, while tacking or jibing, shall keep out of the way of a yacht on a tack.

The exceptions, and marks and obstructions, were dealt with in a similar clear and logical way. Note that the fundamental changes are that there is no "overtaking boat" clause -though many racers still believe it exists somewhere- and that a starboard tack boat has right of way over a port, whatever the respective points of sailing. Vanderbilt also introduced the idea "mast line" to curtail a luff, rather than guessing when and where the leeward boat might hit the windward one, and an "anti barging rule" to prevent windward boats forcing a passage at the start line.

In 1941, Yachting reported that the Lake George Yacht Club had used the Vanderbilt rules throughout the summer, and voted to use them again:

"They are easier to understand, easier to remember, and easier to interpret".

By 1945 he was on his 5th version, had distributed 5000 copies, had addressed issues of barging at the start line, and the concept of a one boat length circle beyond which an inside boat could not establish an inside overlap. (Increased to 2 boat lengths in 1946). He felt confident enough to imply a threat to NAYRA to establish a rival yacht racing union if NAYRU did not follow the lead of the increasing number of clubs in the US who were using the Vanderbilt rules.

In 1946, NAYRU appointed a special committee on revision of the racing rules, and shrewdly appointed Vanderbilt as the 7th man. He managed to convince the committee of the validity of most of his ideas, and they produced an official version, which in 1948 became its racing rules, except for international races.

### **Politics, politics**

In 1947, Vanderbilt attended the permanent committee of IYRU as one of the US "observers", and was given an opportunity to present and explain what were still known as the Vanderbilt rules. The IYRU was shocked at the speed of change: it was explained that NAYRU had been forced to take this action through public opinion.

During 1948, several UK clubs trialled the new rules and reported back, and at the autumn meeting Jan Loeff suggested that the time had indeed come to consider how the existing IYRU rules could be improved. One of the committee members was one Gerald Sambrooke Sturgess, who spent most of the next 31 years as chairman of the committee.

The sub-committee's preliminary report on the NAYRU rules was negative: they had not had enough time to be trialled; in attempting to solve some of the problems encountered under existing rules, the new code was quite likely to produce a number

of new ones, equally difficult; they conflicted with the collregs and therefore presented potential legal problems; that YRA and IYRU case law would no longer be of any use. It was regretted that that USYRA was trying to force their hand, and had unilaterally adopted a different code to the rest of the world, however the IYRU was adopting some of the NAYRU rules in its 1949 draft amendment rules.

The dichotomy continued, with NAYRU continuing to develop its version, IYRU doing the same, each using some concepts from the other but with no common goal of a unified rule. An example was the IYRU's new rule 29: "If a right of way yacht fails to avoid a collision that may result in serious damage, she shall be liable to disqualification as well as the other yacht." The implication is that even if she tries to avoid a collision, and fails, she may be disqualified.

This was a significant change in Europe: where previously all responsibility was placed on the give way yacht. It also which leapfrogged NAYRU's "...yachts shall do their utmost to avoid collision." The cynical may conclude that the European rule makers of the day liked the NAYRU concepts, but felt that they could do better.

However, several Scandinavian countries experimented with the NAYRU rules, and Sweden adopted them, while at the same time, NAYRU came closer to joining IYRU.

### **The universal rules**

A softening of attitudes followed when a group including Peter Scott of England, Vanderbilt, Crown Prince Olav of Norway influenced the Swedish Yachting Union to submit a draft by Niels Benzon of Denmark which incorporated the main features of the Vanderbilt rules into the IYRU rules: a truly international effort!

Sir Ralph Gore - one of the key opposers to change in the rules - resigned as head of IYRU (and the newly designated RYA), his place as President of IYRU was taken by the more liberally minded Scott.

A new rules committee was established: "To evolve the best racing rules with a view to achieving a universal code as soon as possible".

Prince Olav was chairman; other members were Robert N Bavier of the NAYRU, Niels Benzon, Jan Loeff, and Gerald Sambrooke Sturgess. Prince Olav resigned on his accession, and Niels Benzon took over. During this time there was negotiation between Sambrooke Sturgess, representing the RYA, and F. Gregg Bemis of the NAYRU.

Sambrooke Sturgess recalls the final leg of this long and apparently painful voyage:

*"If the two largest and most powerful authorities governing the sport agreed a code of rules, the other NA's would accept it, subject to any further amendments. [We] were discussing the two codes to discover how and why some of them differed in principle or detail, and attempting to draft wording they hoped would be acceptable to both authorities. Progress was slow as all decisions were conducted by correspondence, sometimes a particular point travelled back and forth several times before being finally settled.*

*In 1960, [we] met for the first time at Naples for the Olympic Regatta. Each evening, after the International Jury had heard protests and had dined, [we] retired to one of their rooms to do [our] best to resolve the remaining differences in some rules. The International Jury comprised most of the members for the IYRU rules committee, so, after breakfast the next morning, it met for an hour before going afloat to follow the races, when [we] presented [our] previous nights work for approval.”*

The end result of these efforts was the most important event in the administration of our sport: the first universal code of racing rules.

## **Consolidation**

IYRU now had a fully representative rule making committee, and a universal set of racing rules, with a logical construction. The next thirty years saw a fine-tuning process, as practice identified areas of concern. The rules were also required to move with the times: coming to terms with, for example, increasing professionalism and the possibilities of sponsorship, a demand to attempt to make the sport more interesting to spectators, and rules for specialist parts of the sport such as match racing, team racing, and board racing. Then as now, National Authorities and various other bodies, which made recommendations to the Council every four years, made submissions to the Racing Rules Committee. The deadline for submissions for rules changes to be considered for the 2009-2012 rules will be the ISAF November 2007 conference.

Some of the significant changes in this consolidation period were:

1963:

- Introduction of the two-boat length zone as the point at which an inside overlap had to be established to entitle a boat to water. (Yet another idea originally proposed by Vanderbilt, it is suggested that this incarnation came as a result of a discussion between Paul Elvstrom, on the way to his 4th Olympic gold medal, and Niels Benzon
- The member of a club in charge of the boat no longer had to be an amateur; this was now left to class associations and race organisers to specify.

1969

- A new one minute “round the ends rule” to apply after a general recall. General recalls were already beginning to be a problem. (And still are: even with the much more brutal “black flag rule”, starting processes are a cause of serious debate to this day.
- A new rule prohibiting advertising except for manufacturers labels.

1973

- Individual recalls signalled by dipping the class flag with no requirement for a hail to the boat or display of a recall no: putting the onus on competitor rather than race committee.
- The “heavy sweater” rule: prohibiting clothing worn for increasing weight, unless specified in class rules, and then limited to 20kg max. Over the years this maximum weight steadily reduced and is now zero).

- Alternative penalties for breaking a right of way rule: a 720-degree turn, or a 20% penalty as specified in the SI's. (A welcome liberalisation: packing up and going home for an unintentional foul always seemed over harsh, especially for recreational sailors)
- If there is contact, one has to take a penalty, protest, or retire: the counterpart of the alternative penalty: "now that there is an alternative there is no excuse for not following the rules).

1977

- An experimental rule (not allowed in major championships) to allow unlimited kinetics in certain conditions.

1981

- The first relaxation of the advertising rule, to allow event sponsors.
- The experimental kinetics rule disappears (but not for ever!) Instead there are clearer definitions of what and what is not allowed.

1989

- 720-degree turn (rather than re-rounding) for hitting a mark. (This later becomes less iniquitous 360-degree turn.)

### **Does it have to be that complicated?**

Any sort of "fix" is invariably more complex than re-building from scratch, this it was inevitable that the fine tuning process had led to an increase in the number of rules, sub clauses, and exceptions, and therefore their complexity. It was felt that this complexity was not helping people into our sport, and was discouraging competitors from understanding the rules and using them properly. There were even disagreements between judges about what some of the rules meant, which led to conflicting interpretations, until the "correct" solutions found their way into the case book. If the rules could be made shorter and less complicated, they would be easier to understand and remember.

In 1993, the leaders of the IYRU decided that the rules should be simplified, in time for the 1997 rule book. NA's were asked to propose simplified right of way rules for consideration at the 1993 annual meeting. The guiding principles were that the new rules should:

- Embody principles of fairness that most sailors accept.
- Discourage contact between boats
- Allow manoeuvring in close quarters with a minimum of anxiety
- Encourage sailing fast, and discourage impeding others
- Minimise exceptions and rules of unusual situations
- Be stated in simple, direct, familiar language.

The prime movers were Goran Pettersen, Dick Rose, Bill Bensen, and Mary Pera of the racing rules committee, which produced an experimental right of way rules for testing in 1994. These were used by more than 100 clubs from around the world, and based on their feedback, another version appeared in 1995.

The experimental right of way rules were certainly shorter and simpler: just 9 in the 1994 and 11 in the 1995 (compared to 17 in the 1993 rule book). Definitions were clarified and simplified, and by simplifying the rules, some definitions that would not be required were dropped, for example there was no definition of tacking. As well as simplification of structure some basic principles were changed: some (but not all) of these new principles made it into the new rules, and some were changed several more times in development before finding their current form.

Though this extreme level of simplicity did not make it in its entirety through to the current rule book, there are now only 13 right of way rules compared with the previous 17. The language has certainly been simplified, there are far fewer sub-clauses and special exceptions, and once the sailors began to get used to a completely new set of rule numbers, (the revision extended to the whole rule book not just the right of way rules) the changes met with fairly universal approval.

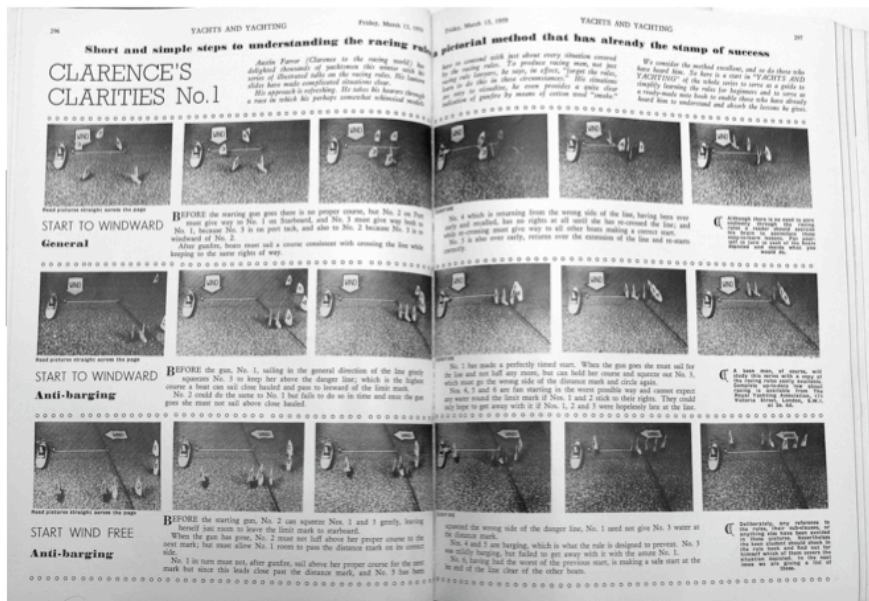
As for the changes in meaning, some of the major difference between the “old” (1993) rules and the current (2005) ones are:

- Boats to avoid contact if reasonably possible.
- There is no luffing rule: any course change must give the other boat room to keep clear, and no “mast abeam”: the leeward boat can continue to luff until the windward has passed.
- The limitation on altering course (old rule 35) now simply prevents a starboard tack boat making a course alteration that immediately requires a ducking port boat to change course.
- A boat tacking within 2 boat lengths of the windward mark cannot force an outside boat to sail above close hauled, and must give room if another boat gains a leeward overlap.
- The new mark rounding rule (18) is structured in a completely different way.

### **The future**

The new rules structure may not have achieved the level of simplicity that IYRU’s leaders hoped for, but it certainly provided principles for future change. For 2009, the rule makers are again looking closely at rule 18. With racing boats of all sizes getting faster downwind each year, one area for concern is the point at which rule 18 begins to apply: “just how far from a mark is ‘about to round or pass a mark’?”

Whatever solutions are proposed, the development of the rules is sure to continue. All sailors who compete have a debt of gratitude to all the personalities who have toiled over our rule books for almost 200 years in attempt to make sailboat racing fair and understandable.



Few racing sailors of the 1970's and '80s travelled far without their "Elvstrom Explains the Yacht Racing Rules, with its friendly green cover, model plastic boats, and black and red illustrations indicating which boat was right and wrong in every case. In a recent interview for Sailpower, Elvstrom himself explained:

*"The racing rules were interpreted in different ways. I thought this was wrong because the rules needed to be interpreted in the same way all over the world. So with Richard Creagh-Osborne I decided to make a correct interpretation of the rules and published the book. When Richard died, one of his friends took over. Now, my son in-law who is an umpire and an international judge has taken over the rules book. Although it still has my name on it."*

But Elvstrom was not the first rules educator. Heckstall-Smith published "The Complete Yachtsman in 1912, Sambrooke Sturgess presented "The 1959 IYRU Yacht Racing Rules", and there have been plenty of others including R.n. Bavier, Eric Twiname, Mary Pera, Dave Perry, and Bryan Willis. One of our favourites; "Clarence's Clarities, was written for Yachts and Yachting magazine by Austin Farrar in 1959 and still has pride of place in some UK sailor's attics.

With simplified rules, specialist books, features in yachting magazines, the full rule book plus case book and Q and A's published on ISAF's website ([www.sailing.org](http://www.sailing.org)), plus commercial DVD's and quizzes and articles on the internet, there has never been less excuse for today's sailors to access, understand, and follow the current racing rules.