

2015 National Iceboat Authority Racing Rules Change Summary

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INTRODUCTION

The National Iceboat Authority (NIA) Racing Rules have served iceboating well for several decades. They were developed so sailors from different regions could race safely by following a common set of rules. This recent update is meant to provide improvements that keep pace with some of the lessons learned during that time. Since July, 2015, the Directors of the NIA have been meeting regularly via telephone and email to discuss the proposed changes. Many hours of editing, deliberation, and debate have been invested. For example, I have participated in over 8 hours of teleconferences and sent or received over 400 emails on this topic since July.

The biggest change most sailors will notice is the addition of two race course configurations called DARLING COURSE and INLINE COURSE which may be used as alternatives to the STANDARD COURSE we've been using for many years. This allows Race Committees to select a course which is most appropriate for their ice sailing event. Many different course layouts were discussed, but we felt it important to limit the number of combinations in order to prevent confusion. This was always a key point: allow some flexibility for Race Committees while minimizing confusion for sailors. On the race course, the goal for sailors is to be able to react intuitively and with common sense. Therefore, the number of possible race course configurations needed to be limited. We concluded three configurations met this purpose.

STANDARD COURSE

The first course is the STANDARD COURSE. This is unchanged from the previous Racing Rules.

DARLING COURSE

The second course is the DARLING COURSE, which is a STANDARD COURSE modified with the addition of two DARLING MARKS which must be left to PORT. This is named in honor of John Darling who was the resident race committee and race starter in the New Jersey area throughout the 1970's and 1980's. Mr. Darling was the first to use the DARLING MARK at the leeward end of the course. The DARLING MARK serves several purposes:

- A. In larger fleets, there can be a tendency for some of the even side starters on STARBOARD TACK to over stand the windward MARK. When they tack over to PORT TACK, they are set up for a head on collision with yachts that have already rounded the windward MARK. Therefore, near the windward MARK, the DARLING MARK creates separation between ON-THE-WIND PORT TACK yachts and OFF-THE-WIND STARBOARD TACK yachts to minimize collisions.
- B. After rounding the windward MARK, some yachts may desire to JIBE as soon as possible. This can create head-on collision situations with STARBOARD TACK ON-THE-WIND yachts that have understood the windward MARK. Therefore, near the windward MARK, the DARLING MARK creates separation between ON-THE-WIND

STARBOARD TACK yachts and OFF-THE-WIND PORT TACK yachts to minimize collisions.

- C. Creates separation between a PORT TACK ON-THE-WIND yacht that has just rounded the leeward MARK and STARBOARD TACK OFF-THE-WIND yachts approaching the leeward MARK.
- D. Creates separation between a STARBOARD TACK ON-THE-WIND yacht that has just rounded the leeward MARK and subsequently TACKED and a PORT TACK OFF-THE-WIND yacht approaching the leeward MARK.

The bottom line is....the DARLING MARK is intended to create separation between yachts which should minimize head-on collisions near the potentially congested areas around a MARK. Some may claim that DARLING MARKS reduce the playing field and reduce the tactical freedom of a race. I think they're overstating it. With a 1 mile course and two DARLING MARKS each placed 100 yards from their associated MARK, the "tactical area" is only reduced by 11% ($200\text{yards} \times 1\text{ mile}/1760\text{ yards} = 0.11$). Typically sailors don't change tacks until they've completed the MARK rounding and achieved full speed. That is likely 50 yards from a MARK so the real effect on the "tactical area" is more like 5%. This is a minor issue compared to the safety gained.

A key point regarding DARLING MARKS is the imaginary line between the MARK and its accompanying DARLING MARK is considered part of the MARK. Therefore, if a yacht crosses over this line, she will have fouled the MARK and be disqualified.

The disadvantage of the DARLING MARKS, of course, is the need for the Race Committee to have additional equipment and the added labor of placing or moving the DARLING MARKS on the course.

INLINE COURSE

The third course is the INLINE COURSE. This is A DARLING COURSE modified with the finish line being placed in line with the windward and leeward MARKS. This configuration has been used successfully for years in the Eastern region of the US. The INLINE COURSE is intended to provide the following advantages:

- A. Due to the placement of the leeward DARLING MARK, all yachts should be sailing in the same direction at the finish.
- B. The Race Committee location during the finish is more protected than when a perpendicular finish is used.
- C. On smaller sailing areas, such as those which can be found in the Eastern US, there is not enough room to have a finish line perpendicular to the wind and direct the finished yachts through a safety zone, then round up from OFF-THE-WIND to ON-THE-WIND and coast into the parking area(s). The INLINE COURSE finish line uses less space because it directs finishing yachts parallel to the starting line and directs finished yachts around the odd end of the starting line.
- D. All finished yachts would be entering the parking area from the same direction.
- E. No safety zone for the Race Committee to set up.

- F. Since there is no safety zone, all yachts sailing in the following race would be allowed to line up on the starting line. This makes it easier for those sailors and quicker for the Race Committee to start the next race.

A disadvantage of the INLINE COURSE is the MARK end of the finish line is significantly “favored”. This may cause congestion near the MARK end of the finish line, but the fact that all yachts are traveling in the same direction should make that issue more manageable. In addition, the lack of a safety zone means there is less room to evade a hazardous situation near the leeward MARK. Similar to the DARLING COURSE, the Race Committee will need additional equipment and added labor for placing or moving the DARLING MARKS.

RACE COURSE SELECTION

No one race course is perfect; however some course configurations may work better for your sailing event. We’re relying on the Race Committee of the event to make the best decision for your fleet. As you can see in the descriptions above, there are significant differences in the race courses and it will take time for sailors to become comfortable with a new course. With this in mind, the NIA recommends that once a course configuration is selected for the event, this should not be changed for the duration of that event.

SAFETY ZONE

The safety zone has created much debate amongst ice sailors over the years. Some have claimed it’s a “danger zone” rather than a safety zone since it is often littered with parked yachts, moving yachts, personal gear, or spectators. It’s true that a safety zone which is not correctly set up or enforced can be dangerous. We discussed eliminating it, but concluded that it adds more to safety than detracts from it. The bottom line is we must do better as Race Committees and sailors to enforce and self-police the safety zone to make sure it truly is making everyone safer.

APPROACHING THE WINDWARD MARK

Another addition is Right-of-Way rule 8.a which states: *“When yachts sailing ON-THE-WIND on opposite tacks are approaching a MARK, the PORT TACK yacht shall keep clear of the STARBOARD TACK yacht.”* This new rule eliminates the previous confusion about the governing rule when approaching the windward MARK: Did the STARBOARD TACK yacht have rights over the PORT TACK yacht or was the PORT TACK yacht inside and therefore require the STARBOARD TACK yacht to stay clear? This new rule clarifies that the PORT TACK yacht shall keep clear.

PROPULSION

You may have noticed that some of the better runners in our fleets might push their boat straight upwind or downwind during a light air race. In addition, they might push straight upwind during the start, then layoff, when tactically advantageous, to start wind propulsion. This practice is now limited by Sailing rule D which now states: *“Propulsion - A yacht may not employ any means of propulsion other than the action of the wind on the sails. However, the crew (unassisted by anyone except for reasons of physical disability as authorized by the Judges) may push the yacht to achieve wind propulsion.”* The previous version of the rule stated: *“may push the yacht to leave the starting line or to return the yacht to wind propulsion when*

necessary.” The previous wording allowed a sailor to push straight upwind from the starting line without the intent of achieving wind propulsion. The simple point of the new wording is that any pushing, other than pushing to achieve wind propulsion, is not allowed.

TACKING AT THE START OF A RACE

One of the safety issues addressed is protecting the Race Committee immediately following the start of a race. New rule IV.C.3 states: *“After a yacht starts and until she rounds the windward MARK for the first time, a yacht shall not pass between the center of the starting line (positions 1 and 2) and the leeward MARK.”* This prevents yachts from tacking immediately after the start of the race and endangering the Race Committee.

ROOM TO FINISH

Another point which has often confused sailors is Right-of-Way rule 8.b, which states: *“Each yacht shall be entitled to room to cross the finish line.”* This is often misinterpreted and I’ve even heard some champion sailors state after a particularly close race: “I left you plenty of room to finish:behind me”. This is not the intent of the rule. The intent is explained in the Rules Interpretations on page 22: *Right-of-way rule #8 giving each yacht room to finish is for the ends of the line and is designed to keep the race committee from getting killed and to avoid general havoc in the finishing area. Port tack yachts shall keep clear of STARBOARD TACK yachts except at the committee end of the line where PORT TACK must be given room to finish. At the ends of the line a windward yacht must allow a leeward yacht room to finish.* The bottom line here is sailors must use COMMON SENSE as explained in Sailing Rule A.

CONCLUSION

The changes to the NIA Racing Rules are significant and may take some time to get used to. Many sailors will continue to use the STANDARD COURSE and these changes will have little effect on them. The important point to remember is: using the DARLING COURSE or INLINE COURSE is optional, so you can choose the course which fits your fleet best. Regardless of which course you choose, the 2015 Racing Rules should make your sailing safe, fair, and fun, in that order.