

**BLACKWATER YACHT RACING ASSOCIATION, INC.**  
"Fundamentals of Sailboat Racing"

March 2011

The Blackwater Yacht Racing Association, Inc. (BYRA) is a non-profit organization made up of members who enjoy sailing and sailboat racing. Sailboat racing is a sport, and like all sports, there are rules and regulations for the competition. The object of a sailboat race is for all of the competing boats to sail around a designated course safely, as fast as possible, in accordance with the rules. BYRA uses a handicap system which gives each boat a standardized rating based on its relative size and speed. The competition among the boats is determined by the order of finish based on the handicap corrected time elapsed for each boat. The handicap system ideally makes each boat competitive with every other boat.

BYRA uses the Racing Rules of Sailing, established by the U. S. Sailing Association. BYRA also has its own Sailing Instructions established by the BYRA Board of Directors, which apply to all BYRA events. (See [www.ussailing.org](http://www.ussailing.org))

Every sailor who intends to compete in a regatta should obtain copies the rules and instructions and study them, not only for the competitive aspects of the rules, but because the rules have the goal of maintaining safety and order on the racecourse.

There are many textbooks which give extensive and exhaustive discussions about all aspects of sailing rules and sailboat racing, boat preparation, starting, upwind sailing, mark rounding, downwind sailing, finishing, and, of course, recognition and use of the racing rules. US Sailing, West Marine or Annapolis Performance Sailing are good sources of rules and racing books.

It is not practical to give a complete listing and thorough explanation of all of the rules of racing in this document, but it is important to list (1) Fundamental Rules which must be observed, (2) Fundamental Terms which must be understood, and (3) Basic Sailing Rules which must be learned in order to enjoy and safely participate in sailboat racing. **You may obtain a copy of the current Racing Rules from US Sailing at [www.ussailing.org](http://www.ussailing.org).**

FUNDAMENTAL RULES

Safety is the overriding concern of all rules, so regardless of any other consideration, the following rules are paramount:

1. Render help and assistance to any boat or person that is in danger or distress.
2. No boat should sail in conditions that are beyond the capability of the boat, or the skill or experience level of the skipper and crew. It is the responsibility of each skipper and each crewmember to decide themselves whether to race or not and when to discontinue racing because of adverse or harsh weather conditions. BYRA recommends that all persons wear approved flotation devices while participating in BYRA events.

## FUNDAMENTAL TERMS

1. Starboard and Port – When facing forward towards the bow of the boat, the starboard side is on the right and the port side is on the left.
2. Starboard Tack – when the wind is striking the starboard side of the boat, the boat is on a "starboard tack", and has right-of-way over any "port tack" boat. When the right of way is in doubt, the starboard boat should hail and warn the port tack boat.
3. Port Tack – When the wind is striking the port side of the boat, the boat is on a "port tack" and must give way to any boat on a starboard tack which is approaching.
4. Tacking (to tack) – the maneuver involving changing direction from one tack to another when sailing upwind. The boat changes tacks the moment her bow passes head to wind.
5. Jibing (to jibe) – the maneuver involving changing direction from one tack to another when the boat is sailing downwind. The boat jibes the moment her mainsail crosses her centerline from one side to the other.
6. Leeward - a leeward boat is a boat which is downwind from another boat.
7. Windward – A windward boat is a boat which is upwind of another boat.
8. Clear Ahead or Astern - Overlapped – Boat B is "Clear astern" and Boat A "clear ahead" when Boat B's bow does not cross an imaginary line drawn abeam across the stern of Boat A. When the bow of Boat B crosses the line drawn across Boat A's stern, they are "overlapped".
9. Mark – A mark is an object which the sailing instructions require each boat to pass on the specified side (either "to port" on the left side of the boat, or "to starboard", on the right side of the boat). The mark may be an inflated ball, a channel marker, an island, a boat, or any designated object.
10. Starting Line and Finishing Line – The starting and finishing line is that straight line between the "pin" or some other designated point and the committee boat flag or some other designated point.

## INTRODUCTION TO SAILING RULES

1. Avoiding contact: (Rule 14): Regardless of port or starboard tack, windward or leeward position, or any other consideration, all boats shall avoid contact with another boat if reasonably possible. **DO NOT HIT ANOTHER BOAT OR LET ANOTHER BOAT HIT YOU.**
2. Boats on opposite tacks. (Rule 10) When boats are on opposite tacks, the port tack boat shall keep clear of a starboard tack boat. The starboard tack boat has the right of way over port tack boats.

3. Boats on the Same Tack: (Rules 11 and 12) When boats are on the same tack and overlapped, a windward boat shall keep clear of a leeward boat. When boats are on the same tack and not overlapped, a boat clear astern (behind) shall keep clear of a boat clear ahead.
4. Changing Course: (Rule 16) When a boat with the right-of-way changes course, she shall give any other boat room to keep clear. Even when you have the right of way, do not hit another boat.
5. Starting: (Rule 29.1) A boat is "over early" when any part of the boat crosses the starting line prior to the starting signal, and the boat must come back entirely across the line and start over. A boat which is "over early" which does not exonerate itself does not start the race.
6. Barging at the Start: (Section C and Rule 11) When boats are approaching the starting line to start the race, a leeward or outside boat is not required to allow a windward (or inside) boat "room" to "squeeze in" between the leeward (or outside) boat and the Committee Boat or pin. "Barging" is risky and dangerous. This is a complex rule which should be studied.
7. Rounding a Mark: (Rule 18.2) If Boat A and Boat B approach a mark and are "overlapped" Boat A must give Boat B room to round the mark if the overlap occurred before the bow of Boat A reaches a point which is three boat lengths from the mark. Under these circumstances, Boat A cannot "squeeze" Boat B out at the mark. Boat B is not entitled to "mark room" at the mark if the overlap occurs after Boat A's bow reaches the three boat length distance from the mark.
8. Honor the "honor system" of sailboat racing competition. DON'T CHEAT. Voluntary compliance with the rules, acceptance of any penalties imposed, and good sportsmanship are essential to the success and survival of the BYRA fleet. (If you strike a mark of the course, exonerate yourself by completing a 360 degree maneuver even if no one is close enough to see your infraction)
9. Violation of Rules – (Rules 30 & 31) Exoneration: (Rule 44)
  - A.. If a boat hits a mark, the boat must either withdraw from the race or exonerate itself by doing a "360", (one complete rotation).
  - B. If a boat violates any other rule, the boat must either withdraw from the race or exonerate itself by doing a "720", (two complete rotations).
  - C. (Rule 21) A boat which is exonerating itself or restarting shall keep clear of all other boats, regardless of tack.
  - D. (Rule 44.1) If Boat A violates a rule and causes an injury to a person on Boat B or damages Boat B to the extent that Boat B can no longer compete, Boat A shall withdraw from the race.

- E. If a boat violates a rule and then does not exonerate itself or withdraw, the boat may be protested by a competitor or disqualified by the race committee.
- 10. Protests: (Rule 60 & 61) A boat may protest another boat for an alleged breach of a rule. The proper protest procedure is as follows:
  - A. Hailing "PROTEST" to the other boat.
  - B. Displaying the red protest flag until you are no longer racing.
  - C. Reporting the protest to the Race Committee as soon as possible upon completing the race, but not later than 15 minutes following the end of the subject race
  - D. Filing a written protest with the race committee within one hour of the completion of all races for that race day or within the time limit stated in the sailing instructions.

#### BASIC GOALS OF BYRA FLEET SAILBOAT RACING

1. Sail Safe
2. Have Fun
3. Learn to Sail Faster
4. Finish First
5. Study the racing rules and racing books
6. Practice, practice, practice, in order to accomplish numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4 above.