

Outside Help or Not Outside Help – That is the question – RRS41

RRS 41 is quite clear that a boat may not receive help which does not fall into the list of exceptions. This rule of course is a pillar of the principles of fairness in sport.

Asking the question, “Tack or Cross?” is soliciting information, and if on a collision course, any favourable (“Cross!) response could be considered ‘help’.

‘Help’ may merely be favourable tactical information, or it could be physically measurable gain say, as positional or speed advantage. The helpfulness of the help may differ from case to case.

In its mildest form, the help could simply be information allowing Paula to take her mind off Sally and focus on sailing onwards and on her other competitors without the need to act or prepare to act to keep clear.

At a more significant degree, the help could be the fact that Paula is able to cross to a preferred side of the course, thus a positional gain. On larger multi-crewed boats where tacking or ducking is costly, enjoying unimpeded sailing is enough to gain a relative speed advantage in the race (over say, a 3rd party) through the cooperation/assistance of another boat.

In its most sinister form, help could be given by Sally with a malicious goal of giving Paula advantage over Olive. (This is a form of collusion or team tactic and could be a breach of the principals of sportsmanship and possibly RRS 2. More on that later.)

Whichever degree of help is received, it is still help. If it was solicited, it still breaks rule 41.

The ‘degree’ of help is only relevant to whether any 3rd party would feel aggrieved enough to protest.

Fair’s fair – Or is it? – RRS 2

Sally is not required to invoke her right-of-way and cause Paula to tack or duck to keep clear. If she feels it is more beneficial to her race to not engage Paula, that’s her choice. She is entitled to bear away behind Paula.

Still, if the boats do reach **Point X**, then Paula has not kept clear, and she *should* take a penalty as per the fundamental principle of sportsmanship. Although Sally is expected to ‘enforce’ the rules per the same principle, the rules do not require her to protest another boat. Sally does not break RRS 2 by not protesting Paula.

The sport of fleet racing expects that boats sail as individuals competing for advantages to help them win. When a boat receives help from another by means of a ‘private agreement’, a 3rd boat is unable to compete for that advantage. In short, the rules do not intend such advantages. RRS 41 sets out the parameters of the kinds of help a boat is or is not allowed to receive. Knowingly receiving any help prohibited by RRS 41 (or breaking any rule) is a breach of sportsmanship.

Team tactic is of course not permitted in fleet racing and is a clear RRS 2 breach. However, a seemingly harmless agreement by Paula and Sally is in effect a collusion between boats and while may not be malicious, has the same effect (in terms of advantages and disadvantages) as team play. Thus, any agreement between boats no matter how small, could be under scrutiny in a protest hearing and found to be a breach of RRS2.

Generally, though, ‘Tack or Cross?’ would not fall into the scope of RRS2, unless there are ‘clear’ elements of the usual concepts, such as knowingly, repeatedly, malice, intimidation and team tactics involved.

Variations Around a Theme

In the many discussions on this topic, there are permutations and variations of the scenario. Each need not be listed here since the analysis above should be enough to resolve most of those.

However, a couple of the more interesting or problematic alternate scenarios are considered.

Sally indicates to Paula to cross but Sally is not able to execute the duck and a collision occurs – Since the boats passed **Point X**, Paula broke RRS10. Sally broke RRS14.