

Sail Fiji. An ocean race with Big Red out of Auckland. Sounds familiar. That's right, same as my first SOL start two years ago. So yes, I wanted to do well in this one.

The start turned out DC-friendly. Even so I was up early (on Sat. morning) for the second round of tacks. In open water it's a two day upwind leg before we meet a front about halfway to Fiji. Once we get there all bets are off.

Point is weather routing only works if the weather is somewhat predictable. The combination of a slow moving front, high pressure and generally low winds simply isn't. Sailing the hypothetical fastest route, or even to make sense of the wx is no longer possible, rather it's playing position vs the fleet and maximizing my odds.

There were three key moments in the race. On Monday morning the first tack before the front moved much sooner than expected, with pure luck I now had the right side of the favorites group. But there was no way I would tack super close to the wx (first try at routing said about 1015), so I set up a tack at 1030. The other boats tacked behind me, only to have the old course favored at wx. I get a good lead, if the other boats waited or if I sailed the routed course it would have been a wash.

With the tack now back at ~1330 I decided to move a bit early, in case east would be favored later. Aner59 and karriv tacked much earlier, good luck with that. I can't cover the whole fleet. But I get the jump that I wanted on the main group. Sure enough East wins at 1630, but the shift is so massive that aner and karriv are now ahead.

'Ahead' might not be a problem with a boat miles away, just wait for the next wx! But here it's more dire, they can simply tack in front of me. And as it turns out aner understood this. Now it's a hard choice, go the routed course east and eat my losses, or tack west to keep my distance, and maybe run out of wind. After some deliberation, West it is. Never surrender!!!

At 2230 it looks like I've made the right choice, in fact I can tack even further west. On Tuesday morning karriv is somehow behind me, now aner is my only opponent. But he's now 40nm away!!! The router shows a dead heat.

The next few days the lead swings widely, it's only on Thursday that I am firmly ahead. And the wind gets less and less, I finally reach the finish on Friday morning, a 10min lead doesn't do justice to how close it has been. BRAVO for the BRILLIANT race aner59!!! karriv completes the podium, well deserved. Well sailed you guys and the Top10, thanks for an epic race!

/outlaw  
June 2014