

Well, what a race! Who would have guessed it would be so challenging when we set sail on July 31? I did not have the best of the starts. SOLing can be quite difficult for me when I am in my working rotation, and I had very little time to prepare. So, I had to go into “damage control” mode, and took a few minutes to find the best angle towards the north, before tacking to Southwest, as opposed to the group that decided to go SW before tacking North. I was fortunate enough to do well during the first two days and, when the dust cleared, just before Cabo de Sao Vicente, on August 2, I was third, some two miles behind outlaw and kroppyer (<http://sol.hmm.iki.fi/sollog/standings/956/20160802-0800/>).

The next critical moment was the choice between the offshore and the coastal route. I have to admit that the idea of going West after Sao Vicente never crossed my mind but, after I saw the leaders go towards the Azores, I had a closer look at the forecast and reckoned there was some probability that it could pay off. I chose the coastal route, repeating the battle with outlaw that took place in Race 1. I knew it would require a great deal of online time and work – and, as I had tickets for the opening ceremony of the Rio Olympic Games, I was aware that it could be problematic to do this consistently. For two days, there was a lot of tacking along the Portuguese coast. I did my best to keep the boat ahead of the chasing pack, and I pretty much succeeded, at the same time I was optimizing the tacking frequency. Then, I had to travel to Rio de Janeiro, and I went back to “damage control” mode by going offshore. It was during this phase that the lead changed hands to knockando.

I tried to come back to the normal race management routine (that is, some manual steering, being up and online for every weather update etc.) after August 5, but family, friends and the olympic judo did not make it any easy, and I was distracted a lot for the next two or three days. Still, I was able to hold on, despite a couple of brief groundings, and I was even happy with my result until then. At that point, the western pack was out of contention, sailing to the “edge of the world” with no saving low in the cards for the immediate future.

For the next few days, the Portuguese trades kept on blowing, discouraging any adventure. That was until August 10, when the forecast showed that a wind hole was approaching the Galician coast, and the decisive moment of the race came. The leaders had to choose between sailing the shortest distance in light to very light airs and going north for pressure and shift at the expense of distance.

I made my mind about going north while off Viana do Castelo and took the morning sailing northwest in preparation for the excursion that would start off Pontevedra. It was not a gamble to me, but simply the best way to go. A few hours later, the point of no return was past me, and I was pretty much alone, to make it or break it.

On August 12, it had become clear that the option paid off handsomely, as the inshore fleet got trapped by a wind hole that ended up being worse than it was forecast. With the race fully under control, all that I had to do was to keep focused to avoid any stupid mistakes and clinch the victory. Regardless of the result, it was a quite demanding race! Who said virtual sailing was easy? ☺

Alexandria / August 2016