Race 1364: Block Island Sound

Sprint races are fun, because they don't require too much preparation. There is no need to monitor the synoptic situation days in advance. The 16:30 weather forecast, that would be valid for most of the Block Island Sound sprint race, predicted a steady breeze between 9 and 10½ knots from SW to W over the race area, somewhat weaker in the Long Island Sound and slightly stronger in the East towards Block Island. That was the reason for my strategy to stay to the East as much as possible.

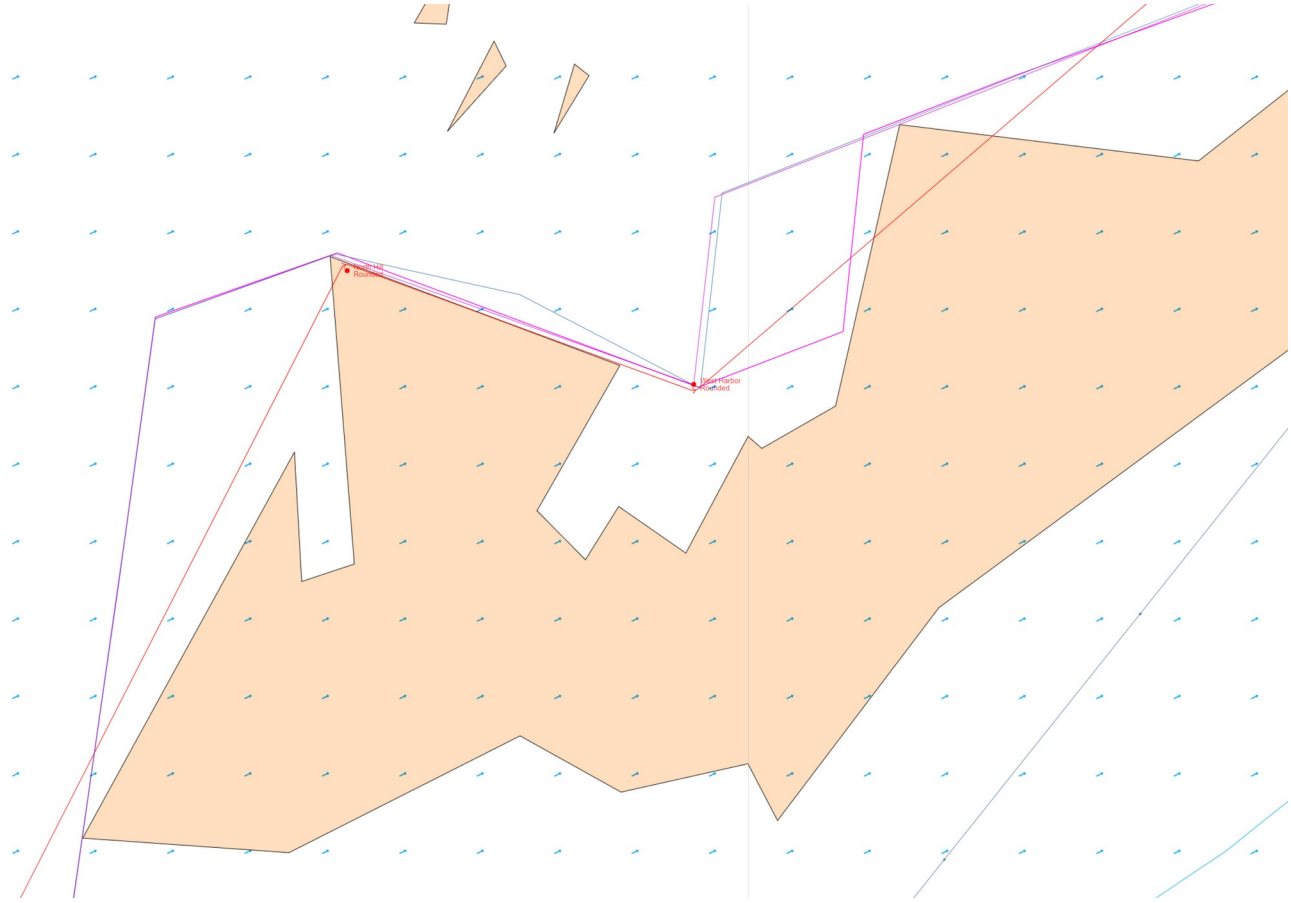
The first leg from Devon YC to Cherry Hill Point on Gardiners Island was particularly simple. I had set a start DC straight to the first headland, and have not touched the helm until I got there some 40 minutes later.

The wind was 9.2 to 9.3 knots at a TWA of about 119 degrees. Depending on the sail inventory, this would in real life probably call for the A3. But with 100 identical boats it would maybe no be fun at all in real life, because boats would start to luff in order to protect their wind, accompanied by lots of yelling, while the leaders usually abstain from such follies and just increase their lead. Virtual sailing is much more relaxed.

At Cherry Hill Point it was possible to bear away and peel from the A3 to the A2. Once past the Gardiners Island mark the staysail was put to use, because the course to the next mark at North Hill was downwind.

I was pushing close to the downwind target TWA and gybed to starboard on the layline to Bostwick Point, the northern headland of Gardiners Island. After passing that peninsula I headed up slightly above target TWA to speed up into the stronger wind in the East.

Then I proceeded a little bit past the layline towards Race Point, the South-East headland of Fishers Island. That allowed me to go a little faster when I came into the diminishing winds after the gybe back to port. Between Race Point and the gybe point towards North Hill it was again max. VMG running.



The leg from North Hill to West Harbor was the only difficult one. At 9.8 knots and 108 degrees TWA there is a very slight dent in the polar curve, possibly indicating the crossover from the Code0 to the A3. Because the leg was only one mile long I decided to ignore the dent and went on a straight CC course to the mark. The figure above shows the tracks of the three podium finishers. It appears that second place finisher bonknhoot was more ambitious and executed a polar hop.
The figure also shows where after the West Harbor mark the tracks of the podium finishers differ. The rest of the race was again downwind VMG running with the A2. bonknhoot and race winner Kipper gybed to port right at the mark. Please note that the screenshot was taken a day after the race, so the wind arrows are not relevant to the situation!
That strategy has the advantage that, because of the greater distance, it is easier to properly time the subsequent gybe on the layline towards Clay Point on Fishers Island's north shore. A second advantage is that one only has to pay the performance penalty for two gybes. But I felt that at the prevailing wind (and boat) speed I could afford the extra cost of the bear away maneuver at the mark. Instead I followed my strategy and went East past the mark towards the stronger wind. Because I was concerned that the next WX update, that was due at this time, might interfere with the timing of the next gybe I was careful not to push my luck.
Past the last headland I sailed again slightly higher than target, in order to speed into the higher wind speed in the East. My plan was the same as between Gardiners and Fishers Island, sail a little past the layline towards the favored starboard end and after the final gybe to port progressively head up more and more as the wind decreases. The plan was good, after all most competitors seemed to do something similar. Only I made a small mistake executing the plan, because I got distracted.
The good thing about virtual sailing in US waters is that I can load NOAA charts into QtVlm and, once connected to an NMEA feed, I can watch the virtual boat sail on a genuine nautical chart. I like that a lot. For example, it revealed that the finish line was insidiously hidden behind a breakwater.
This time I was wondering what the units for the depth information on the NOAA chart might be. Metres or fathoms? Actually the depth was given in feet. Fathoms and feet, that crap went out of fashion with the French Revolution, more than two centuries ago.
When I returned to the SOL client, I thought I was already late for the gybe, because I accidentally confused heading up with bearing away. I definitely have a right-left weakness, but I am much better telling windward from leeward. But not this time. I gybed a little too early, and instead of heading up I had to soak deep to reach the starboard mark. Guilty of not paying attention.

rumskib