

Bainbridge Island, September 7, 2019

This year's 26.5 mile long 'round Bainbridge Island marathon was both frustrating and exhilarating, sort of like a fever curve.

Frustrating because we forgot a shopping bag at home which, aside from dry clothes, GPS-based stroke coach and other race stuff, contained my cap with the attached rearview mirror, an absolute requirement for efficient and safe navigation around the island. Our two team mates in the quad, Todd Silver, director of the Commencement Bay race in Tacoma, and Ivan Medvedev, interventional cardiologist at Swedish Edmonds and designated stroke, didn't know the race course, and Adrian didn't know how to steer. So, it was me sitting in bow, mirrorless and not happy. I felt like letting everybody down!

Exhilarating because we won in the end.

The day was overcast and cool. A flood tide persisted throughout the race, and a mild NNE wind blew at the start. So, everybody headed south, clockwise, from Faye Bainbridge State Park on the island's NE side toward Restoration Point. I steered erratically for 9.6 miles along the island's eastern shore which didn't offer great landmarks (you need to stay offshore a ways to avoid hitting shallow underwater shelves that extend east from the island's various points). On port was Puget Sound's big body of water with the commercial shipping lanes. The race crossed the routes of the giant Bainbridge and Bremerton car ferries. The brief showing of a porpoise's dorsal fin and a sea lion traveling next to us provided distraction. We meandered, changing stern points and adding distance but seemed safely in first place. However, at around Eagle Harbor, the double rowing shell of the Pocock Rowing Center's Peter Hirtle passed us. Their stroke rate seemed unusually high. I tried following them but lost contact while making a wide turn outside of the Decatur Reef buoy and around Restoration Point in the direction of Rich Passage, a text-book example of dismal steering. The high-performance double surf ski of Peter Turcan and young Egor Klevak went way inside the buoy, close to shore and passed us. Frustrated, I swore (in German and under my breath ☺).

Once straightened out, we picked up speed and passed the surf ski, which swiftly glued itself onto our stern, intent to draft us and make use of the forward pointing jets of our stern wake (scientifically called the 'von Karman vortex street'). I yelled to Ivan, "let them hang on and ask them to guide us through Rich Passage", given that they were looking

forward. That's what they did. While hanging on to us, they gave directional guidance: "5 degrees port", "even", "10 degrees port", "even" 5 degrees starboard"...etc., truly symbiotically. That way we rode optimal flood currents and cheated our way through the >5 mile long, winding Rich Passage.

Exiting the Passage, I made another bad (but safe) turn outside the Point White dolphin into the Port Orchard stretch. The area has big rocks close to the water's surface, recognizable only by unusual wave patterns. The surf ski weaved by us on the dolphin's inside and then drafted the Hirtle double which wasn't far ahead. From here I knew it was a straight 5.6 mile shot north to Battle Point, so I picked a stern point on the Kitsap shore, and we started swinging. Within minutes, already by the long Point White pier, we caught up with and then passed the two doubles. Adrian, in # 2 seat, provided a second-by-second account of the pursuit, "I can see them ahead, 100 yards, 50 yards, 20 yards, we got them, yay!" The surf ski switched back to our stern while the Hirtle double seemed spent and fell back. Again we pulled the surf ski along, using them for course corrections until about a mile before Battle Point, which I could see by then with Adrian's help. At this point Peter/Egor skipped a couple of strokes while shoving mouth pieces of their hydration systems into their respective mouths. They fell back. Seeing this, Ivan raised the stroke rate up from the steady 27, and we shot off. The surf ski lost touch with the quad's vortex street and could not catch up.

Once around Battle Point, we had a straight 4.3 mile long, offshore shot to the entrance of Agate Passage against a weakening flood tide. Absent the rearview mirror, I didn't bother dodging the tide and chose Battle Point as stern mark. Then Fortune smiled: we managed steering safely into the Passage's marginal currents by staying close to the Bainbridge coast, heading between the east pillar of the bridge, that connects Bainbridge with the Kitsap Peninsula, and shore, flying past mooring buoys and moored boats, bumping over a series of power boat wakes, and then winding a tight turn around Agate Point -- sheer luck we didn't hit anything. At the Point, a man cheered from shore as if to applaud our lucky navigation.

Once past Agate Point, Adrian made out Point Monroe, the northern-most tip of Bainbridge, helped getting me oriented in that general direction and finding a stern point on Kitsap. Unfortunately, we didn't account for drift from the increasing NNE breeze, and wound up rowing straight into a sailboat race involving dozens of little single-hand boats skippered by kids trying to turn around buoys. We impeded sailboats wholesale and, in turn, were

impeded by them. With shouts of "hold down", "row", and "sorry", we eventually muddled through 😊 By this time Peter/Egor had dropped from sight -- they told us afterwards they hit the wall before Battle Point and simply couldn't keep up anymore with the speed of the quad despite benefitting from drafting. In the end they were behind by 5+ minutes. The last part of the race before and around Point Monroe and then south to the finish was rough because the NNE wind had built up considerably creating waves that lapped into the boat, but the team didn't care -- we were exhilarated. Our finish time was 3:19hours, 10 minutes off the all-time course record -- I like to think (wishfully 😊) that with the navigation mirror we might have broken that record.

The hardest and most hazardous part was carrying the quad across the beach's extensive driftwood collection to the boat slings. Our thanks went to race director Kevin Olney who extended a helping hand.