

Sailing Volvo Ocean Race

Current leg to Sanya likely to be one of the trickiest

Race Log

Justin Slattery



If the Iranian Naval Patrol had any issues with us, we certainly never saw sight nor sound of them at the weekend as we departed on leg three of the Volvo Ocean Race from Abu Dhabi to China.

We never actually crossed into their territorial waters as these form part of an exclusion zone for the race as well but we pushed as close as we could as we crisscrossed our way eastwards towards the Straits of Hormuz.

With thick fog and light airs, our departure from our home port was a fairly cloaked affair but pretty soon it was just our six-boat fleet, neck and neck as we tried to shake off the calm conditions.

Just the six of us – reduced by one since the loss of Team Vestas after her grounding in the last leg – and dozens of large oil tankers that we must dodge in this narrow stretch of water.

Vestas skipper Chris Nicholson has announced that they plan to re-enter the race with a rebuilt boat but we won't see them again until May at least for the final legs.

It's hard to say what state the race will be in at that point as the leaderboard is completely tied between ourselves on Abu Dhabi Ocean Racing, Dutch entry Brunel and the Chinese Team on Dongfeng.

Unknown waters

This is what the switch to one-design racing is all about and there's little prospect of any one of us delivering a knock-out performance much before the end of the race in Gothenburg less than six months from now.

But for now, the focus is on this 4,600 nautical mile stage to Sanya which is likely to be one of the trickiest.

Certainly it's in relatively unknown waters in ocean racing terms as this is only the third time the route has taken us this far north into the Far East and Asia.

Even so, I never expected to be racing off the rugged coast of Pakistan as we gybed steadily out past Musandam over towards Karachi. Close to any shore, added hazards include fishing-nets and boats and we passed one fleet of around 45 dhows in a line with nets out.

But the next week is likely to bring us back into deeper, less congested waters as we sail southwards towards Sri Lanka and the eventual turn that will line us up for the Straits of Malacca.

All hands

The turn south cannot come soon enough though. Since leaving last weekend, we haven't really followed a proper watch routine as the breeze has been more or less north-westerly so we've been gybing almost constantly.

That means that, even though you might be "off-watch", as we only have eight crew members on these boats all hands are needed on deck to perform the manoeuvre.

From being asleep in your bunk, once the call comes from up top – "Gybing" – you literally have seconds to be on deck to help out.

Typically, one crew member steers while another handles the control sheets and one or two others are on the winch grinders.

But the real workload comes with the "stacking".

To maximise weight distribution, we keep most sails on deck on the windward or high-side which changes when we gybe or tack. These weigh around 600kgs in total and much more when they're soaked by waves and wet.

Serious workout

Below decks, another 600kgs of food and equipment also need to be moved with each manoeuvre so it becomes a serious workout and there would typically be three of these needed every hour regardless of whether you're on or off-watch.

We usually take around ten to 12 minutes to move the stack, slightly longer in rough conditions before being released back to rest again so

Below decks, another 600kgs of food and equipment also need to be moved with each manoeuvre so it becomes a serious workout

it's a case of grabbing whatever sleep is possible between calls. And that's the way it's been for days now so I'm relishing a change in course and wind-direction.

We should soon be into the North-East Monsoon so that should give us the needed break from the relentless pattern of gybing.

Perhaps it'll also allow us to find a passing lane as we're currently bunched together with most of the pack with the exception of Charles Caudrelier's Dongfeng that has managed to open up a small lead on us.

He beat us into our home port last month where we placed third behind him while seven-times race veteran Bouwe Bekking took the leg win. No doubt Caudrelier would like to deliver his sponsors a win in home waters in a few weeks time when we reach Sanya.

We, of course, have every intention of returning the compliment in their home port as our 39,000 mile game of nip and tuck stretches towards the halfway mark.

Gaelic Games Hurling 2020 Committee Report

Proposal to reduce sanction for two yellow cards a feature of new report

Instead of a player being dismissed he would be replaced by a substitute

EAMON DONOGHUE

A hurling review committee headed by former Tipperary manager Liam Sheedy has made 15 proposals to help improve the game, including the introduction of squad numbers and the scrapping of the rule whereby two yellow cards result in a player being sent off.

Whilst the committee decided that there was no appetite for introducing a black card, they propose that rather than a player being dismissed for two separate yellow card offences and a team being reduced to 14 men, the player in question should be replaced to keep the game at 15-a-side.

Sheedy explained during his presentation of the proposals that "a huge amount is going well in hurling and we are under no illusions – this is the best field game in the world."

"The two yellow cards is probably the one proposal that didn't get the best traction from the counties when we went through it, but ultimately, rather than thinking of what might not work, what we are trying to ask is would the game be better than it is today if that was the way, rather than looking at what might be wrong with it."

"Ultimately, as a minor it is a big deal if you are sent off in Croke Park and your team is down to 14 men. At 16, 17 years of age, when you are trying to come of age in Croke Park, and you are sent off for what could have been two borderlines – the bigger players can deal with it but I feel for a minor."

Big deal

"I think it is a big deal for his family and for his club for him to be sent off and I feel, definitely, that if it is borderline then there is the option with two yellows of him being replaced."

The GAA Hurling 2020 Review Committee's proposals were released yesterday and may be passed in time for the start of the championship.

The committee also propose that the introduction of squad



numbers for intercounty teams will stifle the current trend of "dummy teams" and allow for further marketing of the players, and the game itself.

"Initially what I'd be saying is that you would get your one to 30 squad," said Sheedy. "The programme will still stay the same but positions don't mean

It is a big deal if you are sent off in Croke Park and your team is down to 14 men

anything now. The number two could play number six; number six could play number two. Really, does the number on the back matter anymore from a positional sense?"

"I think the dummy team is not good. If everybody gets the one to 30 panel that's playing on

Sunday that will help. Every bit more importantly whatever player is wearing number eight or number nine... they become very much recognised. It is about building a fan-base."

"My first All-Ireland was watching Johnny Flaherty and I can still picture him with his 'tache, small little lad in the corner. Cillian Buckley was probably one of the players of the championship last year, if he walked into this room would everybody know him?"

"I think that's the challenge for the GAA. Would numbers help move us on to where players are more identifiable?"

"I think taking off the helmets when they are walking around was good. It is all about trying to build the identity of our intercounty players and we feel squad numbers would benefit that."

The 11-person committee, which also included former Lim-

erick hurler Ollie Moran, Veronica Curtin and Ollie Canning from Galway, Clare's Frank Lohan and Paul Flynn from Waterford, has already proposed changes to the penalty rule – reducing the number of players allowed on the line from three to just one.

Further to the penalty proposal, for any free from outside of the rectangle they propose that only three players be allowed to join their goalkeeper on the line so as to increase the taker's goal scoring opportunity.

Hydration concerns

Other proposals include the removal of a relegation/promotion play off between the Christy Ring Cup winners and the losers of the Leinster round-robin series, allowing for the Christy Ring winners to automatically be promoted. There's also recommendations to increase the number of 'maor uisce' to ad-

dress hydration concerns as well as the standardisation of the sliotar at all levels.

The former All-Ireland-winning manager added that the core aim of the proposals is the necessary "transformation" of the game's participation levels, rather than the "tweaking" of rules.

I think in the 90s we thought we were going to have a hurling revolution

"Let's be open and let's also recognise that 15 of the last 16 All-Ireland finals have been won by three counties – that's 94 per cent – and is that ultimately good for our game?"

"I think in the 90s we thought we were going to have a hurling revolution; you had Clare com-

Dublin's Ryan O'Dwyer is sent off by referee James Owens after receiving a second yellow card during the 2013 All-Ireland senior hurling semi-final at Croke Park. PHOTOGRAPH: CATHAL NOONAN /INPHO

ing up, you had Offaly making the breakthrough you had Wexford making the breakthrough, I think you need counties like that coming through.

More counties

"I'll personally never forget the experience when the Liam MacCarthy went into Tipperary in 2010 but we need more counties feeling that because that's where you grow the game because that's where the kids will get the taste of it."

The GAA's Central Council will meet next month with these proposals on the agenda.

Gaelic Games O'Byrne Cup

Laois aim to make amends as buoyant Offaly take on Dublin

EAMON DONOGHUE

The second round of the O'Byrne Cup takes place tonight, just three days after the first for 14 of the 16 Leinster counties and universities involved.

Fresh from their nine-point victory over Laois on Sunday, Offaly travel to the capital likely to face a largely experimental Dublin team.

Dean Rock, midfielder Emmett Ó Conghaile and Shane Carthy, who was released by St Vincent's for the encounter, all stood out for Dublin in their victory over Maynooth University at the weekend.

A number of new faces such as Eoin Culligan, John Small, Harry Dawson and Craig Dunleavy all got opportunities to impress.

Elsewhere in group A tonight, Laois will host the stu-

This week's Gaelic Games fixtures

Tonight
O'Byrne Cup, second round (7.30 unless stated) – Dublin v Offaly, Parnell Park; Laois v Mayo, Maynooth University, Portlaoine; Louth v UCD, Haggards-town, 8.0; Kildare v Carlow, Athy; Meath v Longford, Páirc Tailteann; Westmeath v DCU, Kinneagad; Wexford v IT Carlow, Enniscorthy; Wicklow v DIT, Bray.

Friday
Waterford Crystal Cup preliminary round – Tipperary v Maryl, Dr Morris Park, Thurles, 7.30.
Saturday
O'Byrne Cup, third round –

Meath v DCU, Páirc Tailteann, 7.0.
McKenna Cup, second round – Cavan v UUJ, Breehin Park, 7.30.
Connacht SHL, second round (2.0) – Mayo v Sligo, Ballina; Leitrim v GMIT, Ballinamore, 2.0.

All-Ireland club JHC quarter-final – Fullen Gaels v Modeligo, Páirc Na hÉireann, 1.30pm

Sunday
O'Byrne Cup, third round (2.0 unless stated) – Laois v Dublin, Portlaoine; Offaly v Maynooth University, Tullamore; Kildare v UCD, Newbridge; Carlow v Louth, Dr Cullen Park, 2.15;

Longford v Westmeath, Ballymahon; Wexford v Wicklow, Gorey; IT Carlow v DIT, IT Carlow.

McGrath Cup quarter-finals (2.0) – Kerry v IT Tralee, Austin Stack Park; Limerick v UCC, Newcastletown, 2.0; Tipperary v Cork, Clonmel; Waterford v CIT, Clashmore, 2pm.

Monaghan v Down, Clones; Fermanagh v Derry, Brewster Park; Donegal v Queen's, Ballybofey; Antrim v Armagh, Creggan; Tyrone v St Mary's, Healy Park.
Connacht FBD FL second round (2.0) – Roscommon v NUIG, Ballyforan; Mayo v

IT Sligo, Ballina; Leitrim v Galway, Mohill; Sligo v GMIT, Tubbercurry.

Walsh Cup, first round (2.0 unless stated) – Carlow v NUIG, Dr Cullen Park, 12.30; Antrim v DIT, St Paul's, Belfast; Laois v UCD, Abbeylisk; Westmeath v Offaly, Cusack Park.

Waterford Crystal Cup, preliminary round (2.0) – Cork v UL, CIT; Waterford v LIT, Carriganore, 2.0.
Connacht SHL, first round – IT Sligo v Roscommon, IT Sligo, 2.0.

Monday
Connacht SHL, first round – NUIG v Athlone IT, Dangan, 2.0.

against Carlow on Sunday.

Kildare, who eased past Louth in round one in what was a repeat of last summer's Leinster championship encounter, which the Lilywhites also won, take on a Carlow team that will again be without talisman Brendan Murphy.

Murphy will be lining out for Carlow in their group D encounter with Wexford, as Wicklow take on DIT in the second game from that group.

In group C, Meath face Longford on the back of an impressive showing against Westmeath, who themselves face a DCU side containing the likes of Galway's Tom Flynn and Laois's Colm Begley.

Both Longford and DCU will have the advantage of an added day's rest as their round-one clash was the sole fixture last Saturday.

Sports Briefs

Rugby

Castleknock and Skerries through to second round

Castleknock were made to work hard for their 25-7 victory over Tullow Community School in the first of a Leinster Schools Vinnie Murray Senior Cup first round double-header at Donnybrook yesterday.

Right wing Rob O'Meara was their ace finisher, with two tries in the tenth and 65th minutes to bookend what was a trying time against a fired up and well-drilled Tullow.

In fact, the Carlow boys were good value for moving into a 7-5 lead when their out-half Colin Byrne bamboozled the winner's defence for a superb 19th minute try converted by centre Darragh Murphy. It looked all set to be

a real humdinger, especially when 'Knock flanker Bilal M'Uazzam ghosted through for their second try just before the interval.

However, Tullow were hurt by the loss of their captain Martin Cole to injury and they could never quite recover, losing out to further tries by centre March Boucher and O'Meara.

Skerries Community College were ruthless in their 41-14 domination of The High School. Out-half Cianan Frawley seized on the interception instinct of flanker Con Marrey for the opening try and hit HS for seven with the conversion, which led towards a 24-0 score line at half-time.

Cricket

Century from Warner gives Australia lead

A poignant century from David Warner put Australia in complete control of the fourth Test against India, with the hosts 348-2 at stumps on day one.

Warner paid tribute to Phillip Hughes upon reaching 63 not out, removing his helmet and kissing the pitch where his friend was felled by a bouncer while on the same score.

Australia slipped from 200 for no loss to 204-2 in the space of seven minutes during the second session. Meanwhile, South Africa wrapped up a 2-0 series victory over West Indies in Cape Town.

Golf

McGinley yet to decide who he favours as Ryder Cup captain

Paul McGinley says he hasn't yet decided who he will be recommending to be Europe's 2016 Ryder Cup captain but says a new man will be appointed in the next two months.

McGinley inspired Europe to victory over the US in September and is now tasked with choosing a successor to lead the team next year.

The selection panel will include former captains José María Olazábal and Colin Montgomerie, as well European Tour officials, but McGinley's opinion is likely to carry particular weight after his Gleneagles triumph. Darren Clarke is the strong favourite to take the post having played in the



Paul McGinley, strained relationship with Clarke

Ryder Cup five times and helped lead the team as vice-captain in 2010.

However, McGinley's relationship with Clarke, remains strained after Clarke withdrew his support for McGinley's bid to lead the side in 2014 and suggested he may not have the presence to face US captain Tom Watson.

Tennis

Nadal loses to German journeyman

Rafa Nadal's comeback from injury and illness stalled in the Qatar Open first round with a 1-6 6-3 6-4 defeat by German journeyman Michael Berrer.

The Spaniard, who endured a lost-start latter half of 2014, looked on track for a promising win.

However, he was overcome by the 127th-ranked Berrer who came out firing winners to all corners of the court to pull off his first victory over a top five player.

There were no such problems for Novak Djokovic, who polished off fellow Serb Dusan Lajovic 6-2 6-1.

Results round-up

Cricket

FOURTH TEST (Sydney) Australia v India – Australia 348-2 (D Warner 101, C Rogers 95, S Smith 82 no, S Watson not out 61).
THIRD TEST (Cape Town) South Africa v West Indies – West Indies 329 (J Blackwood 56, L Johnson 54, D Ramdin 53, D Steyn 4-78) & 215 (M Samuels 74, S Chandrapaul 50, S Harmer 4-82) South Africa 421 (AB de Villiers 148, F du Plessis 68, H Amla 63) & 124-2 (D Elgar 60 no).
South Africa beat West Indies by 8 wickets.
SECOND TEST (Wellington) New Zealand v Sri Lanka – New Zealand 221 (K Williamson 69, N Pradeep 4-63) & 524-5 dec (K Williamson 242 no, B Watling 142 no) v Sri Lanka 356 (K Sangakkara 203, L Chandimal 67) & 45-1.

Gaelic Games

LEINSTER COLLEGES – North Leinster SFC D first round: St Paul's Monasterevin 2-15 St Fergals, Rathdowney 3-12 (AET); North Leinster SF D quarter-final: Rathoath Col 5-4 Coláiste na hIrise 4-6.

Rugby

LEINSTER SCHOOLS – Vinnie Murray Senior Cup first round: At Donnybrook – Skerries CC 41 (C Frawley 2 tries, 4 cons, pen; R McKey, D Martin, D Lowndes, R Woods try each) The High School 14 (D Donnelly T Dolan try each; O

Tennis

ATP BRISBANE INTERNATIONAL – First round: Jarkko Nieminen (Fin) bt Denis Kudla (USA) 4-6 1-6 4-6; Mikhail Kukushkin (Kaz) bt Marius Copil (Rom) 6-4 4-6 6-4; Lukas Kubot (Pol) bt (5) Kevin Anderson (RSA) 7-6 (7-3) 6-4; John Millman (Aus) bt Rhyne Williams (USA) 6-3 6-1; Steve Johnson (USA) bt Mariniko Matosevic (Aus) 2-6 7-6 (7-0) 7-5; Samuel Groth (Aus) bt Lleyton Hewitt (Aus) 6-3 6-2.
ATP Qatar Open – First round: Sergiy Stakhovskiy (Ukr) bt Jabor Mohammed Ali Mutawana (Ost) 7-6 (7-3) 4-6 6-1; Jooq Souza (Bra) bt Malek Jaziri (Tun) 3-6 6-4 6-3; Michael Berrer (Ger) bt (2) Rafael Nadal (Spa) 1-6 6-3 6-4; (4) David Ferrer (Spa) bt Thiemo De Bakker (Ned) 6-7 (4-7) 6-4 6-3.
WTA BRISBANE INTERNATIONAL – Second round: (3) Angelique Kerber (Ger) bt Daria Gavrilova (Rus) 6-3 7-5; Elena Svitolina (Ukr) bt Ajla Tomljanovic (Cro) 6-3 6-2; (1) Maria Sharapova (Rus) bt Yaroslava Shvedova (Kaz) 6-0 6-1.