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Leg 8 from Itajai to Newport, day 09 on board Brunel. 30 April, 2018. Sam Greenfield/Volvo Ocean Race

Volvo Ocean Race: Into the trades, racing north

Written by Volvo Ocean Race HQ, May 1, 2018

Yesterday, the goal for the leading group was to be the first to pick up the northeast trade winds and Brunel has done just that.

"Not very stable trade winds, very shifty and cloudy," skipper Bouwe Bekking reported on Tuesday morning. But shortly afterwards his team was enjoying the conditions and charging north at nearly 20 knots, extending a narrow lead out to double digits.

But now there is a new hazard for the fleet to deal with: huge clumps of seaweed floating on and just below the surface.

"Sometimes, especially at night, you can go from doing 18 knots, all of sudden down to 12 knots. Quick action is needed to get rid of the weed around the rudders, keel, daggerboard and the sail drive. We have a good trick, but I'm not sharing this right now as it seems we did alright during the night and made some gains, so probably we're sailing with less weed stuck to us."

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The top teams are still very close, with Dongfeng Race Team furthest west and Turn the Tide on Plastic directly south of Team Brunel, within 10 and 14 miles of the lead.

"We just got out from the Doldrums and we are in good shape at the west of the fleet, behind the leader Brunel, but we are going fully west," said Dongfeng skipper Charles Caudrelier. "There are still a lot of traps in front of us on the way to Newport but we are in a good position to attack and will try to come back to potentially win our first leg which would obviously be something great for the team."

It won't come without a fight however, as Dee Caffari's Turn the Tide on Plastic is also looking to secure their best finish of the race.

"It took us some time, effort and energy getting through this (Doldrums) area until we finally established consistent wind direction and pressure making us happy we had reached the north east trades," wrote Caffari on Tuesday.

"Now we have been easing sheets and sailing full throttle along the routing suggestion as we make our curved route to Newport. The forecast is pretty confident for the next few days... meaning we just have to stay fast so we can stay with the leading pack."

Monday's leader, Vestas 11th Hour Racing, suffered in the clouds in the Doldrums and is now further east than the leading group and 30 miles behind on distance to finish.

Then it's a bit further back to MAPFRE, team AkzoNobel and SHK/Scallywag, all of whom have now picked up the same northeasterly winds and are blasting towards Newport at 17 to 20 knots.

With the teams now through the Doldrums and into the trade winds, Race Control has issued a preliminary ETA into Newport for the afternoon of May 8 (UTC). Still a week away, this can be expected to change, and will be updated before the end of the week.

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