

Tour de France

Ahead of last Tour fight, Boasson Hagen's homework pays off

By JOHN LEICESTER
Associated Press

SALON-DE-PROVENCE, France — Edvald Boasson Hagen showed that brawn and speed don't guarantee victory at the Tour de France. Winners do their homework, too.

Going right around a roundabout while others took the left and longer route proved to be the key that enabled the Norwegian to finally win a stage at this Tour on Friday after two second-place finishes.

Only Boasson Hagen and Nikias Arndt took the shorter route. The Norwegian then eliminated the German rider with a burst of acceleration and sped to the line in Salon-de-Provence.

Arndt placed second, five seconds back.

Third-placed Jens Keukeleire was among those who went left around the roundabout in the last three kilometers (under two miles)

and immediately realized their mistake, as Boasson Hagen motored away.

"That's when it struck me: We should have taken right," Keukeleire said. "He's one of those riders, give him 10 meters and he's gone."

It was Boasson Hagen's third career stage win at the Tour, after his first two in 2011. He said he'd studied the finish and identified the short cut.

"I was hunting for opportunities, and then the roundabout arrived," he said. "I understood that going right would be quicker."

Riding at a leisurely pace far behind them, race leader Chris Froome and other top contenders for the yellow jersey were happy to let others contest the victory on the Tour's longest stage.

Boasson Hagen was part of a 20-man group that Froome and Team Sky gave freedom to escape from the peloton because none of them presented a threat to his



AP Photo/Peter Dejong

Norway's Edvald Boasson Hagen celebrates as he crosses the finish line to win the nineteenth stage of the Tour de France cycling race over 222.5 kilometers (138.3 miles) with start in Embrun and finish in Salon-de-Provence, France, Friday, July 21, 2017.

overall lead. After two energy-sapping days of climbs in the high Alps, Froome and his rivals had their sights set instead on the time trial on Saturday in Marseille that will determine the podium

order before the race ends in Paris on Sunday.

Froome's group was still riding as Boasson Hagen celebrated his win. The peloton eventually rolled in more than 12 minutes after

Boasson Hagen claimed the first stage win for the Dimension Data team at this tour.

The overall standings remained unchanged at the top, with Froome leading French rider Romain Bardet by 23 seconds and Rigoberto Uran of Colombia by 29 seconds.

With no major difficulties, the 222.5-kilometer (138-mile) stage from Embrun in the Alps offered no real opportunity for Froome's rivals to claw back time. Instead, they and Froome let the 20 breakaway riders do the hard graft.

"We could just sit on the wheels and recover a little bit," Froome said. "Everyone was quite happy to sit back."

The breakaway group split again with 20 kilometers (12 miles) left. Boasson Hagen was among nine riders who ditched the others with a furious burst, leaving him in the right group to contest the stage victory. But among that leading nine, everyone but Arndt and Boasson Hagen then went left

around the roundabout, essentially eliminating themselves from the running.

On Stage 7, Boasson Hagen lost to Marcel Kittel by mere millimeters in a photo finish at Nuits-Saint-Georges. He was also second on Stage 16 and third on Stages 11 and 14.

"I didn't have to do a photo finish this time," he said. "I finally got my victory."

The 22.5 kilometer (14-mile) time-trial course is the last significant obstacle between Froome and his fourth Tour victory. He needs to hold only Bardet and Uran at bay. They could be tempted into taking greater risks to make up time on the course with more than two dozen bends and a short but very sharp uphill to the Notre-Dame de la Garde cathedral, Marseille's most famous landmark. The start and finish are both at the Stade Velodrome, home to the Olympique de Marseille football club.



AP Photo/Peter Morrison

England's Richard Bland and his caddie shelter under an umbrella on the 8th fairway during the second round of the British Open Golf Championship, at Royal Birkdale, Southport, England, Friday July 21, 2017.

BRITISH OPEN: Spieth at 6-under going into weekend

Continued from 1B

turf to about 18 feet away.

"I mishit the shot, which is probably why it looked so gross," Spieth said. "I hit it low off the heel, which is easy to do when you're trying to carve a cut. And it just ... one hop, scooted around the group of bunkers there, and then it was obviously fortunate to get all the way to the green."

The flight of that 3-wood looked as ugly as the weather. The outcome was as bright as his chances of getting his name on another major championship trophy.

Spieth was at 6-under 134. It was the 12th time he has been atop the leaderboard at a major, including the fourth rounds of the Masters and U.S. Open that he won in 2015. Spieth is the sole leader at a major for the first time since the third round of the Masters last year, when he was runner-up to Danny Willett.

"Anytime you're in the last group on a weekend in a major ... you get nervous. And I'll be feeling it this weekend a bit," he said. "But I enjoy it. As long as I approach it positively and recognize that this is what you want to feel because you're in the position you want to be in, then the easier it is to hit solid shots and to create solid rounds."

Kuchar played in the morning in steadily strong wind, but without rain, and pieced together a solid round until a few mistakes at the end for a 71. He was at 4-under 136, and it would have been a good bet that he would be leading with the nasty weather that arrived.

"I think that's what people enjoy about the British Open is watching the hard wind, the rain, the guys just trying to survive out there," Kuchar said. "Today is my day. I get to kick back in the afternoon and watch the guys just try to survive."

He wound up watching

another short-game clinic from Spieth.

The key to his round came in the middle, starting with a 10-foot par putt on No. 8 after he drove into a pot bunker. The biggest break came at No. 10, when the rain was pounding Royal Birkdale. Spieth hit into another pot bunker off the tee, could only advance it out sideways, and came up short of the green in light rain.

"Massive," he said about the chip-in par. "Nothing said '4' about this hole. I feel a little guilty about taking 4 on the card."

And he wasn't through just yet. Spieth rolled in a 35-foot birdie putt across the 11th green, and then after watching Henrik Stenson's tee shot on the par-3 12th land softly, Spieth realized he could take on the flag. He hit 7-iron to 2 feet for another birdie, and followed that with a beautiful pitch to tap-in range for par on the 13th.

Even so, his work is far from over.

The chasing pack features U.S. Open champion Brooks Koepka, who failed to make a birdie but stayed in the hunt with 16 pars in a 72, and Ian Poulter with his newfound confidence, which is growing even higher with the support of the English crowd. Poulter shot 70.

Not to be overlooked was Rory McIlroy, who recovered from a horrific start Thursday to salvage a 71, and then kept right on rolling. McIlroy, who was 5 over through the opening six holes of the tournament, ran off three birdies with full control of every shot on the front nine.

And much like Spieth, he kept his round together with crucial par saves early on the back nine when the wind was at its worse. McIlroy posted a 68 and was at 1-under 139, only five shots behind with only five players in front of him.

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