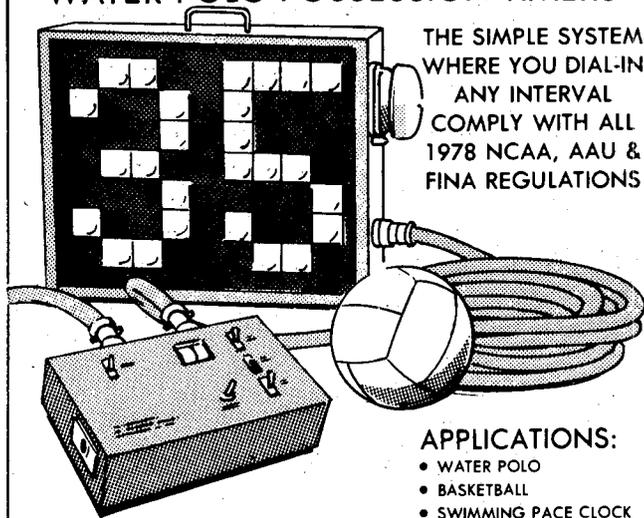


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DISTANCE SWIMMING

By Conrad Wennerberg



For the first time in the history of marathon swimming a marathoner has won every professional race he has entered. None of the historical greats had ever been able to accomplish this Olympian feat.

John Kinsella of the United States not only won seven of the eight scheduled pro races this year but also set new records in six of them. Kinsella did not enter the eighth race because it was one of three scheduled in one week. He opted for the greater prize marathon and was richly rewarded to the tune of \$25,000.

Here follows the record of Kinsella's phenomenal performance in 1978 which many observers see as the greatest pro marathon year in history.

On Feb. 5, Kinsella won the 28-mile Rio Coronda race in 7 hours, 44 minutes, 10 seconds. This Argentine race paid \$2,000 and the second-place swimmer was 16 minutes behind. Both marathoners broke the old record.

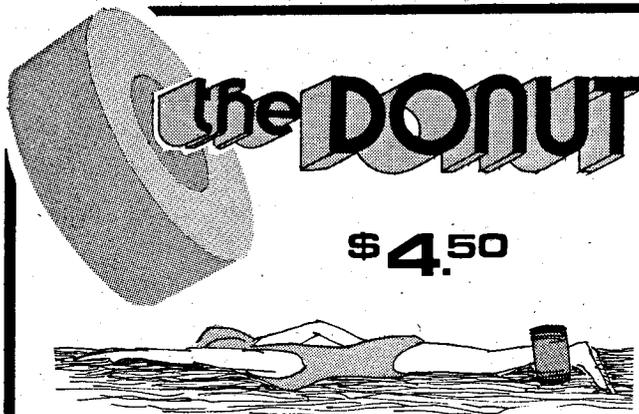
On July 9, Kinsella became the first American in history to win the 21-mile Capri-Naples (Italy) marathon. He set a new record for the course in 10 hours, 28 minutes. The water temperature was 68-72 degrees, and his prize was \$1,200.

Thirteen days later, he and his partner showed up for the LaTuque (Canada) 24-hour team race. When the race was over Kinsella and his partner, fellow American Bill Heiss, had set a new record by covering 197 laps (65.6 miles) in 24 hours. The second-place team of Amin Youseff (Egypt) and James Barry (USA) was a scant three laps (one mile) behind at the end of 24 hours. Kinsella and Heiss split a \$5,000 purse.

On July 30, Kinsella was at Roberval for the Lake St. John International 21-mile lake-crossing event. The water temperature averaged 70 degrees and was flat all the way. Again Kinsella emerged a victor to the tune of \$7,000 plus \$1,000 for setting a new record in 7 hours, 13 minutes, 35 seconds (breaking his old record of 7:18:06).

One week later, Kinsella arrived at the shores of Chaleur Bay and the first thing he did was to check the water temperature. In previous years it had registered in the mid- and upper-50's. This year was different, for he obtained a reading of 65 degrees. The 15-mile race would begin at Grand Anse and end at Paspébiac.

As in all the other races Kinsella took the lead from the start, and when he arrived at the finish he had again broken his own record for the swim. His time was 6 hours, 2 minutes, 50



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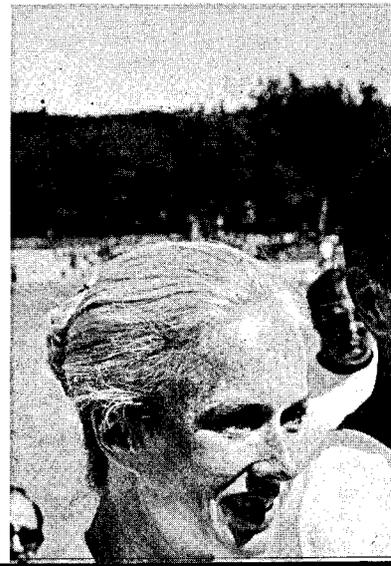
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John Kinsella (right) receives Chicagofest 10-mile International Marathon Swim Championship award from Chicago's mayor, Michael Bilandic, with mayor's wife, Heather.



seconds, and was worth \$4,000.

It was after this race that Kinsella had to make an important decision. The following week would book three international championship marathons. Aug. 13 marked the \$12,000 Chibougamau (Quebec), then the Pepsi Challenge \$50,000 Canadian National Exhibition (across 32-mile Lake Ontario) would be held on the 16th, and the Chicagofest 10-mile (\$15,000) would be held on the 20th. Kinsella acted wisely, choosing not to enter the Chibougamau 15 mile race, thus giving himself 10 full days of rest.

The Pepsi Challenge Swim was scheduled for the opening day of the Exhibition. The eight invited swimmers (chosen from the top World Professional Marathon Swimming ratings) gathered at Niagara on the lake directly across Lake Ontario from the CNE grounds at Toronto. Lake Ontario was basically flat and registered a comfortable 74 degrees. The swim began at 2 a.m.

Kinsella powered himself out into the lake from the start and by dawn had a significant lead of two miles on second position in the form of Claudio Plit of Argentina. From that time on Kinsella kept up a strong pace with only minor stomach problems.

Lake Ontario for once appeared to be showing her kind side. The water remained warm with only gentle one-foot waves. Then around noon a stiff breeze picked up, and by 2 p.m. it had whistled in a thunderstorm, carried along on 30 mile-per-hour winds. Waves rapidly built up to a steady five-foot height with some cresting to seven feet. The rubber Zodiac boats containing the trainers of two other swimmers were capsized, but they rapidly regained their boats and control. Don Watson, Kinsella's high school coach and trainer for this swim, maintained Kinsella's course and after several hours of violent conditions safely brought his swimmer onto the docks at Toronto.

Kinsella not only won the \$25,000 first prize but again set a new record of 13 hours and 49 minutes, breaking the old record by 1 hour and 21 minutes. Five other swimmers finished the race, which speaks well of the WPMSF selection committee.

Now the surprising part of Kinsella's extraordinary season: with only three days rest from his 32-mile ordeal, he showed up for the Chicagofest 10-mile International Swimming Marathon where 76 rested swimmers would compete for the \$15,000 purse. Swim officials and contestants alike were surprised to find that the usually-salubrious Lake Michigan registered 57 degrees. Many were also surprised that all of the Lake Ontario entrants were also there.

Surprise turned to bewilderment when, after five miles, John Kinsella broke away from the pack that was determined to break him, and held the lead till the completion of the race, finishing only two minutes off his own record for the course (made in 72 degree water). Only 15 swimmers finished the race, which included the five who had completed the 32-mile Lake Ontario Marathon three days earlier.

This outstanding performance by John Kinsella in 1978 is sure to go down in history as one of the greatest years in the history of marathon swimming.



(Photo by Rolf Achilles)

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