

DISTANCE SWIMMING

By Dennis Matuch



Many readers of *Swimming World*, correspondents to the World Professional Marathon Swimming Federation, and students ask me to describe the physical and mental states of a marathon swimmer during a swim. While members of the general population show great variation in all traits the outstanding marathoners show great similarities.

Modern psychological testing, for example, has no more than finessed or verified the astute aphorism of the famous Antarctic explorer, Admiral Richard E. Byrd, who many years ago said, "I have always substituted anticipation and preparation for worry." That statement accurately describes the mental approach of the top amateur and professional marathoners. They are highly motivated and disciplined as is proven in their ability to ignore discomfort and pain while undertaking their six- to eight mile daily training sessions or their actual swims.

To transport you into the mind of a marathoner undertaking a gruelling swim I can do no better than to quote Penny Dean, the most outstanding female marathoner to appear on the scene since Greta Andersen and Judith DeNys, on her world record swim across the English Channel last July 29th.

Listen well to Penny as she describes her swim and keep in mind she also holds the world records for two single crossings (island to mainland, mainland to island) at Catalina, a double crossing (non-stop) at Catalina, two world records for 36,000 meters in a pool, and when she turned professional last summer at the Chicagofest 10-mile International Marathon Swim she came in third, beating the majority of top-rated professionals.

Here is her description of her record-breaking English Channel swim: "Swimming a channel is the ultimate feat for a marathon swimmer. You try to push yourself 110 percent

regardless of conditions, water temperature, or other external stimuli. It is truly a test. During each of my swims I have gone through extreme periods of pain both mentally and physically, but the satisfaction of being able to conquer and reach beyond those limitations is why I swim. At that point I have reached a point where I felt as if I were reborn. That is not to say that the rest of the swims were easy. They were not. Every muscle ached, but I was able to get beyond the pain.

"In the English Channel swim I did not have a coach. I had to be totally in control. In April I had seen a sports physician and was advised to quit swimming. Shortly thereafter my assistant coach wrote and said she was pregnant and could not come to England. I had planned for 13 years to swim the Channel. I was not going to let these setbacks defeat me. They acted as inspirations since I accepted them as challenges that allowed the swim to be completely my own.

"As I began my nine-day taper I felt the Channel was mine. Feelings of strength and speed came with the longer rest periods. On the departure date we boarded the attendant boat — the pilot, his assistant, the official Channel Swimming Association observer and a few friends. While everyone else was nervous I was not. I knew I was completely prepared.

"The swim went very well. My mind never drifted and the cold water remained a vague reminder to keep my stroke rate up. The observer surprised me by noting in the CSA report that my stroke rate never went below 90. I wanted this swim too much and a gradual elation took place as I felt better and better the further across I got. It seems a paradoxical statement to make now since I also remember that my body ached with pain. At a few points we ran into current problems but a masterful navigation job by the pilot overcame them and we were able to get in.

"I suppose I should have been ecstatic when I reached France but relief was the predominant emotion. For 13 years I had dreamed of this swim and now the haunting memory of a failed Golden Gate swim faded. I had completed a job."

Penny set a world record by swimming the 21 miles from England to France in 7 hours, 40 minutes. That was one hour and five minutes under the former record. Watch this young lady in 1979. I believe she will be the women's world champion in pro swimming and if I'm wrong it will only be because she may very well capture the overall world professional championship.



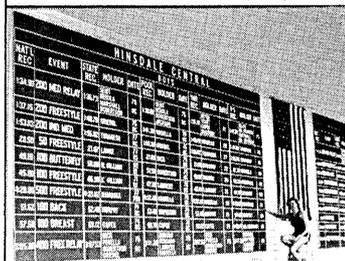
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