

Swim marathon evokes daring of yesteryear

By Leo Zainea

AT 11 O'CLOCK next Sunday morning, the world's greatest marathon swimmers will wade into Lake Michigan in search of fortune.

What with the perils of water pollution on our lakefront, you say, that takes courage. Anybody willing to chance bumping into empty beer cans or stray apple cores along the way deserves some sort of prize.

Chicagoans will be surprised to discover that their lake is not as dirty as they think. "It is a tribute to the cleanliness of Lake Michigan's waters that these professional marathoners are coming here," says Conrad Wennerberg, the sport's historian. "They are very particular as to the water they swim in. More than once they have packed up and left a contest site if the

water was too polluted. They have never left a Chicago swim."

CONTESTANTS FROM 13 countries, including 11 from Egypt alone, will vie for the \$3,000 first prize in the Chicago Lakefront Festival's 10-mile swim. Several of them are champions from the world's five other marathons and the hotly-contested event will likely rekindle memories here of Chicago marathons of yesteryear.

A Chicago athletic club sponsored the first marathon swim here in 1910, a three-mile race. Over the next 20 years, such swimming greats as Peter McGillivray, Norman Ross and the famed Johnny Weissmuller sought the coveted William Hale Thompson Challenge Trophy.

They first swam for money here in connection with Chicago's Century of Progress exhibition, after noting the

popularity of the event in Canada. In 1926, America's Gertrude Ederle had become the first woman to conquer the English Channel, and a year later a young Canadian named George Young drove across country on motorcycle, with his mom in a sidecar, to take up William Wrigley Sr.'s offer of \$25,000 for swimming from his Catalina island to the California mainland. And he won it! The following year, a German won \$30,000 of Wrigley's money for the same feat, the largest prize ever offered in marathon swimming.

IN THE EARLY 1960's, popular car salesman Jim Moran resurrected the event here with Lake Michigan challenge swims. He offered \$3,000 for the first person to swim 36 miles from Chicago to Michigan City. That first year, 1961, a Chicago chemist named Ted Erickson won the race the hard way, being blown off course by a storm. He

actually swam 44 miles, and for the first time in history Lake Michigan had been conquered by a swimmer.

The following year, the course changed, going north. Moran offered \$4,000 for anyone to beat Erickson's world record by swimming 36 miles to Waukegan. If anyone would continue another 14 miles to Kenosha, Wis., he would receive \$10,000.

Erickson outstroked internationally-famous Greta Anderson to Waukegan, but she went on to pick up the bigger prize. In 1963, Moran offered \$15,000 for his swim from McCormick Place to Benton Harbor, Mich., 60 miles.

OF COURSE, NEXT Sunday's 10-mile swim cannot measure up to those marathons in length, but the drama is still there.

Much will depend on the weather race-day. Clear skies with gentle breezes will help keep the water warm.

And there are different favorites, depending on water temperature.

LEADING CONTESTANTS IN warm weather are Argentina's Horacio Iglesias, 31, who has averaged over \$20,000 a year in prize monies; Holland's Johan Schans, 25, winner of the fabled 24-hour LaTuque race; Egypt's Opsama Rashad, and Holland's top female, little Corrie Dixon. Cold water favorites are Chicago's Jon Erickson and Dennis Matuch, 31, who has entered more LaTuque swims than anybody; and gorgeous Diana Nyad, a graduate of Lake Forest College.

Some 60 contestants will cover a half-mile course from Oak Street Beach to about Goethe, with the finish line at Oak Street where thousands are expected to gather. There is also a \$1,000 prize for the first woman finisher, regardless of place, to add interest in the event.

Frank Blair; Howard Wainer; Mansuet Rac; Jon Erickson, Chicago; Herbert Fried; Steve Wozniak;

Michael Paesler, Chicago; Diana Nyad, Lake Forest; Ralph Willard; John Sullivan; Charles Johnson; Dennis Matuch, Chicago; David Gifford; Cecelia Dunn; Jane Bidlo, Portage Park SC; Ralph Kauders; Debbie Taylor; Jo Anna Gray; Nicholas M. Simon; Edie Turkington; Dennis Britain; Sandra Bucha, Hinsdale.

CANADA

Regent La Coursiere; Margaret Wisniewski; Claude Fournier; Yves La Vole; Derek Duvall; Hassan Abdeen; John Convey.

EGYPT

Shadi El Raghob; Samia Mandor; Magdy Mandour; Ossama Rashad; Marwan Ghazzani; Sahar Mansour; Mohamed Gamle; Hafiz Shedi; Marwan Shedi; Taby Abou El-Emin; Opsama Rashad.

HOLLAND

Corrie Dixon; Raymond Dixon; Johan Schans; Jan Van Scheffindel.

ARGENTINA

Carlos Aguirre; Horacio Iglesias; Claudio Pill.

POLAND

Zygmunt Gradek; Thaddeus Turek.

ITALY

Giulio Travasla.

GERMANY

Kirk Kleist.

SYRIA

Mahmod Khamis; Marwan Saleh.

SUDAN

Sultan Kisab; Farouk Sulliman.

YUGOSLAVIA

Veljko Rogosic; Miljan Montenegro.

MEXICO

Raul Villagomez; Oscar Torres; Fausto Delgado.