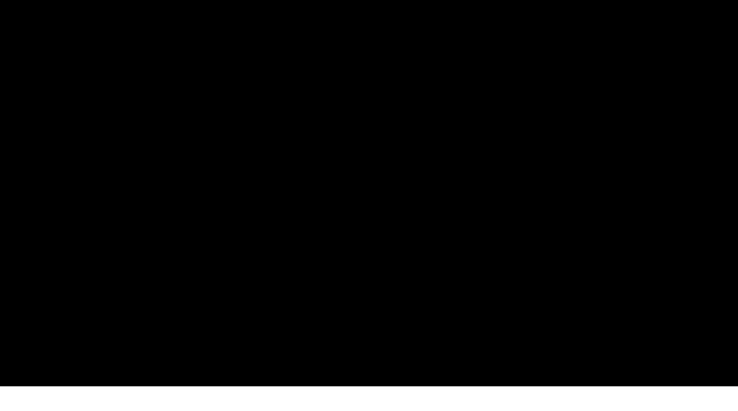


Diana Nyad determined to try Cuba-Florida swim again

By Reuters

September 27, 2010 12:47 PM PDT · Updated September 27, 2010

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By Tom Brown

KEY WEST, Florida (Reuters) - Veteran long-distance swimmer Diana Nyad looks as tough as nails as she talks about setting out on a treacherous swim of more than 100 miles from Cuba to Key West, Florida.

She is 61 years old but coils up like a middle-weight prize fighter as she speaks of digging in with her broad shoulders and powerful arms and "boxing the waves" on her anticipated swim across the Florida Straits.

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"It's supposedly going to be maybe 2-1/2 days or so, 60, maybe 65 hours, and that's if I get maybe pretty good conditions," Nyad said in an interview on Friday.

"I've got the body ready," she told Reuters.

"Once I start that first stroke, I'm not going to stop," said Nyad.

"I don't care if it takes five days. I'm not going to stop stroking until I touch this shore."

For all her bravado, Nyad also admits to crying lately and feeling her stomach tie up in knots as she worries about how bad weather and water conditions could make her Cuba-Florida swim all but impossible.

Prevailing winds out of the east have whipped up rough seas in the strong currents of the Gulf Stream for more than a month now, making conditions for the swim no more favorable than they were in August 1978.

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That was when Nyad, then 28, failed in her first attempt at a crossing from shores near Havana to Key West after battling the waves for nearly 42 hours.

'MOTHER NATURE'

Conditions are not expected to improve any time soon, and Nyad conceded that time may be running out. But she said there was still hope for at least a brief period of calm seas before the end of October, when she would likely be forced to give up any attempt to make the swim until June.

"I can't fight Mother Nature," said Nyad, who noted that her name is derived from the Greek word for water nymphs or female swimmers.

A native New Yorker, Nyad was raised in south Florida by a French mother and Greek-Egyptian stepfather.

She retired after successfully completing a swim from Bimini to Florida in 1979, ending a long-distance career that set several world records including one for circling Manhattan in less than eight hours in 1975.

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She went on to a career in sports journalism and expressed a lifelong fascination with Cuba.

Susan Maroney of Australia became the first and only person on record to swim the Florida Straits from Cuba to the United States in May 1997.

Maroney was 22 when she made a similar crossing in a shark cage, which Nyad says provides a protective barrier against at least some of the bashing that swimmers are confronted with in the open sea.

Like Maroney, Nyad intends to make the crossing without flippers but would become the first person to make the crossing without a cage.

Nyad, who has undergone a grueling personal training regime, including a 24-hour ocean swim in July, says she may be the only person in the world with a solid chance of making the swim at this time.

"This is a tough sport. There are sports that take more talent, probably most sports take more talent. But I don't know that there's a tougher sport that takes more will and more chutzpah to stay in there and suffer through all the hours. The long hours, mentally and physically," she said.

Nyad expressed frustration over the time it took to get a visa from Cuba to make the swim, saying it involved a lot of "political rigmarole" in both Havana and Washington to get the necessary licenses for the trip.

The United States has a 48-year-old trade embargo on Cuba, which includes a broad ban on travel to the island.

Nyad plans to fly from Miami to Havana immediately after the weather clears. Most of her crew will join her by boat.

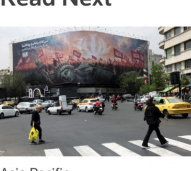
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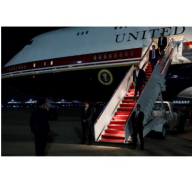
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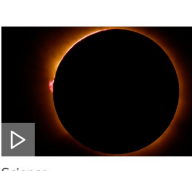
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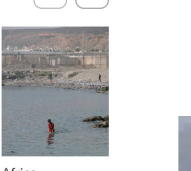
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