

# PROFESSIONAL MARATHON SWIMMING

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Marathon swimming appears to be a sport of such great importance that the Russians have laid claim to "inventing" it!

While doing research on the origins and history of long-distance swimming, I unearthed a United Press dispatch datelined Moscow, August 18, 1949. The piece, in its entirety, read:

*"Russians not only swim farther and faster than anybody else, but they started long-distance swimming back in 1773, a Soviet 'Sports Master' claimed today.*

*"Iskander Faizulin, prominent Soviet swimmer, wrote in the trade union newspaper Trud that a shipwrecked Russian sailor stroked 14.8 miles in 12 hours off the African coast 194 years ago.*

*"Another pre-revolutionary Russian, Leonid Romanchenko, swam 29.7 miles in the Caspian-Baku area in 24 hours and 12 minutes, the 'Sports Master' reported. This is faster, he said, than anyone has swum the English Channel."*

In August, 1953, the same Sports Master Faizulin reportedly swam 125 miles on the Amur River, USSR, from Stepanovo to Khabarovsk, in 26 hours, 8.39 minutes. That indicates that Comrade Faizulin is a better swimmer than a researcher.

Even if one considers being shipwrecked a legitimate start for a sporting event, the 1773 swim by the Russian sailor was a late entry. According to Greek legend, Palinurus, the pilot of Aeneas' ship, was swept overboard from his vessel off the African coast and swam for three days before reaching shore — and was slain by the natives when he reached the "finish line"!

Julius Caesar, said to have been a superb swimmer, is recorded to have been shipwrecked off Alexandria, Egypt, and jumped overboard, carrying his sword between his teeth and clutching

his "Commentaries" in his left hand while stroking ashore with his right. (The distance and his time for this handicap event are not recorded!)

Acts 27:13-14 of the New Testament reports that when St. Paul's ship was wrecked off the coast of Malta, the centurion in charge commanded that, in order to save lives, all those aboard able to swim should do so. "And so it came to pass that they all escaped all safe to land," including St. Paul.

The three above-mentioned marathon swims, all occasioned by shipwrecks, took place well before 1773 — although one can understand why the Soviet "historian" was uninformed about St. Paul!

Faizulin could have consulted the records of the Channel Swimming Association in 1949 and discovered that Ernst Vierkotter of Germany had crossed from France to England — 21 miles — in 1926 in 12 hours and 40 minutes, which is a great deal faster than Romanchenko's 29.7 miles in 24:12! Still, it's nice to know the Soviets are interested in the sport.

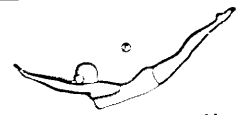
The Greta Andersen Trophy, awarded annually to the girl marathoner who compiles the best record in her first year as a professional has been won by Egypt's Samia Mandour. Miss Mandour, who finished third among the women in the competition for the distaff World Championship crown in 1971, was second woman finisher in the 19-mile Nile River race and was third in the 18-mile Aswan and the 12.5-mile Varna (Bulgaria) races.

Looking forward to the 1972 racing season, the first three events have already been scheduled: The Aswan race will be held in Egypt the last week in March, the Nile River race at Cairo the day before Easter Sunday, and the 19th annual Capri-to-Naples, Italy, race on July 9. No dates have as yet been set for the North American races, but the City of Chicago has the Lake Michigan race, originally slated for last August, on its calendar for this coming August.

New races in North Carolina and New Jersey and the renewal of the Canadian National Exhibition races at Toronto are also tentatively on the 1972 "menu."



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