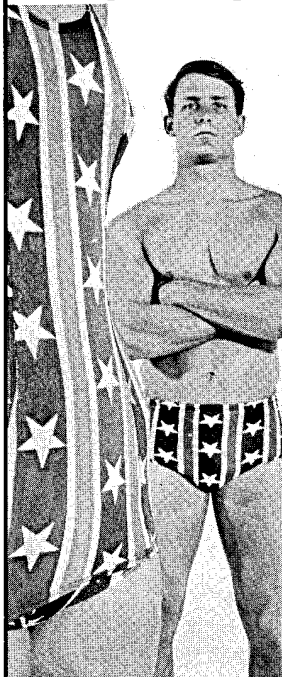


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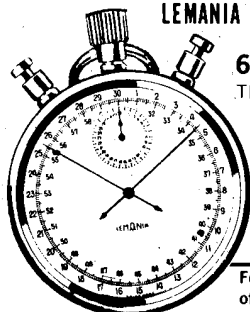
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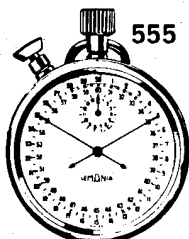
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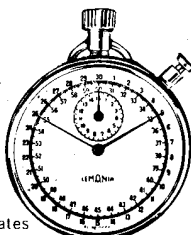
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## LONG-DISTANCE SWIMMING

By JOE GROSSMAN

Executive Director

Marathon Swimming Foundation & Hall of Fame

During 1972, devotees of marathon swimming marked the loss of one of the most outstanding — and controversial — figures the sport ever spawned — George Young. "The Catalina Kid" died at his Niagara Falls, Canada, home in early August, and with his passing, an era was marked "finis."

It was George Young, a 17-year-old protege of Toronto Coach Johnny Walker — who had compiled a batch of newspaper clippings in amateur meets in Ontario — who propelled marathon swimming into a big-time sport in Canada when he was the winner, and only finisher, of the Wrigley \$25,000 swim across the Catalina Channel in 1927.

Young decided to enter the big California winner-take-all race and, with a friend, left Toronto on a motorcycle which broke down en route. Hitchhiking the rest of the way from Arkansas, the two were inconspicuous among the "big name" swimmers of the era — Sam Richards, Henry Sullivan, Lottie Schoemmel, Charles Toth, Clarabelle Barrett, Millie Gade Corson. But it was Young who crawled ashore at Point Vicente after a 15 hour, 48½-minute swim from Catalina Island — the first person ever to complete that often-attempted swim!

Somewhat carried away, one Toronto paper headlined "TORONTO BOY SWIMS TREACHEROUS PACIFIC"! George's hometown went mad. A crowd of 150,000 was on hand to greet him on his return, and the youngster could have written his own ticket at that moment. Interest in their new hero was so intense that Mr. Wrigley quickly offered a \$30,000 prize to the winner of a 21-mile race to be held in Toronto that August (which is interesting when one realizes that Lindbergh's prize for flying the Atlantic for the first time solo that same year was only \$25,000!). The whole town was at the waterfront to see George perform — but, paralyzed by the cold water, Young couldn't complete the race!

The adulation quickly turned to ashes — a bitter lesson for a teenager who had risen to the heights overnight. And more ashes were heaped on Young when he tried to recoup his lost glory in 1928; but his 11:33 effort was to no avail as none of 199 starters finished a Wrigley Toronto 15-mile race. Still game, he entered the 1930 Toronto 15-mile event, but lasted a mere three miles. It was not until 1931 that George managed to win the Toronto Classic, copping a \$10,000 prize with an 8:08.36 finisher in the 15-miler. But it was Young's last big splash.

Married to Margaret Ravior (winner of the 1931 Toronto women's 10-mile race), George retired from competition. Still, it was Toronto Fans' interest in George Young that established marathon swimming as one of Canada's leading spectator sports — and kept it alive through a full decade when there were no pro races anywhere else in the world.

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With his marriage dissolved, Young came out of retirement in 1947 to enter the first of Toronto's post-war races, a 10-miler. But a new crop of marathoners — Park, Lumsdon, Wozniak, Kerschner, Gazel, et al — who had been babes in arms when George crossed the Catalina Channel, had speed Young couldn't match, and he quit for good.

Out of the water Young found the going rough, too. His 1927 winnings had been put in a trust fund and George later said he'd only seen about \$400 of it. He was badly advised in business ventures and was sued for a portion of his Catalina loot. When he found a job during the depression, people who didn't know of his troubles complained the job had gone to a "wealthy man," and George was fired. He worked in Canada as a swimming instructor and as a pool lifeguard in Philadelphia for 35 cents an hour. When his second wife died in 1953, Young moved to Niagara Falls and worked with the parks commission — the job he held when death overtook him.

The life of this once-great athlete, who has been elected to the Marathon Swimming Hall of Fame in recognition of his Catalina "first," holds several lessons: the first is that fame is a fickle mistress; the second is that an indomitable spirit can have more value than fame or riches. The world of sports — not only marathon swimming — will miss George Young.

Buck Dawson, executive director of the International Swimming Hall of Fame, has been named the 1972 winner of the Davids-Wheeler Award, presented annually to a person who has made outstanding contributions to that sport. Dawson received the trophy (and had his name engraved on the permanent silver tray on display in the ISHOF) at a ceremony in Ft. Lauderdale in December.

Dawson was cited for his support of marathon swimming in his role as ISHOF executive, and also for his skill as a coach and trainer of marathon swimmers. Dawson proteges — Mary Martha "Marty" Sinn, Judith DeNijs and Diana Nyad — had held every women's professional distance swimming record from 10 to 28 miles since Buck discovered he had coaching talent in 1963!

The Davids-Wheeler Award was created by a group within the World Professional Marathon Swimming Federation in 1970 to honor the memories of two deceased members, Irving Davids and Capt. Roger W. Wheeler. The 1971 winner was Commander C. Gerald Forsberg, President of the (English) Channel Swimming Association, author of books on marathon swimming, and compiler of some two-dozen marathon swimming records.

While this corner normally eschews mention of marathon relay swims, one worthy of note was recorded last August. Six members of the Nassau County (N.Y.) Police Swimming Team, intent on proving that "all cops aren't fat and out of shape," swam 150 miles in a total of 108 hours and 25 minutes from Montauk Point to Sheepshead Bay. The six were Benson Huggard (an English Channel conqueror), Jame Olivant (each of whom swam 20 hours, 15 minutes; Richard Boullianne, Martin Rea, George Fecke (who did 18:15 each), and James Wanser (13.10). Each man swam two hours, rested 10 and then went at it again. Good show, men!



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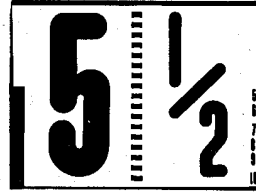
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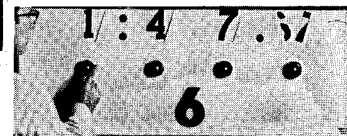


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