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DISTANCE SWIMMING

By Dennis Matuch



This summer will be a very interesting one for professional marathon swimming. We have six big money races on the horizon. Competitors from 15 different countries will be vying for top prizes. What will be most intriguing will be to see how a top-flight amateur like John Kinsella will do. John wrote me a few weeks ago asking for information on the professional races being held this year. It looks like John is laying it on the line and not content to rest on his amateur laurels like Mark Spitz who seems to have been seduced by the easy life. If John does turn pro there is a good chance that he will team up with Sandra Bucha for the 24-hour team race at LaTuque. It would be a great opportunity for an All-American team to win this premier race for the first time. If they do team up, it will be their youth and vigor against the proven endurance and experience of the foreign teams. I think they could do it. No American team has come closer than second when Billy Barton and Harry Wickens competed in 1969.

A set way to swim the 24-hour race has yet to be found. It is a play-it-by-ear race where the coach and coordinator are one. He has always been an important factor in the fortune of the team. The coach must know when to baby and when to scold his swimmers. He must know where the rest of the competition is at all times. He must know when and how much food is to be taken. The wrong word by a coach can put a team out of the race. I've seen it happen in every marathon race. In the 1968 ten-mile Hamilton race, world butterfly champion Dan Sherry was defeated by both his and his coach's inexperience. Dan shared first place with Tom Bucy for about eight miles. Abo-Heif and myself, who were trailing them, could see the three or four mistakes he was making during the race and we laid back waiting to capitalize on them. When the time came we made our move and were able to beat him in the last two miles. Dan never again entered a professional race. Abo-Heif and myself owe that particular race to

(Continued on page 51)



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Many diving coaches, this writer included, have been guilty of bringing divers to the NCAA Championships who do not have a chance to make the finals. The NCAA Championships should be held to determine the best 12 divers in collegiate competition. That should be our only purpose at that meet. The experience can be gained at other meets at other levels. Allowing 94 divers in the meet only creates poor conditions for those divers who really belong in the competition. It is hoped that the NCAA Swimming Rules Committee will approve this recommendation. The swimming coaches might take a good look at this. It might be the answer for some of those events with 10 or 11 heats. Let's make the NCAA's a quality meet, not a free for all.

DISTANCE SWIMMING (Cont'd. from page 48)

our coaches who kept us aware of the situation as it developed. Similar situations have taken place in Lake St. John when Billy Barton and Harry Wickens were defeated by their innocence of just what and when to do something. At St. John, as well as all the races, the coach has to be a combination of psychologist, physiologist, nutritionist and navigator. Take that last point for example. I don't know how many swimmers I've seen collapse when their inexperienced coach is unable to answer such a simple question as, "Where am I and how far do I have to go?" Yes, it's a great big void out there when you can't find out where you are.

Getting back to LaTuque, I always get a kick out of the expectations of some of the new competitors. LaTuque is not the easiest athletic event in the world. The Boston Marathon (track) fans who claim that the 26 mile run is one of the toughest athletic events in the world would turn in their slippers if they ever saw the LaTuque, Saguenay River, or St. John swims.

In any case I hope that an American team will win the LaTuque race this year. Since it will be the tenth annual race, it would be nice to see the old Stars and Stripes flying above the other countries who have so long dominated professional marathon swimming.

There is rumor that Horatio Iglesias of Argentina (last year's world champion) may swim in only a few races this year, or even perhaps none. If this is true it will be a real battle for the world's championship. One of the fiercest gatherings of competitors is shaping up.

As far as the women's title, it looks like Corrie Dixon will have a difficult time repeating as Sandra Bucha is odds-on favorite for honors. Diana Nyad, if she gets her kind of swim, is another very serious threat. The Egyptian girls were 2nd, 6th, and 7th in the world ratings last year. I hardly see how they can improve their standing since they will be meeting much more serious competition this year.

Just as I finished writing this column, I received word of the male and female winners of the 23 mile Nile River Race. Marwan Ghazzawy of Egypt set a new record of 7:39.29 hours bettering his old record of 1971 by 55:31 minutes. Corrie Dixon of Holland took the women's purse in 8:24.57 hours.

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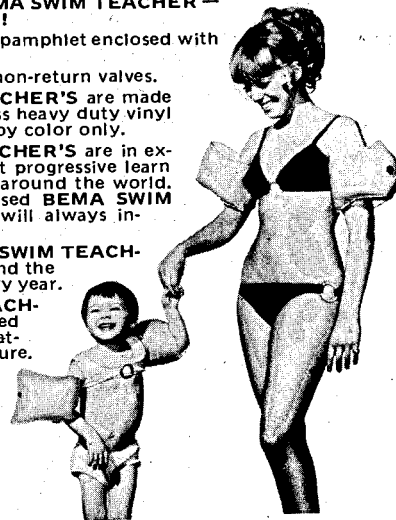
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