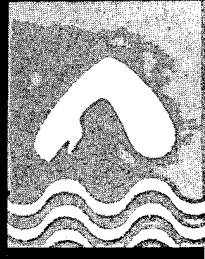


DISTANCE SWIMMING

By Dennis Matuch



In 1927, William Wrigley, Jr., the chewing gum magnate, offered \$25,000 to the first person to swim from Catalina Island to the California mainland (19 miles). Wrigley also offered an additional prize of \$15,000 to the first woman to finish, regardless of position. Wrigley's swim received world-wide publicity at the time. He was so pleased that the following year he sponsored the first Canadian National Exhibition marathon swim (21 miles). The winner of that race received \$30,000 for his efforts.

In 1963, Jim Moran, a Chicago auto dealer, put up \$15,000 for the winner of his Lake Michigan Swim. The 60-mile swim got front page treatment in all the local papers and many national and international ones. Television coverage was almost as complete.

Wrigley and Moran, as well as sponsors of other marathon events, were delighted with the "million dollar" publicity they received for a relatively low output. Prize money, however, is only a part of the expense to a pro marathon sponsor for there are also the expenses of organization, publicity and security arrangements.

When the World Professional Marathon Swimming Federation officials meet with the sponsors of the 1975 swims in the coming months, they will be stressing how the above sponsors gained maximum publicity by offering large purses. If the sponsors of the 1975 races are convinced, all the swimmers will be competing for substantially increased purses. The officials, on behalf of the swimmers, will be asking that the \$14,000 total purse at LaTuque

be increased to at least \$25,000 (last year the first place team split \$3,500 which officials do not consider much for a 24-hour grind). Lake St. John, which had a total purse of \$20,000 last year, will also be asked to increase their purse. Laval (10 miles), Saguenay (28 miles) and the Nile River (which offers a ridiculous \$1,000 to the winner of its 23-mile swim) will also be asked to go along with the Federation's proposals. WPMSF officials feel that in order for a pro race to be really considered a pro race the last place swimmer (23rd place in some cases) should at least be able to meet expenses for his trip.

There may be some hard bargaining ahead, for the sponsors of pro marathon swims are acute and successful businessmen who, like all successful businessmen, want the most for their money. The uninformed believe that the pro marathon sponsors love the sport and its athletes enough to pay out big money to see them perform. The informed know that this is far from the truth. The prize money offered is only the tip of the iceberg. The LaTuque and Lake St. John sponsors spend close to \$200,000 each to put on their events. This money is spent on publicity, security, boats, medical consultants, advertising and many other incidental expenses.

One does not have to be a businessman to see that there must be a reason for such an outlay. The answer is the 50,000 spectators that attend each event. It is estimated that each fan coming into the area spends at least \$10 during his stay at the event. That's a gross of a half-million dollars for each race. The net, you can be sure, is somewhere between \$200,000 and \$300,000 which is not bad for a one-day event.

Swimmers and Federation officials believe that there is too great a disparity between those figures and their prize money. The swimmers believe that the sponsors can painlessly up the prizes for the swimmers by decreasing that part of their budget now going for promotional work.

Wrigley and Moran knew that by offering excellent purses for their swims, the news media would come to them rather than they having to go to the news media. Money seems to be the common leveler. They knew instinctively that by offering great prizes, you attract all of the public rather than just the athletically-oriented segment. All of the promoters and sponsors of the big money

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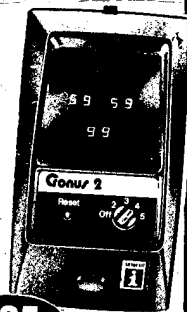
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sports today are aware of that fact. It remains for the sponsors of pro marathon events to learn.

Today pro marathon races have the potential to blossom into the greatest of sporting events when the public becomes aware of one fact. It is the only sport in which women and men can compete against each other equally on a physical basis. If and when this extraordinary fact is combined with the lure of big money, the coffers of sponsors and swimmers will increase along with the satisfaction of the public.

When is a world champion not a world champion?

One answer to that question is when the champion comes up against a statistician. Shortly after I sent out the latest World Professional Marathon Swimming Federation bulletin to its members, I was hounded, pounded and vilified by a few interested members. The beating I received was harsher than any I experienced in pro swimming. The reason: in the bulletin, the tabulations of the pro swimmers for the season showed that Diana Nyad had beaten out Sandra Bucha for the women's world championship.

I was accused of partiality and dishonesty. How could a swimmer who had two sixths, one tenth, one 14th, one 21st, and one 13th place (Diana Nyad) beat out a swimmer who had one first, two seconds, and a third (Sandra Bucha) for the world's championship?

The answer to that question is in the 1968 bulletin of the Federation. When the late Joe Grossman, the previous secretary, approached a pro-football statistician and asked him to come up with a fair and equitable point system in rating pro marathon swimmers, the statistician came up with the following (adopted by unanimous vote of Federation members):

The WPMSF scores finishers in sanctioned races under a point formula devised for the Federation in 1964 and has been in use every year since then. Under this formula, men and women are considered separately but equally. (Thus, if a girl finishes a race in fourth position, she is considered first among the women in that race and the man who finishes behind her, fifth overall, he is considered fourth in the men's division, etc.) Points are awarded as follows: (1) Finishing points — for 1st, 500; 2nd, 350; 3rd, 250; 4th, 150; 5th, 125; 6th, 100; and minus five points for each succeeding place to 25th. (2) Distance points — each finisher receives five points per mile for length of the course. (3) Time Points — each winner's time is considered 100 points and times of all other finishers are scored by subtracting one point for each minute he is

behind the winner (fractions over 30 seconds considered one minute). (4) Bonus points — a swimmer who establishes a new record for a race receives an additional 100 points (races held for the first time not considered in this category). For 24-hour team races, finishing points are divided among the two members of each team (i.e., each member of winning team receives 250 points, each second-placer 175 points, etc.); instead of distance points, time of race is scored at five points per hour and total divided among both members of each finishing team; and instead of time points, each individual swimmer receives one point for every lap he swims."

In a 1970 bulletin the following addition was made:
"DNF = Did Not Finish. In races which were officially ended at the conclusion of a specified time, swimmers still in competition were credited with the places in which they were swimming at the end of the race. Championship points for finishing positions were awarded those swimmers.

THE 1970 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP STANDINGS — (At the annual WPMSF meeting in Hamilton, Ont., it was unanimously voted to select the world champions on the basis of the highest point totals amassed by swimmers in a specified number of sanctioned races each year, that number being one more than half of the number of sanctioned races. In 1970 there were seven sanctioned races: thus, the four highest point totals were counted for all swimmers who participated in more than four of the seven races.)"

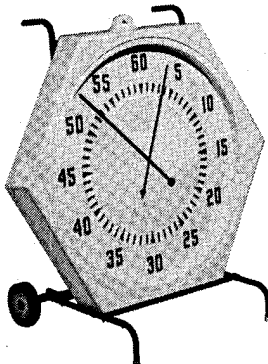
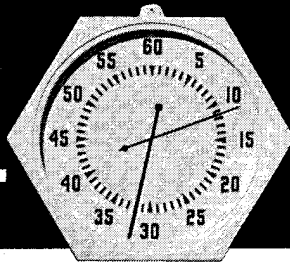
Thus, it can be seen that when a tally is made, you pick a swimmer's best races; that is, races that will give him or her the greatest number of points. Joe Grossman and the statistician thought that this system would be the fairest way.

If money won were a criteria there would be inequities. For example: the Nile river (23 miles) marathon pays \$1,000 to the winner while the Chicago Marathon (10 miles) pays \$3,000.

When I first sat down to make the tally, it appeared that Sandra was a shoo-in. When the figures came out, I was surprised as most of the bulletin readers were to become. However, I was bound by the Federation Rules. I could not arbitrarily ignore them, for then I would be open to even harsher criticism. These rules were voted on and adopted by the members themselves. I myself have over the years attempted to get our members to take a look at these rules for determining pro swimmer's rankings.

If there is anything I've learned to appreciate this past summer, it is the words of the research scientist who once said, "Never claim to make a discovery in science unless you have taken into consideration nature's (and I may add, statistician's) misplaced sense of humor." And this is said with all respect to two of the finest and beautiful pro marathoners I know — Sandra Bucha and Diana Nyad.

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