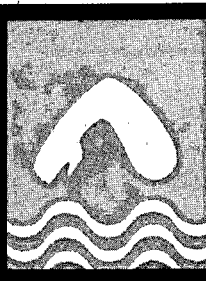


# DISTANCE SWIMMING

By Conrad Wennerberg



Mar del Plata is Argentina's largest oceanside resort. It is located some 250 miles south of Buenos Aires on the Atlantic Ocean. Every year from late December through March the resort's normal population is increased by 600,000.

The city seems to be a combination of Atlantic City, Miami Beach and Las Vegas and among the many attractions offered vacationers and tourists is the Chapadmalal-Mar del Plata Marathon Swim. In previous years the marathon swim began at Miramar, a smaller resort 28 miles south on the coast.

Two years ago the Chamber of Commerce of Chapadmalal, another upcoming resort area, successfully persuaded The Sindicato de Luz y Fuerza and the Argentine Department of Tourism to start the international marathon at their city. Thus the marathon has been shortened to 22-24 miles. The reason for that approximate distance is because of the irregular shoreline and the spit of land (Wizard's Point) extending two or three miles out from shore at about the half-way mark of the marathon. The swimmers have to swing out and around this spit before making a turn back towards the main coast on their way to the finish.

This year the sponsors sent fully paid round-trip air fares to the top swimmers of each nation entered in the marathon. John Kinsella (world professional marathon champion in 1974), Diana Nyad and Jon Erikson were the American representatives in the international field.

On the day of the race a gale from the south created huge rollers and surf that reached a height of five feet. Luckily, the wave form was in the same direction the marathoners were headed. The water temperature was 65°.

For the first three hours of the race John Kinsella held the lead before the "frigid" (to him) water and "stomach problems"

forced him to quit the race.

"I couldn't take it any longer," John said later. "I got cold and my stomach started acting up. Also, the battering of the waves was more than I could handle."

Twenty-year-old Claudio Plit, Argentina's foremost pro water salubrious and number two in world-ranking last year, found the mar salubrious. He constantly altered his stroke rate (as did the other experienced pro marathoners) in order to "climb" to the top of each successive wave. This allowed him to take advantage of the planning effect. The success of the technique was evident when Plit arrived at the winner's dock at Mar del Plata. His time was seven hours and 45 minutes, considerably under Horacio Iglesias' time of 12 hours the year before.

Claudio said the only trouble he had during the race was in the bay about three miles from the finish. "I was one-half hour late on the tides. The currents, eddies and waves were worse here than at any other place on the course. The row-boats had an even more difficult time than I did. They had trouble staying with me. Also, I got stung by a lot of jelly-fish along the way."

All the other swimmers in the race were also stung; none badly.

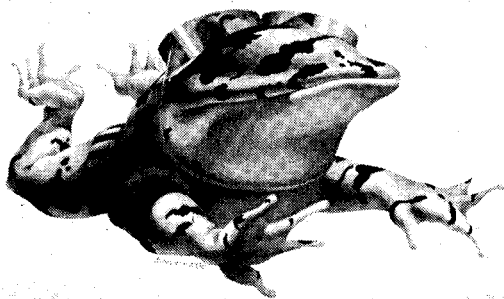
Of the 28 swimmers who started the race 15 finished, all of them under Iglesias' winning time last year.

It seems under John Kinsella needs to be finessed. He has dropped out of one-third (two out of six) of the pro marathon races he has entered. Even though he won the world's pro marathon championship last year (many marathoners feel that he was fortunate since he had ideal conditions in four of them) he still has a lot to learn about handling tough conditions. One advantage would be for John to add about fifteen pounds to his 6-4 frame. Pugh, who made studies of English Channel swimmers, showed that even a slight addition of fat did wonders for the marathoner.

Finishing second after Plit who won \$3,000 for his efforts, was Ossama Rashad of Egypt.

England's Raymond Dixon finished third in eight hours and won \$1,500. Marcello Guiscardo of Argentina followed 21 minutes later and was awarded \$1,000 for his fourth place finish. And Jon Erikson of the United States finished fifth at eight hours, 30 minutes and won \$800.

After the Mar del Plata race, the sponsors of a pro race in Buenos Aires lured the swimmers to their city for their event. When the WPMSF members learned that the top prize was \$600 they walked out.



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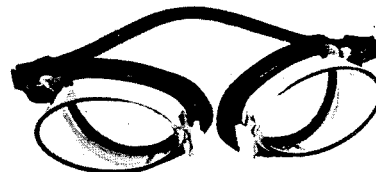
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