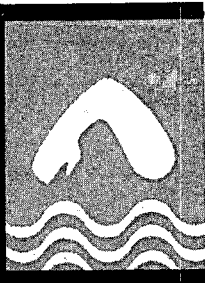


DISTANCE SWIMMING

By Dennis Matuch



Professional marathon swimmers face a lean season this year. The sponsors of three Canadian pro races (LaTuque 24-hour Team Race, Laval 10-miler and the 28-mile Saguenay River Race) have cancelled their races because they believe the Olympic Games in Montreal will draw interest away from their events.

In contrast to their opinion, the sponsors of the Lake St. Jean (John) 20-mile race (across the lake from Peribonka to Roberval) under the able direction of Ghislain Harvey, believe the Olympic Games can only serve to increase interest in marathon swimming. Therefore, they (and I whole-heartedly agree) believe that many spectators attending the Olympic Games will try and attend "the final event" at Lake St. Jean on August 8th. This year will be the 22nd annual crossing of the Lake.

The Lake St. Jean marathon is by far the most prestigious pro marathon race in the world today. It is superbly organized and offers more than \$25,000 in prizes to the top 23 marathon swimmers in the world, with \$5,000 going to first place. In the past such famous personalities as Johnny Weissmuller and Prime Minister Trudeau were official starters.

Lake St. Jean lies about 250 miles north of Montreal. The drive from Montreal is among the most scenic in the world. Shortly after you leave Quebec City you drive through the famous Laurentides Provincial Park which is famous for its trees, mountains and small lakes. Every year from 25,000 to 50,000 spectators arrive at Roberval (which has Lake St. Jean as a front door) to take advantage of its excellent hotels and restaurants.

One of the many spectacular sights in the area is an official "Ghost Town" (under Provincial supervision) with a 300-foot waterfall that used to run the machinery of the now defunct mining camp. All interest focuses on the marathon swim on race day, however, as pandemonium breaks loose and the spectators cheer the arrival of the marathoners as they course up and down the lanes in front of the grandstand in the final sprint. No marathon race in the world today attracts the attention that Lake St. Jean does. By all means try and see it.

The Chamber of Commerce of Chibougamau, Quebec also disagreed with the sponsors of the cancelled races. They felt that interest is heightened in all swimming by the Olympic Games. As a result they have sponsored (to the tune of \$12,000) a unique three-part marathon race in Lake Gilman near town. After a five-mile qualifying race on July 31st, 23 swimmers will compete on August 1st.

It will be a 10-mile race in which only the first 12 qualify for the second race which is a five-mile race held two hours later. The first six finishers of this race are then eligible for the last race (two hours later) which is a one-mile event.

The city of Chicago decided to cancel their 10-mile marathon this summer since all the money is going into the American Bicentennial and the renovation of the city's historically famous Navy Pier. The city fathers decided to stress American history and folk-events. In place of the pro event will be a five-mile amateur race.

On July 11th, the 23rd annual 18-mile Capri-Naples marathon will be held. This marathon by far is the poorest paying one around. After 18 gruelling miles, the winner picks up only \$925. This fact alone prevents this race from being a truly international world-championship race. Few swimmers are willing to spend the money to go to this race because there is little chance of profit. Strange to say the race is sponsored by a Naples newspaper but is organized and run by Major General Zorkani of Egypt under the auspices of an Egyptian marathon swimming organization.

For any information on these races, please write this column in care of *Swimming World*.

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