

Olympic Trials

Facts

- For the 1968 Trials, the women swam at the [L.A. Swim Stadium](#), adjacent to the L.A. Memorial Coliseum. The men swam at the [just-opened Belmont Plaza](#) in Long Beach.
- Belmont Plaza had an electronic scoreboard. The LA Swim Stadium did not. (Nyad's Trials tales often include a glance at an electronic scoreboard.)
- Swimmers qualified for the Trials by [meeting a time standard](#). Place meant nothing.
- Diana Nyad never qualified for any Olympic Trials.

Nyad locates her Olympics tale either at the actual Trials, at a meet before the Trials, or both. However, until about 2018, all the stories had one thing in common: Nyad had to finish in the top three to move on. All emphases are mine.

1971

***Sports Illustrated*: Nyad would trade it all for a gold medal.**

"I haven't come close to my potential in marathon swimming yet, but I'd trade all of what I'm going to be for an Olympic gold medal. I just wasn't fast enough." (["She Takes A Long Swim Off A Short Pier"](#))

1974

***Military Life*: Nyad claims she swam the 400 IM in the Trials.**

"I was in the 400 individual medley. When I got on the 'block' for 1968, for the Olympic trial, I knew I was going to make it because that's the coaching philosophy, 'where there's a will, there's a way.' . . . I came in fifth. I was only 600ths of a second behind third place." (["In the Swim with Diana Nyad"](#))

1976

***Miami Herald*: Diana's friend doesn't qualify for Trials by a familiar-looking time, so the friend commits suicide.**

"Diana says she had a friend who missed qualifying in '68 by 6/100ths of a second and committed suicide." [*There's no evidence this happened – DS.*] (["Marathon Woman,"](#) p. 16)

1997

ARB&B Speech: Nyad makes the finals “by the grace of God.”

“It came to the Olympic trials in Mexico City . . . Somehow, to tell you the truth I think it was by the grace of God, I made it into the final eight. The Olympic trials were at Long Beach. Eight people are going to go for the three top spots. Three people would then get to go to Mexico City . . . The rest of us were going to go on with the rest of our lives.

“I remember it like it was yesterday. Walking down that pool deck to that 100-meter back stroke . . . [Friend tells [*“fingernail faster” story*](#).] When I hit the wall, I had no earthly idea if I was first or eighth. I closed my eyes, and I closed my fists, and I said, ‘I couldn’t have done it a fingernail faster,’ and I meant it. I looked up at the electronic scoreboard and I was sixth. I didn’t go to Mexico City after all that.”

[*“Courage to Succeed” / “A 23-Year-Old Speech Exposes Diana Nyad’s Decades of Deception”*](#)

1998

On Roseanne: Nyad’s at the Trials.

Nyad’s on the Roseanne show with Olympic gold medalists Mary Lou Retton and Jackie Joyner-Kersey. Nyad looks into their eyes and tells her Trials tale with utter sincerity.

“I was walking down the pool deck at the Olympic Trials. And this is gonna be it. I was going to swim a 100-meter race. Lasts about a minute. And either wear the USA uniform and stand up on an Olympic medal stand; or not, and go on to the rest of my life. In 10 years of the hours Mary Lou was just talking about, eight hours a day — there’s, there’s no exaggeration — eight hours a day when you’re 8, 9, and 10 years old. [Nyad didn’t start swimming until she was 12 — Ed.]

. . .

“I didn’t make the Olympic team.”

[clip](#)

2014

Middlebury College Commencement: Sort of not at the Trials.

“So, I was a kid who had Olympic dreams, and it came to be the Olympic Trials for Mexico City, 1968. I believed I had a chance to bow my head and receive a medal for the United States of America . . . And that last 100-meter backstroke was in front of me, and it was either going to be this one or the next one when the three go on to Mexico City.

. . .

“Touch the wall, don’t look up at the electronic scoreboard, don’t look around the pool. You’re either moving on to the Trials, or you’re not.”

...

"Now I've got 100 meters of perfection in front of me, and I blast off with those shoulders, and with that heart, and when I touch that wall, I have no idea if I was first or third or eighth, and I closed my eyes and I closed my fists, I said it and I meant it, 'I couldn't have done it a fingernail faster!' I didn't leave a fingernail in that pool. And I looked up at the electronic scoreboard and I was sixth. And this kid didn't go to Mexico City . . . I went and shook the hands of the three girls who were moving on."

[video](#)

2015

Lake Forest College Commencement: She's at the Trials.

"And then it came, the Olympic Trials, a little too early for me. I was stunned walking down that pool deck to the 100-meter backstroke. Three are going on [*long pause, as if she's deciding which version to tell*] to the [?] the elite heat, Mexico City, United States uniforms, and five are going on to the rest of their lives.

...

"And now I launched with a vision, and I blasted off the blocks with *my* shoulders and *my* heart. And when I touched that wall, I had no idea if I was first or eighth or where in between. And I closed my eyes, I closed my fists, I said it, and I meant it, 'I couldn't have done it a fingernail faster.' I took a deep breath, and I looked up at the electronic scoreboard. And I was sixth. This kid didn't go to Mexico City. I never stood on the Olympic podium and bowed my head for a medal." (10:07)

[clip](#)

2015

***Find a Way*: Not at the Trials**

"It was my last 100-meter backstroke. The last hoorah, with an outside, desperate chance at the elite Trials. Top three would go on to compete for a coveted spot on the Mexico City team. The other five would go on to the rest of our lives.

"I am sixth. I go over to shake hands with the three girls who are moving on."

Find a Way, p. 50

2016

[FFA](#) Convention: At the Trials and not at the Trials

[*She's ostensibly speaking to actor Christopher Reeve.*]

“Yeah, I was walking down the pool deck, Olympic Trials. I believed I was going to be an Olympian . . . One more 100-meter backstroke. Am I going onto the elite Olympic Trials? Or am I going on to the rest of my life?

. . .

“And when I touched the wall, I didn’t look up, I closed my eyes, I closed my fists, I said it and I meant it, ‘I couldn’t have done it a fingernail faster.’ I took a deep breath and looked up. And I didn’t make it.”

[video](#)

2019

Nyad’s Demonstrates In Excuse-Making Mastery

In [a letter to the then International Swimming Hall of Fame director Brent Rutemiller](#), Nyad makes excuses for using place rather than time. After this, her Olympic Trials stories change.

“I remember your concern that I spoke incorrectly about the qualification process for the Olympic Trials **at one point**. The gist of my story was that I did not qualify and the point was to share the life lesson that came with not making it. Could I look back at the discipline, the dedication, over my young years and feel confident that there were no regrets that I could have given more? Absolutely no regrets. And that’s what the audience, non-swimmers, took from that story. I spoke with a couple of Olympians after that conversation with you. John Naber, for example. They found it meaningless, especially some fifty years later, the details of whether Trials qualification was based on time or place in a heat.

“But you respectfully pointed out that your job is to protect the sport and the correct details are important. I respected that and have never made that mistake since.”

2021

[“Seize the Yay”](#): Never good enough to swim in the Olympics

“So, I can’t ever say — it’s been written about me that I would have, maybe could have made the ’68 Olympic team. It’s not true. I wasn’t in that elite category. No, I wasn’t . . . I did my best to try to make it to the Trials, not the team, just to the Trials of the ’68 Olympics. Didn’t make it there.”

[clip](#) (28:40)

2021

“Startup-to-Storefront”: “It actually was by time”

“So, it’s the night. One more 100-meter backstroke. I’ve qualified for the finals, and the top three in this heat are going to go. It actually was by time — the top three *times* are going to go to the Trials.”

[clip](#)

That’s a [distinction without a difference](#). The top three times in a final are always the top three places. What’s more, if everyone in the heat beat the time standard, everyone would qualify for the Trials. If no one beat the standard, no one would qualify.

2022

“No Barriers”: “Not Olympic material”

HOST: “You were like nearly an Olympic swimmer, right? You were real close to making the Olympics.” (38:41)

NYAD: “Well, you know, I’d . . . first of all, I need to correct you because I was a decent sprint swimmer, you know, and swam in the U.S. Nationals and all that. But I was not Olympic material. I wasn’t that close. I came close to making it to the Olympic Trials.”

[clip](#), 39:05

...

When Nyad lies about the Olympic Trials, she parasitizes or ignores the accomplishments of many great athletes. Some examples:

- **Laura Novak**, the 14-year-old Dearborn, Michigan, high schooler who qualified for the 1968 Trials in the 100-meter backstroke. At the Trials, she qualified for [the finals and placed sixth](#), the place Nyad often awards herself.
- **Kaye Hall**, who won the 100 back at the Trials and went on to [set a world record in Mexico City](#). (See image on right.)
- **Jane Swaggerty**, who took second at the Trials and [bronze at the Olympics](#).
- The five U.S. women who set nine world records at the Trials: [Hall](#), [Pokey Watson](#) (200 back), [Catie Ball](#) (100/200 breast), [Claudia](#)



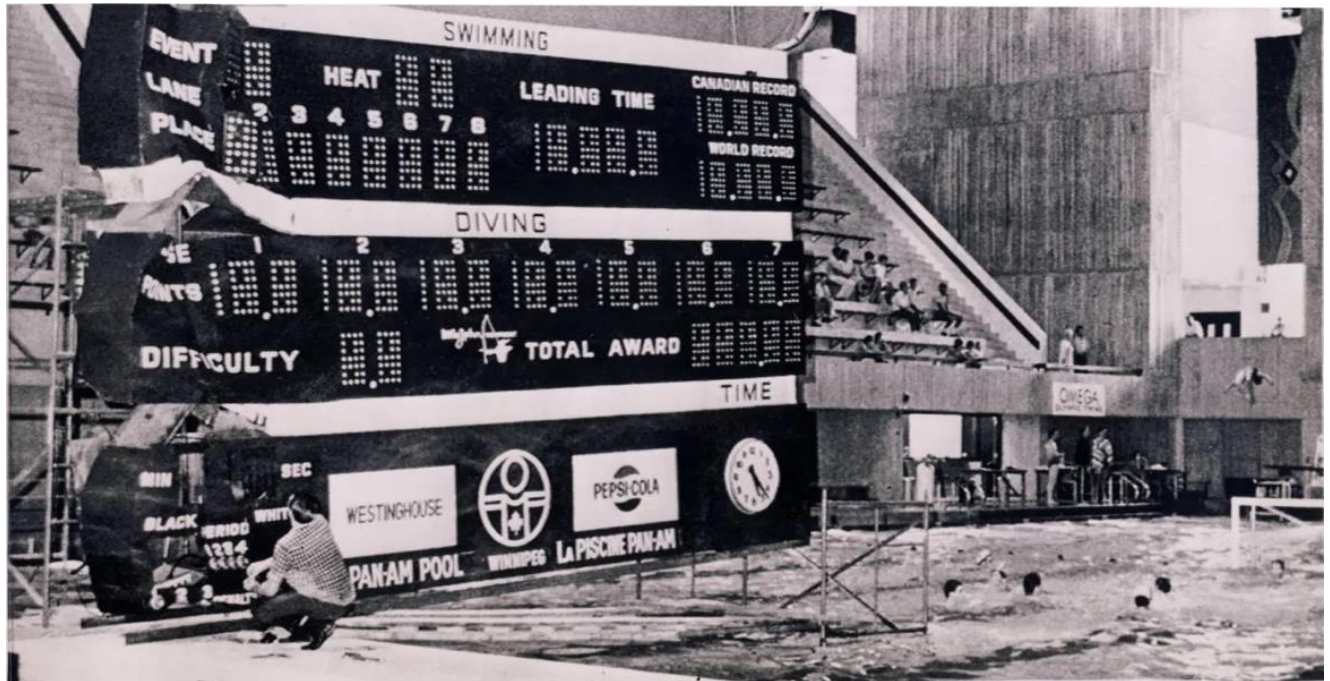
Above: Kaye Hall after setting the 100 backstroke World record in the 1968 Olympic final. Via the [Longview, Washington, Daily News](#).

[Kolb](#) (200/400 IM), and [Debbie Meyer](#)

(200/400/800 free).

- **The U.S. women's team** that went on to dominate the Mexico City Olympics. [It won 11 out of 14 events and 26 of 42 medals.](#)

When Nyad talks about the 1968 Olympics, she never names anyone but herself.



Above: Damaged electronic scoreboard at the 1967 Pan American Games in Winnipeg. Image reproduced in the [Wisconsin State Journal](#), July 23, 1967.

Electronic scoring for swimming had just begun in '67. Omega rolled it out for the first time for the Pan Am Games (pictured). As you can see, they had some kinks to work out. (I am grateful to a real competitor at the 1968 Trials who mentioned the damaged scoreboard in Winnipeg.

Compiled by Daniel Slosberg • daniel@nyadfactcheck.com

Last update: 3 Mar 2026



nyadfactcheck.com