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PROFESSIONAL MARATHON SWIMMING
By Joe Grossman, Secretary, WPMSF
World Professional Marathon Swimming Federation

As the popular series of jokes begin: "I have good news and bad news."

First, the good news. The City of Chicago has announced that a 15-mile race will be held on Lake Michigan in the week of August 20 to 26 (exact date and other details to be announced later). This race, originally planned for last year, was postponed in order to permit the City's special events department to make proper plans for an event which promises to be the North American highlight of the international pro long-distance swimming circuit for 1972.

The Lake Michigan event will have the sanction of the World Professional Marathon Swimming Federation, under whose guidelines the competition is being staged.

Thus, five sanctioned international races are now on tap for the coming season. On July 9, the 19th annual race from Capri to Naples, Italy, will be held over the 18-mile course. The action moves to North America for the seventh yearly 24-hour team race at La Tuque, Quebec, on July 23 and ~~24~~ 24; the annual 28-mile Saguenay River race at Chicoutimi, Que., will be staged July 29; the 18th annual crossing of Lac St. Jean at Reberval, Que., will take place on August 6, and the Chicago event will end the season as matters now stand.

One professional race has already been held, a ~~21~~ 21-mile event, called The First Arab Nile Marathon, on the River Nile at Cairo on April 9. In the competition, ^{supposedly} restricted to entrants from Arab nations, Ossama Rashed of ~~Egypt~~ Egypt was the winner in 8:19.16, with Mahmoud Khamis of Syria second in 8:28.16; Hani Hemat of Egypt third in 8:32.53; Marwen Saleh of Syria fourth in 8:33.50, and Baher Hamid of Egypt fifth in 8:52.10.

Three-time World Champion Marathoner Abdel Latif Abou-Heif of Egypt was female 10th in 10:14.55, finishing immediately before the first woman, reigning ~~marathon~~ World Champion Shadia El ~~Ruzim~~ Rageb of Egypt, whose time was 10:23.36.

As in most Egyptian-conducted long-distance races, amateurs swam the same course along with the pro entrants, although their results were listed separately. Magdi Mandour of Egypt, the first amateur to touch in, actually touched out the pro winner, Rashad, by 7 seconds.

Among the entrants in the "All-Arab Marathon" were Hans Schmitt of Switzerland, who was fifth amateur finisher, and Dobri Dinev of Bulgaria, who did not complete the course. This race did not have WPMSF sanction due to the intermixture of amateurs and pros (a Federation policy designed to protect amateur swimmers) and to the restrictive entry policies set by the race organizers.

Now the bad news. If current trends continue, professional marathon swimming races may soon go the way of professional wrestling matches and become merely amusements, rather than tests of swimming ability and skill. The committee organizing the ~~28-mile~~ Saguenay River race has announced that its 1972 edition is to be a team race, with 12 two-swimmer teams stroking the 28 miles from Bagetville to Chicoutimi.

The team concept in pro marathon racing was originated at La Tuque in 1964, when sportsmen in that ~~swimming~~ swim-crazy community sought a method through which their one-third-of-a-mile-circumference Lac St. Louis could accommodate a marathon swimming race. Their plan -- teams of two swimmers competing for 24 hours to determine which team could swim ~~further~~ the ~~most~~ longest distance -- has proved both workable and crowd-pleasing. But in the strict sense, it is not a true marathon swimming race and has been a subject of debate within the WPMSF for the past several years.

Since 1964, 30-hour team races were tried ~~in~~ in Quebec City and 24-hour events in Santa Fe, Argentina, and both were discontinued -- to the relief of long-distance swimming purists!

Monetary problems have now prompted officials of the Marathen du Saguenay to bow to the wishes of pursestring holders in Chicoutimi, who have agreed to back a team race or nothing. To prevent the sport from ~~disappearing~~ disappearing from their river, the race committee agreed reluctantly, and hope to "get well" financially and return to the fine 28-mile individuals' race of previous years.

Each swimmer in the race will be followed by his own boat, and team members will spell one-another by diving in and touching their mates, who will then climb aboard their craft to rest while awaiting their next call. Chicoutimi city fathers believe this type of race will attract larger crowds than in previous years -- although it is difficult to imagine why more people would flock to see fewer swimmers swim half as far as in past races.

NEWS ITEMS: Commander C. Gerald Forsberg, OBE, President of the Channel Swimming Association, a Marathen Swimming Hall of Fame electee and author of numerous books on the sport, was presented the Davids-Wheeler Trophy for outstanding contributions to long-distance swimming in London's House of Commons last month. The presentation was made during the annual general meeting of the British Long Distance Swimming Association. The trophy memorializes two deceased WPMSF members, Irving Davids of Massachusetts and Capt. Roger Wheeler of Rhode Island.

Hall of Famer Greta Andersen, who retired from marathoning in 1965 holding 17 unbroken race and solo records, has announced she will attempt her sixth English Channel crossing in September! The former Danish Olympic gold medalist (100 meters, 1948) is the only woman to have made five successful Channel swims and, if successful, she will join ~~Bruker~~ Brojen Das of Pakistan as the only six-time conquerers of the Dover Straits.

Miss Andersen was moved to "unretire" when Holland's Gerrie Ebbelaar broke Gretz's 1964 England-to-France mark by 2 hours, 57 minutes last summer. The Los Alamitos, California, swimmer is determined to recapture the east-bound record before retiring ~~him~~ "for good" at the age of 45.