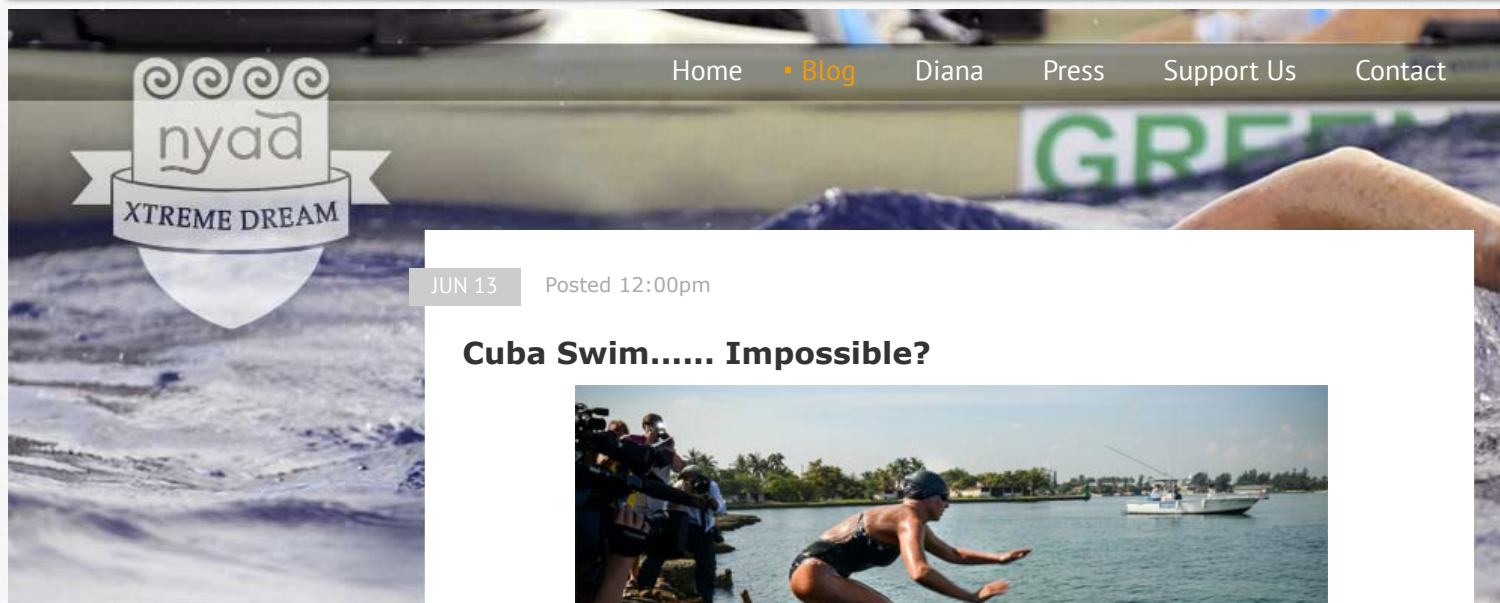




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JUN 13 Posted 12:00pm

Cuba Swim..... Impossible?



Chloe McCardel is widely touted as the top ocean swimmer in the world today. The 29-year-old Australian holds most of the current prestigious records, including the double, non-stop crossing of the English Channel.

When Chloe announced early this year that she was inspired to try the epic swim of our time, Cuba-to-Florida, emotions ranging A-to-Z boiled in my brain.

First, this is *My Ocean*. I'm the one who has gone to the nth degree of effort and innovation....FOUR times now.....to make it across. Well, it's not my ocean. Many swimmers have tried, dating back to 1950. (And I respectfully, of course, am not referring to Cubans tragically attempting to swim out of their country.)

All athletes have competition. But in this sport, the ultra endurance swims, it's usually not other swimmers who present the challenge. It's Mother Nature herself....and those forces in this particular ocean are monumental.

Tuesday night I sent a message to Chloe in Havana, wishing her a safe and successful trip....and kidding with her that, if she makes it, she should wait for me on the other shore so we could celebrate together.

And Tuesday night, into Wednesday morning, I went into full "*sympathy pain*" mode, knowing exactly the excitement, the nerves, the overwhelming anticipation of the unknown Chloe was experiencing.

But shall I go so far as to say I was rooting wholeheartedly for her? I'm only human and the scenario I was hoping would play out was that she would give a three-day, valiant, heroic effort but fall short of the Florida shore in the end.

I swam an all-day training session yesterday so was in the water when she started, about 10am EST. Arrived at Bonnie's (my best friend and Head Handler) house by 8pm EST. We started following Chloe's tracker....and texting our Xtreme Dream Navigator and Ops Chief.

Our hearts were in our throats.

It's akin to an athlete in a sport where one performs first, such as gymnast. You want to beat the best when they're at their best. So you follow the first. There they are, showing their courage, their talent, as Chloe was doing yesterday.

I was pretty sure I wouldn't be sleeping for the entire duration of her swim.

Then **WHAM!** Our navigator calls to say she has been pulled, about 11 hours in, due to

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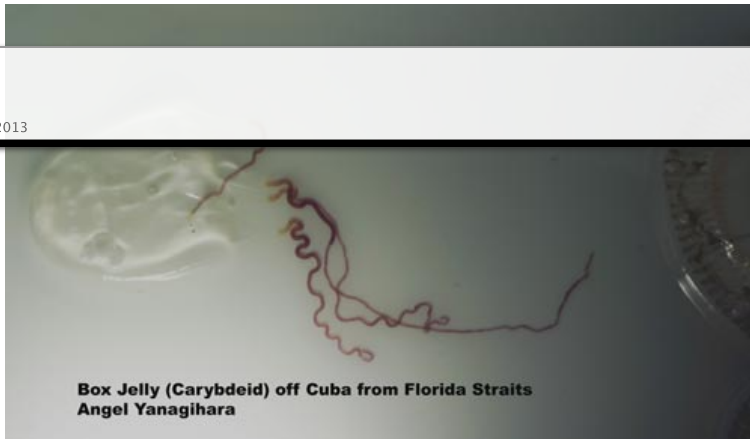
Join the Xtreme Dream Team!
Show your support for Diana with
a shirt, cap or wristband!

debilitating jellyfish stings.

[4 captures](#)

18 Jun 2013 - 12 Sep 2013

JUL AUG SEP
2012 **2013** 2014
About this capture



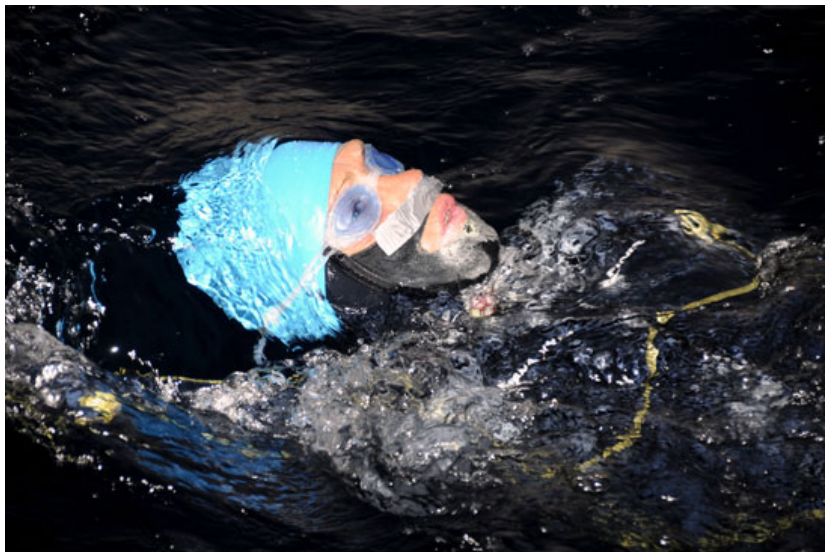
As one who has suffered those other-worldly Box jellyfish stings on three frightening occasions now, I promise you that is NOT what I wished for Chloe. After the stings of 2011, I continued to swim for 24 hours but it was hopeless. I was literally wounded. I wouldn't wish that pain on even my worst enemy.

I admit I didn't want to witness Chloe's triumph on the Florida shore. But not this.

I know only too well the crushing disappointment of that night-time boat ride back to Key West. After the huge push of grueling training, the months of organizing, government permits, fund-raising, research....it's literally gut-wrenching to have the Dream plucked from its lofty perch.

But we will follow Chloe McCardel again. She will achieve impressive feats, to add to her already-sterling resume. And I will heartily root for her in the future, no matter where she swims, even from Cuba.

We are a very few, the truly extreme ultra marathon swimmers of this blue planet. We may vie for titles and records but in the end our journeys are far more than athletic marks.



Diana swimming backstroke 18 hours into her 2012 swim, after receiving multiple jellyfish stings. Photo: Christi Barli

We are testing the limits of human will and endurance potential.

Chloe McCardel dared to swim the toughest, most dangerous ocean passage in the world. And, as the expression goes,

"Who dares, wins"

As for me, I have worked tirelessly since my last attempt 2012 to come up with some solution to these darn jellyfish. No wet suits allowed. Neoprene, a floating aid, not permitted in the sport. But I have worked with the Swim Tech company FINIS to develop a very thin suit, in consultation with the world's leading expert on Box Jellyfish, Dr. Angel Yanagihara of University of Hawaii. Then there are surgeon's gloves and thin latex booties....and a mask that makes swimming (*and breathing lol*) cumbersome.

All this gear both slows me down and tires me more than swimming free, but what other choice do we swimmers have in these waters?

And with the focus today on jellyfish, we can't overlook the swirling eddies all the way across these Florida Straits.

Last year about this time, another powerful Australian swimmer, Penny Palfrey, was heading beautifully toward Florida when an eddy grabbed hold of her and her boats and literally spun them around in full-circle compass headings which they just could not escape.

I've been trapped in those, too.

Chloe and Penny, welcome to my world.

So now the stage is set. Cuba-Florida is once again My Ocean. Is it possible? I must believe there is at least a remote chance. But the paramount attitude for me now is that, like Chloe, I need to summon the courage to dare the crossing.

Brava, Chloe. Brava for daring to try.

