



AUG 18

Posted 8:36pm

## 1 hour before the swim



photo: Christi Barli

**Saturday August 18, 2012, 2:43pm EST, 1 hour before the swim began**

In her white terrycloth robe, bathing suit underneath, goggles in hand, Diana made her way on foot across the grass with a Cuban escort to where her escort boat was docked and sat awhile to chat. It's an impromptu chat—everything will be from now on. For all the years of training, planning, making adjustments after learning from experience, this swim will happen as it does and she knows that better than anyone.

"It's going to be a rough start," she says, "but hopefully by sundown it will calm down." The weather window shortened; the rougher seas expected on Wednesday are now forecast closer to Tuesday, the day she will have to finish, thus this early mad dash to get going. "It's a good call to get out of here," says Diana, "This feels right. I'll get through the rough part at the beginning while I'm full of adrenalin."

Someone asks what she sees while she's swimming. In fact, Diana sees nothing but the handler at the appointed feeding or hydration times. "People ask me after a training swim, 'Wasn't that a beautiful sunset or did you see that great sailboat passing by, but I rarely see a thing. I don't go to that visual place,'" she says. "If you start thinking visually, every little movement or shadow in the water seems like a shark. I focus only on that streamer and go where the boat goes. That way I stay on course."

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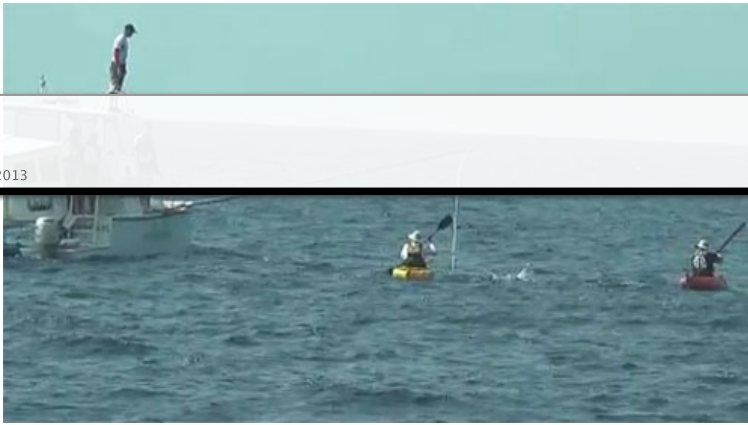


photo: Gunnar Schrader

Cuban customs stops by, as does head handler Bonnie, it's all hustle and bustle, but the swimmer seems calm, even philosophical. "What the oddest thing is, a lot of what I've experienced in these last three years of training has put me in mind of when I retired from swimming the first time." (This was age 30, after accomplishing the farthest unaided shore-to-shore swim in history.) "You know athletes retire when they're young and still in good shape, and I've been having all those feelings of withdrawal that I had then—will I ever be this good at something again? Will I feel this passion again? But what's different this time is that I'm so full of appreciation. There's been so much to appreciate, the discovery of it, the goal setting, the discipline. I've enjoyed the three years of this push. I've been so focused and intense. It's hard to live this kind of intensity in a non-sports world, but I'm looking forward to applying it to the rest of my life and all I plan to do."

--Candace Hogan, reporting from Havana



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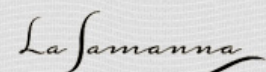
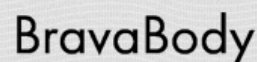
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