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The Dream Team Update

Dear TEAM,

I've passed panic now. That all came to a crashing head last Thursday. Did an 8-hour swim in a very rough sea on Wednesday. After 32 days of non-stop cool rains and winds from due East, the surface temps had dropped to 82. That's getting to be my lowest threshold. Was dehydrated in 88, 89 of mid-summer, during that 24-hour swim, but I know 82 would mean shivering and suffering for a long 2 1/2 days. Went to the pool the day after that 8-hour and before I could turn off the ignition, a hard, sobbing cry overtook me. I let it spill forth for 90 or so minutes.

It was all so perfect. I took all I knew about my body and the sport from years ago and put together the perfect year of training. Late July, early August, I was audacious enough to actually think to myself that this swim was going to be easy for me. Was ultra confident, in both body and mind. The crew assembled, meaning you, is first rate. So much innovation, so much smart analysis, such varied and intelligent input, such great spirit. The Gulf Stream the warmest in 45 years.

If I had accepted foregoing Cuba, diving off that inflatable dock in the ocean, orswimming from some other friendly destination, I would have had all the weather windows of August, calmly laid out before me. But it's Cuba in my heart. It's always been Cuba. Perhaps I was too stubborn, not imaginative enough. I couldn't let go of that vision of walking off the Cuban shore, looking back at Havana and beginning the journey, the famous journey, to the United States.

The Cuban visas came through the last week of August. And it's been since that time that the winds have blown... and blown...and blown.

You, my best friends, have sent me wise messages of patience and strength. I've needed your words. And I've taken them deep into my being. I've been for the most part steely throughout these long 14 months. I suppose that's the factor that is behind making these swims to start with. But in more recent weeks, I've faltered. There have been days of doubts, anger, frustration. And then came last Thursday. A week ago today. The WALL.

That 90 minutes of emotional upheaval ripped me apart. It's one thing to pour your best self into a perhaps impossible achievement, and not be able to complete it. But it's another unfathomable story altogether, not to be able to even give it a try. So there I was, sobbing, my mind racing with the anguish of all that was so right. This was my year. And now it all seemed to be evaporating, day by windy day.

For for the first time in 14 months, I waffled on training that day. Went into the locker room to get into my suit but so deflated that I put my clothes back on and drove away. Just didn't have the heart for it. Half way home, something braced my innards. I pulled a u-turn, went back, got my suit on this time and swam the workout. Then a few phone calls:

Candace: "This year has been about the high of commitment for you. You've inspired not only us but yourself. Nobody can ever take from you what you've put into this. Feel it. Find that commitment again." Jenifer Clark, Queen of the Gulf Stream: "The water temps still 85/86 in the Stream. Not time to pack it in." Dane Clark, meteorologist: "The window of hope smaller than it was, but October has historically produced periods of warm, calm seas in the Straits."

Bonnie: "It's not over until it's over. AND IT'S NOT OVER!!!!"

I am trying hard to express just how difficult these last weeks have been. Put the duress of the yearlong training routine, the exasperating process of procuring the visas, and the resilience needed to raise the funds all together and all of that combined is nowhere close to the stress of watching these winds continue. Of getting forecast after forecast that tell me still not good for yet another 5 to 6 days.

It's not just my own heartache that comes with the possibility of the Dream being dashed for now, after I worked so hard to put it all together....and thought I had succeeded in every aspect of the Expedition, to be prepared to handle each and every detail that might come our way. It's you. It's the Team. I appreciate, believe me, that you've all let me know not to worry about you. You've been gracious, compassionate teammates. But it's only human nature to feel

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the weight of your hopes, your excitement, your support, your willingness to take this journey with me. How will I cope if I don't even get the chance?

Well, now we're a week past that day of The WALL. In the end the Easterlies blew for 36 straight days. Then the storms South of Cuba started switching the pattern. There has been hope that a calm will come when they finish traveling through. In fact, the Nicole system that just skirted us here in the Keys and headed to Miami and up the Eastern Seaboard, has today created the calmest, most perfect day of the last couple of months. Very light 5mph

winds, out of the West (East the worst. The Stream flows hard to the East, meaning a wind coming from the East rams right up against it and forms sharp peaks. The Stream has been showing 10 to 14 foot waves for more than a month now. Next worst for me are winds from the North. I'm trying to swim North. Best would be no wind at all. Next would be SW or W.)

I literally felt my heart pounding with hope yesterday, in anticipation of some calm following Nicole. And, although it's good to look out today and see the near-glass, it's only going to last today. By tonight midnight, NE at 20 knots for maybe 3 or 4 days. Then another gathering of tropical storms below Cuba. Then we see if that system can pass and bring a longer period of calm behind.

I have not slept through the night in a long, long time. Trying hard to keep my resolve in tact. Training. Eating well. Making sure body and mind are ready, if the window does in fact materialize. But the anxiety is high indeed. I can't quit. It's been too big, too authentic, this Dream. The water temps will be the determinate. If the true Fall changes come and the temps slip down to 80 and below, my body can't take that low for 2 1/2 days. I'm perhaps rationalizing now but I'm telling myself that the extreme high's of the summer, that went up to a scorching 90, were making me dehydrated. I couldn't work in that heat without feeling ill. But the cooling off to 85/86 will be perfect.

So as long as we hold at these temps, here I am.

Perhaps not good for the "General" to admit weakness to the "Troops". I'm still strong. I can still visualize the FL shore. Time has not run out on me yet. Yes, I'm still here.

sending love to you all.....missing you all, very much,
diana

p.s. If we do get our chance, we won't have the long, leisurely window that summer can bring. It's going to be short. For that reason the Ops Team is going to have to kick into action IN A HURRY. Email out to Ops Team in next couple of days with some new instructions, some new personnel, some review of already laid plans.

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