

Major Issues in Diana Nyad's ISHOF Submission

1. Forgery of Bonnie Stoll's Letter to Brent Rutemiller

Bonnie did not write the letter to Rutemiller. Whoever wrote Nyad's letter to Rutemiller — presumably Nyad — wrote Bonnie's letter too. (See ["Notes on Bonnie Stoll's Letter. . . ."](#))

2. Florida Straits Open Water Swimming Association (FOWSA)

Two packet documents mention FOWSA, an organization that does not exist. When Nyad writes about "Rule #8.6 of the Florida Straits Open Water Swimming Association," she is writing about a rule that no one else besides she and Steven Munatones have ever seen.¹

3. Speaking (and Only Speaking) of Rules

Nyad's swim had no rules. She knows this a problem, which is why she and her team talk about rules so much: "It defies logic that forty-four individuals would collude to support a swim that was not carried out within the fair and accepted rules of the sport." (letter attributed to Bonnie)

For any other marathon swimmer besides Diana Nyad, the "fair and accepted rules of the sport" are English Channel rules unless stated otherwise IN WRITING BEFORE THE SWIM. Here we are eight years later and still no written rules.²

4. Misdirection

Nyad uses several rhetorical strategies to avoid confronting the real accusations against her:

1. Build straw men.³
2. Dehumanize her skeptics.⁴
3. Trumpet her nobility and her good name (and, of course, the honor of her crew).⁵
4. Pity plays.⁶
5. Threats of legal action.⁷

. . . and others I'm sure I missed.

5. WOWSA Submission (Nyad to Steven)

A charade⁸ in which Nyad pretends that WOWSA is an objective governing organization and that Steven is a neutral party. Perhaps this is for Brent's benefit. I suspect that as soon as Steven and/or Nyad learned that Cameron Bellamy intended to swim from Cuba to Florida in the summer of 2019, they began racing to get her swim sanctioned one way or another. With Cameron set to go in September, Steven gave up on the ISHOF and ratified Nyad's swim on August 14, 2019. However, Bellamy learned on August 21 that the U.S. government had denied him permits for the swim. Nyad may have worked to make that happen.

6. Withholding the Three Critical Documents

Three documents have the potential to eliminate the two fundamental problems with Nyad's swim: the absence of rules and the presence of unqualified observers who produced inadequate documentation. But Steven didn't include those documents among the materials.

1. **FLORIDA STRAITS RULES:** Steven Munatones has said that he drew up rules for the swim. He chose, however, not to include them in the packet.
2. **OBSERVER LOGS:** In the WOWSA submission, Nyad writes that Bonnie Stoll has the "real-time hand-written logs of both Independent Observers." In her letter to Brent, Nyad says that these logs "account for every single minute" of the swim. Steven did not include the logs in the packet. I can think of only one reason he would choose to omit them: they contain no more (and possibly less) than [what Nyad eventually posted](#). The posted logs, ostensibly transcribed from the originals, consist of desultory entries with hours-long gaps toward the end.⁹

¹ An [Openwaterpedia entry for FOWSA](#) *does* exist. Openwaterpedia is one of Steven's sites. He created the original FOWSA entry in 2014. In 2018, he backdated FOWSA's founding to 2010. You can see how the original and backdated ones differ [here](#). He edited the text [one more time](#). The entry now states that FOWSA "was created in 2010 to propose and adjudicate the rules and conditions under which Diana Nyad attempted her crossings of the Florida Straits and to authenticate the rules as written were followed."

Nyad devotes a good chunk of the end of the WOWSA Submission to the work she'd be willing or not willing to do for FOWSA. "As for the Florida Straits Open Water Swimming Association," she writes in part, "I would be willing, if WOWSA also so wishes, to become the President of this entity."

I reiterate: FOWSA does not exist.

² Other crew members on rules:

- Observer Janet Hinkle said that Diana was "**was seeking to meet all the requirements of an open water swim.**"
- Kayaker Russell Pantelis: "**There is no doubt in my mind that Diana Nyad completed this epic swim under the rules stipulated.**"
- Jellyfish expert Angel Yanagihara writes about the "**well articulated rules of the swim (no touching the vessel, no buoyancy assistance or forward motion help) of which all team members were made aware.**"
- Handler Dee Brady: "I worked for Diana for four years on all her previous attempts and each one she would have it no other way than **by the book. It was her rules and we obeyed them.**"

But there's no book. I wonder what Dee Brady thought when [Diana grabbed the boat in 2012](#).

³ Straw men are issues that one creates to substitute for topics away from which they want to draw attention. Since Diana never directly addresses any of the major accusations against her, she builds a lot of straw men. Some examples:

7½-hour feeding gap: "My understanding is that a couple of these "haters" are fixated on a mis-report from way out at sea, that Diana had gone seven hours without drinking any fluids...." (from letter attributed to Bonnie)

When a 7½ hour feeding gap appeared on [Nyad's blog](#), experienced marathon swimmers naturally wondered what was going on. Nyad, of course, denies it happened. Whether it did or not, we'll probably never know. But no one is "fixated" on this issue. I don't raise it at all on [the Cuba page](#).

Getting out on the boat: "It seems the crux of these three contending my Cuba Swim was not legitimate is their allegation that during both nights I climbed onto the boat and rested, while the boat glided forward faster than my swimming speed, and then I slithered back into the water before dawn." (from Nyad's letter to Rutemiller)

Detractors have mentioned this as a possibility, but it is far from the "crux" of anyone's argument that Nyad's swim is not legitimate.

44 people: "It defies logic that forty-four individuals would collude to support a swim that was not carried out within the fair and accepted rules of the sport." (from letter attributed to Bonnie)

This is a common trope that Nyad and Munatones use. Yet none of Nyad's detractors (including myself) have ever claimed that her entire team colluded. I have spoken with two people on Nyad's crew — observer Janet Hinkle and captain Scott Thomas — and I'm sure that neither one was in on Nyad's scheme. Whatever that scheme turns out to have been, I'm certain that only a few crew members knew about it.

One other thing: as far as I can tell, there weren't 44 people on the water with Nyad. As with all else, she has been flexible with her crew count, going down as low as 30. The highest reliable number I can find is 40, which I extracted from ["The Xtreme Dream Team: A Record Breaking Operation."](#)

(Straw men, cont.)

Olympic trials qualification: “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 give 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.” (from Nyad’s letter to Rutemiller)

Nyad often claims to have swum in the Olympic trials and placed sixth. That’s the big lie. Here, she takes a minor but related problem, pretends it’s the fundamental issue, solves it (maybe), and hopes this deflects attention away from the central untruth.

⁴ In Nyad’s world, it’s us (good, decent people who believe everything Diana Nyad says) vs. them (malicious, jealous non-entities who want to corrupt the righteous, i.e., the people who love and worship Diana Nyad).

- “I don’t care a whit about these three. I have no regard for them whatsoever.”
- “The other three I’ve mentioned come under the syndrome of ‘haters are going to hate’. Nothing I can do about them and I have no intention of addressing them directly. . . .”
- “These few negative, petty individuals . . .”

- “But when their malicious and unfounded accusations reach the ears of decent people who don’t know any better, I must speak up and defend myself.”
- “It is not only a grave insult to Diana, to hear these few haters express their vitriol, but it is an unsportsmanlike and unworthy affair, to have Diana’s dedicated team experience aspersions cast upon their character as well.”

⁵ I know of no other swimmers who publicly proclaim their high-mindedness as often as Diana does. Actually, I know of no other swimmers who publicly proclaim their high-mindedness at all. Legit swimmers don’t need to. Perhaps this comes under the syndrome of “the lady doth protest too much”:

- “It has come to my attention that there primarily exist three people . . . who malign **my honorable character.**”
- “. . . their largely unsuccessful, yet relentless, attempts to sully **my good name.**”
- “Believe me, I sleep very easily, no doubts about what I’ve done or **the fair and noble way I’ve gone about my life and my swimming career.**” (C.f. [Walter Poenisch](#), the six women who [preceded her around Manhattan](#), doing a “happy dance” when Chloë McCardel failed in her attempt to swim from Cuba to Florida, etc.)

⁶ Nyad [appeals for sympathy](#) to deflect from real issues. Some examples:

“We put in all the lonely, grueling training hours. We suffered as she suffered in her painful failure attempts. And we all deserved the emotional triumph on Smathers Beach . . .” (“Bonnie” to Rutemiller)

“As the sun set, I swam into a swarm of what we later determined to be the extremely dangerous box jellyfish. I have never experienced such utter pain. I went into anaphylactic shock, struggling to catch some air. My spinal cord went through a period of semi-paralysis. I had the sensation that my body was dipped in hot burning oil. I screamed: “Help me! Bonnie, help me!” And I started counting aloud, to somehow survive the intense pain.” (History, p. 9)

Box jellyfish always sit with the dignitaries at Nyad’s pity parties. Note that the highly toxic species do not appear in the Florida Straits. Nothing Nyad says about box jellies is true. She was never in danger.

“Perhaps the person who was willing to challenge this epic ocean five times deserved a little luck.”
(Triumph, p. 6)

Maybe more an example of the [Gambler’s Fallacy](#) than Appeal to Pity. Either way, it’s not a rational argument for the legitimacy of her swim.

⁷ Nyad makes two veiled lawsuit threats to coerce people into remaining silent about her lies:

1. Against the three bad guys: “This is patently absurd, to the point of laughable. Were we to, for instance, go to court with this . . .”
2. Against Bruce Wigo: “This is outright slander and I cannot stand by and allow him to make such preposterously untrue statements.”

Threat #1 is the key to the whole Cuba-Florida mess. After setting up the two-nights-on-the-boat straw man, Nyad responds with her usual non-evidence:

Were we to, for instance, go to court with this, the truth of my swimming every stroke from Havana to Key West, every minute of the 52 hours, 54 minutes, unaided, never a moment’s help in either staying afloat or in moving forward, would be proven quickly and unequivocally.

But the packet represents her attempt to prove exactly that. So, why wait for court? Why not provide the documents that prove she swam from Cuba to Florida under her own power? The answer is obvious: she doesn’t provide those documents because she can’t. Either they don’t exist, or they prove something different than she wants them to prove.

⁸ Evidence that the WOWSA submission is just for show:

“Dear Steven Munatones and Officials of the World Open Water Swimming Association”

Just an educated guess, but I’d bet no other WOWSA “officials” (if any such exist) ever saw this document. For the purposes of this discussion, Steven = WOWSA.

“(Bartlett also participated in a lengthy phone call with many members of the marathon swimming community, to answer questions as to our course, the vectors of the Gulf Stream and the vectors of my swim speed, over the entire 110.86-mile journey.)”

Steven organized this call and held it at his home in Huntington Beach. Anyone else associated with WOWSA would have known this. Nyad had no reason to include this information if the submission was meant for Steven.

“NOTE: The real-time hand-written logs of both Independent Observers, Janet Hinkle and Roger McVeigh and can be lent to you for your perusal at any time.” (pp. 2-3)

Steven would have had access to the logs any time he wants. Nyad would not need to remind him. Again, it’s apparent that she did not create this for his benefit or WOWSA’s. She wants someone to know that the logs exist and that she has afforded Steven (but no one else as far as I know) access to them.

⁹ Marathon swimmer Bob Needham posted the following list to Facebook four days after Nyad finished her crossing. Needham is not one of Nyad’s three bad guys, though two others on [the thread](#) (Evan Morrison and Andrew Malinak) are. Regarding the logs, see #12.

So, if you think Nyad was sincere when she implied in the Rutemiller letters that she had only just learned about the skeptics — and that the rule problems and the observer issues were relatively new to her — this thread shows that they were anything but. In fact, Nyad contributed to the discussion. However, she quickly deleted her contributions. Evan Morrison had the foresight to save [a screenshot](#).



Bob Needham

I'd like to know:

- 1) Who are Roger McVeigh and Janet Hinkle?
- 2) What is their experience with marathon swimming or acting as an official observer on a marathon swim?
- 3) Who selected them?
- 4) What criteria were used in selecting them?
- 5) Did they receive any compensation, or have their expenses paid for?
- 6) If they did, who paid them?
- 7) How much were they paid if they were?
- 8) What were they told to record?
- 9) Who gave them instructions on what to record?
- 10) What rules were they told would apply?
- 11) Who told them?
- 12) Can we get a full copy of their logs? (digitally scanned is fine, preferably as a PDF file)

Diana I'm sure you can appreciate the importance of having these questions asked.

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Saturday, September 7, 2013 at 2:23 PM

