

Florida Straits Open Water Swimming Association

1.0 Overview

- 1.1 The Florida Straits Open Water Swimming Association (FSOWSA) is a volunteer-run organization dedicated to the observation, sanctioning, recognition and reporting of open water swimmers and relays that attempt to cross the Florida Straits between Cuba and the U.S.A.

2.0 Scope

- 2.1 FSOWSA recognizes solo swimmers or relays that attempt non-stop, charity or stage swims by swimmers of any nationality of a minimum age of 16 who attempt swims in the Florida Straits.

3.0 History

- 3.1 Swimmers have been attempting to swim between Cuba and the U.S.A. since 1950 including Jose Cortinas, Leo Vigil, Rolando Elejalde, Luciana Nunez, Susie Maroney, Skip Storch, Chris Green, Diana Nyad, Penny Paltrey and Chloe McCardel.
- 3.2 There have been two recognized crossings, both conducted under different conditions:
- Non-stop swim with a shark cage and protective mesh: 22-year-old Susie Maroney of Australia swam 111.8 miles (180 km) in 24 hours 31 minutes in May 1997
 - Stage swim with fins and snorkel: 68-year-old Walter Poenisch of the U.S.A. swam 128.8 miles (207.2 km) in 34 hours 15 minutes in July 1978

4.0 Conditions

- 4.1 Open water swimming is a sport inherent with risks.
- 4.2 When humans swim offshore from Cuba, they can encounter a host of obstacles to their success: currents, eddies, venomous marine life, hypothermia, hyperthermia, sharks, collisions with boats, and strong winds and turbulence due to unexpected weather conditions. Because of the great distances involved between Cuba and Florida, these conditions present significant risks to swimmer and crew.
- 4.3 FSOWSA requires that the safety of the swimmer and crew is placed above all other priorities. In the event that a swimmer encounters currents, eddies, venomous marine life, sharks, strong winds or turbulence that cause unnecessary or unknown risk to swimmer or crew, the swimmer should be pulled immediately from the water.

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- 4.4 In the case of dangerous, emergency or questionable conditions occur or appear that jeopardize the safety of the swimmers or crew, the swim or relay must be stopped, postponed or modified.

5.0 Guidelines

- 5.1 An open water swim in the Florida Straits shall be a swim by a swimmer or relay that starts on one shore and ends at another shore under the swimmer's own efforts and power. Swimmers shall receive no propulsion, push, buoyancy, increased warmth or cooling from any equipment. That is, a swimmer's normal speed should not be enhanced by equipment.
- 5.2 Swimmers may wear a swimsuit and a swim cap, and use earplugs and goggles. The swimmer may also wear a stinger suit and use other porous or non-neoprene items (e.g., face mask, gloves, booties, tape) that cover their body and protect against venomous marine life. The items should not enhance the swimmer's normal speed.
- 5.3 A swimmer may also employ GPS technology, swim streamers, glow sticks, disc lights, pace swimmers, shark divers, kayakers, paddle boarders and boats to help them navigate from shore to shore. These items or people may help with the navigation of the swimmers, but may not enhance the normal speed of the swimmers.
- 5.4 In light of the previous attempts and successes of swimmers performed in the 20th century, swimmers may also employ fins, snorkels, shark cages and/or jellyfish cages with protective mesh throughout any part of the swim if they so choose.
- A swimmer may also get out of the water and rest on board their escort boat due to dangerous conditions, fatigue, injury, illness or marine life, but must re-enter the water at the same point (as marked by GPS technology) for the swim to continue. In this case, the swim shall be described as a Stage Swim.
- 5.1 The official time of the swim shall be the time the swimmer leaves one shore and reaches the other. The official time shall include all stoppage time including feedings and rest, and in the case of a Stage Swim, the time spent out of the water.
- 5.6 All use of equipment (i.e., swimsuit, swim cap, ear plugs, goggles, stinger suit, protective swimwear, face mask, gloves, booties, tape, GPS, swim streamers, glow sticks, wristwatch, disc lights, kayaks, paddle boards, fins, shark cages, jellyfish cages, protective mesh, snorkels, Shark Shields® or other shark repellent, hand paddles, nose plugs) shall be noted and explained in the Observer's Report.

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5.7 Swimmers may use any type of sunscreen or skin lubrication including lanolin, Vaseline® or any other kind of commercial skin protection on any part of their body. It may be applied by the swimmer or crew.

5.8 The role of pace swimmers, shark divers, kayakers, paddle boarders and crew shall include the navigation, protection, motivation and, if necessary, the rescue of the swimmer.

6.0 Documentation

6.1 FSOWSA provides an Observer's Report as part of its Sanctioning Documentation for solo swims and relays. These documents must be completed in full and returned to FSOWSA to complete the sanctioning requirements. The Observer's Report shall include any supplementary materials or information such as marine charts, GPS readings, weather information, photos and videos.

6.2 In the case of dangerous or questionable conditions occur that jeopardize the safety of the swimmers or crew, the swim or relay must be stopped, postponed or modified. The information and the circumstances must be documented in the Observer's Report.

7.0 Course

7.1 There is no specific course for swims between Cuba and Florida. A swimmer and crew may choose any point on Cuba as the starting point and any point on Florida as the finish point. The official distance shall be the straight-line tangent between the starting point and the finish point.

8.0 Crew

8.1 The crew may include pilots, navigators, oceanographers, shark divers, pace swimmers, observers, kayakers, paddle boarders, mechanics, IT specialists, feeding support and other volunteers. Media representatives, government officials and other individuals approved by the pilot may occasionally board the escort boat. Due to the great distances involved, it is encouraged that at least two (2) escort boats are used.

8.2 The crew is encouraged to support the Observers in the execution of their duties in completing the Observer's Report, especially at night and if the swim proceeds beyond 24 hours. The Observer's Report shall remain on the primary escort boat at all times during the swim. The original Observer's Report shall be archived and copies saved.

8.3 Shark divers may use non-lethal equipment (e.g., poles with a soft end) to direct aggressive or curious marine life away from the swimmer.

8.4 The decisions of the boat captain shall be final in all cases.

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- 8.5 The Observer shall be responsible for documenting the swim or relay and completing the Observer's Report. The Observer shall observe the swimmer and document the activities as detailed as possible and backed up with photographs, charts and videos.
- 8.6 Crew members shall take care to not support, touch, propel or push the swimmers during the swim at any point along the course as long as there is not a rescue or emergency. However, if equipment is used and cannot be put on by the swimmer, then the crew can assist taking care not to propel the swimmer forward.
- 8.7 Swimmers may be handed fuel (food), hydration (drink) or equipment by their crew from an escort boat, stand-up paddle board, kayak, or paddle board. The fuel, hydration or equipment may be provided hand-to-hand or via a feeding stick or water bottle on a rope.