

# GODDESS OF WATER

## Diana Wants To Be No. 1 Marathon Swimmer

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There is probably nothing in a name, but don't try to tell that to a wide-eyed group of male counselors at a summer camp in Ontario, Canada.

The boys are going "Ak-O-Mac" over a neighboring goddess.

Ak-O-Mac (Algonquin meaning "across the water") is the name of a girls' camp run by Swim Hall of Fame Director Buck Dawson directly opposite a boys' camp on Lake Ahmic. One of the counselors at Ak-O-Mac is Diana Nyad, whose name means, literally, "goddess of water", which is exactly what she is to the ogling males of Ahmic and the ones she beats in international marathon swimming competition.

Diana Nyad is from Fort Lauderdale, where she was captain of the girls swimming team at Pine Crest for four years. But if she was conspicuous as the best girl backstroker in Florida, this was nothing compared with the attention she is receiving as the best woman marathon swimmer in the world.

The Ahmic boys are being shunted aside. Eager reporters are moving in from "Sports Illustrated," in order to do a feature article on marathon swimmers. At least, this is the official line. It is suspected to be an excuse for investigating the charms of goddess Diana.

Miss Nyad, you see, is the sort of girl who attracts inquisitive men. She is, as Dawson says, with apologies to his daughter, Marilyn, "by far the most attractive girl swimmer to come along in a long time."

But she is more than that. She is also an excellent student, outstanding tennis player, ambitious actress and amazing swimmer.

And she has guts. Last February, on a dare, she found an opening between ice floes and plunged into Lake Michigan. She stayed there for 30 seconds.

But don't bother daring her to swim the English Channel. Too easy, she says.

"I just have no desire to swim the Channel. Everybody has been encouraging me to

do it, but it doesn't prove a thing. Everybody and his uncle has done it."

No woman, however, has swam a 10-mile marathon race as fast as Diana. She broke the world's record last year in her first season of marathon competition.

But, typical of Miss Nyad, she didn't think much of the accomplishment. "I actually thought I swam a better race in one I didn't finish. It was a 28-mile race at Chicoutimi. Our 25. The best men marathon swimmers in the world were in the race and I stayed with them for the first 22 miles down a river into the bay. But the tide was against us when we got to the bay. The world's champion passed out and had to be dragged into the boat. I swam for an hour in the same place before I had to quit."

A much slower swimmer, who arrived at the bay 2 1/2 hours later, when the tide had reversed, won the race. But Diana had proved something to herself that gave satisfaction above winning.

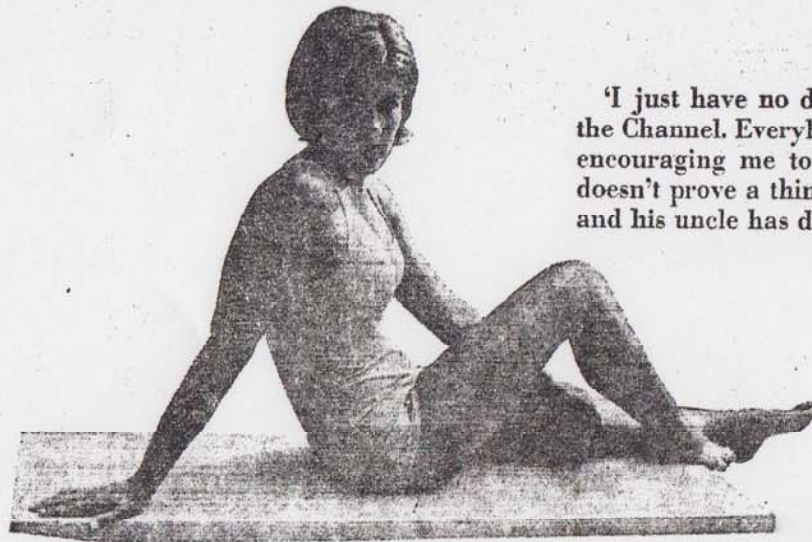
"The water temperature at Chicoutimi was 52 degrees. That might not sound so cold to someone who isn't a swimmer, but the pain becomes excruciating when the grease wears off your body. My legs went completely stiff, but I kept pushing myself to keep going. I felt within myself that I accomplished more in that race than in the one I set the record."

Diana is so intense during a race that she shuts everything else out of her mind. She swam once last summer in Lake Ontario and didn't notice the pollution. She claims she has never even encountered a large fish.

"At least, I never noticed if I did. Most marathon swimmers wear goggles to help them see, but I don't. If I ever did see a shark or anything, I'm sure it would speed up my stroke."

Diana swims about 10,000 meters every day in planned workouts and usually makes one of her famous "island swims."

"Almost every day, we take some of the campers out paddling canoes a few miles to a town across the lake or out to the islands," says Dawson. "We paddle and



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Diana swims along with us. Sometimes the round-trip is as long as 18 miles."

The result of all this swimming is that Diana has developed clocklike precision. She takes exactly 60 strokes per minute and knows precisely how many strokes it takes her to go a mile.

"Sometimes," says Dawson, "we will be going around a course that has been laid out and is supposed to be a certain distance, and at the end she will tell me they ought to check it because it is a little too long or too short."

Miss Nyad is driven by the desire to be

No. 1. She was frustrated as a backstroker because she was never quite good enough to make the Olympic team.

"It didn't matter how much I worked at it — there was always somebody stronger and faster who could beat me. But in marathon swimming, it's different. The winner is the one who is willing to work the hardest and can stand the most pain."

In this respect, she is just as capable as the best men marathon swimmers. "There are two or three men faster than she is," says Dawson, "but she can compete with any man or woman in the world without

being embarrassed. She is a tremendous competitor."

And that's the same in everything she does. She is an honor student at Lake Forest (Ill.) College. She's a member of the school's tennis team and has been unbeaten in dual meets two years in a row. In her spare time, she attends an acting school in Chicago and is thinking about a career in films or on stage. But that's uncertain.

"I am not sure what I'll do," she says. "But whatever I do, I want to be the best."

The men of Ahmic are anxiously hoping she doesn't turn to Women's Lib.