

Some Hopefully Helpful Tips: Updated for June, 26th, 2010
By Race Organizer: Bill Welzien

I have been thinking about tips and pointers that can assist you as you prepare for a big but exciting swim. I have completed the 12.5 miles around the Island of Key West 50 times thus far and plan to swim again this year. The year's swim is the 34th Annual and it will be my 21st anniversary swim. Many of you know that I did this swim as a personal challenge for 30 consecutive months. I hope I can bag my 51st lap around the Island. I turned 60 this past April 17th (there is still some life after 55!).

I usually think of these things to tell you as I swim in the salt water building up my endurance. Unfortunately, once I get out, I get so busy with work and family that I forget what I wanted to say. Now I will put down news I think you can use. In the future, if I think of anything to add I will do so. Check the website periodically for updated info.

This year the swim begins with 2 waves. The first wave at 7:30AM and the second at 8:00AM. A big part of this swim is tides and currents. High tide in Key West harbor on Saturday, June 26th is 10:15AM. That means the first wave will leave 2:45 before high tide and the second 2:15 before high tide. The time and date changes from year to year because of this fact. We try to get the best water conditions to the swimmers advantage. We look for a Saturday toward the latter part of June or early July when the tides are highest at an acceptable early hour. We are thankful that the Coast Guard awarded us this date for this year. This works quite well for most of the swimmers. Only the super fast or very slow swimmers will have a challenge with changing tides. It is imperative that we begin on time as I have learned that the tide waits for no man. You should be out to the west end of Smathers Beach at least an hour before we start. That will give you time to load your kayak or boat and get your sunscreen on. It is best not to be rushed. If you are not ready we will not wait for you. The first wave will leave at 7:30 and the second at 8:00AM. All solo swimmers who complete the course will receive a finisher medal but only those in the second wave in any category will be eligible for a placement award. We go three deep in the solo division for both male and female and two deep in both the two and three person relays.

The cut off time is 8 hours beginning at 8:00AM. If you are not finished by 4:00PM we come to fish you out of the water. The average swimmer will cover the 12.5 distance somewhere between 5 and 7 hours. That means at 5 hours it will be 1:00PM and at 7 hours it will be 3:00PM. Any elites will finish before that but most of us mere mortals will be in the water between 7:30AM until 3:00PM. The sun is at its peak between 11:00AM and 3:00PM. Many of you will be coming down from the north and will have had little exposure to the hot sun. This means extra care for skin protection must be heeded.

This length of time in the water means is that you must protect your skin from the harsh rays of the sun. I have tried many types of sunblock.. Since I plan to swim the whole distance that means I must apply the sunblock before I leave the beach. At 7:30-8:00AM it is not critical for sunblock but from 11:00AM onwards it is critical. Most sunblock

will be washed away before you need it since you applied it around 7:00AM. It is not practical to apply it while you are in the water. Anyway, even if it was possible who wants to waste time fooling around with sunblock when you are supposed to be swimming? What you need is a sunblock that you can apply preswim that will stay on all the time. My sun block of choice is zinc oxide. I learned that I could ask the pharmacist to order me a 1 pound jar. I picked it up a day or so later. This is a big savings over purchasing a bunch of tubes. I picked some the other day and the cost was about \$12.00 for the jar. For swimming open water swim in a hot climate I am convinced this is the best way to go. You may look funny but you can't beat the protection. Also don't forget your bottom lip. I swam almost 11.5 hours in Tampa Bay in April of '07. I covered my body with zinc but forgot my bottom lip. I had a very sore blister for a good week after. Use the zinc or a good lip protectant for your bottom lip. If you don't want to put zinc on you bottom lip be sure to apply lip balm with sun protectant. Cover the back of your legs with this don't forget to put it up under your swim suit line incase you suit shifts and then exposes lily white skin. You don't want to ruin your time down here with serious burning and the risk of skin cancer in the future. If you are thinning on your pate or fully bald either wear a cap or cover your head with the zinc oxide.

One special note before leaving the subject of skin protection: Check the ingredients of your zinc. Some of it is formulated with fish oil. I couldn't stand the smell so I returned it for zinc with mineral oil or a petroleum base. Be careful of the lenses of your goggles after applying your skin protection, you don't want them smeared up with grease. When you finish you will need to have some generic cooking oil on hand and a paper towel, pour the oil on your skin, rub it all over and then wipe your skin with the paper towel that will dissolve the remaining zinc oxide.

While we are on the subject of the heat; the water is generally about 84-85 degrees in mid June. You will be swimming and sweating as you do with all exercise. You must stay hydrated if you hope to complete the swim. Some swimmers drink every 20 minutes. You need water. Some swimmers opt for a sport drink of some type. That is personal preference but you must keep hydrated. Doing 5-7 hours of continuous exercise will probably make you hungry. I generally don't eat much. Consider gel packs. I will also have a Cliff bar or two cut up in pieces. Put each piece in a separate baggy. Remember you are swimming in salt water. If you have several pieces in one bag and it all gets wet, you will not want to eat any of it. Make sure whatever plan to eat it is well sealed. I am sure that you are aware that it is dangerous to eat or drink anything that you have not used successfully in your training. We want to avoid any surprises on the big swim day!! Work with your support boat personnel as to what you will likely call for so they have some idea what to expect. You might want to tie a thin rope/cord around your drink bottle so if you drop it, it won't float away. Your kayaker could refill the same bottle from your other bottles as needed. It is a waste of time to drink a sip from an almost empty bottle and then have to have another bottle given to you. I like to have full bottle every time I drink.

Some of you wear swim caps. I only wear one in cold water. If that is your style go ahead but also be aware that it will retain heat on an already warm swim. There is the

protection factor to wearing a cap (esp. if you are near bald or balding) and I can understand that you ladies with long hair find it a must to keep you hair out of your face.

Before I begin my island swim I always put a gob of Vaseline jelly or Body Glide under my armpits and on the sides of my neck. I never notice any chafing in this area of my body when I swim in fresh water but I often have during my 5 .5- 6 hours of salt-water swimming. After I gave this information last year I neglected to apply the Vaseline under my arms. I regretted failing to take my own advice

The support boat must have an orange pennant clearly displayed. These flags will be handed out at your check in on Friday. Your pennant will have your number or the number of your team marked on it. **If you do not have the pennant prominently displayed you will be disqualified!!** The support boat is extremely important to your success. Your support boat will provide you with protection from jet skis and unaware motor boaters. Don't let your support boat get too far away from you. This is not only for protection but also when you need food or drink. If the boat is far away you have to swim to it or the boat has to come back to you.

There are three areas that your support boat must be especially vigilant. The first is going through Key West Harbor between mile 2.5 and 4.5. It is a fast portion but there is a lot of boat traffic in the Harbor. There may be a huge Cruise Ship docked. If so, there will be a Key West Marine Patrol officer directing you. Follow his directions. Keep a good distance from any Cruise Ships. The next is Fleming Cut. This is one of the most exciting portions of the swim. It is a narrow cut and it is the fastest portion of the swim. You will fly through this area. There are also generally a lot of motorboats, so heads up. When you come out of the Fleming Cut you swim under a bridge, this is mile 5. You want to make sure you do not smash into one of the pilings that hold up the bridge, so be attentive as you approach the Fleming Cut Bridge. The final area of especial vigilance is the Cow Key Channel. There is a lot of motor boat traffic here as well. When you swim under the Cow Key Channel Bridge you will be at mile 9. It is strongly recommended that you stay on the Channel as you swim through Cow Key. If you attempt to take a short cut (the sea wall) you may come up short. The short cut may cut your swim short. The deepest water is along the channel markers. If you end up in water too shallow to swim in and you get up or crawl (and I don't mean crawl stroke) along the bottom your swim is over, finished, caput, no more!! This is tragic as you have already swum almost 10 miles. Don't chance it. You have a sure bet if you stay with the channel markers. However, the final decision is yours. There will be "Committee Boats" on the course. These are designated by bright yellow flags. They serve for your safety and as umpires. There will be a "Committee Boat" moored at the 2 bridges. They will have a roster and will take roll call as you pass the bridge.

The first five miles of the swim is the deepest water. Beyond that you can see the bottom the rest of the way. Actually, the only time you can't see the bottom is through the Key West Harbor until you exit the Fleming Cut. On a calm day you can see some of the most breathtaking sea life you will ever witness. I found this is not unusual from the start line until you enter the Key West Harbor. I have seen Conch shells, manna rays and sting

rays, once a sea turtle, schools of huge tarpons, nurse sharks (very docile) colorful tropical fish (as you round Fort Zachary Taylor). I have never been threatened by any thing in the water. Jet skis and motorboats scare me more than anything under the water. The only time I have ever encountered Men of War is in December, January and February.

Some times you will hit a pile of seaweed floating on the top. Some of it has organisms that sting. Generally the sting only last some minutes before it fades. Naturally, I avoid any of this stuff if at all possible. Much of the water we will be swimming in is very shallow. Here, I also avoid touching the weeds growing on the bottom, if I can. Some of it has organisms that can sting pretty badly. None of it is life threatening and should not threaten your completion of your swim.

Another tip is: don't swim out too far. If you swim out too far you have to swim back in, which increases your distance and hence your over all time. Look for water deep enough to swim comfortably in and as close to shore as possible. This can be a challenge especially from mile 10 to the finish. The Atlantic side is pretty shallow. Remember if you stand up you will be disqualified. Also, the only time you can hold onto your support boat is if you are on a relay team; once you have completed your full leg of the race then, and then only may you touch your boat to exit the water.

We will start in the water and finish in the water. When you pass inflatable buoy your time will stop. You are finished! You will find ten poles parallel to Smathers Beach as you approach the finish line. You must swim to the final (10th pole). It is there that the lead boat will be stationed with the time official on board. This official will have a clear view of the buoy and you passing the finish line. Your time will be recorded and entered into the record.

We plan to have some refreshments and fruit on the beach for the swimmers as they exit the water.

If you finish early and wish to leave, please return to the site of the pre race meeting, the Radisson Hotel. We will hold our Post Race Awards Buffet at the Hotel Key West in the pool area. Shortly after 6:00PM we will begin with a free raffle for all the swimmers with gift certificates to many fine restaurants and attractions in Key West. The post swim party will also give you time to meet and speak with many other swimmers about their swim.

Relay Swimmer's Only:

Let me say something to all our relay people. There have been questions which I want to address. It is advisable for all relay teams to have motor boats to transport your team members to the transition points. Some relays have used kayaks in the past. This is acceptable but that means after you finish your leg you have to paddle in the hot sun. You may not be that hearty. None of the transition points are accessible by land and the Swim Committee will not be responsible to take your team members to the exchange

points. That is your responsibility. Also, every swimmer must swim the entire distance before exiting the water. If you are on a three person team you must swim your full four miles then get out. As the first swimmer exits the water the next swimmer jumps in. Please be careful entering the water as some areas will be very shallow. NEVER dive in!! And be sure to hang on to your goggles so you don't lose them in the water as one swimmer did in the past! Once you enter the water swim to the next exchange point. These points will be marked by bright orange buoys. You will have a map giving you the general location of these buoys. There will transition buoys at mile 4 and 8 for the 3 Person Team and a buoy at the mile 6 for the 2 Person team. Tag team relays are not allowed. You are not allowed to swim until you are tired and then get out and rest and then get back in when you feel ready. Three person team swimmers will each swim a full 4 mile leg and the two person team members will swim a continuous 6 miles each and then exit after completing their leg.

All Swimmers read this!

A couple of years ago year we had very rough weather. A serious storm rolled through. We had lightening. Hence the introduction of a new rule: **The Lightning Rule** is thus: *If a lightening storm threatens you as a swimmer you may swim to shore or get into your escort boat and head for shelter. Once the threat passes you may reenter the water in as near to the location you exited the water as possible. You will not be disqualified for the event; however the clock continues to run.*

I pray that we will have wonderful weather and not need to utilize the Lightning Rule! Be at the Hotel Key West (located at 3820 North Roosevelt Avenue in Key West) for the Pre Race Meeting at 6:00 (this is mandatory as we discuss the course and any changes). You may check in and receive your "goody bags from 4:00 PM onwards until 5:30PM. You must be signed in by 5:30 so we can begin our 75 minute meeting promptly at 6:00PM on Friday, June 26th.

Br at the beach by 6:45 AM on Saturday, June 26th to be marked and prepare to swim.
Bon Voyage!!

N.B.If the Coast Guard at any time feels the weather is dangerous or the swimmers are in danger they have the right and duty to call the event. We will not question their authority over this event. If the event is called we are sorry but there are no refunds whatsoever.