2007 6X6 Channel Swim Relay

On July 21, 2007, Santa Barbara Channel Swimming Association, in conjunction with Semana Nautica, introduced the first 6X6 Channel Swim Relay. Six teams competed with six swimmers on each team. Each team had their own boat with a hired skipper to navigate the channel, two kayakers, and an official observer to ensure all official rules were observed. There were no restrictions for the number of male versus female swimmers. Three teams were from Santa Barbara, two from New York and one from San Francisco.

The race was scheduled to begin at midnight from Santa Cruz Island and scheduled to end approximately 26 miles later at East Beach in Santa Barbara. Due to 5-7 foot seas and 30 knot winds, the race start was delayed until 1:48 am. The temperature of the water at the start was 59 degrees, dropping to 57 degrees in the channel. No wetsuits were allowed and a strict timeline was enforced to ensure each swimmer swam the exact amount each round of swimming.

Team SBCC

Swimmers: Tara Stockton, Steven Trueblood, Kristen Stahle, Pete Engle, Marcie Kjoller and Ingrid Schmitz

The swimmers’ biggest battle was with seasickness (due to the conditions) and hypothermia, not the actual distance. The time between each swim was spent re-warming the body to endure the next round. The swimmers were too cold to worry about any marine life encounters and swimming fast was the easiest way to get warm.

During a trial swim two weeks before the event, Team SBCC discovered they would be overcome with hypothermia half way through the race and would not be able to finish if they swam 1 hour intervals. They opted to cut their time in half and get in the water more frequently to stay ahead of the hypothermia. This proved to be a good choice as this time interval was even difficult for a couple swimmers to endure due to dehydration from the sea sickness and hypothermia. If one swimmer became too ill to swim the entire team would be disqualified.

SBCC (4 females, 2 males) finished second behind another SB team (5 males, 1 female). The first place team was so fast they lost all of the five boats on the first leg from the island. Everyone watched in amazement as they disappeared on the horizon. Second through sixth place was very close with all 5 boats finishing within 45 minutes of one another. Team SBCC would have lost at least two swimmers to hypothermia if they had stayed with the one hour intervals.

Was this fun? Maybe not during the race, but after it was heaven. The best words to describe the race was a challenging adventure! We’re already in training for 2008!