

Beat: Sports

U.S. swimmer Diana Nyad completes historic Cuba-Florida crossing

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USPA News - American endurance swimmer Diana Nyad was greeted by hundreds of spectators Monday as she became the first person to swim from Cuba to the U.S. state of Florida with neither a protective cage or flippers, accomplishing her 35-year-long dream. Nyad, 64, began her swim at 8:59 a.m. local time on Saturday from Hemingway Marina near the Cuban capital of Havana.

But neither severe weather, jellyfish, nausea or utter fatigue could stop her during her fifth attempt, even continuing at full speed as she repeatedly threw up. After breaking a previous distance record on Sunday evening, Nyad approached the island of Key West in the Florida Keys on Monday morning. She was about 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) from the beach when she stopped to thank her supporters, realizing that she was just a few hours from accomplishing her dream. "I am about to swim my last two miles in the ocean. This is a lifelong dream of mine and I'm very very glad to be with you," she told her team and spectators, who were with her in nearby boats. "Some on the team are the most intimate friends of my life and some of you I've just met. But I'll tell you something, you're a special group." A media frenzy then ensued as it became clear Nyad was likely to complete the historic crossing from Cuba to the United States. Television networks showed live footage as she approached the beach and walked onto land just before 2 p.m. local time, ending her crossing after 52 hours and 54 minutes during which she swam roughly 110 miles (177 kilometers). Nyad, whose lips were swollen, was put on a stretcher after getting out of the water and received medical treatment. "The group out in Florida is probably going to be busy cheering, hugging and celebrating for a while. I hope everyone's enjoyed the journey," team member Chris wrote in a blog post after Nyad completed her crossing. "I'm sure Diana will speak to the press as soon as she's able - maybe today, maybe after a good long sleep." Nyad first attempted to swim from Cuba to Florida in August 1978 but gave up after 42 hours due to strong winds and large swells which slammed her against the steel shark cage she was using. She made her fourth attempt in August 2012 but stopped halfway through after suffering jellyfish stings and being sent off course by a storm. The endurance swimmer, who is from Los Angeles, has set a number of world records, including a record for circling Manhattan Island for nearly eight hours in 1975. Nyad was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in 1986 and the International Swimming Hall of Fame in 2003.

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