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Lafayette Resident Attempts Breaking Open-Water Swimming World Record

By Clare Varellas



Jamie Patrick attempting world-record swim.
Photos provided

easy one, according to crew chief and lifetime friend Matt Richardson, especially considering the nine months of rigorous training and planning that had preceded the attempt, which took place on June 23 and 24 off the coast of the Bahamas island of Eleuthera. Patrick, Richardson said, surely has the physical ability to one day complete such a distance.

"For this type of thing you need the right anatomy and physiology and training and experience and mental training," said Richardson, who is also a doctor in physical therapy at Saint Francis Memorial Hospital in San Francisco. "I think Jamie was prepared for this. It's just that it was too hot."

"Prepared" seems to properly describe someone who has completed 15 Ironman triathlons, participated in the invitation-only Ultraman World Championships twice, and seen the finish line of a triple-Ironman race. Patrick, general manager of San Francisco office supplies company Patrick & Co., started swimming recreationally at Miramonte Swim Club under then-coach and Olympian Matt Biondi during grade school, and hasn't stopped since.

"I just love every aspect of being in the water," Patrick says. "In long open-water swims, you're looking at the deep-dark blue for hours and hours, and really testing yourself mentally and physically. For some reason, it's almost like active meditation for me."

That's why Patrick, after a student-athlete career decorated with All-American titles at Miramonte High School and success at both California State University Long Beach and University of Hawaii, endeavored to break the 77-mile record for longest open-water marathon swim, set only a few months prior to the attempt. Marathon swimming, according to Patrick, is a slightly more strict form of open-water swimming in which the athlete receives no "unnatural" assistance from the crew: no touching the boat, and nutrition and water are tossed from the boat in containers.

But despite his ultimate miss at obtaining the world record title, the 2011 World Open Water Man of the Year achieved some successes, at least personally. Only two hours after the swim's 4 p. m. launch off Eleuthera, Patrick found himself swimming directly over three large sharks for seven or eight minutes.

"One of my biggest fears is sharks," said Patrick. "They were about five- to seven-foot, and

During the 18 hours straight he spent at water level in the Caribbean in late June, 44-year-old Jamie Patrick encountered three sharks, a box jellyfish, and 10 hours of overnight swimming in unlit ocean water.

But none of these were what ultimately forced an end to the Lafayette resident's swim at the 36-mile point. Dehydrated due to unexpectedly high water temperatures, Patrick was pulled from the water almost halfway to his mileage goal: the marathon open-water world record of 77 miles.

"I was severely dehydrated and started to be a little erratic and had slurred speech, and that's ultimately why my crew decided that it was time to pull me from the swim," said Patrick. "Physically I had a lot more in me, but to be safe that's why I had those people there to make the decision."

The decision, made by the nine-member crew of friends who accompanied Patrick, was not an

they proceeded to hang out for a little while, and there were a couple points during that period of time where I almost grabbed onto the boat just out of pure fear. But if I would have done that the swim would have been over right then and there."

As if swimming with the sharks wasn't enough, Patrick was also stung by the poisonous box jellyfish, a sting that can be fatal, and was forced to swim through the injury's pain until a new medical product recently released from the University of Hawaii allowed him some comfort.

Patrick had been training for the swim for about nine months, logging 10,000 yards a day on weekdays and regularly completing 12-hour swims on weekends. But the planning alone, he said, was half the effort.

"The planning process is almost as consuming as the actual training side of it: support boats, travel for crew, electronic shark shields, nutrition, safety gear, medical supplies," said Patrick. "It's quite a task, and you've got to dot all the i's and cross all the t's because once you get there, it's very difficult to try to find something you need."

Patrick and his father selected Eleuthera as a location for the swim due to its shallow water, favorable wind conditions, and, important for long-distant swims, its high temperatures. Unfortunately, an unexpectedly high water temperature of 86 degrees was what ultimately left Patrick severely dehydrated, and forced him to stop. Richardson, crewmembers, Patrick's parents, and a physician all agreed upon the decision to reign in the swimmer for the sake of his health and safety.

And yet, one failure is certainly not enough to stop Patrick from trying again in the future. For now, though, he's back above the surface.

"There was some unfinished business left in the Caribbean, and when will that be, I'm not sure," said Patrick. "I need to get back to real life for a while."



Jamie Patrick

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