

Freediving in cyberspace

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Key words

Freediving, breath-hold diving, record, general interest

Abstract

(McKie N. Freediving in cyberspace. *SPUMS J.* 2004; 34: 101-3.)

The international organisational governance of the extreme sport of breath-hold diving and the associated criteria relating to the various disciplines were investigated on the world wide web. The universally accepted descriptive term for this activity is 'freediving'. The umbrella organisation is the International Association for the Development of Apnea, which promotes freediving, both competitive and recreational, and encourages the safe practice of the sport. Various web sites around the world were explored, the different disciplines defined and the current world records for each listed. Freediving is a potentially dangerous activity, and the web sites visited all carry warnings regarding safety.

Introduction

Having previously written to the *SPUMS Journal* about breath-hold diving records, and Tanya Streeter in particular, the author thought it would be appropriate to investigate a little more deeply the national and international organisational governance of this extreme sport and the criteria relating to the various associated disciplines. This proved to be a fascinating journey that may be of interest to fellow SPUMS members.

A two-page feature on Tanya Streeter in the United Kingdom (UK) *Sunday Times*, on 28 December, 2003 provided a reference to the British Freediving Association (BFA) so this seemed like a good place to start. As will become obvious, the first take-home message is that the universally accepted descriptive term for this activity is 'freediving'. The author recommends that, in future, SPUMS standardises by using not only this generic term but all of the others used by the sport's aficionados for its various disciplines.

UK freediving web site

The BFA web site was set up in 1999 to represent the sport of freediving in the UK.¹ Each page on the web site includes a disclaimer highlighted in red text which states that,

"Freediving is a potentially dangerous activity. This web site exists only to provide general information about freediving and does not constitute any form of instruction. Individuals interested in freediving are strongly encouraged to undertake a course with a qualified instructor and to never freedive alone. The BFA accepts no liability for injury or death resulting from the use of information on this web site."

Various topics are accessible on the web site under the following main headings:

- About Freediving (which includes a section on physiology)
- The BFA
- UK Freedivers
- Instruction/Courses
- Competitions
- Records
- Links
- Contact Us

The BFA is the UK representative of the International Association for the Development of Apnea (AIDA). The objectives of the BFA are *"to promote freediving, both competitively and recreationally, and to encourage the safe practice of the sport"*. In addition, the BFA is the sole body that selects UK teams for international competitions and ratifies any UK record attempts according to the rules specified by AIDA UK.

AIDA

AIDA is an acronym based on the French, Association Internationale pour le Développement de L'Apnée. AIDA is, in its own words,

"the worldwide sportive Federation which manage and overview since 1992 the recognition of records, the organisation of competitions and the elaboration of education standards of Freediving".²

Clarification of the different disciplines within this sport was one of the main areas of interest to the author. According to the web site html 'Disciplines', AIDA recognises only eight categories as official disciplines for world records and competitions, and it considers that other kinds of 'similar' or 'different' categories could only be considered 'demonstration categories', without any sanctioned world record. It should also be noted that men's and women's records exist for each category.

AIDA definitions and world records

The following are the AIDA discipline definitions and world records taken verbatim from its web site on 23 May, 2004.

Static discipline

STATIC APNEA (STA)

“The freediver holds his breath for as long as possible with his respiratory tracts immersed, his body either in the water or at the surface. Performances can be done and recognized in both pool or open water (sea, lake, river, etc).”

- Women: Annabel BRESINO (USA) - 6' 21"
13/11/2003 - Pool - Kona, Hawaii (USA)
Men: Martin STEPANEK (Czech Republic) - 8' 06"
03/07/2001 - Pool - Miami, Florida (USA)

Dynamic disciplines

DYNAMIC APNEA WITHOUT FINS (DNF)

“The freediver travels in a horizontal position under water attempting to cover the greatest possible distance. Any propulsion aids are prohibited and performances can only be recognized in pools with a minimum length of 25 metres.”

- Women: Renate DE BRUYN (Netherlands) - 104m
25/04/2004 - 25m pool, Huy (Belgium) - subject to anti-doping test result.
Men: Stig Aavall SEVERINSEN (Denmark) - 166m
19/07/2003 - 25m pool, Aarhus (Denmark)

DYNAMIC APNEA WITH FINS (DYF)

“The freediver travels in a horizontal position under water attempting to cover the greatest possible distance. Any propulsion aids other than fins or a monofin are prohibited. Performances can only be recognized in swimming-pools with a minimum length of 25 metres.”

- Women: Natalia MOLCHANOVA (Russia) - 155m
25/04/2004 - 50m pool, Moscow (Russia) - subject to anti-doping test result.
Men: Peter PEDERSEN (Denmark) - 200m
18/07/2003 - 50m pool, Randers (Denmark)

Depth disciplines

CONSTANT WEIGHT (CWT)

“The freediver descends and ascends using his fins/ monofin and/or with the use of his arms without pulling on the rope or changing his ballast; only a single hold of the rope to stop the descent and start the ascent is allowed.”

- Women: Mandy-Rae CRUICKSHANK (Canada) - (-)78m
21/03/2004 – Sea, Grand Cayman (Cayman Island, British West Indies)
Men: Herbert NITSCH (Austria) - (-)95m - 04/09/2003
Lake, Dellach, Millstätter See (Austria)

CONSTANT WEIGHT WITHOUT FINS (CNF)

“The freediver descends and ascends under water using only his own muscle strength, without the use of propulsion equipment and without pulling on the rope.”

- Women: Mandy-Rae CRUICKSHANK (Canada) - (-)41m
01/09/2003 - Sea, Vancouver, BC (Canada)
Men: Stig Aavall SEVERINSEN (Denmark) - (-)61m
28/09/2003 - Sea, Mochima National Park, Puerto la Cruz (Venezuela)

FREE IMMERSION (FIM)

“The freediver dives under water without the use of propulsion equipment, but only by pulling on the rope during descent and ascent. Performances can be done head first or feet first during the descent.”

- Women: Annabel BRISENO (USA) - (-)71m
15/11/2003 - Sea, Kona, Hawaii (USA)
Men: Martin STEPANEK (Czech Republic) - (-)102m
23/03/2004 - Sea, Grand Cayman (Cayman Island, British West Indies)

VARIABLE WEIGHT (VWT)

“The freediver descends with the help of a ballast weight and ascends using his own strength: arms and/ or legs, either by pulling or not pulling on the rope. Freedivers descended head first with the older sleds but with the modern sleds, the descent tends to be feet first.”

- Women: Tanya STREETER (USA) - (-)122m - 19/07/2003 - Sea, Providenciales, (Turks and Caicos)
Men: Patrick MUSIMU (Belgium) - (-)120m
12/11/2002 - Playa del Carmen (Mexico)

NO LIMIT (NLT)

“The freediver descends with the help of a ballast weight and ascends via a method of his choice which could include an inflatable balloon, diving suit or vest.”

- Women: Tanya STREETER (USA) - (-)160m
17/08/2002 – Sea, Providenciales (Turks and Caicos)
Men: Loïc LEFERME (France) - (-)162m
20/10/2002 – Sea, Nice (France)

The international hierarchical structure of AIDA is somewhat complicated. AIDA is made up of 32 national AIDA ‘Members’ who appear to take precedence over the

27 national AIDA 'Contacts'. Fully constituted national 'Members' include named national representatives and national consultants, whereas fully constituted national 'Contacts' have two named contacts. There is no indication on the AIDA web site as to what is meant by the term national representative, national consultant or national contact. At the time of writing, the BFA, which is the UK national AIDA Member, has a nominated national representative and a national consultant.

And for those of you who have been unable to get Verdi's slave girl of Amneris, the King of Egypt's daughter, out of your minds since I first mentioned AIDA, yes, indeed there is an AIDA Egypt, which is one of the national AIDA Contacts with a nominated contact #1!

South Pacific region

What about representation in the South Pacific region? The only national AIDA Member state I could identify was that of Fiji, with a national representative but no national consultant. Australia is a national AIDA Contact with Sacha Dench of Freedive Australia being the first contact, and Scott Laverty of HMAS Penguin being the second contact. Their e-mail addresses are <sacha@freedive.com.au> and <scott.laverty@defence.gov.au> respectively. New Caledonia (AIDA France) and New Zealand are also both national AIDA Contacts each with a nominated contact.

The final port of call was the 'Enter Freedive Australia' web site.³ However, this could not be accessed until the WARNING - DISCLAIMER gate had been cleared. This cautioned, like the BFA, that Freedive Australia accepts no liability for the various potential adverse outcomes associated with the interpretation, application, or instruction of any information presented within the web site.

The Freedive Australia web site has a selection of accessible topics under the following main headings:

- Training
- Why Freedive?
- Gear
- Adventures
- Meet the Experts!
- News
- Freediver Fun
- Message Board

In exploring the options, it was noted, in particular, that most of the data on the current world records page of the 'Freedive News' section were out of date, as compared with the data shown on the equivalent AIDA web page. For children you can go to 'Amphibians with Attitude', the Freedive Australia "cool new marine studies programme and holiday for kids".

Finally, when passing through the WARNING - DISCLAIMER gate one comes across an additional barrier

not mentioned earlier. This is the EXTRA WARNING, an absolute pièce de résistance, which reads as follows:

"Young adult males are the most likely to suffer from shallow water blackout, the most common freediving accident and are expressly asked NOT TO BE DICKHEADS and to respect their own limitations.

Always dive with a competent and alert buddy"

Now that is what I call a good, old-fashioned, in your face ockerism, or WYSIWYG in cyberspeak!

References

- 1 British Freediving Association. <www.britishfreediving.org>.
- 2 Association Internationale pour le Développement de L'Apnée (AIDA). <www.aida-international.org>.
- 3 Freedive Australia. <www.freedive.com.au>.

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Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I am researching the history of recompression chambers (RCCs) in Australia. Based on my research to date, Australia's first chamber was a Heinke chamber that came to Broome, Western Australia in 1914.¹

A variety of RCCs were used during the next 50 years, mainly for the treatment of decompression illness using air tables. It was not until the mid-1960s that a chamber was purpose built for the use of hyperbaric oxygen therapy, and installed at the Prince Henry Hospital, Sydney.

To assist with my ongoing research, I welcome any contributions of information on chambers, their use and the people involved.

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Reference

- 1 Thurston S. The first Broome recompression chamber 1914-2004. *SPUMS J.* 2004; 34: 94-100.