

# Block overcame obstacles in double-swim of Lake George

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LAKE GEORGE — In her attempt to do a double swim of Lake George, Lake Placid's Caroline Block has learned that about the only thing she can control is her stroke.

But that stroke was steady enough to land her a time of 52 hours, 24 minutes, 47 seconds on Sept. 18, making her the first person, as documented by the Marathon Swimmers Federation, to complete a double swim of the 32.3-mile lake without stopping.

Block, 36, said she knew she wanted to do a double swim of the lake ever since she swam her single in 2017. It isn't her ultimate quest, however.

"This was my first double, actually," Block said. "I have been trying to do a double of the North Channel between Ireland and Scotland, and I have attempted that twice, and it's still a top project in my mind. So I thought I'd double something else."

That decision was about the last time Block had control of things. She attended law school at Cornell University after earning her PhD in anthropology from Johns Hopkins University. She graduated in June with

the hope of taking the bar exam in July, doing her double swim in September and starting a job with a law firm in New York City in October.

The bar exam was postponed, first to September and now to just after the first weekend in October. Her job's start date was moved to January. And her double swim of Lake George one weekend ago got moved up by a couple of days because of the weather forecasts.

The swim originally was scheduled to start at 9 a.m. Sept. 18 and finish sometime on Sept. 20. But when the long-range forecast for that period changed for the worse on Sept. 12, and stayed that way Sept. 13, Block and her support crew had to alter course. The forecast called for freeze warnings.

"So I spent Sunday just making sure the boat was still loaded to take me on Wednesday and enough of my crew was still able to come," Block said. "Because basically the goal was we wanted to be off the water by Friday night because it was going to be in the 30s."

Everyone was able to get to Lake George, but not until the night of Sept. 16. Instead of a preparatory meeting the day before, as had been planned, it was condensed.

"We all just met Wednesday afternoon at the dive shop and drove over to the docks, and they got on the boat and I got in the water and off we went," said Block, who began swimming at 5:45 p.m.

The forecast called for 12-mph winds Wednesday, but not until Block was a little farther into her swim.

"Usually when it gets darker (the wind) calms down," Block said.

"Usually, overnight it goes down to zero miles per hour at night. We had just the opposite. The first mile or two it was smooth sailing. By the time it got dark, it was so choppy that the boat couldn't stay with me and I was trying to figure out where exactly the boat was in relation to me. It was very dark; we didn't have a moon."

While the boat had lights, Block said that doesn't help a swimmer as much as one might think.

"If you are looking at the lights, you can't tell if you're behind the boat or next to the boat," Block said. "And then if you get out in front of the boat, usually if there's a moon, the lights will enable you to see the curve of the boat so that you know what direction the boat's going. Whenever I got out in front of the boat, I could see that one bright red light, but I didn't know which direction I should be heading. They were working very hard to keep track of me and I was working very hard to keep track of them. It was super choppy."

Block said that marathon swimmers also usually have a kayaker as part of the support team, but with the winds being so bad, that wasn't able to happen until she got to Mossy Point, where it gets shallow, and then the kayaker helped guide her into Diane's Rock in Ticonderoga before turning around.

Normally, marathon swimmers have "feeds" every half-hour, when they get nourishment while treading water, and are not allowed to touch any support boat for any reason. Block had a sports drink that was clipped to a long rope, and her team would throw her the rope.

When she reached Diane's Rock, Block admitted she had some questions in her mind as to whether she'd start her second lap.

"I wasn't enjoying it so much, but I knew the conditions were supposed to get a little better — they didn't, they got worse," Block said. "And it was sort of like why would I come here and do another single, I'd already done a single. Once I started on the way back I didn't really have any doubts about finishing. I didn't care how long it took at that point. It didn't occur to me at the time, but they could have stopped the swim just because there was a small-craft warning."

As far as the temperatures she faced, they never got into the 30s, but did touch the low 40s. Block said the water temperature stayed around 67 degrees. But her arms got cold because of the air exposure.

"It wasn't dangerous cold, just annoying. It's like standing outside in a parking garage in the winter with just a T-shirt. It wasn't a swim-ending kind of thing," she said.

"I had been telling people 48 hours and had been thinking 44 to 50 hours," Block said. "But I knew it was a possibility it could take longer. And when I hit 50 hours, what am I going to do, stop?"

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