

World Championships of Freediving

By



LEFT: William Trubridge World Record Holder - Unassisted Constant Weight Division.

As Thanksgiving approaches, temperatures will fall. But just off Long Island's shore in the Bahamas, the mercury will not descend nearly as far as the competitors of the World Championships of Freediving. Already unfathomable records will be pushed still deeper in this sport where adrenaline is the enemy.

The competition will take place during the mornings of November 25th through December 5th, during which time a number of competitors will descend into Dean's Blue Hole, reaching for the title or personal bests. Each contestant will approach the floating dive platform and attach themselves to the weighted descent line with a safety line and lanyard, then execute a technical hyperventilation technique, calm themselves as thoroughly as possible, and dive. Any excitement-related increases in heart rate along the way coincide with a subsequent increase in oxygen consumption.

On their way to the bottom plate holding the tag, they will pass numerous safety freedivers, who plunge toward the diver at a prescribed depth to ensure the diver makes it to the top in case any potentially fatal symptom of hypoxia (lack of oxygen) renders the diver unconscious. After the competitor pulls their tag, they ascend to the surface and execute their recovery breaths, and if the whole dive is clean (no blackouts or lost motor control), then the attempt is submitted into the running.

Those who wish to take advantage of a fascinating opportunity to see a sport still largely in its infancy need only show up. No tickets are sold, and fans can watch the competition from the beaches or cliffs roughly fifty feet from the action, or they can grab a mask and snorkel themselves and get even closer. As the competitor dives, an announcer will keep the crowd informed of his/her

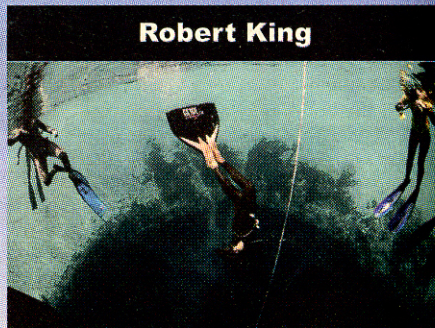
depth periodically during both ascent and descent. An exciting atmosphere is assured, as the production company NHK will film a documentary of the event, and an Imax movie centering on the competition will also be filmed.

Freediving is easily the oldest form of diving, but our understanding of it is just beginning to unfold. Due to this fact, it could be argued that nearly all the competitors are pioneers. Some of the more well-known include the event's host, William Trubridge of Australia, Herbert Nitsch of Austria, and Martin Stepanek of the Czech Republic. William Trubridge has set records the last two years in the unassisted constant weight (no fins) discipline, Herbert Nitsch is the defending champion in both the constant weight (fins, no weighted sled) and unassisted, and Martin Stepanek is the current world record holder for static breath hold (laying face down in a pool) at a whopping eleven minutes, thirty five seconds!

Among the women, the main contenders are current constant weight champion Sara Cambell of Great Britain, Mandy-Rae Cruickshank of Canada, and Natalia Molchanova of Russia.

These great athletes and many more compete in a sport with both a large international following and Olympic aspirations.

Unfortunately the United States has lagged behind other countries as far as interest in the sport. Contrary to what you might expect of a sport called freediving, our own competitors have had to pay handsomely for instruction from other parts of the world, as we have yet to bring much of the United States' vast resources to bear on the subject. But despite the cost and limited rewards, two competitors will represent our country in the event: Robert King on the men's side, and Carla Sue Hanson on the ladies'.



Robert King is the US record holder for depth in the constant weight discipline at 83 meters. For those of you unfamiliar with the metric system, 1 meter= 3.28... feet, so his 83 meter dive was roughly 272 feet! He is 46 years old and currently on sabbatical from his day job as a business lawyer. He has taken two courses, one with the aforementioned Martin Stepanek, and the other with Performance Freediving International, a company for which Mandy-Rae Cruickshank plays a critical role. His current training involves 4-5 hours a day of work in the gym, the pool and yoga, among other things.

In his three years of competition, he has attained a moderate recognition level within the states. Even still, most of the population passes him by never knowing of his very unique, some might say extreme abilities.