



Projecto Oceano Swimming Competition Report

Author: Freddie Brunt

Date: July 2009

Preparation

My initial idea was to have a swimming race from the continent to the Ilha under the main bridge. I had hoped to gather a team of swimmers who would participate in a 10 day training programme, leading up to the final race. My intentions were not just to organise a race and give out prizes, but to create a team of swimmers who would train and compete together. I wanted to install the concepts of team work, encouragement and hard work. I wanted to have a diverse training programme where the team would be pushed to succeed with the ultimate aim of completing the demanding distance required. In my early training programme I spoke of the advantages of eating healthily, mental focus and commitment to training and working as a team. With many locals having little drive, dedication and goals in their life I hoped that this experience could demonstrate how successful they can be, and what they can achieve when they apply themselves.

I began the promotion for the race by putting up posters and spreading the word around the Island. Having held opportunities for registration, I had gathered 15 names of people willing to compete and began to plan a training programme for the competitors. However, at our first training session, only 8 people turned up and following a discussion between us all, I decided that the distance was too ambitious and the majority of people were scared at attempting the distance and would prefer to compete in a race of a more achievable distance. As a result, I informed the swimmers that instead the race would be from the Ponte Velha (Old Bridge) opposite the Museum, to the Fortaleza (Fort), a distance of just 1.5 km. I spent a further day of promotion, writing new posters and putting them up round the Ilha and telling keen parties to register the following day. Again, I had around 20 names and informed them of the time and location of the first few training sessions and what, as a team, we were hoping to achieve in preparation for the race. I arrived at Nautico Beach optimistic that this time round, with the shorter distance, training would be successful.....no one turned up! At training the next day, again no one turned up, which was hugely disappointing. I was very close to giving up and believing that there was no interest in swimming on the Ilha. A couple of local guys had told me later on that week that they had turned up but no one was there, but I explained that, not being Mozambican, when I arrange a 1 o'clock meet, that means 1, not 3 or 4.

I left everything for a few days and then decided that having any competition whatsoever was a better idea than nothing at all. Therefore, I wrote some new posters inviting anyone who was keen to participate to turn up on the following Saturday for the race with two optional training sessions on the Thursday and Friday before the race. I travelled to Nampula and bought prizes - swimming goggles and swimming shorts. Come the day of the race, the weather from the previous week had continued and the skies were grey, it was uncharacteristically cold and attempting to rain. It was really disappointing as I had envisaged normal Ilha weather, with perfect blue skies, clear turquoise water and the beach full of people watching the race. Only 6 people turned up, but having had everything in place and being fully prepared I was ready to go ahead with the race if a few more people turned up. However, in the end, even though we managed

to get 5 more willing participant, with good advice from a few friends, I decided to postpone, as not only was it not what I envisaged but also the sea was quite choppy and cold - not safe conditions for a swimming race.

The Race

For the final time, I promoted the new race date and time and as the weather returned to normal it was now or not at all. Come the day of the race, the conditions were perfect. It was hot, completely clear and the sea was even more clear than normal. For once a lot of people turned up early and by 11:00am I had 25 swimmers registered and prepped. I had everything in place, helpers, a start line constructed, a finish line ready, enough swimmers and a boat rented and in place to accompany the swimmers in case of any problems.

Once the whistle had been blown, the competitors ran down the beach and into the sea, they were instructed to swim round a boat (however most duly ignored this request) and then turn right and swim straight for the small beach in front of the Fortaleza. After about a couple of hundred metres the first few swimmers dropped out and were dragged into the boat. The view from the boat was incredible, with all the swimmers and the perfect sea and the backdrop of the Ilha. The race came down to 3 guys who had pulled away at the front. The only thing that could have been improved for the race was the fact that it was low tied so for the final 50 metres or so, it was impossible to swim as the water was too shallow and there were also a number of 'picos' in the sand, which did cause a few problems and small cuts. However, this did not seem to affect the leading pack and the race concluded with a sprint finish up the beach. Fortunately, 1st, 2nd and 3rd place were clear cut, saving any reason for dispute over final positions and who should receive the prizes.

I organised a presentation at Nautico Beach, where the prizes were handed out and everyone left feeling positive with many requests for future such races, including running and biathlon competitions in the near future.

Conclusion

In the end, the race itself was a success; the guys involved enjoyed the competition and requested future races. However, looking back at my initial aims before anything had began, it is a shame that the training and 'team ethos' push, that I had hoped for, never materialised. There were definitely moments of despair - I would pass people in the street and they would ask what time we are meeting and then when it came to turning up at the allotted time, no one appeared. To tell the truth I don't completely understand - is it laziness, is it the lack of incentives to train when there is no material incentive for doing so, or is it just a lack of interest in swimming? I don't know. From what I know of the guys who did participate in the race, there are no obvious reasons why they would not want to train, (such as jobs or other commitments) but personally I feel it is a combination of the three reasons stated above.



Projecto Oceano Swimming Race