

THE GREATEST RACE TACTIC

In 1963, \$15,000 was offered for first place in a 60-mile (97K) race in Lake Michigan. The greatest professional marathon swimmers of that generation showed up, including Abdel-Latif Abou-Heif of Egypt and Americans Greta Andersen and Ted Erikson. Intense tactics began almost immediately after the sound of the starting gun.

Three hours and 15 minutes into the race with Abou-Heif and Andersen sharing the lead, Andersen found herself between Abou-Heif and his escort boat. Abou-Heif took a 90-degree turn straight toward his boat, cutting right in front of Andersen and interrupting her stroke. Two minutes later, Andersen did the same, tit for tat, right back at Abou-Heif . . . with still more than 53 miles left in 66 °F (18.9 °C) water.

As the swim continued through the afternoon and into the evening, Andersen and Abou-Heif tried to surge and lose the other. Back and forth, their battles continued as they pulled far ahead of the rest of their competition. Thirteen hours and 50 minutes after the see-saw battle, Abou-Heif finally broke free and surged into the lead as night began to fall.

Meanwhile, Erikson and his crew hatched an audacious plan to make up Abou-Heif's 1-mile (1.6K) lead. Sensing an opportunity around 10 p.m., Erikson's escort boat turned off all its lights. Erikson decided to swim in total darkness hoping to catch Abou-Heif unawares.

For seven hours through the pitch-black summer night, Erikson swam dangerously close to his escort boat, quietly and steadily gaining on Abou-Heif, who was lulled into believing he remained far ahead of his competition. Stroke by stroke with the focused aid of his crew, Erikson swam like a man possessed.

With morning approaching, but still under the cloak of darkness, Erikson dramatically closed the gap to less than two city blocks when a rope accidentally became entangled in his escort boat propeller. Disappointingly, valuable time was lost. At 4 a.m., race officials unexpectedly came across Erikson and informed his crew that they had to turn their lights on for safety reasons. The gig was up. Abou-Heif was suddenly alerted of Erikson's proximity and infuriated with his brilliant tactic.

Incensed and motivated, Abou-Heif gradually pulled away to win in 34 hours and 38 minutes, but Erikson's valiant and unheard-of efforts through the night on Lake Michigan showed the extent to which tactics have been used at the highest echelons of open water racing.