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**AT Feature:
Aquabear Toni Diaz Takes to the Open Water**

by Gordon Johnson



Toni crosses the finishes line 4th overall in the 2006 Alcatraz 100 Swim of the Centurions.

When one thinks of "competitive swimming" in the Bay Area, they usually think of the many great Olympic swimmers who have come from this area, Cal & Stanford Universities, strong junior college teams, the many top notch USA swim teams, world class masters swimmers and, of course, probably the greatest number of rec swim teams in the nation. However, there is another swim season in the Bay Area and it's going on right now through October, and that's the

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very popular "Open Water Swim Season." For instance, the Tiburon Mile coming up October 1 has a "limit" of 1,000 swimmers and will be covered by ESPN! This is a sport that is usually dominated by adults, but in three short years Walnut Creek resident, 14-year-old Toni Diaz, is making an impact. So far in 2006, she has been the overall winner in the "2006 Swim a Mile and Run if You Can," took fourth overall in the Fourth Annual Alcatraz 100, finished first in the no-wetsuit division and second overall men and women no-wetsuit and wetsuit divisions in the "Round the Rock 2006" 3.2 mile swim with a time of 1:19.19.



What are her plans for the remainder of the 2006 season? Toni is preparing for the 2006 Alcatraz Shark Fest, is swimming the Miami 2006 10K, and the 2006 RCP Tiburon Mile.

Toni first started swimming when she was one-year-old at the El Cerrito Community Pool. When her family moved to Clayton, they had a home with a pool and, for safety reasons, enrolled her at the Concord Community Pool for the summer sessions when she was five-years-old. While swimming in Concord, she was noticed by the Terrapins and at the age of 10, began swimming year 'round with them. She later moved to Walnut Creek and currently trains with the Walnut Creek Aquabears. She also swims high school season for the Las Lomas Knights in Walnut Creek.

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Toni receives tremendous support from her parents (Tony and Martha) and her sister & brother (Bella and Cesar), as well as her extended family. Cesar (not pictured) and Bella plan on joining Toni for the Tiburon Mile swim. You can see both Cesar and Bella in action in the AT Feature on the Vallejo C, B, A+ meet.

It was one of her Aquabear coaches who first got her into open water swimming -- Mike Heaney, who went with her for her first open water swim. Toni trains at least once a week in "open water" with Pedro Ordenes at waterworldswim.com and had a lot to say about what's different about open water swimming. The obvious thing is the cold water, which is usually in the high 50's. The vast majority of open water swimmers use wetsuits to protect themselves from the cold, but there are quite a few swimmers who still brave the cold bay waters with just a suit and a cap (Toni recommends 2 caps.). Also, there are swells which affect your breathing and Toni has swallowed her fair share of salt water. She advises aspiring open water swimmers to breathe on both sides so they can breathe away from the swells. Toni also advises, "Don't eat too much after swallowing too much salt water!" You can only guess why she gives that tidbit of advice! Open water swimming can also be pretty rough and shares some similarities to water polo, with flying elbows, the possibility of getting kicked and people swimming over you. There are no lines, and swimmers jockey for position, so things can get pretty crowded and wild. You also have to lift your head up and take a peak once in awhile to stay on course, but don't want to do it too much in an effort to not get more tired. As in the pool, you can "drag" another

Katy Erhardt-Diablo Valley College
Blake Henderson
Sean Peneyra-Vista Diablo
Sam Craven-Vista Diablo
Jocelyn Chang
Ryan Wall
Dewing Park &un Girls
Jimmy Bailey-Diablo Valley College
Blake Henderson
Chelsea Allard
Suzanne Heim-Bowen
Dave Boatwright
Lauren Rogers

swimmer (get behind them and be pulled by their force), but make sure you don't get too close or you may get kicked. You get running starts, but need to be careful about diving in too soon and hitting the bottom. Other differences are wildlife (such as sea lions popping up randomly in front of you!), fishing lines and boats.

What are Toni's long-term goals? First, she would like to qualify for the open water nationals. To qualify, she needs to swim a 1500-meter swim in a pool under 19 minutes (men have to swim it in under 18 minutes). Her current time is 19:13. Toni's second long-term goal is to swim the English Channel in 2008, but admits it will be sometime after 2008. Of course there is always a shot of making the Olympic Team for Beijing in the 10K. Toni's aspiration is becoming an excellent doctor.



Toni receives her award for 4th overall in the 2006 Alcatraz 100 Swim of the Centurions.



Beginning of the 2006 Alcatraz 100 Swim of the Centurion



Starting to spread out a little.



Toni warms up for the 2006 Swim a Mile and Run if you Can (Crissy Field to Fort Mason). She finished 1st overall.



Toni warms up after finishing 1st place in the no-wetsuit division in the Round the Rock 2006 3.2 Miles swim.

Is your team not being covered in AT??? Do you have a swimmer(s)/coach that you would like to be featured in AT? Then give us a call at 60 WATER.

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