a world record attempt in Constant Weight. His target is 114 meters, or 374 feet, and if he is successful it will be the first constant weight world record outside of Europe/Egypt since 2001. The Blue Hole has undergone a complete spring clean since last week, and is resplendent with visibility over 30m. This year a camera crew and professional photographers will be on hand so keep watching this space for the latest videos and images from Vertical Blue. Let the diving begin... TOP TIME SCHEDULE

No less than 4 national record attempts have been announced, and Herbert is going to go for the throat on the very first day with

op Time	Athlete	Discipline	Announced depth	Announced dive time	Record attempt? (W)orld / (N)ational	
9:00	Frank Pernett	CNF	41	1:30		
9:09	Mads Jorgensen	CNF	45	1:50		
9:18	Ilaria Molinari	CWT	60	1:50		
9:27	Tomoko Yamanouchi	CWT	61	2:10		
9:36	Davide Carrera	CWT	91	2:45	N	
10:00	Jana Strain	CNF	46	2:00		
10:09	George Miller	CWT	47	2:20		
10:18	Walid Boudhiaf	CNF	56	2:30		
10:27	Leo Muraoka	FIM	70	3:00		
10:39	William Winram	CNF	80	3:00	N	
11:05	Herbert Nitsch	CWT	114	3:40	W	
11:17	Ryuzo Shinomiya	CWT	101	3:10		
11:29	Walter Steyn	CWT	86	2:30	N	
11:41	Robert King	FIM	80	2:50	N	
	her ner the weather is wind		the weather	r is not		

It's under way, and on the first day of Vertical Blue 2009 nobody is pulling any punches.

Top times for DAY ONE

been plaguing the Vertical Blue freedivers for the last several weeks. A huge groundswell, large not so much for its height as for

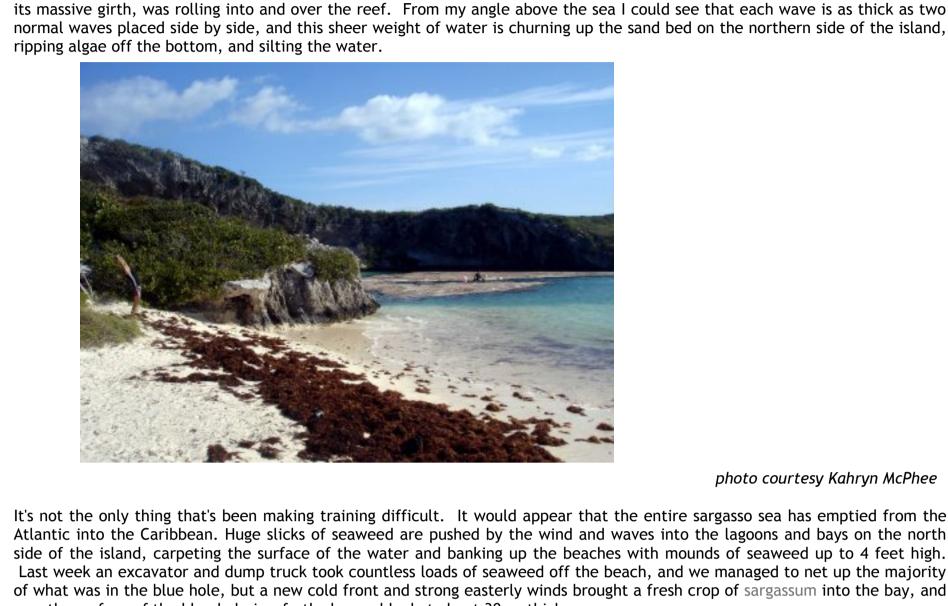


photo courtesy Kahryn McPhee It's not the only thing that's been making training difficult. It would appear that the entire sargasso sea has emptied from the Atlantic into the Caribbean. Huge slicks of seaweed are pushed by the wind and waves into the lagoons and bays on the north side of the island, carpeting the surface of the water and banking up the beaches with mounds of seaweed up to 4 feet high. Last week an excavator and dump truck took countless loads of seaweed off the beach, and we managed to net up the majority of what was in the blue hole, but a new cold front and strong easterly winds brought a fresh crop of sargassum into the bay, and now the surface of the blue hole is a frothy brown blanket about 30cm thick. It has been worse - in February there were patches where the weed was 2m thick, and birds walked on its surface. Not even the oldest fisherman on the island can remember ever seeing such a quantity. However even at its worst Dean's is still better than most freediving locations. There have been dives to over 100m despite 4m

the seaweed covering.

visibility, and some freedivers are reaching personal best performances, with the last meter of the ascent a scramble through Fortunately the winds are predicted to ease in the next 48 hours, and a few cycles of the tide should start to clean the water and empty the weed from the blue hole. It is proof that no freediving location in the world, not even Dean's, is perfect. Vertical Blue 2008 is scheduled to have 9 competition days over the first 11 days of April, so if the weather does clear it is possible that many athletes will use the first few days to complete their training before attempting their targets towards the end of the comp. Just so we don't forget, here is a picture of what Dean's Blue Hole can look like, and hopefully what it is working towards in April...

photo courtesy Chris Alchin

V.B. TEAM SHIRTS

team shirt and Orca swim cap (2nd prize).

Countries represented:

GREAT BRITAIN: Sara Campbell, Georgina Miller

ITALY: Davide Carrera, Ilaria Molinari

DENMARK: Mads Becker Jørgensen

AUSTRIA: Herbert Nitsch FRANCE: Walid Boudhiaf

however are anything but boring...

The Vertical Blue team polos have arrived, and one of the only ways to get your hands on one of these limited edition shirts is to enter the Suunto Pick the Records competition Have your entry in before Sunday the 29th of March for a chance to win a Suunto D4 and team shirt (first prize) or a

Thanks to the models Walter Steyn and Olivia Phillip **EUROPE**

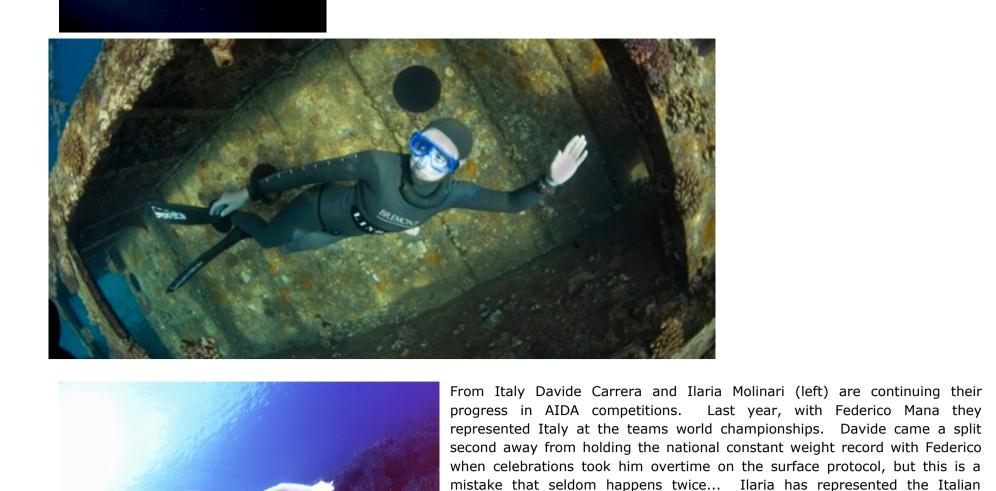
Look at those flags above. Aren't they a boring assembly red blue and white stripes? The freedivers who come from these countries

of one of the men doing over 120m, it is a formidable goal indeed.

England is sending the indomitable Sara Campbell (below), who has taken a year and a half off since the World Championships in 2007 to deal with familial issues. Wherever she keeps her freediving talent it doesn't seem to have been affected, and she is back to her grueling training routine of one day on, 2-3 days rest. On her website she has announced an intent to be the first woman to dive 100 meter in CWT. Considering that this is 66 body lengths, the equivalent

Georgina Miller (left) is another UK freediver who is quickly moving up the ranks, having just cracked the 50m barrier in CWT. She won't challenge Sara at this comp but powerful finstrokes and fearless tenacity may push her into the ranks of the top women by the end of the

> women for almost a decade, but her youth and elegance show that she still has a lot to offer. Both are graceful and languid divers who push for new



depths from well within their limits.

Walid Boudhiaf (below), who will be representing France in his first freediving competition, is a truly multinational freediver - he was born in Tunisia, raised in France, and now lives and trains at

From the landlocked country of Austria comes the freediver who has dominated competitive depth diving for the most part of this decade. Herbert

altitude in Bogota, Colombia. Something in his demeanour tells of deepset determination.

In Colombia he maintains a grueling schedule, training several times a day, and reaching results at the pool that would be impressive even at sea level, not to mention over 8,000 feet up! Mads Becker Jørgensen (left) is a respected Danish freediving coach who has recently been focussing more of his attention on his own training. Until recently most of the top Danish freedivers originated from a club in the city of Aarhus, on the main peninsula, but Mads is a member of a new camp of apneists who have been training in the capital Copenhagen. Mads is concentrating on no-fins dives, and has Stig's 61m dive, previously a world record, in his sights...

Nitsch will compete for the first time ever outside of Europe/Egypt, and after a relative absence from the

Herbert has been seen in Dean's Blue Hole with a monofin, swimming breaststroke and pulling on the line, so nobody, perhaps not even Herbert himself, knows which discipline he will be competing in, if not all of them...

competitive scene in 2008 he will have a lot to prove.

QUICK QUESTIONS

Walid: Umberto Pelizzari Mads: Chris McDonell

whenever you feel a bit down!

1. who is the sportsperson (any sport) you admire the most (past or present)?

Herbert: I met Umberto some years ago, and respect him a lot, but I do not tend to admire anyone

among the peas, chips and pizzas, in a bikini, holding my breath... Well, it might work...?:-)

Walid: I am not supertitious but I like to repeat a sufi preyer before an important challenge.

who would win in a dive-off between Donald Duck and Kermit the Frog? - and why?

5. have you done a PB recently in training, and if so which discipline? Sara, Ilaria, Herbert: No (One of these may be lying or need updating... Ed) George: Had some happy static sessions in the pool before I came out here. Walid: I am reaching 125m DNF in Bogota (at 2.600m above sea level)

Ilaria: Kermit. Donald seems to me a bit too agitated to freedive

Sara: No idea!!! But will choose Kermit as frogs are far cuter than ducks!

as for me... (update from William)

the Bahamas in September/October, building towards being in peak condition in April.

developing into full-blown congestion, and within six days I was able to return to depth.

This year, like last, I started achieving very promising results early on, and by January I was exceeding the goals I had set for myself for that period. I was training with Mike Lott (below left), Jimmy Montanti (above left) and Michele Tomasi (above right), all of them excellent freedivers, with whom I feel completely at ease in the water, and have shared grand and beautiful experiences. Mike and Jimmy were there for my first freediving record attempt in 2006, and have helped me through the difficult phases and celebrated with me the successes.

Herbert: Kermit, frogs can hold their breath much longer.

George: Valentino Rossi. He is argueably the most talented rider ever.

2. what is the strangest thing you've done underwater?

Mads: Penetrated a few hour old shipwreck

choreographies with some friends of mine!

Mads: Kalymnos Island in Greece

George: My red Ducati bikini is lucky.

Mads: DNF 136m and 6:51 in static

carry around under the water.

song "Frogs in the Glen" says: The deer can jump higher The fish can swim faster Than ever a froggie swam But a deer can't dive deep

After

turn events meant that

unable keep

kind training

the same

three left in January a

all

of

was to

up

sea - pure human aquatic potential.

PACIFICA

Countries represented:

AUSTRALIA: Walter Stevn

his first depth competition since 2006.

NEW ZEALAND: William Trubridge, Kathryn McPhee, Kerian Hibbs JAPAN: Ryuzo Shinomiya, Megumi Matsumoto, Tomoko Yamanouchi

Mads: Yes my little Buddha and a littele piece of coral.

3. where is your favourite place to dive?

Herbert: Hanging for 3 hours at night doing a deco stop on scuba

Ilaria: I have done very stupid but very funny underwater dances and

with no teeth came in asking about a course.... so I found the owner. Random.

Walid: The tunisian spots on the Mediterranean coastline where I used to dive when I was little. George: The Chepstow quarry in the Uk... Salt free is an amazing set up, albeit a bit chilly. (And I suppose Blackpool is your favourite beach in the world too - Ed). Herbert: Palau Ilaria: French Polinesia: visibility is never-ending, you see any kind of fish and marine mammals underwater, you can play with savage dolphins, manta rays and more: it's divers' heaven! Sara: So far I haven't found anywhere to beat the Dahab Blue Hole for training. But I did a stunning dive off Abu Nuhas reef, in the Gulf of Suez recently - it's littered with wrecks and I swam through the Giannis D, which was really, really beautiful (see pic) 4. do you have any superstitions or good luck charms? Herbert: No. Ilaria: I used to wear a certain wool hat before any training and competition, then I stopped competing for 3 years and when I started again I decided not to be bound to any object in particular, to be completely free and independent.

Sara: Ellen McArthur, teeny-tiny British woman who smashed all expectations of what she was capable of in round the world yacht racing.

Ilaria: Not considering freediving, where Umberto to me is the absolute king ever; I really admire and have always supported Jury Chechi, the italian gymnast. As well as five gold and two bronze medals at the World Gymnastics Championships he won the Olympics title in the

George: i found some false teeth on a coral head, put them in my pocket and took them back to the shop. About a week or so later a man

Sara: what are these questions....? PUBLISHABLE, it would be on a 60m dive, my first ever in cold water, wondering how I would ever train for this on a regular basis (not that I'd want to!!) - had a vision of myself sitting in one of those huge open supermarket freezers

A truly inspiring woman, amazing story of what can be achieved, and a great book - worth sitting down with for some motivation

rings at Atlanta 1996 and was third at Athens 2004, at the age of 35, which is amazing for a gymnast, and despite several physical accidents which occurred in very delicate moments of his sport carrier, he always stood up and began training and competing again.

And a fish can't ribbet So I'm proud to be what I am Be proud of your flippers" George: I had a small kermit the frog when i was little. He accidently went diving into the toilet and was retreived several meters along the pipe by my reluctant mother before he reached the septic tank. So thats real evidence, i believe, that kermit the frog is a superior diver. (And with that hard evidence, and a tally of 12.5 - 2.5, I think we can conclude that Kermit would be the deeper diving toon).

I don't know how much the readers of this page know about my particular training patterns. My yearly regime is the opposite of most northern hemisphere athletes, in that I do base training in Europe in the summer and begin depth adaptation when I come to

Mads: Kermit of couse.... Kermit is much more aquadynamic and much less boyant because he dosen't has a huge fatty duckbutt to

Walid: I guess Kermit the frog will be the winner, since he has more experience in deep waters and much more self confidence, as the

rhythm as before: appointments, inclement weather (yes it even happens in the Blue Hole once every few years!), and equipment failures seemed to conspire to disrupt the momentum that I had gathered in previous months. This year I am attempting to train all three disciplines at once, and combined with these interruptions it has been a formidable challenge. The three disciplines all require different musculature, and even different dive strategies: in constant weight with the monofin I am limited mainly by muscular failure in the rapid ascents, since I am still a relative beginner to the technique and haven't developed the same lower body power and lactic acid resistance; in constant no fins, the years of pool training and repetitive deep dives mean that muscle failure is still a long way off, and so I am limited principally by hypoxia - a threshold that is shifting slowly but surely with the years; in free immersion, limits are imposed by equipment properties - a bouncing platform and slightly stretchy rope make the ascents frustrating, and at times, when combined with narcosis, downright scary. Two weeks ago, after a month of setbacks, it felt like the last nail in the coffin was being driven home when I started to feel the first symptoms of a cold - a scratchy throat and itchy sinuses. Training was immediately suspended and for four days I did little but rest.

eat raw garlic and honey sandwiches, and chew vitamin C until my tongue was raw. Incredibly the symptoms subsided without

Now, with 12 days left until the competition starts I am guickly building back towards the form I had in January, and hope to register dives in all three disciplines during the nine days of Vertical Blue. However for those of you who are waiting to make predictions in the Suunto Pick the records challenge, it is hard even for me to know what I will be capable of, and where that stacks up with the

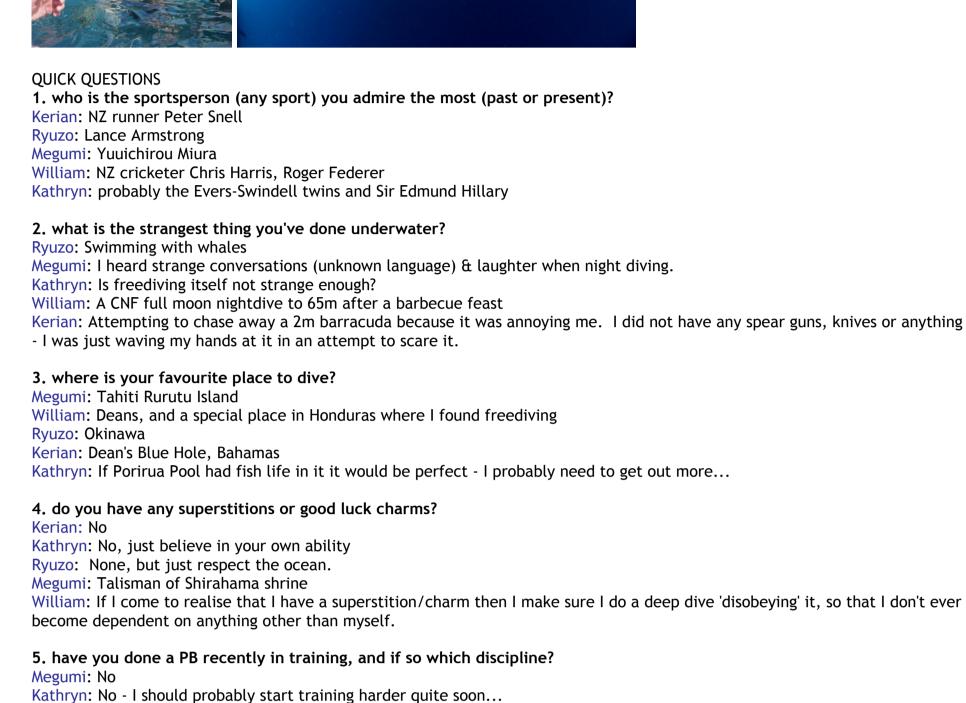
Here is a photo taken by Nanna Kreutzmann, a Danish photojournalist who was present at the AIDA Team WC last year. She recently won "best danish sports reportage of the year" for this picture, and two others of the NZ team. One of my first ever deep dives with a monofin, it's obvious I'm still unable to keep my arms still, and I think I did at least three arm strokes during the ascent from 88m. Since then I have left this depth a good way behind in CWT, and other than a conclusive pull as I approach the surface, my arms are more behaved and have reconciled their jealousy of the legs. My preference will always be for no fins however - the purity, simplicity, and beautiful lilting rhythm of this discipline will never lose their attraction for me. One man, one breath and the

Three of the islands of the world's biggest ocean have sent three men and three women to represent the countries of the ring of fire. From Aotearoa New Zealand, world record holders William Trubridge (CNF & FIM) and Kathryn McPhee (DNF) will be joined by Kerian Hibbs, who is recently recovered from a road accident and looking to improve on the 71m he registered in last year's Vertical Blue. Kathryn recently lost her CNF national record to compatriot Nikky Roderick (53m), but with the world record for DNF under her belt and the second longest breath hold in the world for the women, she has the capacity to eclipse this mark. William has been training all three disciplines, but has been guarantined in his apartment for several days with a cold...

From Japan, Ryuzo Shinomiya is back to improve on his personal best of 104m, set in Dean's Blue Hole last year. He has started off well, and is already in unchartered territory with 2 weeks to go until the competition commences. Several key changes have been made to his training, including a no warm-up approach, and a slower dive profile. Megumi Matsumoto is back to lay claim to the national records which have been taken away from her since Vertical Blue 2008. And Tomoko Yamanouchi is carving into

Despite its strong swimming background, Australia has never had a big showing in the freediving world. But there is one freediver who is flying the Southern Cross, and after huge performances in the pool (175m DNF, 206m DYN) he will compete in

new depths with a new fin, though there is secrecy as to whether she is approaching the Japanese record.



Kerian: Kermit - he's smaller, has a more streamlined profile and last time I saw him dive, we discussed in depth his technique,

Kathryn: Kermit, easily. Frogs have great underwater technique while ducks are designed more for surface swimming and the

William: in Honduras flippers are called 'duck feet,' and in Italy breastroke is 'la rana' (the frog). So since I have gone deeper as a frog than with duck feet, I would normally pick a frog. However Kermit is probably not a good ambassador for Ranidae - he is,

Five men and one woman will represent the Americas at this year's Vertical Blue. They are all record-holders, past and present,

of Theo Ivanovic in constant weight (82m)? Or will he steal

in behind Leo to try for 76m in Free Immersion??

Flying the star-spangled banner, Leo and Robert may end up going head to head for the US constant no fins (CNF) or free immersion (FIM) record. Robert is the current record holder in CNF, Leo holds FIM; although Leo attempted CNF in 2008's Vertical Blue he was too exhausted from his eventual victory in FIM - will we see a similar odyssey towards 55m no fins for him this year? He has had a year of training in the waters of Hawaii to perfect his breaststroke technique, and he will return to quickly resume where he left off. Rob King, the lawyer from Miami, is already in training in the Blue Hole, and has been seen frequently with a monofin. Could he be looking to make a raid on the 2-year old record

Canada is represented by three world-class athletes this year: Eric Fattah and William Winram return for another year, and Jana Strain who is a fresh addition, after securing her first national record in the pool with a 171m dynamic apnea. In the waters of Hawaii the Humpbacks tell of a girl with a mermaid tattoo and a monofin falling past 50m... Last year Eric reached 67m in Dean's Blue Hole, diving on a partial exhale. He returned to train in the fall of 2008, and was rumored to be making fundamental changes in his approach, which could push him back amongst the world's

Kerian: Yes, I recently did a PBs in both DYN and DNF in training.

(That's 7.5 - 2.5 in favour of Kermit - poor old Donald get's it rough!).

6. who would win in a dive-off between Donald Duck and Kermit the Frog? - and why?

odd dip. Besides that, Donald Duck doesn't have the psychological capacity or stamina.

after all, a muppet. Donald on the other hand is a sailor, so my money is with the duck on this one.

William: In the last 6 months: PBs in CNF, CWT Ryuzo: Yes, in CWT since arriving in the Bahamas

which I think we have all been trying to copy since

Megumi: Frog (same reason as Leo)

THE AMERICAS

Countries represented:

USA: Leo Muraoka, Robert King

COLOMBIA: Frank Pernett

greedy for new depths and blue glory.

CANADA: William Winram, Jana Strain, Eric Fattah

deepest. William Winram is easily the top American freediver, with continental records in all the disciplines, and medals in almost all the European competitions. There is only one thing bigger than a continent, and that's the world... from left to right, William Winram, Jana Strain, Eric Fattah William Winram

From high up in the mountains of Colombia, Frank Pernett is the lung doctor who has put his knowledge to practice. In Vertical Blue 2008 he swam without fins down to 43m in VB 2008. He is back in 2009 with his loyal support team: wife Cristina and daughter Valentina.

Rob: a tie between Zidane and Kelly Slater Jana: Karen Kain Frank: Enzo Maiorca Eric: Mike Powell (Long Jump), Haile Gebrselassie (5K/10K), Goran Ivanisevic (Tennis) Leo: Sagawa Yukiyoshi 2. what is the strangest thing you've done underwater? Eric: Breathed from an air pocket in a wreck at -25m. Leo: I saw phantasmagoria when i almost die working as a commercial diver Jana: Hmmm I think that one is private. 3. where is your favourite place to dive?

QUICK QUESTIONS 1. who is the sportsperson (any sport) you admire the most (past or present)?

think he'd be as reliable.

Eric: Tie - double drowning.

Frank: Donald Duck, because he's diving with helium!

(That's 4.5 - 1.5 in favour of Kermit, so far).

Frank: Nirvana, San Andres Island, Colombia Eric: Mozino Point, North Vancouver Island, BC, Canada Jana: It is a toss up between Dean's Blue Hole and Kona. Kona because it seems like there is big animals are always around. Being serenaded by a humpback whale during a freefall is something that happens, but it could easily be out of a dream. I love the Bahamas because of the diving set up, beautiful water and white sand beaches. It is also an added bonus to see reef sharks when diving recreationally. Rob: Dahab (i expect soon to be joined by Dean's) Leo: Hawaii 4. do you have any superstitions or good luck charms? Eric, Leo & Jana: No. Frank: I need to check the color of my urine before any attempt, just to know how hydrated I am, despite I know it's not related Robert: My old Suunto D3 is the closest thing I have to a good luck charm--plan to keep using it until it dies. 5. have you done a PB recently in training, and if so which discipline? Jana: yes, in CWT, FIM, CNF and VWT Frank: yes, in DNF and DYN Eric, Rob, Leo: none recently (could they be concealing something?) 6. who would win in a dive-off between Donald Duck and Kermit the Frog? - and why? Rob: My money's on Kermit. It's not easy being green, and overcoming that adversity would probably give him a competitive edge. Leo: Frog (because it looks like William Trubridge!) Jana: Definitely Kermit the Frog, he is better equipped for long periods in and the water and diving deeper. But more important

then anything is the psychology. Donald has a history of being a spaz, and Kermit, well he has put up with Miss Piggy for how long and is still mellow. I think Kermit would be able to complete his dives under any conditions. Donald has a big heart, but I don't