

# Faster, higher, stronger... deeper?

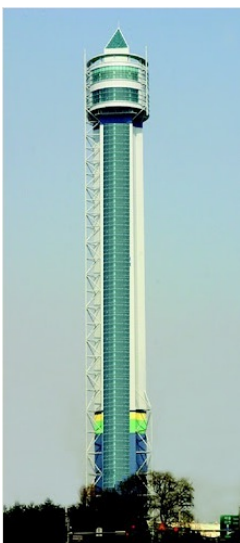
*Could freediving ever be an Olympic sport?*

Every four years that well-handled question re-surfaces for fresh debate. By now I've had some occasion to practice an answer, and it normally goes along the lines of:

"Yes, I think it should be an Olympic sport, since it is the only purely aquatic sport (all the others take place on the boundary between air and water, and are thus semi-aquatic at best), and thus the only real measure of human aquatic potential. Sure, the depth disciplines might present some logistical problems for an Olympic organiser, but at least dynamic apnea wouldn't require anything more than a tape measure stretched along the edge of the Olympic pool."



After being awed and inspired by 2012 Olympic games, and marvelling at the technical wizardry, purpose-built venues and attention to detail, I no longer think that even the depth disciplines are out of the reach of an Olympic organiser, in any venue. If a churning whitewater rapid can be constructed in the fields of London suburbia, and an entire stadium can be built just for cycling races, then why not a 130 meter tall tower with glass viewing panels?



Thinking that it would require foot-thick glass at the base, where 14 atmospheres of water pressure would be weighing down, I looked up the specs of tempered glass and found that even inch-thick tempered glass could support thousands of PSI (it would only need to support 250). Furthermore the structure could be made so that it could be dismantled and sold to the next Olympic host (or used as a very deep submarine escape training tank!)

This may answer the questions of 'could' and 'should' the sport be part of the Olympics, but to the question 'will it be,' there is currently still only one regrettable answer...

Until freediving sheds the unflattering and outdated skin of sled-diving, and allows itself to blossom into both a widespread recreational activity and bonafide sport, then it will always be coloured with the monikers 'extreme,' or even 'death wish.' And you don't see those kind of sports in the Olympic roster.

It would be a long and laborious obstacle course even to get dynamic apnea eligible for selection in the 2020 Olympics (disciplines for Rio in 2016 have already been decided, with rugby and golf(!) as new additions). Realistically, even if the sport does continue to grow and reaches the point where monofins don't get suspicious looks in the airport, there is still no chance that anyone will be awarded a 'deepest' gold medal before 2024.

Mind you, those games are likely to be held in Paris, and if any nation might get behind the inclusion of our sport then it would be the French.

Although by then the tower might need to be taller than 130 meters...

I guess freediving should be about internal feelings, should be done for enjoyment and for "return to our origin." I'm afraid that this beautiful activity could be ruined by doping and money in the name of chasing for olympic gold medals..

by Honza Horák on 2012-08-14 13:23:24

A pure Olympic Sport, records to be set, multi diaplne (maybe include a decathlon style all element), hard training required, relatively cheap to start. ALSO it can be included in the PARA-Olympics.rnlt ticks all my boxes and the IOC boxes, all we need now is a good BID team.... Lets go for it...

by Dave Young on 2012-08-14 23:39:46

There used to be an underwater race in the Olympics! That was "purely aquatic"! But I agree with Honza that it is more about the purity and beauty of the experience which includes the natural setting. To reduce it just to a competition in a tube sounds awful!

by David Trubridge on 2012-08-15 02:35:42

You're right, I hadn't thought of diving a tube from an aesthetic perspective...

by William on 2012-08-15 02:50:02

How about a compromise? An ocean-going infrastructure consisting of a huge floating tube would isolate the interior from currents and swell, would be relatively cheap since it doesn't need the structural strength of a tower and could be towed to the next olympic nation, or used for other events in the meantime. Cameras, lighting and possibly safety-diver umbilicals could be fixed to the inside. In fact, it would fairly run-of-the-mill for modern oil and gas companies to fabricate.

by John McLaughlin on 2012-08-15 03:51:43

Great idea John - using a transparent tube in the ocean would mean that you could have a raisable grill at the base of the tube as a safety retrieval device and the athletes could dive without lanyards.

by William on 2012-08-15 06:12:37

I also think that the tube in the ocean idea is probably the best way to go, not to mention, unlike a tower, you could add more length to the tube if people keep reaching the bottom. I mean so far they have curling and recently golf. Both sports I've never understood how they made it into the olympics due to their low excitement rate. then again freediving may be similarly boring to some people. but at least people could comment on it to try and make it less boring. and with all the existing disciplines currently within freediving a good chunk of medals could be earned there. As for pool disciplines, those might do a little better. the only real problem for the olympics would be its excitement factor, for people who don't know about it's not very exciting to look at.

by Jaime Echeverria on 2012-08-15 06:27:36

I would support apnea as an Olympic event. But it's too late for 2020 already - there is already a shortlist of 8 possible new events (<http://www.sportbusiness.com/news/183894/eight-sports-in-the-running-for-2020-olympic-program>), so if you want 2024, time to start campaigning!

by Greg Pfeil on 2012-08-15 14:23:46

Er . . . why do you need the tube IN the water?! It would be staggeringly expensive to build such a structure 130m long. Why not just have a very light sectional framework to run a camera and light down, still with the raisable grill? Maybe with a just a short, clear tube at the surface to keep chop down.  
*by David Trubridge on 2012-08-16 02:27:30*

The Olympics dish out 'staggering expenses' like Saudis tip the bellboys! If you were using a raisable grill then it would need to be an enclosed tube to prevent the freediver from falling out of it in the event of an emergency. However an enclosed 130m tube with sufficient diameter would be very difficult to anchor and keep vertical in even the slightest current..  
*by William on 2012-08-16 02:45:03*

A quick calculation estimates that a freediving tower about 10 feet (3m) in diameter could be built with segmented acrylic hoops that would need to be about 6 inches thick (15cm) at the bottom to the tank to withstand the hoop stresses from the water pressure. This assumes about 10000 psi tensile strength for the material and a factor 4 margin, because there is a lot that I did not take into account for this calculation. Still, this does not seem outside of realistic, and a tall tower like this would be a beacon of attention for the games. The thickness of the material required will scale linearly with the diameter of the tank (ie - if you wanted it to be 20 feet in diameter, the walls will need to be 12 inches thick instead of 6).\\r\\n\\r\\nI like this idea. This can be done, and it would be a signature iconic landmark for the games.  
*by Ron Smith on 2012-08-16 09:28:39*

Hey Ron, Thanks for the analysis! I must have missed something, since I just used a standard conversion from atmospheres to PSI to get 205psi for 14atm (@130m), but I guess the pressure exerted on the sides would be different. A tower for this purpose would probably need to be 20 feet diameter, and 12" of perspex kind of consigns this to the realm of pipe-dreaming. Also, although it would be great for spectating, like David pointed out it would kind of turn freediving into a test-tube sport very different to what we experience in the sea!  
*by William on 2012-08-16 10:38:40*

Good text William and like the idea, thanks Ron for your analyses! Paris would be funky yes, have a tower like that near eifeltower. The dismantling and re- using is possible we do this already at our company with indoor surf pools and normal pools, even Olympic size.  
*by Pim on 2012-08-16 11:56:28*

I think the best strategy to start with would be to start marketing mostly DYN and DNF. They are the easiest to present as safe and athletic sports. Also, having the 8 best dynamic apnea divers in the world diving side by side is very thrilling event and it would definitely be more interesting than many of the current olympic sports. Static seems more like a stunt and depth disciplines still carry a reputation of an extreme sport.\\r\\n\\r\\nBut if freediving ever gets to olympics, the level of performances will rise hugely when the chinese and others start to train freedivers professionally from the age of 5. I\\'m sure it would take over 300m dynamics to even qualify for the olympics.\\r\\n\\r\\n  
*by Mikko on 2012-08-16 13:48:45*

It's been in the Olympics already!\\r\\nhttp://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swimming\_at\_the\_1900\_Summer\_Olympics\_%E2%80%93\_Men's\_underwater\_swimming\\r\\nPoor Peter Lykkeberg! I think he did more like 100m!\\r\\nhttp://www.sports-reference.com/olympics/summer/1900/SWI/mens-underwater-swimming.html\\r\\n\\r\\nThe problem is that freediving in its current competition form would be very very boring for the spectator and difficult to comment upon. William refers us to curling and golf as other examples of this but I think that is unfair because it is easy for a spectator to appreciate the precision required in those sports, and the outcome is slightly less predictable. Depth freediving would be particularly tricky. Where's the interest for the spectator when one diver announces a 68m dive and completes it, then another announces a 70m dive and completes THAT? Yes the 68m diver still has a chance of winning if the 70m diver does NOT complete their dive cleanly, but then you have a situation wherein the spectators have to root for failure! You could do it like high jump / pole vault where they keep increasing the bar, but then how many deep dives will someone do on Olympic day?!\\r\\n\\r\\nDynamic could work if they all set off together. One at a time would be slightly boring for spectators.\\r\\n\\r\\nAs for the static...\\r\\nhttp://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SWgg20IqibM\\r\\n\\r\\nI think finswimming should be in though.  
*by Blue Straggler on 2012-08-17 00:25:56*

Sorry, I am not sure what happened with the formatting there (this was a copy-and-paste job)\\r\\nLinks:\\r\\nhttp://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swimming\_at\_the\_1900\_Summer\_Olympics\_%E2%80%93\_Men's\_underwater\_swimming\\r\\nhttp://www.sports-reference.com/olympics/summer/1900/SWI/mens-underwater-swimming.html\\r\\n\\r\\nAnd the thrill of the static\\r\\nhttp://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SWgg20IqibM\\r\\n\\r\\nAlso apologies for a mistake - William mentioned RUGBY and golf; it was Jaime who mentioned curling and golf :-))\\r\\n\\r\\nIf freediving did return to the Olympics, all the synchro swimmers would say to themselves "hang on a minute, we can do that" and just blitz all the freedive world records! :-))\\r\\n\\r\\n\\r\\n  
*by Blue Straggler on 2012-08-17 00:59:14*

And again with those links as it seems that this form does not like carriage returns:  
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swimming\_at\_the\_1900\_Summer\_Olympics\_%E2%80%93\_Men's\_underwater\_swimming and http://www.sports-reference.com/olympics/summer/1900/SWI/mens-underwater-swimming.html and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SWgg20IqibM Sorry I inadvertently made a mess on the board (as it were)  
*by Blue Straggler on 2012-08-17 04:26:08*

With the number of cameras that are strapped to the bottom plate, safety divers, etc. at almost any freedive competition these days, I fail to believe that freediving could not be portrayed in an exciting way...especially with expert commentary. \\r\\n\\r\\nI understood that the real issue with freediving in the Olympics lies in the problem of involvement. Not enough countries participate in the sport as a whole to make its inclusion considerable. Is this wrong?  
*by Ashley Chapman on 2012-08-17 07:12:08*