

VB 2012 - clash of the Neptunes



Suunto Vertical Blue is the world's 'premier' annual freediving event, and this year it is also the final stop on the AIDA World Cup. 56 athletes, representing 21 countries that span every continent of the world, will compete over nine days of diving between November 20-30 to determine who is the world's deepest man and woman, and for a chance to bring home some of the \$20,000 prize pool - the biggest ever in this sport.

The three freediving depth disciplines contested are:

1. No Fins (CNF)
2. With Fins (CWT)
3. Free Immersion (FIM)

Each discipline is given equal weighting (points are awarded as a percentage of the top score in that discipline). The freediver who scores the most total points from their best dives in the three disciplines will be crowned the *Suunto Vertical Blue Champion*.



The top three male freedivers in the world, **Guillaume Nery**, **William Trubridge** and **Alexey Molchanov**, will all be there, ready to go head-to-head in Dean's Blue Hole's mysterious light-absorbing waters. Between them, Nery and Trubridge are the current world champions in all the depth disciplines. Trubridge has held world records in CNF and FIM for most of the recent years, while Alexey Molchanov recently broke the world record in CWT with a dive to 125m - the deepest self-powered freedive in history, and was also recently the top-performing male athlete at the 2012 AIDA Team's World Champs.

Close behind them is Japanese champion **Ryuzo Shinomiya**, who has reached 115m in Constant Weight. Croatian **Goran Colak**, who is the current world record holder in pool freediving with an incredible 273m dynamic apnea, will be looking to dive to 100 meters and beyond. **Alfredo Roën** and **Miguel Lozano**, both capable of more than 100m in Constant Weight, will drive each other deeper in an attempt to leave the event with the Spanish record. The same goes for **Nick Mevoli** and **Rob King**, USA freedivers who have been swapping national records recently as they work their way through the 90's and towards those magical three digit numbers.

The depth doesn't stop there, with **Antero Joki**, **Ant Williams** and **Morgan Bourc'h** all capable of 90m+ and many other divers with latent talent waiting to be applied to depth.



What makes VB a special event is that it gives the athletes free reign to mine their aquatic potential. None of the concerns of boat rides, fickle weather conditions, cold water or irate taxi drivers affect the venue of Dean's Blue Hole - essentially the competitors are like chemists in a spotless laboratory, free to conduct controlled experiments on what their body can tolerate in an airless world.

And the results continue to astound. If you left your diamonds in the basement of a 40-story skyscraper that flooded up to its roof then these guys could freedive down the lift shaft and collect them for you.

The deepest dives will last in excess of 4 minutes, but that's not 4 minutes of holding your breath in your bathtub: it's 4 minutes of propelling yourself through the water column, while combatting pressures that would crush a soccer ball to the size of a tennis ball and which exert mind-numbing narcosis on neural circuitry. It's 4-minutes that takes place in another dimension, where time is drawn out into an eternity - an eternity that lasts but a single breath.

We'll be introducing the female athletes soon - stay tuned!

A mixed discipline World Champs?

At the AIDA Teams World Champs three athletes represent their country, each of them competing in constant weight (CWT), dynamic (DYN), and static apnea (STA) to try and attain the greatest number of total points. It's an exciting event, with a very social atmosphere, and growing suspense as the leading teams emerge towards the end of the competition and every athlete tries to find that balance between trying as hard as they can and trying 'harder than they can' - the dreaded red card performances that derail a team's chances of a podium position (ask me about it!).

This year's event begins next week in Nice, France. Unfortunately New Zealand didn't have the funding to send three team members to its antipode this time, so since I can't take part, I feel I can entitle myself to the role of grumpy commentator, from my sideline island (Tenerife) in the Atlantic.

According to apnea.cz, last year there were 1,165 AIDA performances in DYN and 961 in DNF (dynamic no fins), while in depth there were 649 AIDA performances in CWT and in 279 in CNF (constant no fins).

So while there is still about a 2:1 difference in depth disciplines, no fins freediving is as popular in the pool as monofin freediving. And yet for no-fins specialists, the AIDA Teams World Champs is still the party they don't get invited to: a competition where they will either have to try and make do with a tail, or sit on the bleachers watching the dolphin-kickers take all the credit for their country.



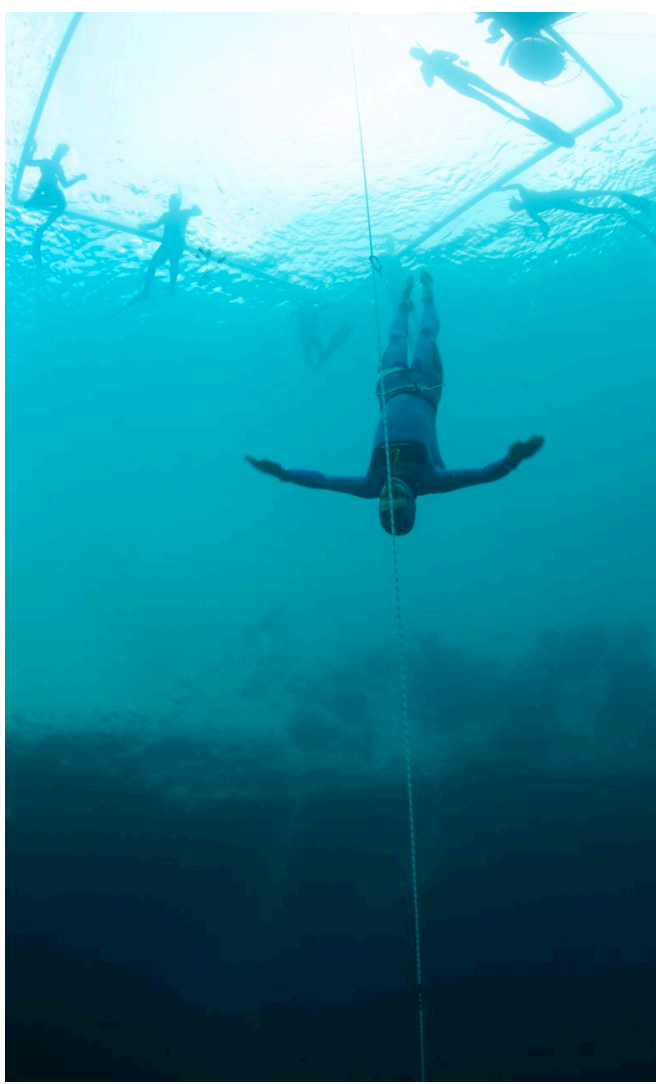
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Of course I have nothing against finned freediving - it has been the focus of my training since the Hectometer in 2010, and after my technique has graduated a little from the "mosquito larvae twitch" (thanks Chris Morey!) I have to say I am starting to enjoy it.

But even if I liked it just as much as no-fins, I would still feel the two forms should be equally represented at the Teams as well as at the Individual World Champs. And this is how it could be done: the team is still comprised of 3 members (plus a reserve if necessary), who compete as follows,

- Member 1 (monofin specialist): CWT STA DYN
- Member 2 (no fins specialist): CNF STA DNF
- Member 3 (all-rounder): CWT STA DNF or CNF STA DYN

This way there are 3 static performances, 3 no fins performances and 3 monofin performances. It can't get any fairer than that! It would need a slight adjustment of the points system to ensure that the two categories were credited evenly, but that is all.



Dave Mullins coaching me in static at the 2008 Teams WC (left), Will Winram diving CNF at VB 2010 (right)

Freediving may never become an Olympic sport, but at least we can, and I feel should, represent the disciplines of our sport evenly, at what is essentially the "Underwater Olympics."