

Kersh to face World Series test

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Marathon swimmer Richard Kersh of Russellville never misses a chance to compete against the best swimmers in the world.

This time his competitive nature will take him to Argentina, the site of the first race in the World Series of Marathon Swimming.

Only the top 20 marathon swimmers in the world are invited to the event — the top 15 ranked swimmers and five alternates.

Kersh qualified as an alternate.

Today, they will swim from Sante Fe to Coronda in the Piranas River, the biggest river in Argentina at 1,800 miles long and 70 miles wide.

The course is 31 miles long.

Kersh said his time will depend on the rain level, which creates a better flow in the river. "It's summertime in Argentina," he said. "How much flow the river has will be to

our advantage.

"If the current is four knots or faster, we should be able to get downriver under eight hours."

Like most rivers, Kersh also expects the Piranas to be muddy along the jungle areas and grasslands.

Kersh's support crew will be assigned to him on race day.

The purpose of the crew is to navigate and provide food and information. "I just hope he or she speaks English," Kersh said.

Kersh is not allowed to touch the boat or its passengers at any time during the race.

The first-place finisher in the marathon will receive \$15,000 for his efforts, but Kersh isn't doing it for the money. "I hope to finish in the top 10," he said last week.

His finish in the first race will determine whether or not Kersh will compete in the entire series.

For this series, the world is divided into three geographic

sections with one marathon held in each section. The second race is scheduled for June in Atlantic City, N.J.

In September, the world championships will be held in Nuremberg, Germany.

Marathon swimmers must compete in at least three distance events a year to be ranked by the World Professional Marathon Swimming Association.

Kersh has been swimming in these marathons since 1982.

Last August, he finished 13th in a field of 50 swimmers in the 10th annual Manhattan Island Marathon in New York.

His time on the 28.5-mile course was seven hours, 46 minutes.

In 1987, Kersh was 19th overall in the event with a time of 8:19.

Kersh, who is an exercise physiologist for Kersh Wellness Management, a division of Little Rock's Baptist Medical System, describes marathon swimming as the "ultimate" adventure.