

# Kersh kicking for Manhattan Swim

By Kirk Clayborn  
GAZETTE STAFF

Richard Kersh, 29, of Russellville, loves to swim. Maybe a bit too much.

In Lake Dardanelle, Kersh tortures his body by averaging an hour and a half in the water on weekdays and three and a half hours for seven to eight miles covered on weekends. All this to risk his life literally for accomplishing his love, to swim 28½ miles around New York City in the Manhattan Island Swim Sunday.

"I'm doing it mainly because it's the last true adventure," Kersh said. "There are a lot of things we can do in modern times, but swimming this distance has been always a big challenge. There's a thrill knowing you can do it."

Race directors rank Kersh among the top three contenders to

win the marathon swim event. Thirty-six participants from Canada, Australia, Holland, India, Mexico, Italy and Germany arrive this weekend to venture in polluted city waters of the East and Harlem rivers, navigate strong currents and, most importantly, survive.

"I love sports, especially swimming, so it was a choice between this or Ironman Triathlon in Hawaii," Kersh said. "I felt good about finishing the Ironman, but this I don't know. There is a lot at stake."

Kersh's background includes two previous professional marathon swims at Quebec, Canada. He failed to finish his first by contracting hypothermia after 5½ hours in frigid 55-degree waters during the Traverse due Lack St. John. in '81. However, Kersh re-

turned to finish second among 30 in the 15-kilometer Lake Memphramogog near Montreal in '83.

That's not bad for a former 200-meter freestyle conference record holder while at Arkansas Tech in '79. Tech's program was limited in talent, so Kersh swam shorter distances. It wasn't until after his collegiate days that his talent to swim distances was discovered by Dennis Matuch of Chicago, world distance record holder at 70 miles across Lake Michigan.

"Marathon swimming is not publicized much, but it's a test of mental more than physical talents," Kersh said. "I can't train for anything past four hours. Officials have picked me to place high, but this is my first time at a longer distance. All I want to do is finish. You have to get away from a normal way of thinking for something like marathon swimming."