

Erie native Kubaney sets Lake Erie swim record

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Conrad Kubaney is the first to finish the 24-mile course to Freeport Beach in less than 11 hours.

NORTH EAST — The tears began to flow not long after Conrad Kubaney completed his record-setting swim across Lake Erie on Saturday.

Imagine how the Erie native will feel once the magnitude of his accomplishment sinks into his mind.

“I’m still kind of in shock,” Kubaney, 26, said of completing the 24-mile journey from Long Point, Ontario, to Freeport Beach in North East, with or without the record in hand.

Kubaney wasn’t aware he stood atop the list of 23 swimmers who have achieved the feat since 1989, and the only to finish in less than 11 hours, until being told about it after stepping onto shore after 10 hours, 56 minutes, 45 seconds in the

water.

Kubaney, an emergency department nurse at UPMC Children's Hospital in Pittsburgh, topped the mark of 11 hours, 15 minutes, 40 seconds set by the Van Volkenburg brothers, Greg and Tommy, from Erie nearly one year ago to the day.

"It will probably sink in tomorrow, in more ways than one," he said with a slight chuckle. Then he added, "I'm just happy to be done with it. It's a lot of work. I'm just happy."

Lake Erie Open Water Swimming Association manager Josh Heynes, who previously held the mark the Van Volkenburgs broke, envisioned a record swim in Kubaney's future after his first conversation with him a year ago.

"I could see it in his eyes what he wanted," Heynes said. "He's our young buck of the summer. He's just a stud guy. He listened to everything we asked him to do. He read the packet. He did the training the right way, listened, got the crew together the right way. He just did everything the right way."

Kubaney, a competitive swimmer at Mercyhurst Prep and Indiana, Pa., University, capped a stretch of four successful swims across Lake Erie by four swimmers in the past month. Tom Minnock, 54, who resides in the Pittsburgh suburb of Mars, reached Freeport Beach on July 1 in 16 hours, 44 minutes, 22 seconds to become the oldest swimmer to complete the standard course.

Erie native Rob Cooney, 38, finished nearly three weeks later in 13 hours, 32 minutes. Erie native Greg Roberts, 31, emerged from the water last Sunday after a 14-hour, 50-minute swim. Then came Kubaney's attempt, which began at 6:08 a.m. and concluded shortly after 5 p.m. at Freeport Beach in front of about 150 cheering supporters. "It's just a great little tradition that I'm a part of," an emotional Kubaney said.

Heynes said nine swimmers from across the United States, Canada, Europe and South America have inquired about possibly attempting the swim across Lake Erie next summer.

“We’ve got some serious studs, some big-time marathon swimmers that are looking at this as a major event now,” Heynes said. “This is what the whole goal was, to bring the limelight to Erie, Pennsylvania and Lake Erie, and to let people know that this body of water is here, and we’re ready to help people get across.”

But this day belonged to Kubaney.

“I did it,” Kubaney thought to himself as he stepped onto the beach. “This has been something I’ve been looking forward to for a long time.”

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