

Racing for Red Cross

First Big Red race goes swimmingly (water temp. 70°)



Robert Kanavel/The Holland Sentinel

Swimmers compete in the Big Red Lighthouse Open Water Swim race.

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[The Holland Sentinel](#)

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Holland, MI —

The Holland State Park buoys doubled as race markers for the first Big Red Lighthouse Open Water Swim race Saturday morning.

Thirty-three competitors swam 1.2 miles through the calm, clear water, finishing with a run up to the beach and over a line in the sand.

After catching her breath, women's race winner Kathy Kreps of Holland called the event a success.

“It was the first time I’ve done anything like it, so I was pleased I could do it,” she said. “It was the perfect distance for rookies who want to try something like this — I would definitely do it again.”

Race organizer Jennifer J.P. Parks said she hopes this becomes an annual event in Holland, with more swimmers and more distances. The event was a fundraiser for Ottawa County Red Cross.

Grand Haven had an open water swim until a few years ago, but the Olympic sport seems to be growing in the U.S. Hopefully the Big Red race grows with it, West Ottawa swim coach Steve Bowyer said.

“As far as an open water swim in our area, this is the only one in the big lake that I know of,” he said.

Steve Bargwell of Rockford — who won the race with a time of 17 minutes, 31 seconds — said you can’t beat the Big Red race’s venue.

“Holland has a beautiful beach and it’s obviously a great place to swim,” he said.

U.S.A. Swimming official Scott Appleyard came to Holland from Kalamazoo for the race. He said Michigan now has five sanctioned open water swim events, up from just two last year.

He said the sport is great for all ages. Holland’s race had several participants in their 60s, and many in the 40- to 60-year-old range.

“Swimming is a lifetime sport,” he said. “A lot of our athletes are former college and high school swimmers.”

The 10-kilometer open water swim is an Olympic event, but the U.S. doesn’t typically make a strong showing. At the next games in Rome, however, Appleyard said that’s likely to change.

“Before we would be there just to swim, but in 2012 they’ll be there to win,” he said.

1.2-mile open water swim

Top three men

Steve Bargwell Rockford 17:31
David Sebastian Chicago 17:41
Perry Klebahn San Francisco 17:44

Top three women

Kathy Kreps Holland 19:16
Lezlie Gruenler Holland 19:41
Janet Jasker 20:16



Steve Bargwell (right)



Kathy Kreps (left) and Ken Cooper



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