

## Marathon swimmer was already planning her return before the waves forced her into the boat

By Gord Hunter  
Heritage Staff

When a baseball or hockey player decides to return to their sport after a lengthy absence, they are allowed an extended period of exhibition games or spot duty in selected match-ups to see if they can meet the challenge. When a marathon swimmer returns after 14 years - she doesn't get any free swings or short shifts. Vicki Keith trained for the better part of a year and in the end, her fate ended up being decided by three-metre waves and a relentless current. Most people would hang their heads or scream in frustration but Vicki Keith is not most people.

Keith's attempt to span the world-record distance of 83 kilometres between Oswego, NY and Kingston's Confederation Basin using her trademark butterfly stroke was called off last week due to high winds and battering swells. The decision was made early Wednesday morning nearly 24 hours after she entered the water in Oswego Harbour. As the people of Kingston publicly expressed pride and empathy for their hometown hero to media outlets throughout the city, plans were already being solidified for another crack at the world record distance.

In an interview with *The Heritage* one day after conceding the challenge and with a full night's sleep under her belt, Keith displayed no sense of loss or lack of accomplishment. In fact, her voice was replete with optimism and determination to take on another grueling swim in less than two weeks time.

"In the last 10 minutes as we made the decision on whether it was wise to get out of the water, my mind was racing," said Keith.

"I was thinking, how can this be fixed, how can we continue on - and before I got out of the water I'd

already come up with the concept of swimming along the shoreline the 80 kilometres into Kingston."

The planning and logistics of a lake crossing made a repeat attempt virtually impossible. On the other hand a shoreline swim from Point Petre to Kingston would be much easier to arrange and would also avoid the possibility for severe choppiness more common to Lake Ontario's open water.

"What I'm going to do is swim from around Point Petre, along the peninsula across to Amherst Island and along the shore there before crossing to Amherstview and then into Kingston," said Keith.

"Right now we're looking at the week of August 15 for the swim."

Her boundless enthusiasm and resolve are evident in the excited tone of her voice and the hurried speech of someone anxious to meet the challenge. This is not the voice of someone who has trained for a year only to have nature negate any possibility of completion.

"I'm sort of looking at it as - well that was a good training session, now I can do the swim," said Keith with a laugh.



**Vicki Keith**

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