

USMS 5K Championship - Gator Bait

By Jen Baker

(In this picture is Jen with fellow NCMS swimmer Jim Green. Not in the picture: Steve Shotts, also from NC)



An open water swim in SW Florida must be in the Gulf, right? Watch out for sharks, people would inevitably say. But their eyes would get a little big when I explained that I was going to swim in a lake. A SW Florida lake likely full of gigantic, mean, hungry people-eating alligators.

This year 119 swimmers signed up for this USMS Championship event. Cumulative relays including 7 three-person and 6 four-person relay teams (three or four swimmers, each swimming the entire 5K as individuals) rounded out the entry field.

The race was held at the spectacular Miromar Lakes resort community near Ft Myers, FL on April 27th and was hosted by Gulf Coast Swim Team and Lee County Parks and Recreation. The 1800 acre private resort community has more than 700 acres of aquamarine freshwater lakes, three miles of private, white sandy beach, a golf course and full service spa all within one luxurious setting. It was incredible as it sounds and looks.

The course was three laps of a 1.67K loop that had to be completed within 2.5 hours. Swimmers arrived at the white sand beach lined with palm trees and tropical vegetation, and enjoyed a lovely breeze and glorious sunshine - a truly perfect day for an alligator attack swim. We had a lengthy wait for body marking, where athletes received massive numbers inked and then filled in with permanent marker on their arms and back with numbers written on their hands.

On that same section the water was noticeably deeper and long strands of grass reached toward the sun, although mostly lower than a swimmer's body. The perfect hiding spot for an alligator, I thought. Fortunately, no one spotted any throughout the race, but the idea of seeing one certainly entertained.

The winning time was 1:05.07 by Ricardo Valdivia, 45-49, of GOLD Masters. The first female to complete the race was Alexis Underwood, 25-29, of Georgia Masters, who swam the 5K in 1:11.58. The time for the final finisher was 2:28.40. One hundred and eleven swimmers completed the race (48 Women and 63 Men). The time for the first place relay was 5:56.31.

Complete results are available below:

[5K National Championship Results](#)

[5K National Championships Photos](#)

For me personally, it was a terribly slow race from lack of consistent training, but it was a fantastic way to spend part of my 16th 21st birthday weekend which included a visit with my kids' Grandparents (free

babysitting!). My favorite part of the swim was passing my teammate Jim Green who started earlier than I did, and having a little chat mid-race.

Enjoy the summer with an open water swim.