

## Oldest surviving winner' of Liffey swim advises competitors 'not to drink water'

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### Canon Kenneth Ruddock (89) won the Dublin river race in 1947

Kenneth Ruddock says the River Liffey was 'a smelly concern' when he won the race in 1947.

He believes he may be the oldest surviving winner of the Liffey Swim. The 89-year-old retired clergyman won the race in 1947 at the age of 17. This weekend marks the 100th swim of the competition, which began in 1920, and he has fond memories of participating in the unique event. Ruddock was attending the King's Hospital School at the time and said he knew the route well, as he would often go for walks down along the river. He was a member of the swimming club, and he recalls that someone had to come to test his ability before he could compete in the race.

Once qualified, he didn't have much concern about jumping in the Liffey waters for a race.

"When the tide was out it was a smelly concern," he says.

“The organisers made sure the tide was full so it wasn’t as bad.”

“You just kind of ploughed on,” Ruddock says about his racing strategy.

“It was only when you came to the bridge that you had to put some pressure on and swim a little harder. You had to make sure you were in the middle so nobody could pass you.”

Ruddock remains undefeated in the Liffey Swim, as that turned out to be the only race he competed in. He says after winning he was heavily handicapped by the race organisers, meaning he would have to start further behind the other swimmers. He did attempt to make the 1948 Olympic team, but fell short of qualifying in the end. After that he stopped swimming competitively to pursue the clergy. He would occasionally swim in the sea, but says he didn’t like the smell of the chlorine found in swimming pools.

He was ordained in 1953, and he believes he is the first person to win the Liffey Swim and also join the clergy. He retired from the Diocese of Connor this year after 20 years serving as Connor Diocesan Curate.

In 1995, on the 75th anniversary of the first race, Ruddock was joined by other past winners to receive a certificate at The Mansion House from the Lord Mayor of Dublin.

Ruddock, who lives in Ahoghill, Ballymena, Co Antrim in Northern Ireland, last attended the race two years ago to present the cup to the winner. He was also awarded a replica of his gold winner’s medal, which he had lost.

He is unable to make it to the event this year due to a schedule conflict, but he said he would like to attend the 100th anniversary swim next year if he is invited.

Though he won’t be here, he does have some words of advice for the competitors.

“Do plenty of training, don’t drink any water on the way down, and make sure you’re in the middle.”

Brady Jones Irish Times

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Photo – Connor diocese