

Bruce Blomgren

Bruce Blomgren admits he doesn't understand the nuances of the English Channel Rules, which appear to be empowering critics of Diana Nyad's historic Labor Day swim from Cuba to the U.S. But the Sarasota marina entrepreneur was with her the entire trip, and saw little fodder for skeptics now questioning her three-day slog across the Florida Straits.

"She didn't touch the boat or anyone or get out of the water," says Blomgren, one of four captains who followed the 64-year-old Nyad for 53 hours and 110 miles from Havana to Key West. "All I can say is, we had blessings from the gods."

Blomgren, president and CEO of Brandy Marine International, LLC, in Sarasota, met Nyad in 2011 in Key West, and the two became fast friends. He assisted with marina-support operations during her third and fourth aborted attempts in 2011 and 2012. But he was in the water on Nyad's fifth effort, clearing the lanes ahead at the helm of his 32-foot catamaran, The Voyager.

Critics have questioned Nyad's data, focusing particularly on one stretch where her typical 1.5 mph stroke accelerated to 3 mph. But Blomgren says Nyad actually took advantage of fast-moving eddy currents predicted by navigator John Bartlett, a relentless cruncher of NOAA data.

Nyad's four-dozen member team monitored the journey, which was also timed to coincide with a low tide and a low moon in order to minimize her encounters with stinging box jellyfish, which derailed her earlier efforts.

Nyad's team said it never agreed to the English Channel rules in the first place, which have strict rules about wetsuits and specialized masks.

For Blomgren, who watched Nyad's nausea prevent her from processing nutrients and water, the feat was an "awesome" display of human endurance.

"I don't know if she was old enough at 28 to be successful," Blomgren said, referring to her first shot at the Havana-Key West run in 1978. "She might've had the muscles for it, but I'm not sure she had the mental fortitude back then. But what she did was phenomenal."