Marvin “Duke” Nelson swam in the Des Moines River in warm and cold water and poor weather. This earned him a specialization in swimming 24 km (15 miles) in frigid, choppy lake waters. In 1930, he won his first world championship title defeating a field of 173 at the Canadian National Exhibition Marathon Swim in Toronto in 7 hours and 44 minutes, winning US$10,000 and won again in 1934. He also won the 24 km (15-mile) Lake Michigan swim in Chicago twice, finishing a half-mile ahead of the pack in 1934. In the middle of the American Great Depression, Duke’s five professional victories earned him US$30,000. Confident in his abilities, Duke bet that he would complete the first double-crossing of the English Channel and raised US$25,000 against 50-to-1 odds that he could accomplish his goal. But he never was able to achieve his goal due to the outbreak of World War II.

Expanded Biography (Openwaterpedia)

Long Swims Database (Marathon Swimmers Federation)