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Swimmer goes for course record in familiar waters

BY J.W. COOKE Citizen Staff jwcooke@keysnews.com

KEY WEST -- For Rames Rodriguez, Saturday's 14th annual Florida Keys Community College Swim Around Key West was more than just a race circumnavigating the island.

"It was awesome, it's a really good race," said Rodriguez. "It's just a nice swim. You can always see the bottom, the water is very clear and it is nice how the tides change.

Twice a year Rodriguez said he competes in distance swims, but never before had he attempted to complete the 12.5-mile journey around Key West, so coming into the event he said he had no idea what to expect.

"Honestly, I was thinking I'd finish in about five hours," said Rodriguez. "But when I got to the last turn, I thought at that point I could go for the record and really pushed it."

The only thing standing in his way of the record: the heat from the afternoon sun.

"I didn't expect it to be so hot," said Rodriguez. "After I made that last turn, the water got really hot and I had to stop to drink every 20 minutes. The heat was the hardest part of the day."

After completing the course and reaching Higgs Beach, Rodriguez said he believed he had broken a course record, but later was informed he was 40 minutes shy of the mark. Nevertheless, the winner of the 14th annual FKCC Swim Around Key West was pleased with his first race off the Southernmost Island, in waters similar to his early days of swimming.

"Four hours and 16 minutes is a good time for anybody," said Rodriguez. "But most of all, it's really nice to get first place in Key West. I'm from Cuba, so it's very similar to my country, so it reminded me of swimming at home. This was a great event and I look forward to being back next year."

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