

The Hammer Report

The Great Chesapeake Bay Swim 2026

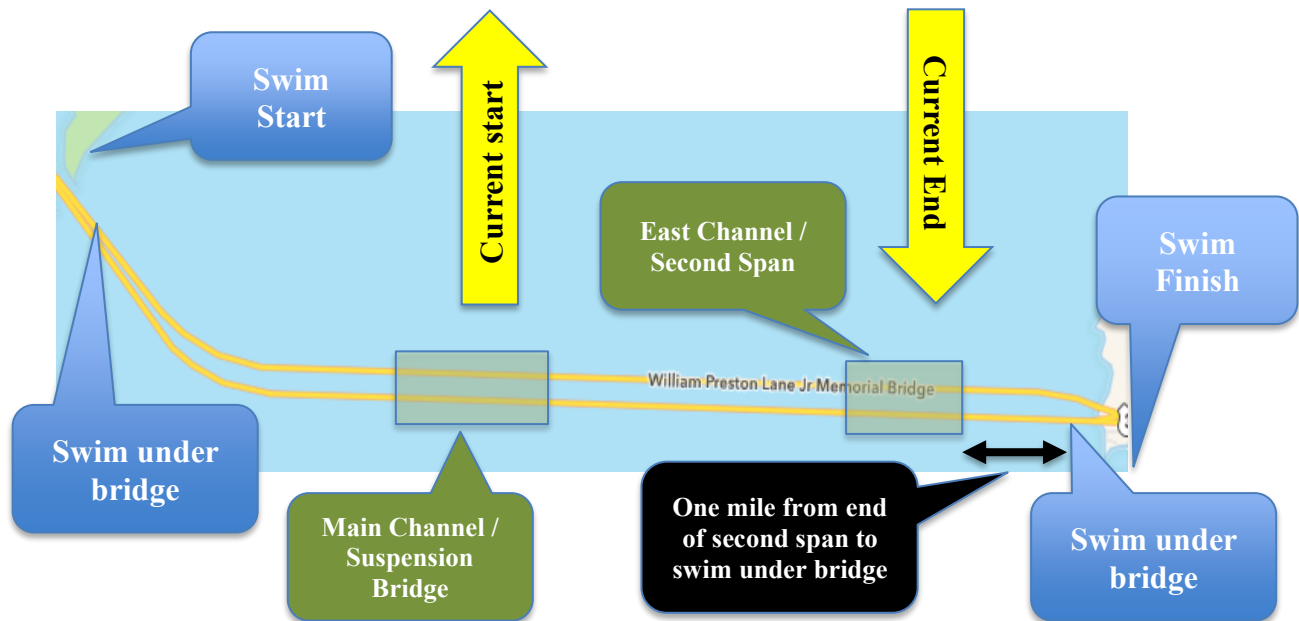
You wanted it and you got it, a sunrise swim start to one of the great open water swims in the world: 6:45am opening gun.

Please visit <http://bayswim.com/> early and often to get the latest news and updates for the swim, like swim day timelines, where to catch the buses from the eastern shore and when they will be running to links to the bay water temperature:

http://www.NDBC.NOAA.gov/station_page.php?station=44063

Suffice it to say that the water temperature for this year's swim will be on the cooler side.

For those veterans who know everything about the swim here is your still small moment of information tranquility: Bay currents will start as a flood, moving to the north. So, the start of the swim will be against the current. At the end of the swim the current will be sweeping to the south which will help getting under the east bound bridge span. However, there are pitfalls to this condition. You'll have to read the rest of the report to get information.



Logistics and Timeline

Parking and shuttle service: Kent Island High School, 900 Love Point Rd, Stevensville, MD

First bus: 4:15am, LAST BUS: 5:45am

Pre-race briefing: 6:15am - First swimmer starts: 6:45am, Last swimmer starts: 7:00am

Final swimmer cutoff: 10:45am - Awards: 11:00am

For those of you who are bay virgins or near virgins:

The rest of this report is for you.

While the swim course is the same every year, the conditions of the bay make each year unique. For some this is a race; for the rest, this is a swim with the only goal: Getting to the Eastern Shore.

The two things that have the greatest influence on the swim are the bay currents and the wind. The graphic about the currents is above. The best situation is having the wind from the west. That will help push you toward the eastern shore, you'll feel like you're surfing. If you plan to wear a buoy with a western breeze just understand that your buoy could be pushed in front of you causing some uncomfortable swimming. However, too much of a good thing can get the Bay swim shortened or even cancelled.

If the wind is from the south, it will be tough on right-side breathers, from the north (very rare), tough on left-side breathers. If however the wind is significantly from the east you'll be battling waves and spray, like swimming in a washing machine. Fear not, you can still make it across the bay.



Fun factoid: Over the past 25+ GCBS it's rained (drizzled) only once. Although, full disclosure, there was one year when a pop-up thunderstorm appeared near the end of the swim, about 3+ hours after the start, resulting in some swimmers needing to be pulled for their safety and that of the kayakers.

**Key Takeaway: Be informed about the conditions but no matter what they are, don't freak out.*

Things to do and pack in your swim bag Saturday:

Pre-swim check list:

- Take it easy on the Saturday before the swim
- Bring goggles that are 100% UV/tinted and broken in
- Saturday night, eat only what you've had 100 times in the past
- Hydrate
- Stay out of the sun Saturday
- Bring sun screen and Body Glide on Sunday
- Swim buoy, if you have one

Prior to the start:

You'll need to drive to the eastern shore to catch a bus that will bring you to Sandy Point State Park. See details of timeline on page 1.

PACKET PICK UP

The bus from the Eastern Shore will probably drop you off near the concession stand at Sandy Point Park.

Bring your driver's license or passport to prove who you are. I'm not making this up, but there will be county and state police, Coast Guard, Department of Homeland Security, as well as some three-letter agencies, so no bluffing about who you are.

Head toward the bridge. Packet pickup will near the restrooms, just follow everyone else. This will be a dynamic distribution, meaning your bib number and transponder will be assigned as you check in. You'll get a cap that you can keep. Next stop: Body Marking.

Want your stuff to greet you when you finish? Swim bag check-in will be in the same general area as packet pick up. Make sure your swim number is on your bag and stuff it with any extra items you brought to the start, but please don't bring your laptop computer. If you really need it, you can get a second bag.

Sunscreen: Do not skimp. It could be sunny on the day of the swim. You'll need to pay particular attention to your face. You can get sunburned and sport a half moon on your forehead. Put your

sunscreen on before body marking since the sunscreen can erase the permanent marker. Race officials may not allow you to pass into the start pens if your body marking numbers are not legible.

Body Glide™ will be your best friend to keep your wetsuit from chaffing you during the swim. Pick some up at your local sports store or bike shop. Do not skimp when applying. The back of your neck will need it, but don't forget about shoulders, backs, elbows and the back of your knees. Hopefully you've done a few open water swims this year and know how and where your wetsuit rubs. Climb into your wetsuit prior to the pre-race briefing. There's not a lot of time between the briefing and the race start this year.

Listen carefully to the briefing by the race director. He will explain the latest current data (which should match what's on the first page of this report), the swim strategy and the safety features that include kayakers, rescue boats, food boats and rules of the swim. Yes, there are rules.

This swim is unique since the swim "lane" is defined by the inner edges of each bridge. Remember: You have to stay between the bridges to stay in the race. If you're under the bridge you'll be pulled and get a free boat ride to the Eastern Shore. The currents can be stronger than you might think. Many swimmers have been pulled way off course because they got too close to the bridge span by the currents and spent all their energy fighting to get away from the edge.

**Key Takeaway: Stay calm, proceed to the start but don't run. Don't start questioning your sanity why you signed up for this stupid swim in the first place (that will come later).*

Now to the swim:

The bay swim is actually four swims in one event.

THE GCBS START:

There will be two arches for the start of the swim; one for wetsuits and one for non-wetsuits. Find your correct line. This year's start will be 10 swimmers at a time every 10 to 15 seconds. Everyone will be in the water within 10 to 15 minutes.

The suggested swimmer alignment will be by average 100-yard pace time with the fastest going first. There will be placards identifying pace time from 1:15/100 yard to 3:00/100 yard. Place yourselves where you see fit. Don't worry if you are not perfectly aligned. No one is going to check and challenge your placement in the group.

The start time sensor will be at the water's edge. Look at this video from the Freedom swim. The same start sequence was used there. [10 Swimmer Start](#)

YOU ARE STRONGLY URGED TO WEAR A SWIM BUOY IF YOU HAVE ONE. With the reduced swimmer release there is very little chance of someone tugging on your buoy or swimming over you. The only caveat: If there is a strong wind from the west your buoy could try to proceed you during the swim. If you opt to wear the buoy and it becomes a problem you can signal a kayaker to take it from you.

And you're off!

Swim one of four: Sprint!

The water may be a bit refreshing or shockingly cold when you first enter at the start, especially if it's sunny and hot. Dive into the water and let it get into your wetsuit. Pop up and get a clean breath of air. Let your lungs expand while the water in your wetsuit warms up, this may take a few minutes.

With the excitement of the start and wanting to get under the bridge span you'll probably be in sprint mode and that's fine. Let that adrenaline work for you. You'll question why in the world you're doing this and it's only the first 200 yards into the swim.

Large, unique buoys will be in place to identify the entry point under the west bound bridge span (the first bridge that you'll go under), each mile marker positioned at the mid-point between the two bridges and the exit point near the eastern shore to get under the east bound span and head to the finish.

Once under the first Bay Bridge span take don't make the left turn too quickly. With the current going north you'll want to get to the mid-point between the spans before making that left shift. Remember, if you can look up and see the bottom of the bridge instead of the sky you're out of bounds; disqualification may loom. You may be battling the current for a while. Fight On!

The bridge curves to the left for what seems like a long time, but it's just a little over a mile. Once the spans straighten out you should be in the middle between the two bridges.

**Key Takeaway: This swim is 90% strategy and 50% physical. At the start, enter the water easy and stretch out. If you're swimming with a buddy don't be shocked if you lose them early. Don't waste time looking for them; you'll meet up at the finish.*

The Main Swim:

Swim two of four: Settle into a pace and stick with it.

You've now established your space and relaxed a little to settle into a comfortable rhythm.

Not the fastest in your swim practice lane; not to worry. There has always been cut off times for the GCBS. This year the cut off for the first mile is one hour after the last swimmers enter the water. So, if you're in an early start group this could give you almost one hour and fifteen minutes to make it to the first buoy. After that the second mile is one hour and forty-five minutes after the last swimmer starts. Mile three is two hours and thirty minutes and mile four is three hours and fifteen minutes. The last swimmer must complete the entire swim in three hours and forty-five minutes which computes as a 3 minute per 100 yard pace. Easy peasy.

If the wind is coming from the east (head wind) there will be swells coming your way. Try to time your stroke to the swells and swim in the trough and breath at the crest. If the wind is coming from the west (tail wind) the swells will be pushing you but do the same thing -- swim in the trough and breath at the crest.

During the swim it may be necessary to adjust your cap or wetsuit neckline. Again, take a good breath, dive under the surface and make your adjustment. This way you'll have a little forward momentum to start your stroke again.

When you're in the main shipping channel, your swim will be affected more by the wind than anything else. You'll also feel a noticeable drop in the water temperature.

At the mid-point of the main shipping channel there's not a whole lot to see. You can judge where you are just by glancing at the span on the side where you regularly breathe. If the bridge starts to grow or diminish you might want to take a quick look ahead to make sure that you're swimming straight down the middle. Crazy Ivan's (swimming left, then right, then over correcting again) will just add many yards to an 8,000-yard swim. Relax and take long metered strokes. You'll probably change your stroke a few times due to fatigue, crowding, and the water chop. Don't get discouraged and don't stop swimming. The chop will be the biggest adjustment. Here you'll be wondering where all the other swimmers are. You're now in the lonely zone.

Picket Fences

Swim three of four: Your achy breaky shoulders

Passing the second span is where mental toughness must kick in, not to mention some physical adjustments. This is the part of the swim you'll need to bear down and just tough it through.

At the far end of the second channel, it's still one mile before you pass under the bridge. This is a very cruel leg; the pillars are like pickets in a fence, except that you'll be looking at each pillar in slow motion. Each pillar will be in your view for a few strokes if you're a right breather. There are 54 cement pillars at this point in the swim. If you try to count them, you'll go insane. However, if you notice the numbers at all they will have a white background. When the numbers appear without the white background, you're getting very close to passing under the bridge.

Toward the end of this year's swim there will be an increasing ebb current going to the south. For fast swimmers the current will be light. However, slower swimmers will be fighting a more prominent current. This will push swimmers toward the southern bridge span. Try not to get too close to the southern bridge; keep a respectful distance from the pilings. Look for the big markers on the south side. That will mark the point of passage under the south (eastbound) span. There will also be kayakers there. They will help you transition under the eastbound span. Suddenly there will be lots of other swimmers. Where did they all come from? Use your best manners to avoid them and have them avoid you.

**Key Takeaway: As Dory said: Just keep swimming, swimming, swimming*

Head for Home:

Swim four of four: What do you have left; the final kick

Finally, you pass under the bridge and go for home. You're still 700 yards from the finish. There should be a large inflatable barrel marking the 4-mile spot. Try to get close to that, then turn left, otherwise you might be too close to the rocks on the left side and get all cut up. There is a tall vertical red and white cable marker near the finish, lots of balloons and commotion: Just aim for that. The water will be very shallow as you get parallel with the sea wall. It's not uncommon for people to just walk into the finish, but don't do it; swimming is faster. Also, because it's shallow it may be significantly warmer water and, therefore, energy draining. Be aware of these changes.

Keep swimming until you touch the bottom twice. Standing up will be more painful than you might imagine. Crawling is acceptable. It might be more comfortable to do an ape walk using your knuckles to help propel you forward.

TO THE FINISH

The sensor for the finish will be at the water's edge at the base of a staircase to the upper area. You can take this nice and slow and let the personnel at the upper level help you with your wetsuit.

**Key Takeaway: This is your moment. Drink it in, but don't do a faceplant trying to get out of the water.*

Congratulations, you've done it! It will seem surreal and your accomplishment may not sink in for a while but enjoy it just the same. Make sure you get something to eat and drink; you've been working hard for hours.

Best of luck! Make us proud!

The Hammer