RED BULL BRINGS ITS CLIFF DIVING WORLD SERIES TO THE UAE

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As long as there have been cliffs from which to jump, humans have been doing so. It requires no equipment or power source – just a lot of courage. Cliff diving can be traced back to Kaunolu on the -Hawaiian island of Lanai, where before the arrival of Western -Europeans, native boys would dive from clifftops as a rite of passage. The cliff--diving antics of -Native Americans in what is now -Mexico were also documented during the 16th-century -Spanish occupation. There may not be cliffs in Dubai, but that hasn't deterred Red Bull from bringing its Cliff Diving World Series to the UAE for the first time.

t's a sport that demands precision and perfection, with top marks awarded for high elevation from the platform, a flawless execution of manoeuvres and a smooth transition into a vertical bodyline, with straight arms, before divers enter the water, feet-first.

This year's World Series kicked off in June in the -United States before moving on to -Denmark, Portuguese archipelago the Azores, France, Italy, the United Kingdom, Bosnia and -Herzegovina, and Japan.

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The ninth and final stop on this year’s calendar takes place at Pier 7 next Friday, when 22 of the world’s best cliff divers will twist, flip and somersault their way into the waters of the Dubai Marina almost 30 metres below.

"We always look for unique locations, and Dubai is a city that is iconic for its skyscrapers and high-rise buildings, and holds all the requirements to host the elite group of men and women famous for diving aesthetically from dizzying heights," the World Series’ sports director, Niki Stajkovic, says.

Jumping-off point

Platforms will be constructed on the seven-storey circular building at 27 metres for men and 20 metres for women. The laws of gravity mean each diver has only two seconds mid-air in which to complete their jump before hitting the water at speeds in excess of 85kph.

This year, the World Series has pushed divers to their limits, with spectacular launch points that include the Stari Most bridge in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina; the 11th-century Chepstow Castle in Wales; and Japan’s towering Sandanbeki cliffs, which rise dramatically out the Pacific Ocean.

So does the technique for jumping from a man-made building differ from jumping off a cliff?

"It’s hard to say without having seen the location," -Orlando Duque says. The 42-year-old -Colombian cliff-diving sensation has won 13 world titles, eight World Series events and set two Guinness World -Records. "Most of the time man-made structures are very good in terms of safety, but it is hard to make any assessments before."

What does pose a potential challenge is the body of water into which the divers land – in Dubai’s case, it’s the artificial canal that weaves through the Marina, at depths of between six and eight metres.

"I know from experience that, for me at least, diving into flat water makes the impact feel really heavy. However, all us divers will be in the same situation," Duque says. "The most dangerous part of cliff diving is -entering the water, but with training, you can avoid injury, and that is why leg muscles are very important. My workouts include a regular mix of cardio, weights, diving and mental training, plus I vary my endurance training to include running, cycling, swimming, rowing and stand-up paddling."

Despite having completed -almost 20 years of cliff diving around the world, Duque says he still gets excited about debut dive destinations and is looking forward to taking on Dubai’s challenges next weekend.

"Every time we go to a new location it’s a completely different situation for all us divers, and that in a way makes the competition more interesting. We have to adapt to the new conditions very quickly because we have only one day of practice before we start the first round of the competition."

And what’s the last thing that goes through his mind before he launches himself into the air?

"To be fully focused on the jump and the 27 or 28 metres I will travel in two seconds," he says.

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Ahead of the Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series finale in Dubai, we spoke to 28-year-old Texan diver Rachelle Simpson, one of the world's top female competitors.

How did you get into cliff diving?

a I was a gymnast before I started high diving. I have been cliff diving for four years now and I started because it was part of an act in an acrobatic show that I was performing in at the time.

What titles do you hold?

The Red Bull Cliff Diving World Series champion title for 2014 and 2015. I am also the reigning Fina High Diving world champion for 2015.

How dangerous is cliff diving?

It is a very dangerous sport. If you do not land vertically you can be injured because the impact into the water is very great from that height and speed. I have had a few injuries from cliff diving, including concussion, lower-back injury and coughing up blood from my lungs.

How do you prepare for a big event, such as this one in Dubai?

By doing a mixture of diving training, resistance and cardio training, as well as yoga.

What are you looking forward to about the World Series final in Dubai?

I have always wanted to visit Dubai. I think it will be a beautiful location for the final of this year's competition.

What do you think about diving off a building in Dubai, instead of a cliff? Does this change your technique?

I have dove from a building before, so I don't think it will be a difficult transition. As long as the height is close to our normal, it shouldn't be a problem.

What's the last thing you think about before you dive?

My last thought before I dive is the visualisation of me doing my dive perfectly. I believe if I picture it perfectly in my mind, then I will perform it better.

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