

Review: 'Nyad' is a fascinating watch on one woman's unexpected grit and determination



CHENNAI: Netflix's latest foray into the arena of sports storytelling explores the trials of a woman who is well into her sixties when she decides to swim from Cuba to Florida without a shark cage.

The daring feat was undertaken by Diana Nyad, who is played with amazing grit by Annette Bening. The swimmer sets out to swim 103 miles between the two points and faces jellyfish, sharks and ageist condescension.

Keeping her company on her long and lonely struggle in the icy waters is her best friend Bonnie (Jodie Foster), a grumpy woman who stands by Diana at all times, come what may.

But Diana must swim alone, retching in the water, having nourishment passed through a tube from an accompanying boat. Nobody can touch her, for that would upset the whole effort.

It has always been Diana's dream to achieve something as remarkable as this and despite her several earlier attempts to conquer the deadly route from Havana to America, she never gives up.

Bening rises up to the challenge of the role with a kind of rare courage that is beyond one's imagination. The actress pulls out all the stops in a stunning showcase of grit and determination. Rhys Ifans plays a grizzly old captain who pilots Diana and others through shark-infested waters and enacts his part well enough, but unfortunately, Foster has much less of a part to play. She really cannot sink her teeth into Bonnie as her coach and though she cajoles and exhorts her best pal, she seldom looks sad or stressed.

Directors Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi and Jimmy Chin, working with the screenwriter Julia Cox, trace Diana's roots, but they do not manage to allow the view to really get to grips with Nyad's awful abuse as a child — and how that may have affected her future. Both have a strong history with documentaries about sportspersons whose feats involve a lot of misery and suffering ("Free Solo", "Meru"). No wonder, then, that "Nyad" turned out to be a fascinating watch.
