

Athlete looking at Sunday for supersonic skydive (Update)

October 10 2012, by Jeri Clausing



In this photo provided by Red Bull Stratos, the 55-story, ultra-thin helium balloon that was to carry extreme athlete Felix Baumgartner to his 23-mile free fall twists in the wind Tuesday, Oct. 9, 2012 in Roswell, N.M. A 25 mph gust of wind rushed so fast that it spun the still-inflating balloon as if it was a giant plastic grocery bag, raising concerns at mission control about whether it was damaged from the jostling. The jump will be postponed until at least Thursday. (AP Photo/Red Bull Stratos, Joerg Mitter)

Extreme athlete Felix Baumgartner hopes to make a second attempt to

become the world's first supersonic skydiver with a 23-mile (37-kilometer) free fall over New Mexico on Sunday or Monday.

Baumgartner aborted his mission Tuesday due to high winds, and his team had hoped the weather would allow him another try Thursday. But now they're looking at the next window being Sunday or Monday.

Baumgartner is hoping to become the first skydiver to break the sound barrier by jumping from a capsule floated more than 120,000 feet (36,576 meters) into the stratosphere by an ultra-thin, 55-story helium balloon.

The jump was postponed due to wind Monday, then aborted at the last minute Tuesday because of wind gusts. The balloon is so delicate that it can take off only if winds on the ground are 2 mph (3.2 kph) or less.



From the left; Mission Control meteorologist Don Day, Capcom 1 skydive record holder Col. Joe Kittinger, Technical Project Director Art Thompson and High Performance Director Andy Walshe speak to the media Wednesday, Oct. 10, 2012, in Roswell, N.M., to announce a four-day hold on Felix Baumgartner's

23-mile-high jump attempt, with the earliest projection for a second jump being Sunday. Baumgartner is hoping to become the first skydiver to break the sound barrier by jumping from a capsule floated 23 miles into the stratosphere by 55-story helium balloon. (AP Photo/Matt York)

Baumgartner is disappointed "like the rest of us" but taking a couple of days of critical downtime, his high-performance athletic trainer, Andy Walshe, said Wednesday.

Team meteorologist Don Day noted during a media briefing at the Roswell launch site that weather delays are common in stratospheric ballooning.

"It takes a lot of patience," said Joe Kittinger, a former Air Force captain whose free-fall record Baumgartner is trying to break. Kittinger is a lead member of Baumgartner's team, and will be the only member of mission control who will communicate directly with Baumgartner during his nearly three-hour ascent in a pressurized capsule.

Kittinger said his 1960 jump, the first attempt to break the sound barrier, also was delayed by weather. He leapt from a helium balloon-floated, open-air gondola from an altitude of 19.5 miles (31.38 kilometers).



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"I was ready to go and had to wait," Kittinger said at the briefing. "It's frustrating. But you have to go through it. What you see is what you get."

Kittinger reached 614 mph (988 kph), or Mach 0.9. Baumgartner, a

former military parachutist from Austria, hopes to reach 690 mph (1,110 kph), or Mach 1.

Kittinger also was involved in the Air Force's Excelsior project, making a series of parachute jumps from helium balloons in the stratosphere in 1959 and 1960. Excelsior was a test bed for the nation's space program. With one balloon flight, "we waited 30 days and we never got it off," Kittinger said.

Baumgartner's team had hoped to make the launch in the summer, when there is less winds, but was forced to delay it until October because of problems with the capsule.



This photo provided by Red Bull Stratos shows pilot Felix Baumgartner of Austria reacting after his mission was aborted in Roswell, N.M., Tuesday, Oct. 9, 2012. For the second straight day, extreme athlete Felix Baumgartner aborted his planned death-defying 23-mile free fall because of the weather, postponing his quest to become the world's first supersonic skydiver until at least Thursday. (AP

Photo/Red Bull Stratos, Joerg Mitter)

One of the disappointments of Tuesday's aborted launch was losing the balloon. The balloons are so fragile that once they are taken out of the box, they cannot be reused. The team has one more balloon. Team members said they are looking for a backup, but that could take four weeks or more.

Art Thompson, the project's technical director, said there likely would be windows in the weather for making the jump through November, but declined to speculate on long-term plans beyond that.

The jump is being sponsored by energy drink maker Red Bull. The costs have not been disclosed. But Thompson said Wednesday the balloons cost several hundred thousand dollars each, and he estimated the team lost \$60,000 to \$70,000 in helium with the aborted jump.

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