

Triathletes

Improve Motivation and Results With a Coach



By Susan Dawson-Cook

You swim like a sinking boat, can't repair a flat tire and your ankle hurts when you run. Yet you can't let go of that triathlon dream. A coach can teach you to overcome obstacles and cross that finish line knowing you've given it your all.

"Almost everyone benefits from having a coach," said Pam Kallio, CEO and head coach of Tri K2 Kallio Coaching (trik2kalliokoaching.com). Pam, who's competed (and often reached the podium) in every triathlon distance, works with elite athletes as well as those training for their first triathlon. She teaches swimming, cycling, and running technique, bicycle maintenance, and faster transitions. Athletes receive training workouts tailored to their schedules and physical limitations and are counseled on proper nutrition and recovery.

Bob Bennen, a busy executive and family man, became a top competitor in sprint distance triathlons, thanks to Training Bible Coaching instructor Tom Manzi (trainingbible.com). Bob has only an hour a day to train. Efficient training has enabled him to evolve from an average finisher to a Top 10 sprint distance finisher.

People coming into the sport need direction, said Pam, who still recalls how difficult it was to enter the scene as a newbie at age 47. Afraid to put her face in the water, she swam backstroke in her first race. Excited to finish, Pam enrolled in swimming lessons, joined a U.S. Masters swimming team (usms.org) and gleaned as much information as she could from athletes and coaches. Working with a variety of coaches incited her desire to give back to the sport by starting her company and supporting other athletes.

Pam is skilled at the hands-on training approach. "I have taught people to swim that wouldn't put their faces in the water," she said "I know what it's like to have water phobia. I'm not a naturally gifted athlete. I get it when people struggle."

New to the sport when he competed in the Sahuarita Lake Triathlon in 2005, Bob finished in the bottom two-thirds. His finish times stagnated until he met Tom at a triathlon clinic. The two became friends and before long Bob hired him to see if he could improve.

Since Tom spends summers in New Jersey, Bob receives mostly remote training. "[Coaching is] going to help people different ways," said Bob. "I have the motivation; what I don't have is the time.

"[Tom] helped tremendously with little things like transitions," said Bob. As Bob's family grew, available training time greatly decreased. Tom "cut out all the fat from what I was doing," he said. "I don't have time to mess around. I make every workout count. That's where I really found the benefit of coaching. The last couple of years I've been on the podium every time!"

Focused and periodized workouts made it happen for Bob. Periodization

involves longer, lower intensity workouts early in the season followed by a phase of workouts emphasizing speed. The week before the critical race of the season, a taper is prescribed, where workout intensity and duration decrease to ensure muscles fully recover.

Although Bob is very self-motivated, other athletes need heavy mentoring. "Without that outside look, it's hard to evaluate improvements in technique," said Pam. "There's also such an influx of information available today in magazines, books and online, much of which isn't individualized."

"Everything I do is on an individual basis," she said. Pam considers physical limitations, training history, strength, and the amount of time available for training before constructing a program. "If I have a training plan and someone holding me accountable, I'll be a better athlete. It's like goals in life – I have to know how to get there."

In order for coaching to work, Pam believes clients must be honest and say if they are missing workouts or not doing them the way they were intended. "If the communications is not there, I will recommend a different coach," she said.

In addition to coaching clients striving to win, Pam has worked with cancer survivors and others training and competing for health reasons.

"They have already won," she said. They don't care about a podium finish—they just want to get out there and participate. Working with this type of client takes a whole different training methodology. "It changes their entire outlook on life."

Athletes, many of whom have compulsive personalities, sometimes need to be told to back off when they are injured or overtired. "People tend to run on an injury instead of taking time to let it heal," said Pam. "It's like double jeopardy." Training and performance suffers and the only way to heal and keep it from escalating into something worse is to rest.

Pam also helps clients with other issues that confound triathletes, such as shoe and bike fit. People tend to select shoes for brand name or color. Others are convinced to buy a shoe by a salesperson not qualified to assess proper fit. Bike fit is a similar problem, she said. Proper shoe fit can improve running form and reduce injuries. When it comes to bike fit, "minimal adjustments can make a huge difference in power output."

Pam's cycling trainer has a computer program that enables clients to ride a virtual version of any triathlon course in the world "so they will know every inch before encountering it." The data provided on the cyclist's ride is extremely useful. Someone can see what happens to speed and watts, for example, when foot position or cadence is changed to figure out what riding style is most aerodynamic and comfortable for any physical limitations they may have.

Pam encourages every triathlete or potential participant to watch at least one Ironman. "An electric energy prevails." You watch war and cancer survivors and participants with prosthetic legs finally finish after many grueling hours on the course. "You can't help but get emotional when you see what the human spirit is capable of."

Triathlon coaching is a win-win situation for the coach and for any client willing to put in the work. "People come to you that are all shapes and sizes, with different motivations," Pam said. "With coaching and hard work, they can achieve more than they ever thought possible. People can do so much more than they think they can. You get goose bumps."



Pam Kallio and her daughter, Kate Truesdale finishing the Ford Ironman World Championship in 2006. Photo by ABS-CBN Publishing, Inc (API)

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