

What to look for in a coach

To help you select the right coach or coaching environment for you, we have created a list of things to consider and some questions you may like to ask a potential coach. Consider your stage of development e.g., are you just starting out or are you a competitive age grouper?, how much time do you have to train, how much you are prepared to pay for club or individual coach support, and what do you most need from a coach e.g., programmes v skill development.

Things to find out

Is your coach ...

- Qualified? – Do they hold a qualification that gives them coaching expertise in your stage of development? In triathlon? Or in a particular discipline e.g. swimming, cycling, running?
- Experienced? – How long have they been coaching? How many triathletes have they coached? Where?
- Code of Conduct? – Have they signed a code of ethics?
- Willing to attend Competitions? – Local/Regional/National/International Events?
- How many events per year/season? How often, what would the process entail? (Ask for examples)
- Would your coach consider attending the event with you personally, or would it be with a group?
- What are the costs – fee, transportation, meals, and accommodation?
- Do they have experience in taking tours/traveling with athletes of your age, gender, stage of development, ability?

Things to think about:

Why are you looking for a coach?

- What is your commitment to training? Are your goals aligned with how much effort you are willing to put into your personal improvement?
- How much time do you have to spend on training?

If you are changing coaches:

- What are/were the reasons for the change? It is important you clearly understand why you are looking to change and what contributed to this (positive and negative)
- Personal – Misunderstandings between you and the coach? Difference of opinion, expectations, etc. Were your expectations realistic? Did you do the work needed to achieve the goals you had both set?
- Professional – The coach lacked the skills and knowledge to help you meet your goals

Things to discuss with a new coach:

- Expectations – It is essential you clearly state your expectations in all areas of training, development and competition. This will avoid potential misunderstandings in the future and assist in establishing a clear plan. Use the categories above to outline your expectations (e.g. technically – improve my swim stroke)
- Goals – What are your goals? Make sure they pass the SMART test (simple, measurable, attainable, realistic, timely). Discuss these with your potential coach.
- Communication – How often will you communicate? How will you communicate? Will you meet face-to-face on a regular basis?
- Review – Set-up a regular time period in which you would like the coach to review your progress and give you feedback. This is an opportunity to do the same and share your thoughts with the coach on how the partnership is working. Every 2-3 months works well with a major review after important competitions or at the end of the programme cycle

- Significant others – Partner/Friends/Parents/Sponsors/etc – What role does the coach expect others to play in the developmental team? This is critical to establish the coach's philosophy on developing a team in the training and competition process. Clearly outline your goals and expectation to the coach.

Has your coach got a proven track record?

- In working with athletes of the same standard, gender, stage of development and achieved the results you are looking for?
- Do they have testimonials from triathletes they have coached?

Can the coach provide...

- Environment – The right environment for your development as a person and as an athlete. Are there triathletes of similar age and gender to interact with and train together?
- Programmes – Squad/individual training. Times that complement your school/work/family routine?
- Location – Is the coach easily accessible relative to where you live/work/go to school?
- Links – To physiotherapists, massage therapist, nutrition, sports doctor, podiatrist, specific discipline coaches, conditioning coaches, sport science testing services?
- Expertise – In the areas you require.
- Technically – Improving an area of your technique in swimming, cycling, running; improving your understanding of bike set-up
- Planning – Can the coach develop a training and competition plan; teach you budgeting and time management
- Mentally – Help you improve your competitive mindset and teach you mental skills that will assist you in training and racing; developing self-awareness, self-responsibility and self-confidence; teach you how to succeed
- Physically – Improve your conditioning and develop your speed, endurance, strength, power, core strength, flexibility, etc?