

Coached Athlete vs. the Non-Coached Athlete

By Larry Manchester

As I enter my 3rd season of coached training, I ask myself if it has been worth the investment...the answer is a resounding yes!

Let me start by giving a little background on my amateur racing career. I have competed since 1994, with a life adjustment (fatherhood) break from 2002-2005. Prior to my hiatus, I completed a relatively successful season in the Expert class. In late 2004, I relocated to Colorado from Illinois and was drawn back to riding with the goal of returning to racing. That first summer in Colorado was spent getting the very thick cobwebs out and acclimating to my new riding environment. What I learned at this point in my "comeback" was NEVER stop riding for any length of time. Feeling good on the bike took a long time, especially since all my riding was now at elevation.

Fast forward to spring 2006. It was time to start my training. I did so the way I always did this time of year...ride a minimum of 4 days a week and go as hard as I could every ride. However, fitness progress seemed slower than I was accustomed to, so I went to the internet for some training advice. After reading through the hundreds of "race fit in 30 days" workouts, I finally found one that appeared to be worth following. I followed it to the tee and felt like I made progress. I started to drop all my friends and felt good throughout a 2 hour 'hammer' session. I learned from the workout program and additional research that riding hard every time was not how to reach your fitness potential. It's a process of building a base and then transitioning as your fitness evolves.

I trained for 4 months and finally felt ready to race! I knew getting on the podium here in Colorado would be a tall order; after all, I would be competing against super fast guys compared to Illinois, and contending with high altitude and climbs that seem to go on forever. But I had tested my fitness against anyone who would challenge me on the trail and I had years of racing experience under my belt to guide me to a successful result. I entered the season finale of the Mountain States Cup, Keystone Climax Fall Classic. I also dropped in class, to Sport, to ensure a good result. I set what I thought was an achievable goal of finishing in the top 3. I started out strong leading the pack up the first climb. A position I was accustomed to from past years in this class. Then it happened, I faded and began the degrading process of falling back into the pack to finish 9th.

Disappointed and confused, I analyzed my training and made some adjustment the following spring. I came back for another try. I improved my result by finishing 6th, but again, I did not meet my goals. It seemed like no matter how hard I trained, I couldn't break through to the next level. It was time to do something different. So I went in search of a team to support me in a full season of racing. What I found changed my racing forever.

Working through my local area bike shop I discovered they had plans to establish their first MTB racing team. I updated my resume and submitted it. November 2007, Optimize Endurance Services (OES) and Bike Source (BS) joined forces to create OES/Bike Source cycling team. I was selected as one of two sponsored riders and my racing aspirations changed. The sponsorship came with something I needed to achieve my goals and break through to the next level...professional coaching!

Rob Lockey is OES's owner and a certified coach (www.optimizeendurance.com). He began with an LT (lactate threshold) test which, for anyone not familiar with this test; lactate threshold is a point during exhaustive, all-out exercise at which lactic acid builds up in the blood stream faster than the body can remove it. Lactic acid is a by-product of the anaerobic energy pathway, a process which provides energy to muscles by partially breaking down glucose without the need for oxygen. This aids your coach in

determining where your fitness is and how to build a plan specific to your needs and objectives. A big difference in the way I went about training and gauging my fitness in the past. Rob set me up on a program and provided guidance and support throughout the 2008 season. Additional LT tests were completed during the year to verify the program was meeting our objectives. That's right, "our objectives"; a good coach takes personal interest in your training. He will not only give you daily workouts, taking the guess work out of training. He is there to support, motivate, and push you to get the most out of your investment and effort.

I registered for the Mountain States Cup series and raced in all 13 races. I finished on the podium in all races and completed the season 3rd overall. This was a vast improvement from all of my previous racing seasons. I exceeded my goals and elevated my riding skills and fitness to a whole new level. I now race in the very competitive CAT 1 class with great success! Rob is now preparing me for the biggest cycling goal of my life...the 2010 Leadville 100. With Rob's training guidance, I am confident I will be donning the elusive sub-nine hour belt buckle next August.

Bottom line is this, if you are sacrificing time away from family to train and accomplish goals be sure you're getting all you can out of every workout. The only way you can be certain is to engage with a certified coach. From LT testing to bench mark rides you must have a professional examining these results and make adjustments as needed and believe me, you will require adjustments especially in the first few months. People respond differently to training; over the counter online workouts are designed for the masses whereas one-on-one coaching is specifically tailored for you and the objectives you are pursuing.

If you are playing to win, professional coaching is the only way to achieve your maximum potential. See you on the podium!

