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Coach Brett Sutton: How to Be “True” Champions

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Over the years, I've had many athletes come to me, wanting to be champions. Just a few were willing to do what it takes. For some, it was just about the training programs. These athletes, or journeymen, as I call them, never understood that the workouts and sessions are simply the cherry on top of the cake. You can copy, plagiarize or emulate the workouts of the best, but may not get to their level. Training the body is pretty simple. It's what most coaches do. I have had my best success, by coaching the athletes' mind. While some resist, I've had many who not only went to the top, but also became better humans in the process.

Finding Divine Discontent

It's easy to get comfortable after a big win. I make it a point to put the athletes in uncomfortable situations, when they think they are good enough. However, it's important for them to still be having some sort of enjoyment and see the light at the end of the tunnel. Regular reality checks with continuous challenges are critical. It keeps the athletes down to earth, hungry, and reminds them of the bigger picture. Especially, on what the real level is. When we talk about great, we always start with the best ever, then go down from there. Good is a general term that's always relative to your competition. There is a point, where the majority of improvements need to come from the physiological side, before they become physical. Never being content is key to the pursuit of athletic excellence.

They Don't Look For Clues

Lots of athletes come to me, looking for some type of secret—a missing piece to their very incomplete puzzle. I keep preaching the same principles, micro improved and slightly adjusted over time through trial and error. I maintain the same parameters of simplicity, repetition, and mental fortitude. When an athlete fails to reach their best, it's not because of one little thing. That's just the ideology of mentally weak people. It's always the combination of several factors, often, a manifestation of their attitudes. It's not how much or how fast you train. A bit more or a bit less, better gear or a more precise number really makes no real difference at the top level. It's HOW you do things and HOW you see things that make the difference.

Developing Their “Red Meat” Computers

I've seen the massive shift on gear, data, and devices over the past 30 years. The sooner they start with the gadgets, the less self-aware they will be later on. It's always hard to coach the numbers athletes because they tend to fail to adjust when faced with imperfections. They set expectations and establish limitation. Few sports, actually use such devices for effort and pacing, why should triathlon be any different? Often, those who emphasize the numbers, use it as a compensation for their lack of athletic abilities and low pain threshold. They think they can outsmart and suffer less than others. I can tell you that most of my best athletes were the least sharp with technology and the most in tune with their bodies.

Conclusion

It will be the coaches or supporters' job to make sure that these athletes are in the right environment, mindset, and have the right objectives in order to walk a straight and narrow path. I look at building athletes like forging a sword. It needs to be put in the fire then hammered, time and again, so it becomes strong and sharp, ready to battle against any opponent.

Brett Sutton is an Australian triathlon coach and a former professional boxer, boxing coach, elite swimming coach and co-founder of Team TBB (The Best you can Be). Dubbed as “The Doc,” Brett has coached various World, Olympic, and Ironman champions; including Rio 2016 Olympic Women's Triathlon silver medalist and London 2012 Olympic champion Nicola Spirig. As well as Ironman world record holder, Chrissie Wellington and Beijing 2008 Olympic champion Emma Snowsill. Hoping to share his training strategies to triathletes all over the world, Brett continues to train and encourage triathletes to become future and consistent champions.



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