

## **Why do I need a USA Cycling certified coach?**

Many self-coached athletes have been successful; however, it can be difficult for those with busy schedules who do not have the time to plan out a training program or need feedback to correct some skill deficiency. I will put forth the following argument for hiring a USA Cycling certified coach.

First, let me point out the word “hire” at the end of the previous paragraph. USA Cycling believes that coaches should be paid for their time and knowledge just as other professionals are paid. We do not expect to learn other tasks and skills for free, why should developing into a better cyclist or becoming more fit be any different? People pay personal trainers to assist them and people pay a tennis instructor (often with the dream of turning their kid into the next Roger Federer). This is not to say that some coaches should not offer their services at no cost in some situations. Many coaches will coach a promising junior for no pay; some clubs hire a coach (or coaches) for the team.

Many people opt to buy a book with a training plan in it. You can do that, but that training plan will likely not take into account your uniqueness as a person in terms of fitness background, currently abilities, time restraints, illness, injury or other disruptions. If you want to get ready for a specific event or type of event, the coach can assist you in developing a plan to meet those needs. As USA Cycling employ Bill Griffin once said, “When that (the book plan) doesn’t work what will you do”? This is what keeps the book publishers in business since you go to the next book on the shelf such as *Adrian Karsten Training Guide for the Tour de France*.

A coach can also provide feedback on how the training is going as an outsider who can be critical (in the best meaning of that term). The coach can offer adjustments to the training plan as an athlete progresses or has set backs. The coach can also keep the athlete on track and to a plan. Are you going to be able to call the book author to help you tweak your training program? If so, you will probably need to pay him or her! I have a theory that sticking to a plan, as long as it is reasonable, will lead to improvement, but people are often too willing to abandon one plan for the most recent plan they see in a magazine or book. Coaching is more than merely writing a training plan. Coaching involves developing technical and race skills and strategies. A book can describe how to improve or develop a skill, but having an observer critique the skill and provide feedback is far easier than trying to do it yourself. As someone who tried to teach himself how to ride some technical sections of local trails, I wish I had had a coach during that time to save me some red blood cells and skin.

A coach can help the athlete set goals and select events for which the athlete is prepared. The coach can also challenge the athlete to push the envelope a bit and also can work with the athlete to hold back so as not to injure the athlete. Athletes can often be overzealous. Sometimes the 40 year old weekend warrior tries to train like he did when he was 21 despite the extra years of inactivity; a coach can help ease the athlete back into fitness and training.

Sometimes just having someone to hold you accountable, or at least feeling that way, is a prime motivator in sticking to the training plan. The personal training business relies on this as one aspect of making money.

A coach can serve other roles including teaching the athlete the nuances and history of the sport as well as linking the athlete into the local cycling scene. One of the criticisms that non-cyclists levy is that cycling is a clique sport; a coach can help get you into that clique.

So, the next time you are trying to figure out how you are going to train for the time trial against your local rival, consider hiring a coach to assist you with your training. It could be an

investment that reaps a larger reward than spending a thousand dollars to reduce your bike weight by 5 grams.

USA Cycling seeks to provide a safe and fun environment for all its participants in the sport of cycling. To become a USA Cycling certified coach, a candidate must pass a test for each level that requires a coach to demonstrate knowledge of cycling principles appropriate for that level.

USA Cycling recognizes that there are elements of coaching that go beyond knowledge of cycling techniques and rules, and that participants and parents alike strive to find coaches who are worthy of their confidence and trust in many other respects. For that reason, USA Cycling subjects each coaching applicant to a background check conducted by the National Child Safety Initiatives ([www.ncsisafe.com](http://www.ncsisafe.com)) to identify coaches whose trouble with the law may have produced a criminal record. In light of the constitutional rights of the accused in this nation, of course, not every brush with the law is documented and recorded and there are significant reporting delays in some cases, but this database is at least a starting point. Riders, parents, and local association officials have other resources to ensure that they are comfortable with their coaching choices, including references from prior coaching appointments and the recommendations of athletes. In addition, insurance carriers are often a surprisingly good source to minimize risk on a variety of fronts.

USA Cycling understands that no screening process is absolutely perfect, and encourages anyone involved in the sport to report potentially criminal behavior to local law enforcement agencies immediately. We support clear “zero opportunity/zero tolerance” policies when it comes to inappropriate behavior by coaches, and we believe that the development of communication, training and response protocols goes a long way toward minimizing problems.

We are not talking only about crimes, of course. A coach who taunts, bullies or drives the athlete too hard (often in an attempt to live vicariously or to promote him/herself as a coach) has no place working with kids. As a parent/guardian, you still play the primary role in creating a safe and fun environment for your child, and USA Cycling will support your efforts.

On a final note, parents are keenly aware from national media reports of the potential exploitation of children in a variety of contexts by adults placed in positions of trust. Although such abuse is not common, it is intolerable and local communities have resources to assist a parent or child in reporting or dealing with instances of abuse. USA Cycling commends the “Darkness to Light” website ([www.darkness2light.org](http://www.darkness2light.org)) for offering many resources about sexual abuse.

*Sam Callan, Science and Education Manager for USA Cycling, developed the above paper with assistance from National Center for Safety Initiatives and USA Cycling staff and legal counsel.*

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