

## How to Buy Triathlon Speed - Legally! - By Coach Daren

If you consider what gives a triathlete the upper hand on race day, and the dollar value invested to gain those advantages, you can put together some sort of “advantage cost” rating. Light bikes cost a lot. Fast aero wheels cost a lot. The price of speed is pretty high for many of the race day advantages. There is one way however that you can spend a few dollars and get an amazing return on your investment. I am talking about serious time-cutting return on the dollar here, and, as a bonus, a real confidence boost.

What am I talking about? Swim sessions with a coach, of course! Now, before I launch into my sermon for this week, let's be honest – I am writing about how you can buy more of my time, and I can become rich...right? Wrong! If you add up the time it takes for a coach to schedule a swim session, drive to/from the pool, rearrange the rest of their day to meet the athlete, and then the dollar cost of a monthly membership for the coach at the pool, and maybe even a cut of your payment going to the pool/club...this is often a break-even deal for the coach, or maybe they make very little per hour at best. So, now that we have the wealthy coach thing pushed aside, let's get on with the real part of this article.

When you run it is pretty easy to see most of your body parts in motion. “Get those hands higher,” your running partner tells you. And you raise them based on visual observation. “Bring your legs up and keep your legs straighter when swimming,” sounds simple. But, have you ever tried to do that while swimming? Without visual feedback it is nearly impossible for us to find the correct position in the water. Gaining a sense of what is correct takes time for it to become ingrained in our mental image of how we should look in the water.

Having a set of experienced eyes on the pool deck is an incredibly valuable asset. Having the observer give you real-time feedback after each lap is the perfect way to make incremental adjustments to body position and movement in the water as well as to stroke mechanics. These small changes in the water make a huge difference in terms of speed, conservation of energy, and athlete confidence. Let's think about this for a second: since water is about 1000 times denser than air, if you make a small bike adjustment and it adds speed, just imagine what making a small change in the water will do! Even tiny adjustments in body position will have noticeable results in lap times.

Now for the tricky part – who do you want on deck watching you swim? Sure you can have your swim buddy do the job. All you have to do is watch them in return, or maybe even buy them lunch in return. Or you can have the local swim team coach watch. I'd say that the team coach is a better bet since they watch a lot of swimmers. But, personally, I like to have a triathlon coach watch my swimming. Why? Because there is a world of difference in swimming 100 yards in a swim meet and the technique used to do this, and swimming ½ mile to 2.4 miles in open water before that little bike and run thing, and the technique used to do the triathlon kind of swimming. Not only does a tri coach know firsthand what it takes to do the swim part of a race, but they regularly observe many swimmers, and bring to you the experience gained with many sessions of, “Here, try this to correct the balance issue.”

So, dollar for dollar, if you decide to spend a bit to buy some speed and confidence, the dollars spent on having a tri coach work with you on swimming will very likely be one of the best triathlon values you ever buy.

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