the well-built triathlete

TURNING POTENTIAL INTO PERFORMANCE

MATT DIXON
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Over the past few seasons, I have been humbled by the success we have experienced with our purplepatch athletes. Our professional athletes have recorded over 150 victories and podium finishes, including multiple top finishes at world championship events. Not to be outdone by the pros, many of our amateurs have secured multiple wins and world championships in all race distances, and more than 100 athletes have qualified and competed at the Hawaii Ironman World Championship. Despite this success, I don’t consider myself a master coach. I am well aware that I still have a tremendous amount to learn. I look around at many other experts in their fields and am humbled by their knowledge and expertise. I am passionate about evolving as a coach, learning from others as well as my own athletes and experiences, and producing more and more top results. So why would I decide to write a book on triathlon performance at this relatively early stage of my career? The answer to this question lies mostly in my own athletic experiences and the reason I began purplepatch fitness in the first place.

My athletic career is a great example of how to “do it wrong.” While I managed to take my swimming to an elite level and raced several seasons as a professional triathlete, I do not advise that anyone emulate my approach. Despite my background in exercise physiology and, in the case of my triathlon career, plenty of coaching experience in swimming, I managed to destroy my potential thanks to a recipe made up of massive work ethic, little focus on recovery, and poor nutrition and fueling. I was a world-class trainer, possessing a passion and ability to train that was unsurpassed by any of my training partners, but it only carried me to early retirement and multiple years of very deep fatigue and ill health. I trained myself into the ground and was left unable to
exercise at all for almost two years. Ironically, I reflect on that experience with a certain fondness now, as it proved to be the catalyst for me to step back and think more deeply about endurance sports. My athletic experiences, coupled with my education and swim coaching experience, began to frame my set of beliefs about how to properly coach triathlon. These original beliefs remain the guiding principles of my coaching career, and they provide the framework that all purplepatch athletes follow.

By the time we launched purplepatch fitness in 2007, I was already having success coaching athletes of all levels. It may sound egotistical, but I viewed purplepatch as more than simply a coaching business. I was flying back from a race with my wife, Kelli, and she asked what I wanted purplepatch to achieve. My gut response, scribbled on the back of a napkin, was: To change the way endurance athletes are coached. Of course as a coach, I want to produce world champions and help my athletes achieve great results! But ultimately, I want to help all enthusiasts and passionate athletes to avoid the common pitfalls, including the one I fell into, and achieve great results in their hobby or profession. In order to succeed at this, I’ve realized that it is my responsibility to do more than coach athletes—I have to educate, guide, and share ideas to the best of my ability.

This book is simply an extension of the mission I set out to accomplish with purplepatch fitness. It’s a guide to what I have learned so far, and it will surely evolve. As I see it, if I don’t have more to say in a few years’ time, I will have stopped learning, stopped evolving, and therefore stopped improving!

Are You Looking to Improve?

Every athlete sets out with a desire to improve. That personal journey toward excellence may include very lofty goals, such as winning world championships, but I believe that the most important focus is on individual evolution and excellence. As the coach, I view it as my responsibility to lay out the framework, training plan, and supporting elements to help each athlete achieve ongoing success and improvement. I am not interested in trying to achieve quick results with my athletes, leaving a trail of fatigue and destruction in my wake. I am equally uninterested in producing a single world champion if it means my methods destroy others’ careers and stand in the way of their improvement. I am proud of many of the results my elite athletes have achieved, but I am most proud of the pattern of success across nearly all of
the athletes I have worked with as well as their continued progression and improvements over subsequent years. I firmly believe in the individual and his or her dreams. I take seriously the fact that, while I will continue to have many athletes to coach toward potential success, each athlete only has one career and one chance. A great coach will never forget that and will do everything possible to help each individual athlete accomplish his or her dreams.

There is great joy in coaching amazing athletes, and I have been lucky to help highly established stars of their sport at the pinnacle of their careers, such as Chris Lieto, Rasmus Henning, and Luke Bell. Wonderful athletes can teach their coaches as much as their coaches can teach them. That said, there is no greater coaching joy than developing athletes from potential into top performance—athletes such Meredith Kessler, Jesse Thomas, Rachel Joyce, and Sarah Piampiano, who began with purplepatch early in their careers, often as amateurs, and evolved to absolute world-class performance. Athlete development, at any level, is the most rewarding aspect of coaching.

So why purplepatch? What is a purplepatch? It is where everything falls into place, where you cannot put a foot wrong, and you experience great flow. Of course, we cannot assume that we will be able to live all our lives in the midst of a purplepatch, but we can certainly pursue the knowledge and tools to help make these wonderful phases last longer and become more frequent. This is the heartbeat of our mission.

What You Can Expect

Before we get started, it’s important to make a distinction between training and exercising. As athletes, we train in order to pursue a specific goal and to create the conditions for our bodies to prepare for that goal. We train to trigger adaptation in our bodies: to develop the capacity to swim, ride, and run faster in the future than we can now. However, there may be a range of reasons why people exercise: for health, to lose weight, to boost self-esteem or satisfy a healthy ego, or to find community, to name a few. Exercising, or working out, is an activity. Training is the highly structured pursuit of a goal. As you consider your approach to performance, never lose sight of the fact that you need to train to truly evolve and continuously improve.
I believe this book will help you find long-term success and development as an athlete. The first step is to establish a framework of belief that will guide your decisions around all aspects of training and performance, in the process making you a more confident and successful athlete. From there, I believe that the lessons in this book will arm you with a filter for sifting through the bounty of information that is available through the many channels in our sport.

I hope that this book creates debate. I hope that many smart and informed coaches, athletes, and experts read this book and comment on what they love and hate about the messages inside. Without debate, we cannot learn and grow. I welcome anyone who wishes to challenge my beliefs, but please read with an open mind.

This is some of what I know and understand about performance . . . so far.

MATT DIXON
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MATT DIXON is an exercise physiologist and an elite coach. He is founder and president of purplepatch fitness, a fitness and coaching company that caters to triathletes and endurance enthusiasts of all levels, from world champions to novices. His clients include leading professional triathletes and endurance athletes, executives of global companies, serious amateur triathletes, and fitness aficionados looking to improve their life and performance. Every purplepatch athlete shares the same goal: a desire for improved performance.

Over the past few years, purplepatch athletes have laid claim to over 150 professional Ironman- and half-Ironman-distance championships and podium finishes, 50 of which have been wins. The winning formula is rooted in Matt Dixon’s pillars of performance. When endurance, strength, nutrition, and recovery are adequately and equally developed, athletes enter into a “purple patch” in which top performances become a reality. Matt has developed numerous athletes from the amateur ranks to have highly successful professional careers. He has also helped more than 100 athletes qualify for and compete in the Hawaii Ironman World Championship.

Matt’s coaching career is steeped in his own experience, first as an elite swimmer and then as a professional triathlete. He was a two-time Olympic trials finalist for Great Britain and an NCAA Division 1 swimmer. His triathlon career spanned multiple seasons; he competed as a pro at the Hawaii Ironman and won Vineman 70.3.
Starting out as a coach in a national champion swimming program, Matt went on to become a NCAA Division 1 collegiate swimming coach while completing his master’s degree in clinical and exercise physiology. He ultimately landed in triathlon and has been coaching triathletes for over 10 years.

Matt is a regular columnist and/or contributor to Triathlete magazine, Triathlete Europe, and Lava Magazine. He has been featured in the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, Outside Magazine, Men’s Fitness, and Men’s Health. Contact Matt through his website, purplepatchfitness.com.

Matt lives in San Francisco with his wife, Kelli, their son, Baxter, and naughty dog, Willow.
Matt Dixon develops champion triathletes. With over 150 championships and podium finishes in Ironman® and Ironman 70.3® events over the past five years, purplepatch pros are proof that he knows how to draw out performance. But these pros don’t train according to the conventional methods.

In *The Well-Built Triathlete*, Dixon debunks the myths that have permeated the sport of triathlon and spells out a better approach to swim-bike-run. His progressive training program is grounded in the belief that performance is supported by four equally crucial pillars—training, recovery, nutrition, and strength. When any one of these pillars is underdeveloped, athletes fall short of their potential.

*The Well-Built Triathlete* begins with a thorough self-assessment to identify imbalances that threaten performance and then supplies the tools you need to tap your full potential:

- Guidelines and protocols to improve training consistency and recovery
- No-nonsense advice on triathlon nutrition, fueling, and hydration
- Functional strength tests and exercises to launch a program that builds resiliency

This groundbreaking book will help you implement Dixon’s winning purplepatch program and uncover superior performance year after year.

**MATT DIXON, MSc**, is an exercise physiologist, a former pro triathlete, and an elite triathlon coach. He is founder and president of purplepatch fitness, a fitness and coaching company that caters to triathletes and endurance enthusiasts of all levels, from elite professionals to beginners.

"**Matt Dixon remains at the forefront of the sport, a beacon to the rapidly expanding triathlon world.**"

—MEREDITH KESSLER, pro triathlete & 6-time Ironman champion