

Nomination for Life Membership - Ben Gathercole

Moved: Garry Muir (Life Member)

Seconded: Jane Seaborn (Life Member)

When Ben Gathercole announced his retirement from professional coaching in May 2011, it signalled the close of two decades of dedication to triathlon.

In the early days of Triathlon ACT there were no full time coaches and athletes had to rely on self training or one or two volunteer coaches who gave their time when they could. Ben became Canberra's first fully fledged professional coach at a time when even nationally there were only the likes of Col Stewart and Brett Sutton. He forged the way for a generation of professional coaches to come and helped to raise the standard of coaching in the ACT to a new level with his ability to draw athletes to his structured, systematic training.

Ben's coaching had a significant impact on the local racing scene in the ACT. His athletes achieved countless open and age category victories. Perhaps Ben's influence on the history of Triathlon ACT is no better represented than by statistics: of the 38 ACT Triathletes of the Year awarded since he started coaching, 21 of them - more than half - were Ben's athletes. In large part thanks to Ben, the standard of competition in the ACT became a mecca for elite racing, attracting the likes of the late Luke Harrop, Lach Vollmerhaus, Rebekah Keat and Jodie Purcell to compete in local events. In the lead up to the Sydney 2000 Olympics, with Ben's squad as the drawcard, Canberra became the training base for international Olympic hopefuls like Michelle Dillon (Great Britain) and Reto Hug (Switzerland) who shunned more popular locations like the Gold Coast in favour of the National Capital. Never before had triathletes in the ACT benefited from such close exposure to the world's elite. Where else could they rub shoulders with and race against future Olympians?

Ben was instrumental in developing and strengthening the triathlon club culture in the ACT through the club he formed with Jane Seaborn - Tridents - which was a founding member and driving force in the Triathlon ACT Clubs Council. Tridents covered every aspect of triathlon involvement from novice programs to Ironman and national championships. The club became nationally renowned for its support of fellow competitors and the yellow army was a regular site at events locally and across Australia. Tridents took club spirit to a whole new plain and set the benchmark for club organisation and achievement, culminating in becoming National Club Champions in 2002.

No testimonial to Ben Gathercole would be complete without highlighting the fact that he coached Triathlon ACT's first and only Olympian to date in Simon Thompson. Simon had been a promising athlete as a young teenager coming up through the Triathlon ACT junior development program. A gap year to the UK returned a pudgy, unfit Simon to Canberra without much motivation to train or race. Ben changed that and took Simon to the pinnacle of the sport - the Olympic Games. Athens 2004 was not to be Simon's event - two falls on the bike put paid to his Olympic dream. But Ben's contribution to Simon's superb Olympic preparation and his success with other athletes nationally saw him recognised by his coaching peers as the Australian Coach of the Year in 2005, the only ACT coach to have received the award.

Ben's legacy is today felt across the sport in the ACT, from the standard of coaching and racing, to the strong club culture, to the level of professionalism and organisation that has come to be synonymous with Triathlon ACT. Personally, Ben has been a tremendous ambassador for Triathlon ACT on the national and international stage. A true gentleman, humble in victory and gracious in defeat, he exemplifies the qualities that make him a worthy recipient of Life Membership of Triathlon ACT.