



Coach Muddy Waters advising one of his athletes and leading a cycling workout.



Muddy Love

by Gordon Wright, photos by Larry Rosa Photography

You know that weathered man with soulful eyes and a ponytail that you've seen at so many races? The one surrounded by some of California's best triathletes, who are hanging on his every word? He doesn't have a Web site. He has an email address, but doesn't give it out. He'll help anyone, but if you want him to coach you, you'd better have an introduction. Because he's Muddy Waters, and he's the best multisport coach you've never heard of.

Muddy is based in San Jose, and has been coaching for 28 years. He's a former pro triathlete and duathlete, but has gained underground reverence as the Yoda of the sport because of his intensely hands-on, iconoclastic coaching methods and his near-pathological aversion to marketing.

Muddy's mythic status is only enhanced by his results; every year roughly two dozen of his athletes qualify for Kona, and he's the head coach of ALCiS Racing, a growing power in the Northern California tri scene.

Todd Hinders, 37, leads the sales and business development for ExtendMedia and is a top age-grouper in California. "Muddy's been my coach for about six years now," notes Hinders, "My wife tracked him down at a race. I knew a bunch of guys he'd been working with were winning, and thankfully he took me on. He kind of creates a scarcity for himself, to put it in economic terms."

There's a rationale behind Muddy's madness. "Anyone I work with can't have an ego," he said during a recent (and hard to schedule) interview. "You can't be in this sport to get free stuff and because you think you're special. You have to commit to be a nice person, because wins are good, but the journey is more important."

But there's another reason it's so hard to get Muddy as a coach. Hinders says, "He's just *all in*, for each of his athletes. The thing that Muddy brings to the table is authenticity. Every athlete's program is individualized by hand. He senses your strength and weaknesses and just has an uncanny sense of what you can do."

When Hinders says Muddy's training programs are individualized, he means it. The programs are written out, by hand, by Muddy, each and every week for each and every client. Then his wife of 21 years, Barbara, emails them to his charges.

Muddy coaches pros, like Brian Lavelle, and top amateurs like Erin McCarty, but is best known for his ubiquitous presence at the races. He rooms with and preps his athletes, careens around the course like a maniac on race day and expends nearly as many calories as his athletes.

That's part of what makes Muddy different: he cares, deeply, about his athletes' success. "The only way to figure it out is to be out there with your athlete," says Muddy. "You can't do it in an office or on a spreadsheet. You can't give them all the same stuff, because not everyone trains the same. Plus," he adds enigmatically, "most triathletes over-train anyway."

When asked further about this, Muddy says, "I want you to be sore after your race, not after a workout. I've had people qualify for Kona riding 150 miles per week." And what about high-tech tools like VO2-max calibrations and CO2 diagnostics? "Forget about it. You need to listen to your body."

You also need to listen to Muddy. And you will, if he takes you on. "I talk to Muddy at least four or five times a week," says Hinders, "And sometimes 20 times a week. Believe me; if you're not calling him, he's calling you to see how your training went. It's not some high-tech method, but it works, and it works for everyone he works with. We have a saying that kind of sums it up. Muddy Knows."

Most triathlon coaching these days, of course, is done via the Internet, and it doesn't come cheap. Unsurprisingly, Muddy is different. "It's not a business for Muddy," says Hinders, a refrain echoed by Muddy himself, who says flatly, "I'm not in it for the money."

The results he's generated for ALCiS Racing have booted him up the ladder from underground legend to local hero. In last month's Wildflower (Long Course), Team ALCiS delivered a race-wide smackdown on the competition. Team member Lauren Swigart was the top overall amateur female and broke the decades-old course record. And team member Nick Thompson? Top overall amateur male, new course record and a nine-minute gap on second place.

Greg Quinn, the ALCiS marketing and sales executive charged with coordinating the team, says, "Muddy is the glue of ALCiS Racing, and he's the one that keeps it all together." A pro golfer by trade, Quinn became so inspired by Muddy's coaching and with ALCiS Racing that he, too, has taken up triathlon. How well does golf translate to triathlon? Well, with Muddy in his corner, Quinn finished the Wildflower Olympic course in an outstanding 2:34 – good for a top-eight percent finish, and it was only his second tri.

ALCiS Racing (www.alcistracing.com) provides Muddy with an outstanding venue for his skills. The team was created in an airport bar in 2005, where Hinders sat groaning from the aftereffects of competing in Ralph's California 70.3. On a

continued on page 34 ►



Team Alcis

► *continued from page 33*

neighboring barstool sat Brian Berchtold, who has an ear for pain and the evangelism of a preacher when it comes to his company's topical analgesic, ALCiS Daily Relief.

Berchtold offered Hinders a sample, which worked wonders and which quickly led to a wider discussion encompassing the sports-marketing opportunities of triathlon for the young company. ALCiS, which differs from other pain-relieving creams in that it actually relieves pain, was a natural fit for the sport.

Berchtold, the company's president and CEO, says, "Our sponsorship in triathlons started as a fluke, but is now a part of a very focused strategy. If it works for these extreme athletes, surely it will work for recreational athletes or anyone who needs pain relief. And our team members have been able to prove that our product works."

Now in its third year and featuring 27 athletes, the team is luxe beyond measure. Each athlete invited to compete for ALCiS Racing is buffed out with swag: race and training kits along with lots of goodies from the teams' sub-sponsors, Wells Fargo, Good Neighbor Pharmacy, Clif, Fuel Belt, Kuota and Fit2Race, along with local shops Runner's Factory and CyclePath.

A key element in ALCiS Racing's success is their geographic bullseye. Most of the racers are based in the South Bay and San Jose areas, so they all take part in track workouts and long weekend rides together, often accompanied by Muddy, who leads on a customized scooter sporting spare wheel racks and drink mixes. Under Muddy's guidance, the "team" is truly that – a group of individuals who push each other in training and pull each other through races.

Lavelle, 33, has been a pro since 2000 and has a Top Ten in the 70.0 World Championships to his credit. He's been working with Muddy for the past three years. He also worked with Muddy back when he was just starting out as a pro, and that interregnum taught him a lot about Muddy's appeal.

"I decided to try other things and tried another coach," says Lavelle. "Then I came back, and it was a great decision. I have never seen anyone else with his passion and work ethic." It's well-earned praise; Lavelle notes that Muddy is on-hand for at least four of his workouts every week, including a Tuesday track workout and a big Wednesday night ride. On weekly tempo road runs, Muddy pedals a mountain bike alongside Lavelle, calling out times and pace and providing hydration. On Fridays, Muddy hauls out the scooter, again, and motor-paces Lavelle, which according to the

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-Todd Hinders

pro works wonders for his cadence and tempo.

"I love him," admits Lavelle, "Everyone who works with him does. The support he gives is almost bigger than the advice he gives."

Muddy's explanation for this insane level of support echoes his athletes, but also hints of a deeper, more subtle psychological mastery of their needs, saying, "I do get a better sense of how they're feeling by watching them, but they also feel more accountable when I'm out there with them."

At the 25-30 races he attends – at his own expense – every year, Muddy sets detailed race-day strategies for his athletes, explaining, "I look at weather conditions. For example, at Ironman Arizona, it was incredibly windy but also brutally hot. The first part of the bike was downwind, which tempts you to hammer. But I told everyone to hang back and really conserve energy, and it worked." He also tweaks equipment, suggests nutrition race-day strategies, and lends moral support on-course.

"The guy can't sleep before a race," marvels Hinders. "I've had coaches for years, for Division One swimming, water polo, national team stuff, and there's no one that can

touch Muddy. He is just as invested in our success as we are. At Ironman Canada last year, I was 15 miles into the run, in the middle of nowhere, and just dying. All of a sudden, there's Muddy, going nuts and screaming at me. He'd hauled out there on some rental bike and was cheering me on. He's as much psychologist as anything."

Paul Thomas, a two-time U.S. duathlon champion and now U.S. Sales and Marketing Director for Kuota, says that Muddy belongs in the pantheon of great endurance coaches, "It is a tall comparison, but he is very similar to the great Bill Bowerman. He's just that inspiring, and instead of the waffle iron, he does all of the bike fitting, tire gluing and nutritional programs for his soldiers."

"When you meet him," adds Thomas, "You think, what's the catch? But there is no catch. The guy will flat-out break down and cry if one of his athletes does well."

Thomas' position with Kuota has come in handy on at least three occasions and offers the last word on Coach Muddy. "Here's the bottom line with Muddy," he says, "He's a martyr to your cause. We give him a great deal, of course, but he's actually bought bikes from me – out of his own pocket – to give to an athlete who needs one. That's Muddy." ✦