



**UIPM**  
World Pentathlon

**UIPM COACH CERTIFICATION  
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**'WHAT IT TAKES TO WIN' IN MODERN  
PENTATHLON**

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# 1 Background

The founder of Modern Olympics and Modern Pentathlon Baron Pierre de Coubertin wanted the pentathlon to test "a man's moral qualities as much as his physical resources and skills, producing thereby the ideal, complete athlete". He has also said: "Every man who can perform such a competition is a great athlete no matter if he is winning or not".

These words have inspired many modern pentathlon athletes over the years to try and show their best at modern pentathlon competitions. As well, these words have inspired many coaches to help those athletes to achieve their personal goals in modern pentathlon.

The upcoming Olympic games in Tokyo 2020 are now in every modern pentathlon top athletes' and coaches' minds. To qualify to those games you also need winning. You have to win yourself in many ways, both physically and mentally. Moreover you have to win top places in qualification competitions to get your place at the Olympic games.

That is why the headline: "What it takes to win in modern pentathlon" is a very current topic and finding a way to win is interesting.

For this manuscript I have interviewed several persons and read books about winning and what it takes to win. There will be examples of these later in this paperwork.

Moreover, there is a lot of statistics what kind of points you should have to make to qualify for the finals, for example in the World Cups and World Championships. I will show them later under the headline Discussion.

In Finland there is a great history in Modern Pentathlon. Names like Lauri Vilkko, Olavi Mannonen, Wäinö Korhonen, Kurt Lindeman, Risto Hurme and Martti Ketelä etc. took many medals in World Championships and Olympic Games. I hope this manuscript will be a part of new success stories in Finland.

One of the reason I chose this topic is to provide insight into my coaching philosophy and at the same time get to know myself better. This will help the athletes I coach or will be coaching in the future to achieve their personal goals better.

In this paperwork I do not go into details and I try not to show training programs like detailed swimming sessions. Therefore I will avoid things like: "Do this kind of training for 2 years and you are going to be a champion".

This manuscript is based on coaching experience and culture in a "smaller pentathlon country".

## 2 Discussion

### 2.1 About winning

When I started this paperwork I asked myself; What is winning and what it takes to win? So I decided to study and have discussions about that. From the internet I found a couple of interesting statements, which will open some thoughts about winning. Moreover, I had very interesting discussions with two former Finish athletes, who are both coaching now.

Here are some general statements about winning:

"To be a champion, I think you have to see the big picture. It is not about winning and losing; it is about every day hard work and about thriving on a challenge. It is about embracing the pain that you will experience at the end of the race and not being afraid. I think people think too hard and get afraid of certain challenge". Summer Sanders. Swimmer.

"It takes a lot of people to make a winning team. Everybody`s contribution is important". Gary David Goldberg. Writer.

Here are some thoughts from my discussions with Kurt Lindeman about winning in modern pentathlon. Lindeman is a two-time Olympian (Modern pentathlon 1960 and fencing 1952,1960) two-time medallist at Modern Pentathlon World Championships (1958 individual silver medal and bronze medal in team competition).

- 1) You need learn to know yourself and your potential and when you know those things you can set your goals.
- 2) You have to be a good fencer and get to know your own style and strengths because at the pist you are on your own and you are the one who makes the decisions. You can be a defensive or an offensive fencer but timing is still everything. You need to know the right tempo.
- 3) Riding is also very important. At first you need to have good horseman skills. At the competition you need to evaluate the horse you got from the lottery, and during the warm up session you need to get to know the strengths and weaknesses of the horse.
- 4) When you are training, practise your strengths, make them better and better.
- 5) Mentally you need to have a lot of positive thoughts, and never give up no matter what kind of barriers you have to go over.

I also had a conversation with Hanna-Maria Seppälä: Swimmer, World Champion, four times Olympian.

Her key points to the question 'what it takes to win?' were:

- 1) Believe in yourself
- 2) The right mind set – be ready to fight to win
- 3) Hard work with joy and passion

Like these examples show, people have different kind of thoughts about winning and how to achieve their goals. There is not one right way to be a champion or winner, but there are similarities in athletes and coaches thoughts. You have to have passion, a great team, love the everyday work, positive attitude and so on. To be a winner is a long and hard road, but when you know yourself and the people who are around you, everything is possible.

## 2.2 Statistics

In modern pentathlon you have to look at the statistics about the competitions and what they tell you. For example, by calculating how many points you need in order to qualify for the final by going through the past years World Cup results. And then, calculating how many points you need to get to the podium.

From the Union Internationale De Pentathlon Moderne website you can find the results from the past years in World Cups. The results in women's competitions show that having points from 970 to 1000 you will be able to reach the finals. To be able to win the World Cup competition you needed to get points from 1339 to 1468. Of course every competition is different. The differences with running course, swimming in a 25 meter pool or a 50 meter pool or the number of fencers in the qualification heat, defines a lot how much you need to get points. However, from the statistics you can get information on how high you can manage to go at the competition, when you are comparing your own potential to these points.

To make it more concrete here is an example on how you can calculate women's points per disciplines.

Points of a hypothetical woman pentathlete:

Swimming: A time of 2 minutes 20 seconds gives 270 points

Fencing: 60 per cent of maximum victories, so 21 victories out of 35 bouts gives you 226 points

Riding: Finishing the course within the time limit but with one obstacle down gives 293 points.

Laser Run: Running 2 minutes 50 seconds per lap and a total shooting time of 50 seconds.

Total time 12 minutes 10 seconds gives 570 points.

Total points: 1359

These points 1359 means that you have the following places:

World Championships 2018:	1st place
World Cup I 2018	1st place
World Cup II 2018	1st place
World Cup III 2018	1st place
World Cup IV 2018	4th place
Word Cup Final 2018:	1st place

These points are just an example and show that everything seems to be easy on the paper. However, when you do this kind of “speculation” it also shows that everything is possible. Based on the potential calculation the coach can, together with the athlete, create training programs that will aim to achieve the potential in the competitions as often as possible.

### **2.3 Coaching philosophy**

There are many ways to coach and there is not just one right way to do it. The way of coaching is almost every time a very individual thing, but the better you know yourself the better coach you are. Ask yourself, who am I and why I am doing this? What are my goals in general and in sports?

I have been a modern pentathlete since 1977, first at the junior level and then moving to senior level. After a break I became a coach. I started my first coaching studies already at the junior level and continued those as a senior athlete. The professional coach studies I started after my international career ended. I have been involved in modern pentathlon for 41 years. I have seen a lot during these years. Rules have changed a lot, athletes are more professional, competitions are more frequent and they have been growing bigger and bigger. During the years I have both studied and used my experience as a coach to strengthen my own coaching philosophy.

The four key points in my coaching philosophy are

- 1) Interaction
- 2) Meetings
- 3) Passion
- 4) Mentality

In the following paragraphs I will open up these key points of mine.

#### **1) Interaction**

Interaction is the main thing. You have to be able to communicate with the athlete about various subjects and make such a trusting atmosphere and confidence that this communication is both sided. The things you are talking can be about sport or the life outside of sport. This is very important; because the better you know each other the better you can achieve the goals, which you have set. The interaction with other coaches at your team is also very important, because then you can be sure that everybody understands the goals and methods and how we are going to reach them. It will also create more new ideas on how to reach those goals when more people are involved and committed to them.

#### **2) Meetings**

Meetings are the second thing. First of all, a coach meets with athletes, other coaches, staff of training places and so on several times during the day.

How do you face these people means a lot? If you are in a positive and energetic mood, things are going smoothly and people around you are getting positive too. Or are you spreading negative thoughts, so that other people might get negative too?

There are also other stakeholders who a coach meets often; like people from the federation, the Olympic committee, sponsors etc. You have to find a right role for those meetings as well.

The meetings are not all about meeting with people. As a coach you are going to face different kind of situations. Winning, losing, injuries, lack of motivation, financial problems and so on. You have to deal with those things as well and solve the problems if there are any.

### **3) Passion**

Passion is an interesting part of coaching. You really must love the daily routines and coaching, because if you do, you will never get bored. In other words, you need to be very curious. And when you are curious you are going to find a new way of developing, for example training methods, mental aspects etc. Coaching is the best job you can have, because you can help people to get better and help them achieve their dreams.

Passion is also about caring. If you care about people around you, in this case the athletes and other stakeholders, most likely they are going to succeed, and when they succeed you are going to succeed as well.

“Nobody (children, parents, staff) cares how much you know, until they know how much you care” -Theodore Roosevelt (allegedly)

### **4) Mentality**

The brains are moving the muscles. That is why mental training is so important when we are aiming for top results. With the right kind of mental training you can strengthen your daily training and keep the motivation up. To get to the right kind of mental training you have to know your athletes well and have a very good confidence.

The mental training gives an athlete an opportunity to train more for instance with visualization training. The good thing with visualization training is that you do not make any mistakes. It also gives you the opportunity to practise your competition skills as often as its appropriate.

As my already deceased coach and idol Martti Ketelä (Olympic bronze medallist 1972) used to say:

“Everyone at the top level is training almost the same amount. What it takes to win depends on how good your mental strength is”.

What it takes to win according to my coaching philosophy? When it comes to winning, there are a lot of similarities between different kind of sports and you can even find similarities to the business world. Moreover, it is a matter of opinion. What do you think winning is and who is a winner eventually? After reading about winning, having discussions and writing about it, I have come to a conclusion that every person who reaches his or her potential and achieves their goal is a winner. Every coach who helps these persons to achieve this potential is a winner too.

Here are my main points on how you achieve your potential to be a winner.

### **Learn from history**

Listen to former athletes, coaches etc. but live and learn in this moment. Read a lot about athletes who have achieved or even exceeded their goals. What are their values, training methods or difficulties what they have experienced during their careers? Note their strengths and compare them to your strengths and your situation. Decide if there is anything you can use on your way to success.

### **Background**

The background must be in very good shape. And by background I mean that the athlete's normal life is in order. Family, friends, studies, home, social life, finance, health etc. If there is not a good balance with these, it will affect training and competing a lot. For example if your athlete is studying and you have made a too tight training program and a deadline for an exam is coming just before competition, it will lower her / his energy and her/his thoughts are somewhere else. Putting this in other words the athlete is not in the focus that is needed for a competition.

There is quite often discussion about finance in sports. When the athlete is reaching for success this matter have to be in good balance. You have to have enough financial resources so that you can do the training and you do not have to compromise. Without financial security both the athlete and the coach is not able to focus on the main thing.

As a coach your own life must be in balance too. Otherwise you are going to meet problems.

### **Knowing yourself**

You and your athlete must know yourself. Who am I and why am I doing this? What are my goals in general in life and in sports? What is my potential?

So briefly:

- Calculate the potential
- Evaluate strengths and weaknesses
- Make training programs according to the potential

### **Passion and love**

You must have passion and love for

- Modern pentathlon
- Daily practises
- Training camps
- Competitions

### **Respect and confidence**

- Your own work
- Between the athlete and the coach
- To other athletes and coaches
- To sport itself

### **Courage**

Both the athlete and the coach must have courage to change the way of training if there is no development and it seems that you are not reaching your goals. There might be a lot of pressure from the society against your commitment to top level sport, because there are still people who thinks that coaching and being an athlete its not a serious profession. In this situation courage is needed to listen to your own voice and then just go forward.

Remember, courage is not found in your comfort zone.

### **Challenges and solutions**

Find out the challenges what you might meet on your way to success and figure out how you are going to solve them.

For example:

Challenge:

- time
- rest
- health
- finance

Solution:

- exact daily and weekly programs
- plan your next day timetable
- regular health inspection, recovery t etc.
- have a good and solid longer term plan

### **Other important things**

There are a lot of other things too that are very important and give a lot of information how you can manage such a demanding sport as modern pentathlon is.

Here are some examples:

- nutrition
- sleep
- physiotherapy
- massage
- sport science
- etc.

## **3. Conclusion**

As a coach, take care of yourself. Eat properly, sleep, work out and have a good social life. Because if you are in good shape your athletes are going to be in good shape too.

Be curious. Read, study, go to courses and seminars. Challenge yourself time to time. Your athletes will respect that.

Create a good network with other coaches even if they are from other sports or from other countries. There are no secrets to hide from others. The coaching methods are always individual and you decide what you can use and what not. In modern pentathlon we need to be united to have this great sport grow bigger and bigger.

Have fun and enjoy coaching. Life is now.

“I have been asked what kind is the perfect runner and how can a young runner know will he be a winner. He knows that, He is most certain of that. If he do not know that already, he will not be a winner” - Lasse Viren (four time Olympic champion 5000m and 10000 meter running 1972, 1976).

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