

COACHES REPORT AFRICA CHAMPS 2017

PAMELA FULTON

VENUE-YASMINE HAMMAMET TUNIS

DATE-6 MAY

TRAVELLING DATES- 3-10 MAY

TEAM- GIDEON BENADE (U19), MATTHEW DENSLOW (U19), MARCEL PAULSER (YOUTH), KATIE DILMITIS (YOUTH)

MANAGER-TAMMY BENADE

COACH- PAMELA FULTON



ATHLETES

Gideon-This event would be Gideon's last race as a Junior as next season he will be moving into the Elite U23 category and start his Olympic campaign. He had his heart set on going to Worlds later this year so he was under pressure to finish in the top 4 in his category. He had been training hard under a new coach, Jono Rumbelow.

Matthew-This is Matthews first season in triathlon and it is an outstanding achievement to qualify at the age of 16 to compete in the U19 category at Africa Champs. This was obviously his first taste of Africa Champs so there was no pressure on him but to go out there and do his best.

Marcel-Having been in the sport awhile now, he is hoping to qualify next season to compete at YOG. He obviously wanted to prove himself and race well and learn from the whole experience. This was his first Africa Champs and also his first sea swim. He was racing as a 15 year old against 15, 16 and 17 year old athletes, so he had his work cut out for him.

Katie- having been in the sport for only a few months, wanted to go to the Africa Championships and enjoy the whole experience.

TRAVELLING

The team of 4 athletes, Tammy and I departed Harare International Airport early on Wednesday 3 May 2017 to Tunis (Tunisia) via Joburg and Doha. Special mention must be made of Qatar Airlines and their staff on board the flights. Once they discovered we were competing in the Triathlon Africa Champs, they made us a good luck cake and presented it to us late Wednesday night before landing in Doha. No First Class seats offered though. We arrived in Doha at 11:35pm and spent the night on the floor under the benches outside our departure gate. Not the best race preparation but everyone managed to sleep for part of the night. We ensured we stretched regularly whilst in the terminals and also whilst on the flights. We departed for Tunis on Thursday at 8am. 30 hours after leaving Harare we arrived midday in Tunis and spent over an hour getting our visas. We were taken by bus with the SA junior team to Yasmine Hammamet which took approximately an hour. We arrived at our very nice 5 star hotel mid afternoon where they had kept the dining room open for us. Checking in took awhile so the athletes ate while we waited. Once we were settled into our plush rooms we ventured down to the beach to stretch our legs and have some fun in the fresh air. Little did we know this was Marcel's first venture ever into the sea! After having some fun we assembled our bikes, and fortunately all had survived the journey.

It was dinner time and an early night was appreciated by all.



COURSE ORIENTATION

We awoke to a beautiful day and a beautiful view from our rooms. After an easy jog to loosen the legs and a breakfast with a large selection to choose from, we assembled for the swim familiarisation. For some reason there were no bouys set up so we were told to swim 150m out, turn left for 100m and 150m back. Go! So we did- guessing somewhat. The sea was fairly calm with a slight pull to the right. We were able to identify a landmark for the exit point whilst we were out at sea. We also had a few practice entries and exits as only Gideon would have practiced this before.

We then went to the bike familiarization. Here we had road closure and there was a lead vehicle. We all rode together for one lap and then everyone was able to ride the second lap at their own pace. The course was completely flat with a few 180' turns where the athletes on race day would have to be attentive as this is most likely where the breaks would be attempted in the packs.

Katie had problems with her gearing so after the familiarization we had her gears adjusted.



REGISTRATION AND BRIEFING

Registration was not ready when we arrived at the designated time with our tri suites to be approved and in fact registration was only done the following morning just before the race. Briefing was on time and was very clear. The original bike course had been amended so instead of the Juniors doing 5 laps they were now doing 3.

After briefing we went back to the transition area to have a look at the mount and dismount lines and to practice mounts and dismounts. The lines were not yet painted so we guessed where they would be and practiced.

I feel that all these continued uncertainties played on the athletes minds but they all seemed to be ok and not let it get on top of them.

RACE DAY

Race day arrived and everyone seemed to be calm and confident. The wind had picked up a bit so it would be interesting to see what the swim would be like. I went down to the transition area early to see if set up had been completed. It had and the mount /dismount lines were more or less where we had thought they would be.

The Para event was before us but the bouys had not been set up yet so they started half an hour late. We then wondered if our races would be late. When do the Juniors start their warm up? More uncertainties. Fortunately they made up time and our Juniors started at 10am as planned. The Juniors would be using the Olympic style racks which Matt had not used before. He practiced a couple of times placing his front wheel into the rack as if coming into T2. All seemed ok.

Half an hour later the Youth were able to set up their transition. There was real uncertainty as to where they could rack. First they could rack where they wanted, then they had to go numerically, then the numbering changed to start at the other end of the racks. Katie and Marcel set up their transition 3 times. Fortunately before their race started I went back to check their transition and it had been moved again. Their bikes and shoes had been moved. I managed to get Katie and Marcel to quickly check their transition was ok before their race started.

Gideon and Matt started their race on time. Gideon had a very good start, he looked aggressive and determined and I could see he had got into the lead pack. Watching their swim with Marcel and Katie

we could tell there was quite a current pulling them right. It would be to their advantage to keep left on the start line and keep sighting. When the U19 boys exited the water I expected Gideon to be mid field. He unfortunately came out near the back just behind Matt, looking very despondent. I told him that Matt was just ahead, to forget about what had just happened and remember his Worlds dream. From what I could see he had a quick transition.

I stayed with Marcel and Katie on the beach whilst Tammy positioned herself by the “Penalty Box”. Marcel’s race started on time. At the line up there were some well developed 15-17 year olds boys for Marcel to compete against. Katie’s race started 10 minutes later. They both swam well exiting mid field. I moved myself up to join Tammy to watch the end of the Junior boys race, to discover Gideon had caught Matt on the bike and they had worked together to pass a couple of athletes. Matt did not have a good transition as he racked his bike too firmly nearly knocking the rack over, his bike fell over so he had to try rack again. He wasted 30 seconds on his transition and then had to work extra hard to try and catch Gideon again on the run. Gideon had a good run finishing 8th with Matt 7 seconds behind in 9th position. I am sure this was a big learning curve for both the boys. Obviously Gideon was very disappointed not having made the Worlds selection criteria. He now needs to move forward and focus on competing on the bigger stage, work out what did and did not work for him in his preparation for AC and adjust his program accordingly with his coach. Matt on the other hand was very happy with his race but annoyed with his T2. He was the first 16 year old across the line. He hopes to qualify to compete at YO, so his first experience of the Olympic racking system will stand him in good stead.

Marcel once again had a good T1 being one of the fastest, had the 9th fastest ride and a solid run placing him 9th overall, a commendable effort by him, being the first 15 year old across the line. Katie enjoyed her race and was very happy with her overall 6th position. She worked hard on the bike by herself not managing to get into a pack. The general comment by everyone was there was a strong headwind on the bike but once they turned around, the wind behind was exceptionally hot, so not an easy bike, although flat.

No penalties were awarded to any Zimbabwean, sadly neither were any medals, but there was some exceptional racing, good sportsmanship, hopefully a lot of lessons learned and memories to keep forever. South Africa and the northern African countries swept up the medals in the Junior and Youth categories. I feel although we were not in the running for medals we did really well having young athletes in both the boy’s categories who raced exceptionally well.

With both Marcel and Matt hoping to qualify for YOG, we need to support and nurture them as best we can. Qualifying will be really tough but either one of them has a really good chance.



YOG CAMP

Sunday, the following day, there were YOG sessions for Matt and Marcel to attend once the Elites had finished competing. It was lead by Rob Harvey from the ITU. He conducted an hour long swim session in the ocean, late afternoon a bike session and the following morning a run session. He was exceptionally impressed with Marcel in the swim session, how he immediately grasped the entry and exit and with Matt in the bike session where he became the demonstrator for each exercise. Unfortunately the run session was cut short due to his early departure. Both boys came out of this camp excited, and motivated having learnt new skills. Very valuable lessons for the future.



Continuing on the Monday afternoon was the beginning of another YOG camp being held by ATU. We were able to attend another bike and run session but were only able to watch the swim session due to our early departure back to Zimbabwe.

Well done Gideon, Matt, Marcel, Katie and Tammy on an outstanding tour!

