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Flexibility crucial to attorney's triathlon training

Salvi, Schostok & Pritchard associate hopes to qualify for national competition a fourth time

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Excuses are something trial attorney and triathlete Rob L. Kohen tries to keep out of his head.

They are inevitably bound to cross the minds of even the most determined professionals and well-trained athletes. But Kohen said the key to his ability to train for multiple triathlons each year while still putting work first is to block the excuses out while still accepting that, some days, you can't do it all.

Kohen, 31, an associate at Salvi, Schostok & Pritchard P.C., will compete in the Chicago Triathlon on Aug. 28 and aims to make a strong finish in hopes of qualifying for the 2017 USA Triathlon National Championship, which would be his fourth time qualifying for the event.

Kohen will compete in the Chicago Triathlon's Olympic-distance race, which entails swimming one mile, cycling 40 kilometers, or roughly 25 miles, and running 10 kilometers, or 6.2 miles.

Kohen has about 35 triathlons under his belt — including six in which he had top podium finishes in his age group — and he has completed seven Ironman 70.3 races as well as two full Ironman races, which involves a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike ride and finishes with a 26.22-mile marathon run.

But just five years ago, Kohen

had never competitively biked, swam or run long distance.

Kohen ran at Highland Park High School, where his longest race was 200 meters, but he didn't compete in college at the University of Illinois. The summer before he began law school at IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law in 2011, he competed with some friends in a sprint-distance triathlon, the shortest distance, and from there he was hooked.

Each year while in law school, Kohen upped his training. He read the "Triathlete's Training Bible" by Joe Friel and began buying the proper gear to compete. He said he quickly learned that bicycling takes years of training to develop strong muscles, and upon taking swimming seriously for the first time, he learned it was the "most technical of all the sports," he said.

All of this was while he was in law school, serving on the trial advocacy team and working as a law clerk.

Then, in 2014, he took his racing to what's considered the top level of triathlon competition: the full Ironman.

While at the race in Madison, Wis., he met Bill Bishop of Chicago, who runs an endurance sports company. Among the various athletes he works with, Bishop specializes in helping full-time, working professionals who want to take their sports seriously but aren't necessarily elite.



Rob L. Kohen competes in the 2014 International Triathlon Union's world championship race held in Chicago that year. Kohen, an associate with Salvi, Schostok & Pritchard P.C., is training to compete in the Chicago Triathlon later this month, where he hopes to secure a spot in the 2017 USA Triathlon National Championship. Deb Wesley Photography

Bishop now helps create a workout schedule for Kohen. If Kohen finds out he's going to be at the office late, for example, he can send Bishop a text letting him know he won't be able to do that day's workout, and Bishop is able to change up Kohen's schedule to accommodate the loss of that day's training.

Bishop, a retired elite swimmer who coaches more than 100 athletes ranging in age from six to 72, said Kohen is a prime example of an adult athlete who has managed to improve while maintaining a high-demand job.

"Making sure you hit your priorities first and then weaving your training plan into the rest of your free time is a really good way to set yourself up for success."

Bishop echoed Kohen's advice for balancing work and training by saying adult athletes, or anyone interested in a serious workout routine, should be sure to get everything work-related prioritized first before turning to athletic goals.

"Making sure you hit your priorities first and then weaving your training plan into the rest of your free time is a really good way to set yourself up for success," he said.

Kohen said learning to be flexible with his training is something that has come to him over time. Likewise, he's also learned as he's gained experience that setting his sights high on certain goals isn't as important as focusing on bettering himself.

He aspires to one day qualify for the world championship Ironman race in Kona, Hawaii, where the world's top triathletes compete.

"I don't know if will ever be able to qualify there, even if I didn't have a job," Kohen said. "But what I've come to accept is that even though that's a goal of mine, if I never get there, I'm OK with that, because all I can do is compare myself to me, and if every year I'm getting better and better, I'm OK with that," he said.

"I think that took a little bit of growing up and a little bit of accepting that hey, even though you love this sport ... I have a job

that comes first and that job is always going to come first,” he said.

In the two years since Kohen’s been practicing law, he’s noticed his triple sport training has helped him gain endurance in the office.

“The grueling aspects of Ironman absolutely relate back to trial preps and trials in general,” he said. “I really think the mental concentration that I gain from work allows me to stay focused while I’m racing and I think that the athletic gains I get give me the stamina to put in long hours for trial prep and trial.”

Finding that balance between being flexible and not making excuses has come with experience, Kohen said. For example, he didn’t allow himself to make any excuses about skipping a run one night after working on a trial out-of-town. Before spending that night prepping for the next day of trial, he squeezed in a run at a local track.

But on the other side, there are some days when the training isn’t in the cards. That was the case last Tuesday, when Kohen found himself especially busy after he reached his biggest settlement to-date — a \$675,000 medical-malpractice settlement

— in a lawsuit on which he represented a client.

He missed his bike workout that night, but he got up early the next day and made up for it.

On the flip side, he said, the most challenging part of maintaining a rigorous workout routine — for Kohen it can include training twice a day five to seven days a week, including up to 22-mile runs and 120-mile bike rides on the weekends — is not making excuses.

“You can have the attitude that you’re allowed to miss workouts but what you can’t do is say, I had a tough day at work, I’m tired now so I’m going to go

home and lay down,” he said. “That’s the number one excuse and that is what you can’t have.”

Kohen admits he’s not obsessive about missing a workout. When he needs a day off, he takes it. But this becomes a problem when a workout is missed two days in a row, he said.

“You only get better by doing the hard thing first,” he said. “Everybody’s tired when they finish work. The people who want it the most are the people who are tired and then go do it anyway. You have to want it. It sounds so cliché, but if you don’t want it, you’ll never do it.”