

Coach Koehr's Swimming Awards Banquet Talk – March 1, 2020

Let's Literally Astound Ourselves

- I **met my future wife** the during the first class period of the first day of my freshman year at Notre Dame
 - **She met me** about two years later
 - It didn't surprise me to quickly learn she was a **Varsity swimmer**
 - I have always been **attracted to athletes** at some level
 - Maybe because, as hard as I tried, **I never really was much of one**
 - Our **first "date"** I decided to see if she'd want to go **swimming** at the Rockne Memorial Gym
 - **"The Rock"**
 - Yes, I knew she was a swimmer, but so was I
 - And **she was a girl**
 - How fast could she be?
 - After she **lapped me in a 200**, I knew I was going to need a Plan "B" for this girl.
- **Fast forward** to a time when I had finally succeeded in making her my wife
 - Now I had to work my way into her family
 - Because we were **out at Notre Dame** and they were from New York, I really **didn't know them very well** at all.
 - It's very **intimidating for a short, fat, cocky, loudmouth**
 - who is very good in school,
 - but was **always the last one picked** on the playground
- **We all start in different places in life**, and the Carey's sure started in a **different place athletically** than me.
 - Both of her parents are in their respective **College Halls of Fame**
 - Her mother is in the **International Swimming Hall of Fame** in Jacksonville, FL
 - Colleen and **all** of her siblings were **college athletes**
 - And **brother John** is 54 or 55 years old and still looks like the **muscle poster in the doctor's office**
- Her **oldest brother Kevin** was the **best athlete** of them all
 - **College football quarterback**, baseball catcher, and 50 Free specialist
 - He was **like an athletic God** to me
 - He even made his living as an exercise physiologist
 - It all seemed to **come so easily** to him
 - He **looked the part** for sure

- He even had a **vein down his bicep** that I always wanted as a kid
- In the **summer of 1986**, the **Carey brothers** were doing a **Triathlon in Baltimore**
 - I was 23 years old
 - Colleen and I **packed up Kaitlyn and a newborn Kelly** to go watch
 - **Wow, I thought.** These guys are racing
 - 1,500 meters of swimming
 - Then 40K (about 25 miles) of **biking**
 - Followed by a 10K (6.2 miles) **run**
 - Continuously!
 - **I could never do that!**
 - A race that takes **3 and half hours**
 - **I would die!**
- Until I realized that I pretty much **had no choice** if I was **going to be part of this family.**
 - So, I set a **goal to finish the 1987 Bud Light Triathlon Series** race in **Baltimore.**
 - I got **new running shoes** and a new Bianchi bike
 - **Kevin gave me a training plan** to follow
 - I know he **may not have thought that I would or could do it**, but he was **surprisingly supportive**
 - His apparent **belief** in me was **somehow inspiring**
 - To my amazement, **I did it!**
 - Without walking!
- I remember thinking to myself, **I can do it faster than that**
 - **Anyone here ever said that** after a race?
 - So, I **trained hard** the next year, even **riding my bike to my consulting project** at the **International Monetary Fund** three days a week.
 - I'd take the long way home through Arlington
- I **don't think Kevin trained very hard** for the **1988 race** in Baltimore, because somehow
 - I was ahead of him after the swim
 - He passed me near the end of the bike
 - And **we started the run at approximately the same time**
- How did this happen?
 - But Kevin being the elite athlete knew he had the mental edge on me
 - He **took up his place right behind me and would not pass me**
 - We both knew that all he had to do was stay with me and he could sprint past me at the end

- **He broke me**
 - I had given all I had and that was more than I could handle
 - But I finished in a much faster time
- I recall thinking, **were we actually racing each other?**
 - Kevin?
 - **Sure he beat me**, but I always figured **that was just a given**.
 - Well maybe it wasn't?
- That year, I got **transferred to a government project** in Virginia Beach
 - I was only **allowed to work eight (8) hours** per day.
 - That's like only 1/3rd of the day.
 - I had so much time on my hands that I **even started taking guitar lessons**, but **most of all, I trained**
 - It's amazing what you **can accomplish** if you don't care who wins **America's Got Talent** or **The Bachelorette**
 - My boss at Arthur Andersen was a great guy named **John McCulla** who was a college running back at William & Mary
 - We started training together
 - In the mornings, I recall **doing 25-mile rides down to the beach**
 - We'd over stop at the beach to swim a half mile against the current and then cruise back to our bikes
 - **Before work!**
 - Then I would do **wind sprints down Ellesmere Court** three nights a week
 - I even **rode my bike to Norfolk**, ran a **10K** and rode home
 - I was ready
- The **next big Carey Brother race** was in mountainous area outside New York City
 - **Harriman State Park**
 - Fortunately for me, Harriman was just a **throwaway race for Kevin**
 - He was so incredibly gifted that he could run it without really training
- The race went **far better than my expectation**
 - The **swim was short**, which didn't help me
 - He got on the bike ahead of me
 - I'm sure he **barely noticed I was in the race**
 - Nor did he probably care where I was
 - On the bike, as we went up a mountain, I could see him ahead of me
 - I had to figure out how to pass him without him seeing me

- If he saw me, it was over because he'd just blow me away
 - He was all the way to the right
 - So I went all the way to the left edge of the road and hid behind a group of bikers that was passing him
 - When I got to the top, I raced ahead as fast as I could hoping to be away before he crested the mountain.
- Then came the **highlight of my athletic career**
 - The run was an **out-and-back run**
 - I was out of the transition area first
 - But that meant there was no way for him to avoid seeing me on the way back.
 - I **had to extend my lead**
 - I made the turnaround and ran surprisingly far before I saw Kevin
 - His younger brother John was running with him encouraging him loudly enough that I could hear
 - **“You’re not going to let Jim beat you!”**
 - I never felt better in my life
- **What a revelation**
 - Being an **“athlete” wasn’t just about natural ability**
 - It was not just about how fast you go
 - Being an **“athlete” is more about how hard you are willing to push yourself**
 - I realized that **anyone could be an “athlete”, even me**
- Over the **next 15 years**, with great support from Kevin, I gradually tested the **limits** of that
 - I ran **10Ks**
 - I did 8 or 10 more **Triathlons**
 - They were sort of fun
 - I wonder if I can run a **Marathon?**
 - Kevin had run New York City before so I tried that
 - I have a great **picture** in my house of **Kevin** jumping in for the last 10 miles of the race with me
 - dressed in his **Halloween costume** from the night before
 - Then I ran 6 other marathons
 - The **dirty little secret of marathon training**
 - Is once you can run **25 miles a week for three weeks** in a row, the hard part is over
 - You are **12 weeks away** from a marathon

- Your cardiovascular system is ready
 - All you need to do is train your muscles to survive that long
 - Muscles get stronger much faster than your cardiovascular system
 - The rest is just how much pain you're willing to take
- By the time I was in my **late 30's**, I started wondering again:
 - I wonder if I can run **2 marathons in the same week?**
 - Richmond and Sunday and Providence, RI the next Saturday
 - I wonder if I could swim across the **Chesapeake Bay?**
 - 4.4 miles in 1:58
 - Still the family record, I'll note for Shane
 - I wonder if I could survive 24 hours with the **Navy SEALS?**
 - The 24-hour Navy SEAL Adventure challenge at Ft. Story in Virginia Beach
 - I wonder if I could do a **Triathlon in combat boots?**
 - New York Playland
 - I wonder if I could do a **Half Ironman**
 - 1.2 mile swim, 56 mile bike, and a half marathon
 - The Eagleman Half Ironman on the Eastern Shore of Maryland
- I wonder if I could do an **Ironman Triathlon**
 - **Kevin had done the Lake Placid Ironman** a few years before, so I determined to try
 - As a professional Exercise Physiologist, he was capable of being a **wonderful coach**
 - And he was
 - He also became my **biggest cheerleader**
 - It was **daunting to even think about**
 - A 2.4 mile open water swim
 - A 112 mile bike in the mountains
 - And a 26.2 mile marathon
 - Without stopping
 - I'm still not sure Kevin thought I could actually do it,
 - But **he was there**
 - For all 15 hours and 20 minutes
 - In this case, **it did almost kill me**
 - But as I was telling myself on the final half of the run
 - **"A gunshot to the head is not going to stop me now"**
 - I'm still amazed I finished
- **Let's reflect** back on that story

- **When I was 23**, in the prime of my life
 - I thought a 3-mile run was a big deal
- But wouldn't I have been **far better equipped to run an Ironman at age 23** rather than age 39?
 - **Why not sooner?**
- Time was certainly part of the answer, but the bigger answer is that
 - **It never occurred to me it was possible**
- What was the **difference between age 23 and age 39?**
 - One difference was that **I had met Kevin Carey**
 - At age 39, he **helped me understand a fundamental truth**
 - **Borne out** from my life experience with
 - Family,
 - Work, and
 - Athletics
 - **You can always do more than you think you can do.**
- **Some of you have already started to figure that out**
 - I saw it at the **Cystic Fibrosis Swim-a-thon**
 - **Maddie Given** has CF and she finished 200 lengths the last two years
 - **Lauran Curley** has never swum before, but she finished the new 3 miles also
 - At the beginning of the season, would Lauran have said she could swim 3 miles continuously?
 - I recall seeing **Jack Champney** behind the blocks at **NoVa Catholics**
 - For **100 Butterfly!**
 - Uh-oh, I thought, that was a mistake on my part
 - It's an easy mistake to make in my software when you are moving with the toggle for 100 Free so close
 - As I started to move to try to fix, I recalled making the same mistake with **Marcie Van de Voorde** at Fork Union Military Academy several years ago
 - Of course, she became a team manager 😊
 - I decided to **let it ride** and see what happened
 - After all, Jack didn't come whining to me
 - And you know what?
 - **He made it!**
 - It took him 2:39, but **he didn't quit.**
 - At the **beginning of the season**

- **Would Jack have said he could finish 100 Fly?**
 - My favorite story was **Elena Morano** at the **Seton Winter Invitational**
 - I always use that meet to get a bunch of you in the 500 Free while the older kids are at National Catholics
 - We had an **empty lane** in the girls 500 and Elena asked
 - **“Can I swim it?”**
 - “Heck yeah, you an swim it!”
 - As I ran off to tell Mr. Dealey to add her in, I thought
 - She can do more
 - **“Hey Elena, make sure you do 19 flip turns”**
 - “I can’t do 19 flip turns!”
 - “Tell you what Elena,
 - This is almost certainly the last time in your life that you will race the 500 Free in a competitive situation
 - **Do you want to lay in bed tonight thinking:**
 - **I could have done better?**
 - Why did I only do **18 flip turns?**”
 - 10:34 later, she had done 19 flips
 - And had a big smile on her face
 - At the **beginning of the season,**
 - **Would Elena have said** she could race **500 yards?**
 - Or would she have said that she could do **19 flip turns** in a row?
 - She didn’t even know how to do a flip turn at the beginning of the season
 - **How many of you here today would have said** you could race the 500, like
 - **Peter Hartung**
 - **Emma Catabui**
 - **Joseph Dwane**
 - **Orla Haggerty**
 - **Amelia Geary**
 - **Cate and Rose Waldron**
 - **Seth Kellogg**
 - **Aaron Bishop**
 - **Michael McGrath**
 - **Liam Halisky**
 - **Chris Arnold**

- **Lucia Bingham**
 - **Mary Catherine Hurley**
 - And a bunch more that I haven't mentioned because I know I'd have to list half the team
 - For the rest of you, **think about those 100-yard races**
 - At what point in the race do your **arms and legs go numb**?
 - {Ask the older boys}
 - If you are all being honest with yourselves, I'll be there are a whole bunch of you who have **never experienced that feeling ever**
 - Why not?
 - There's a **PR waiting** for nothing more than you to **want it badly enough**
- So with all of that said, let's **step back and think about the 500 freestyle**.
 - I **understand the fear** that some of you have
 - **You've never been 56 but I've been 13.**
 - I vividly **remember the first time I swam the 500 Free**
 - I was 12 or 13
 - In a meet with the Ft. Belvoir Sharks
 - At an old pool on the Quantico Marine base.
 - I flipped too early at one wall and didn't go back to touch it
 - I got DQ'd
 - Most of you on the team **can swim 500** yards in practice in between 6:00 and 8:00
 - **All** of you can do it in **less than 11:00**
 - Is there anyone in this room who **can honestly tell me that**
 - They **cannot swim continuously** for 11:00
 - Without permanent or physical or psychological damage?
 - **Sounds a little silly** at this point
 - Right Moms?
- **Some of you probably think I've been talking about swimming this whole time**
 - **Swimming ain't about swimming**
 - **Does this all matter in real life?**
 - Or is this just another thing I do in high school that I'll never use again?
 - Let me give you a **few examples** that your parents might be able to relate to:
 - Maybe you really want your kids at **Seton, but you see something that could really be better**

- Are you going to **pray for someone to come fix it?**
 - Or are you going to pray for the grace to take the lead and fix it yourself?
- Think of all the **best things at Seton**
 - **Someone had to step up** on the blocks and dive in
 - Someone has to run the PRO Board or the **Ad Campaign**
 - Someone has to **direct the play**
 - Someone had to take over **apparel for the Swim Team**
 - Someone had to step up to be new **Head Timer**
 - One day, someone is going to have to be the new Swimming Coach
 - Can anyone imagine **Seton without Kimberly Dalrymple?**
 - Yes, Seton was here before Kimberly and it will be after Kimberly, but look at how she's always stepping up
 - She **doesn't start** with "**I can't do that**"
 - She **starts with** "**How can we do that"**
 - Is that **going to be you?**
 - Or **are you not**
 - Ready
 - Willing
 - Able
 - Or do you
 - Not have enough **time?**
 - Not have enough **talent?**
 - **Fear that you will fail?**
- Maybe you thought about Homeschooling
 - You can **think of all the doubts** you have:
 - **Can I do it?**
 - I don't have a teaching certification
 - What if I **do a bad job** and ruin my kids lives?
 - Where do I get **course material?**
 - Will my kids **not be "socialized"** and turn into dorks?

- My husband wants to send them to school
- Or you can think about all the reasons why you can or should:
 - I need to help them **keep their faith**
 - I can make sure they learn about the **greatness of their country**
 - It will **improve our family life** and make our family closer
 - **Lots of people do it who are less capable than me**
 - Surely, I as **loving full-time college educated mother,**
 - can teach a kid **one-on-one** better than most teachers can handle 25 or 30 kids at once
- Which **thought process prevailed** for you?
- Have you ever met someone who was in a job he/she hated?
 - I was starting to **hate my job** right before we came to Seton
 - I **recall driving home** from Dulles Airport
 - in my old man company car
 - that I had tricked out with a stereo system like a teenager with too much money
 - It was 1200 Watts, roughly the same power as the sound system we use for our Seton meets
- “**Working Man**” by Rush came on
 - *“Seems to me, I could live my life,*
 - *a lot better than I think I am.*
 - *That’s why they call me,*
 - *They call me the ‘Working Man’”*
- What do you do?
 - Do you stay miserable because you **don’t think you can do anything else?**
 - Are you paralyzed by the **false security** of working for a company that could lay you off at the next economic downturn?
 - Or do you **quit your VP job** when you wife is 8 months **pregnant** with your 10th child to take the big swing out on your own?
 - Some of you **might say that was foolish**
 - My **father** certainly said that
 - In some very **colorful Navy language**

- I recall my now long-time business partner in a commercial flooring company tell me back then
 - **“We can’t buy a company!”**
 - I just told him, “Why not, **dumber people than us have done it!**”
 - Today, it’s the largest flooring company in Central Virginia
 - Have you ever heard someone say “**We are not ready to have kids?**”
 - **Nobody’s ready to have kids!**
 - Kids are tough
 - My experience tells me that you have **patience for one less kid than you have,**
 - **Independent of the number** of kids you have
 - You can do it
 - And you will be glad you did
 - Are you going to **apply to that college** you might not get in to?
 - You might have to work really hard to **write a great essay**
 - Or you can just say “**I won’t get in anyway**”
 - Or you might have to take Pre-Calc when Seton just requires Algebra II
 - Do you say “**only the smart kids take Pre-Calc**”?
 - Baloney!
- Thomas Edison once said
 - **“If we did all the things we are capable of, we would literally astound ourselves.”**
 - Maybe you’ll be **lucky** enough to have had a **Kevin Carey in your life**
 - So you learn this very important life lesson while you are still young
 - Or maybe you’ll be **even luckier** and have a **Colleen Koehr** in your life
 - Someone to help give you the **courage and encouragement** to **take a risk** when you are afraid
 - Someone who will just say “**Honey, you need to go do this**”
 - But in the **meantime**, we have the 500 Free
 - And we **can definitely do it!**

Now let’s move on to the **final part of our program.**