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Triathlete Patrick Bell remembered after dying at 23

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Patrick Bell was one of the finest and most talented all-around athletes Franklin County has ever produced. More importantly, the 23-year-old triathlete was just as impressive away from competition.

All of that was put into perspective Monday, as word of Bell's tragic death spread throughout the local fitness community. Bell died Sunday after completing the Ashland Lions Club Triathlon.

"He had balance and perspective," said Bob Perry of Greenfield, a longtime friend of Bell.

"He could have been the next Lance (Armstrong) or a super triathlete, but he balanced that," continued Perry, the owner of Bicycles Unlimited, who rode often with Bell around the county and knew him for about 15 years. "His family was first and his career was next. He loved his family and friends, and he pursued his work and sport with a passion, but he never lost that balance. He never let his passions skew his ability to see the big picture."

Bob Sagor of Greenfield, a regular competitor in the Greenfield Triathlon, said he didn't know Bell quite as well as Perry or others, but fondly recalled his interactions with the Deerfield Academy and UMass graduate.

"He was the kind of guy that wished me well (in the Triathlon) every year and asked me how I did," said Sagor. "I mattered to him. He was a real sportsman."

"This is a shock, an incredible shock," concluded Sagor of Bell's passing. "I think he had the potential to be a national caliber triathlete."

Perry first saw Bell's talent at Deerfield, when he worked with the Big Green cyclists.

"Pat had natural talent, and you never had to coach him twice on the same subject," said Perry. "But he was more than that. He was an inspiration to the other kids, and truly a leader. Just his mere presence was an inspiration to other riders."

Perry said that what set Bell apart from others was his focus.

"Pat had the ability to put the difficulty behind him," he said. "He focused on the finish line, sort of a 'white line' mentality, no matter where he was in the race. He always completed whatever he set out to do. He had that inner fire."

Perry recalled one day that displayed Bell's dedication to his sport, as well as the group he rode with.

"One time when we were about to go on a ride when he was at UMass, he forgot his (riding) shoes," said Perry. "So he drove to UMass and got the shoes. He drove back up here, hopped on his bike, and managed to catch up to us and we were almost a half-hour ahead of him. That, to me, was really the spirit of who Pat was."

Perry said he logged thousands of miles riding with Bell, and the more they rode, the more Perry recognized that Bell was a special person as well as a tremendous athlete.