

A Coach of Significance

Chris Moody



Runners seek out Pat Bateman for a lengthy list of reasons. The training coordinator for Fleet Feet in Roanoke, Bateman, extends the store's mission far beyond selling shoes. Bateman oversees training for anyone who wants to be a better runner. People who seek his services range from experienced marathoners to people who want to start a fitness journey with a walking regimen.

"We meet people where they are," Bateman said. "Some are training for their tenth half marathon, and some just want to start walking a few miles a week. It's all about helping them find consistency, confidence, and community."

Fleet Feet, one of the corporate sponsors of next month's Star City Half Marathon and 10k, works to make running a social sport.

Bateman oversees two intertwined offerings: the open Roanoke Run Club and structured 12–16 week training programs tailored to local races. The calendar tracks Roanoke's "Triple Crown — Blue Ridge Marathon in April, the Salem Half (or 8K) in late summer/early fall, and the Star City Half or 10K in November — so newcomers can roll fitness from one event into the next, while first-timers join at any stage and get a plan.

The weekly agenda is consistent: Tuesday evenings at Big Lick Brewing, Wednesdays at 6 a.m. at the Patrick Henry High School track, Thursday evenings at River's Edge, and rotating Saturday long runs that "dance around the valley," as Bateman puts it. Those Saturday meetups double as a tour of Roanoke and often end at a farmers' market.

Ahead of key races, he'll stage runs from the course area to help athletes visualize race day. "It looks like an aid station," he jokes. "People wander up asking if there's a race. We tell them: this is Run Club, come join us."

A Roanoke native, Bateman's path to coaching was earned through decades in athletics. He was a Division III collegiate swimmer, discovered triathlon during the early '80s boom, racing professionally for four years and finished 12th overall at Kona in 1987, and winning the 25-29 age-group world title in 1989.

Between and after racing, he coached at every level, from summer leagues to year-round programs, YMCA teams, and the Carter Center Marlins, which he founded in 1990. The common thread, he says, is "human performance," helping people improve through sound mechanics, progressive training, and community.

That philosophy now anchors Fleet Feet's programs. Roanoke's topography can be humbling, so Bateman emphasizes personalization, patience, and durability. He encourages beginners and returners to build basic strength before big mileage: stress the tissues gradually, get "meat tight to the bone," then layer in volume and speed. For athletes overwhelmed by internet plans, the Run Club offers something the web cannot: experienced people offering personalized service.

"On any given night there might be 300-plus cumulative years of running experience standing around," he says. "You'll get real, lived advice."

One of Fleet Feet's most useful tools arrived this summer: Run DNA 3D gait analysis. The in-store service captures walking and running mechanics, then translates those images into actionable cues for form, efficiency, and injury prevention. Since July, roughly 55–60 runners and walkers have gone through it, and Bateman says the feedback

has been “a consistent wow.” Pair that insight with shoe fitting, strength suggestions, and a workable plan, and people stay healthier and on track for November.

The culture is genuinely all-paces. Walkers find walkers. Run walkers settle into interval groups. Continuous runners sort by pace and distance. To remove guesswork, Bateman posts weekly routes on Strava for the Star City Half, 10K, and fun-run options, with meeting times and maps. The message is simple: show up, and they’ll guide you from today to race day.

Race day itself looks different for Bateman. He usually skips the bib to serve as an ambassador and chief encourager, helping with course setup or volunteer direction, warming up the one-mile fun run, and staffing a Run Club tent for bag drop, recovery, and post-race high-fives.

“It’s a celebration,” he says, especially for those who used running to manage stress through back-to-school and the last hot weeks of summer. Cooler November weather is the payoff: “You see where you’re at, enjoy the day, and let the training show.”

Fleet Feet Roanoke has been part of the valley for more than 20 years (the national brand turns 50 next year). Current owner Matt Thompson kept the momentum from prior leaders, and Bateman stepped into a community already rich with tradition and now surging with new energy. “Every week I see half a dozen new faces,” he says, many of them young professionals moving from Charleston, Washington D.C., and beyond. They come to plug in, meet people, and often to prove to themselves they can cover a distance that once felt out of reach.

That is the heart of the program. Whether someone is eyeing a first 5K on Thanksgiving or the Star City Half in November, Bateman wants the same outcome: arrive healthy, confident, and ready. With a supportive schedule, course-specific long runs, individualized form analysis, Bateman, and Fleet Feet turn a goal into an achievable plan.