

PERFORMANCE CYCLING CONDITIONING

A NEWSLETTER DEDICATED TO IMPROVING CYCLISTS

www.performancecondition.com/cycling

Issues and Questions in Youth Cycling Development #7 - Rewarding Your Athletes

Ralph Frazier and Kelli Rogan- Frazier Cycling

Frazier Cycling's Atlanta-based Junior Development Program was developed by Ralph Frazier and Kelli Rogan. Ralph has over 35 years of cycling experience as an endurance and marathon racer and a coach. Kelli has 10 years experience of coaching juniors and masters as well as an impressive track and race racing career. Frazier Cycling has a mission to develop the next generation of cyclists with an appreciation for the sport, life-long physical fitness, sportsmanship, teamwork and commitment. As the southeast's largest junior development program, they have been recognized by USA Cycling News as "an excellent model for other junior development initiatives"...focusing on "character as much as athletic ability." The 2008 Frazier Cycling Juniors team holds 9 state championships and 9 national medals, including 2 national championship titles.



**BEG
INT**

Since our columns have appeared in this newsletter, we continually receive questions about how to keep kids in cycling. Early on, we had so many inquiries that we devoted our third column, "Issues and Questions Youth Cycling Development #3, Keeping the Team" to the topic. In that article, we pointed out how we surveyed our team and discovered the number one reason that they remained on our team was because of "friends, teammates, and the social aspects". Bonding among members is very important in keeping the team intact; however there is another factor that is nearly as important and it involves you, their coach, to a greater degree: giving rewards and recognition. Read the entire article [HERE](#).

As the coach of a junior cycling team, you definitely have influence with team building. You can set up a positive environment, you can put a team together, and you can coordinate activities, but friendships and bonding are really out of your control. On the other hand, giving rewards and recognition is wholly under your control and thereby, you have more control in keeping your juniors.

Up to this article, we have mentioned rewarding and recognizing your juniors, but we have not discussed the topic at length. For example, in our first article, "Creating and nurturing a Youth Cycling Pipeline - Starting a Program", we stated: " Kids are attracted to programs that offer popularity, tradition, identity, routine practice schedule, skill development, competition, and recognition." Furthermore, we stated: "Coaches should be aware that youth cyclists need encouragement, acknowledge, and recognition more than adults." Read the entire article [HERE](#).

In this article, we will discuss recognition in more depth. Indeed, we will discuss some of the aspects of our rewards and recognition system. Having dealt with juniors over the past eight years, we learned a few things and we have modified our program with regards to recognition and rewards.

Once more we refer to "Creating and nurturing a Youth Cycling Pipeline - Starting a Program". We listed report cards among the things you can do to keep the team together during the off season. Report cards are an element of our recognition and reward system that we have instituted since the beginning. The report cards are used to give recognition and feedback to team members and



Ralph Frazier



Kelli Rogan

parents. The reports cards are a means to report how an individual team member performs according to certain attributes that we emphasize in our program. These attributes are the basis for our recognition and rewards system. We insure that each individual and parents are aware of these attributes and their importance. Here is the list of the attributes:

Attitude - subjective assessment; most important attribute of our recognition and reward system.

Cycling Skills - objective assessment; based on scoring comparisons for age groups and self improvement. Until an adequate skills level is achieved, this attribute is considered the second most important attribute ahead of teamwork.

Teamwork - subjective assessment; based on actions during rides, practices, and races. This attribute ranks initially ranks third, but becomes the second most important attribute once the junior has attained a certain level of ability such that he/she can affectively contribute to the team during a race, ride, or practice.

Attendance - objective assessment; not weighted as importance as attitude, cycling skills, or teamwork; however, attendance has a direct bearing on all other attributes.

Speed and Performance - objective assessment; based on rides, practices, and races; self improvement is highly considered. This is the least important attribute of our recognition and reward system.

Each junior is scored based on our criteria for each of the attributes listed above. At the end of each year, we hold individual conferences with each junior and their parents to discuss the report card scores. We set up an "end of year " party to for these discussion. From our experience, we can assure you that juniors of all ages truly look forward to the annual report card event. The Report Card Party, itself, is considered a reward by the team.

Although we issue report cards only on an annual basis, we use the attributes for recognizing juniors throughout the entire year. Before most rides and at the beginning of each junior practice, we gather all those in attendance and we give positive recognition to individuals for recent past efforts according to the attributes described above. In particular, following a race weekend, these recognitions generate the most enthusiasm and excitement. But we don't limit these recognitions to races. We include occurrences from practices and our club rides, too. Again, we give priority to the attributes in the same manner that is reflected in the descriptions above. Just a few words of recognition will go far - not just for the junior, who is recognized, but also the parents and the rest of the team, too. Pride should not be underestimated in its significance for keeping kids in your program.

Rewarding your athletes for their achievements has many benefits. It is an important part of building a good report, keeping their interest, building their self-esteem, and we could name several other benefits; however, there are some cautions that we have discovered the hard way.

Be very careful that you don't overdo it. Praise successes but don't build up an individual or the team too much. (Unfortunately, you'll probably find out you've gone too far when it's too late.) This is especially true with regards to successful race results. Even following the brightest successes, there will be races where outcomes will fall short of expectations and disappointment will quickly replace elation. These situations can crush the hardest of egos and damage the best attitudes.


Be careful not to create a "monster". If an individual or the entire team is having success winning races - it can "go to their heads". Success and achievements will bring recognition by outsiders including race announcers, officials, teammates, parents, spectators, and competitors. Almost exclusively, this recognition will be due to performance - rarely have we seen attitude generate monster-dom. Be careful not to add fuel to this fire. It will be a battle not to join the bandwagon, yourself. You need to temper the situation and prioritize the attributes for the individual and the team. As you are aware, things can change very abruptly in cycling - success takes leave to failure. In general, adolescents' emotions are unstable at best. They are dealing with "raging hormones" and changes in self-awareness, that awkward stage, having braces, all of the identity issues, and changes in their whole beings. You need to temper adulation by instilling humility, humbleness, and long term perspective.

Be careful and do not promote your juniors too rapidly. Promotion to a higher category is a de facto reward as arranged by the structure of racing. Naturally, our juniors are trying to improve and reach for the next level. Of course, we want the same for the kids. You must be sure your juniors are ready for the promotion because if they aren't truly ready, it is not only disheartening, it may take a long time for them to become capable at the new level. Indeed, you risk losing them from the sport. We recommend is to promoting at least two or more at a time. Unless your junior is forced to the next Category by officials, we have found it works best to wait until you can promote more than one junior together.

Be careful and do not reward your junior or team by skipping practices, rides, or races. Find other ways and means to reward your juniors. Practices, rides, and races should be planned. Rest days are rest days. Rewarding juniors by giving them a day off in place of a training day sends the wrong message. We don't want to program in the minds of our juniors that training is optional. Their training should be systematic and planned - it should become a part of their lifestyles. You want your juniors to develop good habits. You need to keep rewards separated from training. Rewarding juniors with parties, celebrations, medals, trophies... but do not give them a day off. We know that a successful program stresses the importance of developing a good attitude, work ethic, discipline, teamwork, and learning.

Besides the ongoing recognitions and Report Card Party, we schedule other group parties, events, and outings. These are important ingredients to our recognition and rewards system. We will reward the team with a party or outing following a successful race or team event. Recently, we rewarded several team members who participated in a local junior track race. We rewarded them with a team dinner. This outing was not to celebrate winnings or places, but for their superb attitude at the event. The team had completed a tough multi-day road race event during the previous week. It was the nearly the end of summer break and the kids were looking forward to their last few days of "freedom" to enjoy. The race competition included a few junior national track medalists on their

fine machines. Although our juniors had spent a few Sunday afternoons on the track during the year, they had not trained to race. None of our kids own a track bike, so they used the machines provided by the velodrome. Despite what could have been a thousand excuses, none complained and they raced hard and they had fun. All deserved the reward because of their attitude!

During the year we will have a few impromptu parties and events to recognize and reward the team. Of course, we have recognition and reward events on the schedule, such as our annual Report Card Party. Our most popular recognition event is our annual awards party held at the conclusion of the season. During this party, we give awards to the juniors who best performed according to our attributes during the past season. Again, the party, itself, is a reward that all team members. The juniors and their parents enjoy the recognition and awards for themselves and their teammates. We suggest that you do the same sort of activities for your junior team. By doing so, you can have a huge influence in keeping your juniors in cycling. 

Got a Youth Development Question?

If there is a particular topic you'd like us to discuss or if you would like to share a junior coaching experience or ask a question, contact us at 770-513-8640 or info@fraziercycling.com. We will publish your requested information in the next issue as space allows.



Georgia State Championship Crit Winners cross the finish line together; Juniors 17-18 David Goodman, 13-14 Phillip O'Donnell, 15-16 Andrew Macrae