



PERFORMANCE CYCLING CONDITIONING

A NEWSLETTER DEDICATED TO IMPROVING CYCLISTS

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Issues and Questions in Youth Cycling Development #1-Making it Fun

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.



Ralph Frazier

For the past few issues of Performance Cycling Conditioning newsletter, Coach Kelli Rogan and I have written articles in a series addressing Creating and Nurturing a Youth Cycling Pipeline. Since the publication of the first article, we have been contacted by several coaches and parents who have interest in starting junior programs, or who have specific questions about how to enhance their current programs. There have been a few other coaches who have contacted us to share their experiences within their youth cycling.

We had many coaches contact us during the USA Cycling Junior National Road Race Championships in Bend, Oregon. We drew their attention because we had 20 Junior team members, 18 parents, three sets of grandparents, and three coaches attending each venue. We had several discussions with coaches from around the country. We received follow-up questions and comments to our article topics concerning training and handling parents. However, among all of these discussions, I was most surprised by one coach who commented about our attitude of seriousness with the younger members. His impression was that our program was not "all about having fun".

As we have stated in our articles, it is our observation that having a peer age group and having fun are crucial for most youth cyclists to progress in this sport. Primarily, we have noted that the "fun" part is mainly addressed by meeting the social needs of the youth cyclist. Within the training program, we have created a number of skill games, fun races, and group

outing to provide fun.

That said, we know that to have a successful youth program, it is not "all about having fun." We know that a successful program must stress the importance of developing a good attitude, work ethic, discipline, teamwork, and learning. In order to develop exceptional youth cyclists, you must teach them the seriousness of training and racing. These are life lessons the same type of lessons that youths should be learning in school. These lessons are the keys for future endeavors of life.

All ages should be taught the importance of work ethic and the need to establish good habits. From the early development stages (7 - 11 years old), cycling competency should be stressed. Mastering skills is rewarding, especially for those that it does not come easily. Work ethic is reinforced by attending practices, rides, and races.

As coaches we must recognize that as a youth cyclist progress developmentally, the "fun" part of cycling tends to become more results oriented rather than from the satisfaction of mastering a skill or participating. It's not just the athlete whose expectations change, but also their parents. These changes tend to occur with the onset of adolescence.

Work ethic remains a fundamental teaching, but the teaching focus should begin to include mental toughness and patience. These are key characteristics to developing an individual who is coachable. We should focus on teaching our youth cyclist how to handle the ebbs and tides, successes and disappointments, of competitive cycling. We should keep the young athlete looking forward. Whether a recent performance resulted positively or badly - accept the circumstances and move on: "there is always another day." Once an event, a race, or a workout has passed - it's over. It's in the past. Regardless of the past's outcome, always look forward with optimism. This attitude will keep the youth cyclist happier. A happy youth cyclist goes a long way to keeping the parents happy, too. Attitudes toward training, competition, and having fun are interrelated. These are more lessons that are the keys for future endeavors of life. ●



Kelli Rogan

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.