

Inclusive - Equal - Strong Body - Strong Mind - Strong Character

## **TAOS AREA HIGH SCHOOL MOUNTAIN BIKE TEAM**



### **Things You Need to Know - For Parents and Athletes**

The Taos Area High School Mountain Bike Composite Team is the first organized National Interscholastic Cycling Association high school mountain bike team in the state of New Mexico! We will participate in the Southern Colorado High School Mountain Bike Racing League [www.coloradomt.org](http://www.coloradomt.org). We are looking forward to lots of fun and great success as the team grows and develops great riders.

**Overview:** Like other schools racing in the Colorado League, our program seeks to strike a balance between being a competitive individual and team sport while retaining some gentler recreation club qualities. For athletes new to cycling, immediate immersion into training, racing, and the perceived pressure to perform may be intimidating. This is the reason the League has carefully designed individual racing classes so beginners, intermediate and advanced riders are pitted only against peers of similar ability and experience. Each team's coaches do their best to carefully place riders in the following categories: freshmen, sophomore, junior varsity, and varsity.

The five League races are in Colorado, most a 3-4 hour drive away. The team will travel to races and camp together. Riders are scored individually and on a team basis. Girl's scores and boy's scores are added together in the team computation. Riders must register with NICA to participate.

The season runs from August through October. All high school students are welcome to participate.

**Why cycling?** Cycling is a family-friendly fitness activity that can be done lifelong, with great social qualities. Groups of cyclists (except when climbing difficult hills) can talk, joke, and sometimes even sing as they ride. Enthusiasm for cycling as an alternative sport and healthy, active lifestyle is at an all-time high, especially here in the Taos Area with so many good places to ride.

**Why Cross-Country Mountain Biking?** NICA high school leagues are made up of cross-country mountain bike teams. All races within the high school leagues are cross-country style. The goal of this team and of the National Interscholastic Cycling Association is to bring mountain biking into the high school arena as a legitimate, respected, accessible sport while developing the love of a lifelong sport in student-athletes. We develop physical and mental skills, self-reliance, and a connection to the outdoors. This is about both the individual and the team. We feel strongly that the cross-country discipline of cycling is more accessible both financially and physically. We understand the varied interests in cycling among our athletes (road biking, cyclocross, downhill and enduro) but our team will focus on cross-country training and racing only. The skills and fitness developed will carry over into all other cycling disciplines.

**Is Participating Dangerous?** Are you new to mountain biking? Forget what you have seen on TV with the X-Games or soft drink commercials. In cross-country bike races, the average speed is usually around ten to twelve miles per hour. This is an endurance sport where the fittest athletes win. Each year, the League collects

data on injuries from every team. Statistically, we suffer fewer serious injuries than most other mainstream sports, especially contact sports.

We do our best to minimize the risks to your athlete. Certain risky behaviors are discouraged or forbidden, the helmet rule is strictly enforced and we teach each athlete bike-control skills early in the season to minimize the risk of crashing. After all, if you crash you not only risk injury but also lose valuable time during races. Of course, even with our best efforts, crashes and injuries can occur.

We do our best to provide many parent/coaches as ride leaders, each equipped with a first aid kit and cell phone on every ride, one adult for each group if we split the team. Occasionally, circumstances arise where this is not possible. In this instance, we will designate and equip a student/athlete who we believe is adequately mature, responsible and capable in the ride leader role.

**How We Build Our Team and Train:** We don't have tryouts. If you try, and keep trying, you're on our team. We will create capable and confident riders out of timid, out-of-shape riders, year after year. Athletes who are already in good condition (like cross-country runners) adapt quickly and do very well.

While we may enjoy some elite results, we are not elitist. Instead, we value and promote excellence, believing that ordinary athletes can attain big results through setting goals, mapping a strategy, and giving the task disciplined effort. Our riders will work hard and be transformed by the process.

Once the actual riding starts, we split the team workouts into fitness-based groups since our goal is to challenge but not overwhelm each rider. All groups do a similar type of ride, albeit at different paces. We do our best to design a training scheme for each rider appropriate for his/her level of experience, fitness, and personal ambitions. Groups are coed where practical.

New riders and parents may be surprised when we tell them that by season's end they will be able to easily ride a full 3-4 hours in hilly terrain but it's true! Riders who "made it to practice," that is. Athletes who follow our progressive training schedule will steadily gain fitness and those who skip practice may soon find themselves struggling to keep up.

Practice will not take place each weekday like some sports. For fitness sake, three one-hour rides do not equal one three-hour ride. Longer rides are much more effective in creating the endurance and fitness we need. If your athlete ignores our schedule and trains intermittently on his own, he/she will likely fall short of potential. Accordingly, we do our most essential training ride on Sunday morning at 9:00 am. This allows for family time, and homework in the evening. Combined with two shorter weekday workouts plus recommended core body strengthening, stretching, and rides during the week, this schedule is designed get us fit and race ready in a time-efficient way, minimize time on the bike, avoid injury, fatigue, and mental burnout.

Starting in mid-August, the team will begin practices after school on Tuesday and Thursday. These practices will often meet at the Youth and Family Center and will consist of skills development, interval training and riding. On Sundays, we will have our longer endurance rides, which are critical to athlete development.

Athletes will need to continually monitor his/her own fatigue level and discuss it with the coaches. Rest and recovery are a critical part of any training plan. It is important that your athlete avoids the temptation to do extra workouts beyond what is recommended.

**Bike Racing is Girl-Friendly:** There are certainly girls racing in the League! In fact, girl participation is the fastest growing demographic. We hope to have significant girls' participation and your coaches will work hard to make this happen.

**What to Eat:** Athletes are expected to be informed and responsible with their eating habits. While this is not a weight-loss program, fat loss and increased lean muscle-mass are typical results of training you should expect. Your athlete will need more high quality calories from complex carbohydrates and will also need more protein than is required for a non-exercising lifestyle. An inadequate or junk food diet will put your athlete at a disadvantage against those who are eating to win. Caffeine is considered a banned substance in NICA and as such should be avoided by our team athletes.

**Parents and Others Ride Along:** Training for bike racing is hard work. Fortunately, it's also a lot of fun and the team sometimes end rides with social time. Road trips to the races (camping if weather allows) are the best of all. You will discover that the other teams in the League are full of great kids, with encouraging coaches and wonderfully supportive parents. At the races, the whole gallery of spectators cheers and rings cowbells not just for their own kids, but yours too! This is a very friendly sport. Parents are encouraged to join their athletes in training and at races. Your help is critical in helping the team travel to each venue.

**How Communication Happens:** We use email to communicate with parents and athletes. This method is used because word-of-mouth, flyers, and phone communication is time consuming and ineffective. Emails and Facebook updates will discuss training schedules, offer feedback about rides completed, include team news, tips, motivation and encouragement, recognition, strategic planning for races, travel planning, unrelated fun tidbits, bike culture and more. Please check your email daily and the team Facebook page periodically!

**About Commitment:** If your athlete regularly misses workouts, especially the Sunday rides; he/she will not progress at the same rate as fellow athletes. This may become a source of frustration for your student once they start having difficulty keeping up and will send a clear signal to others that they are not committed to the team. This is a race team and, as such, each participant is strongly encouraged to try at least one race.

The 2018 race schedule is as follows:

Sunday August 26 – Frisco, CO (leave Saturday/return Sunday)  
Saturday September 9 – Leadville, CO (leave Friday/return Saturday)  
Sunday September 23 – Nathrop, CO (leave Saturday/return Sunday)  
Saturday October 6 – Eagle, CO (leave Friday/return Saturday)  
Saturday/Sunday October 20-21 – Durango, CO (State Championships) (travel plan TBA)

**Race Travel:**

We plan on taking athletes to all races. Riding in the van is on a first come, first served basis. Camping, food, and coaching for the trip should be covered by sponsors.

We will need at least one head parent to volunteer to come to each race as an emergency safety net, to take care of food preparation and clean up, and to supervise athletes at camp and in the evening. They will need to drive their own car and will camp and eat with the group.

**Other dates to put on your calendar:**

Sunday August 12 – first Sunday team ride!

Sunday October 14 – Ride the Rift mountain bike endurance event and fundraiser (Taos, NM)

**Code of Conduct:** We are committed to safety. We think about safety, teach safety and require each rider to always ride in a safe and controlled manner. Riders who repeatedly flaunt our safety rules or engage in behaviors that present unnecessary risk to themselves or others will be dropped from the program. As visible representatives of the Taos Area team and ambassadors of cycling, athletes are expected to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with that status and follow the rules of behavior at all times. **If a team member is seen riding without a helmet at any time during the season, the rider will be removed from the team – no excuses.**

**About Academics:** The goal for this team is to help develop our students academically, physically and socially into mature young adults. To qualify to participate, each athlete must be achieving academically in a manner satisfactory to wishes of his/her parents and the standards of the school. **Failure to maintain satisfactory academics during the cycling season is grounds to be dropped from the team.**

**You'll Need Some Equipment:** Your athlete will need an appropriate bike, cycling clothing and other items. Please consult with me before you buy anything so we can help you get the right gear and minimize the cost. Bicycles and helmets must be inspected and approved for function and safety, then re-inspected at regular intervals. Getting all the equipment can be challenging. Prices vary widely and much is available both new and used on the internet at discount prices. Local bike shops support the team by providing discounts and we encourage you to utilize these shops. We also have free gear people have given the team that is available to borrow. Let us help you find what you need.

**Team Sponsorship:** Our team will require a significant amount of sponsorship to help us make racing accessible to all. Please contact us if you wish to become a sponsor or help us secure new sponsors.

**Parent Ride Volunteers and Team Officers:** To be successful, we need lots of help from team parents and volunteers. Some help with transportation and other things, some act in the capacity of ride volunteers. Riders should consider taking on some of the important responsibilities that make the team function. Beginner riders need lots of help learning to keep their bikes in top mechanical shape and lots of encouragement and reassurance from those who were beginners not very long ago. If you or your rider would like to be formally designated as a mentor in some specific area, let us know. We are always looking for parents who would like to be trained as ride leaders. You do not have to be a talented rider or racer to function effectively in this role, you learn as you go, and it's a lot of fun.

Please be sure to let me know if you have any questions. Riders planning to be on the team must have all forms completed before they are able to attend team practices and events.

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