

## 2021 Things You Need to Know - For Parents and Athletes

Taos Composite is navigating the current COVID situation to the best of our abilities, along with everyone else. Your patience and understanding are deeply appreciated!

The Taos Area High School Mountain Bike Composite Team began as the first organized National Interscholastic Cycling Association high school mountain bike team in the state of New Mexico! We participate in the Southern Division of the Colorado High School Mountain Bike League [www.coloradomt.org](http://www.coloradomt.org). We are proud of both the fun and great success we have seen 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 relaxed recreation club qualities. For athletes new to cycling, immersion into training, racing, and the perceived pressure to perform may be intimidating. This is the reason the Colorado League has carefully individual racing classes so beginners, intermediate and advanced riders are pitted only against peers of similar ability and experience. Riders are placed in the following categories: freshmen, sophomore, junior varsity, and varsity.

The four League races are in Colorado, most a 3-4 hour drive away. 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 the Colorado League to participate. The season runs from August through October. All high school students are welcome to participate. We will have a middle school team in 2021. Middle school athletes may not participate in Colorado League races but can participate in other races and events.

**Why cycling?** Cycling is a fun, outdoor, lifelong sport 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. The cross-country discipline of cycling is 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. We are all cyclists!

**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 eight to twelve miles per hour. This is an endurance sport where athletes with the perfect combination of fitness and skills will excel. Each year, the League collects data on injuries from every team. Statistically, we suffer fewer serious injuries than most other mainstream sports, including soccer.

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 when we split the team.

**How We Build Our Team and Train:** We don't have tryouts. If you try, and keep trying, you're on our team. No one is "cut." We create capable and confident riders out of timid, out-of-shape riders, year after year. Athletes who are already in good condition from other sports 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 and skill-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 plan 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. A combination of longer rides, skills development, and interval training are effective in creating the endurance, strength and skills we need. If your athlete ignores our schedule and trains intermittently on his own, he/she will likely fall short of potential. On our Sunday "Stoke Rides", we have a unique opportunity to get some great riding and cover some serious miles. These are long days but by starting in the morning, we try to allow 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.

The team will begin practices by August 1<sup>st</sup> after school on Tuesday and Thursday. These practices will consist of skills development, interval training, and riding. On Sundays, we will have our longer endurance rides, which are also critical to athlete development.

Athletes will need to continually monitor his/her own fatigue and stress levels and communicate 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:** YES there are girls racing in the League! In fact, girl participation is the fastest growing demographic but we want more. 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. Going to the races (camping if weather allows) is 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 and Team App 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 Team App notifications 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 Team App regularly!

**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.

**Schedule:** Please find the 2021 schedule on the FITaos website.

**Race Travel:** Race travel, should racing occur this year, will be discussed and will be entirely dependent on COVID restrictions. Athletes will need their own transportation and supervision on race weekends. Coaches will meet athletes at the venue and be available for pre-ride and coaching.

**COVID Safe Practices and General Health Guidelines:** We will follow State of New Mexico COVID Safe Practices and adapt accordingly. Proof of full COVID vaccination is required for any athlete or coach who wishes to ride in team vehicles to practices and/or races. Athletes and coaches must not come to practices and/or races if they have symptoms of any illness out of respect for the health of teammates.

**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.** ALL ATHLETES MUST FOLLOW ALL COVID PROTOCOLS AT ALL TIMES.

**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 Support:** 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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