



PERFORMANCE CYCLING CONDITIONING

A NEWSLETTER DEDICATED TO IMPROVING CYCLISTS

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Issues and Questions in Youth Cycling Development #3 - Keeping the Team

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



Kelli Rogan

cyclists. Groom junior cyclists with a focus on principles and values; good sportsmanship, attitude and teamwork. Promote a lifestyle of fitness and exercise to build a healthy environment for families." Growing our sport not only means recruiting new cyclists, but it means retaining the ones that we have. Consequently, we are always interested in information and/or suggestions that will enhance our program to keep juniors in cycling.

Recently we received an email from a junior cycling coach who is starting a team in Florida. Within his message, he included a PezCycling News article, "Toolbox: Beginner's Mind Part 1", October 12, 2009. The article contained information with

regards to teenager sports psychology. We were very excited to read this article because information helpful toward understanding teenager psychology is crucial to any junior coach and parent!

<http://www.pezcyclingsnews.com/?pg=fullstory&id=7590>

The PezCycling News article emphasized the importance of coaches knowing why their athletes are cycling, "Ask them! If you know what's driving them, you'll be better able to connect the value of mental skills with what your athletes care about the most."

Of particular interest was the author's reference to the book "Foundations of Sport and Exercise Psychology" by Weinberg and Gould. This book cites research that shows the top five reasons that boys participate in sports and the top five reasons that girls participate in sports.

Accordingly, the five reasons boys participate in sports are:

1. To have fun
2. To improve skills
3. For the excitement of competition
4. To do something they're good at
5. To stay in shape

For girls, it's

1. To have fun

As many of you know, starting a juniors road cycling program is not an easy task. Among the hardest obstacles to overcome in recruiting new juniors is contending with the popularity of "mainstream". In addition, many parents are resistant to involving their kids in road cycling mostly for two reasons: the expense and the concerns about traffic safety.

In the first of our series of articles, Creating and Nurturing a Youth Cycling Pipeline, we discussed several ways that you can overcome recruitment issues. But recruiting juniors is barely half the battle for growing our sport - keeping them on the team can be nearly as difficult.

Even though Frazier Cycling has been successful in sustaining our junior road team to more than 30 members, it has been challenging to maintain our numbers. We monitor our team to find ways to keep juniors in our program and more importantly involved in the sport of cycling.

We at all times consider our mission: "Grow the sport by developing the next generation of serious



2. To stay in shape
3. To get exercise
4. To improve skills
5. To do something they're good at

Asking your juniors why they are cycling is very good advice. Understanding why juniors choose cycling is good for recruitment and even better for keeping juniors in your program.

In August 2006, we issued a survey that asked the kids to list what they enjoyed about being on the Frazier Cycling team.

Here are the things that the kids considered most important to them about our team and program:

1. **Friends** - You make friends in cycling and that makes it 100 times cooler
2. **Games** - It's fun when we learn new cycling games
3. **Parties** - Team parties are fun. We get to see everyone and just hang out
4. **Strategy** - Cycling strategies can actually help in school work
5. **Coaches** - It's fun to learn cycling skills from our coaches

After reading the article, we decided to find out why our juniors choose cycling as their sport. We wanted to compare our team's results with the research documented by Weinberg and Gould in their book "Foundations of Sport and Exercise Psychology." Additionally, we thought it would be important to survey our parents to find out why they believed their children are cycling.

In late October 2009, we sent our juniors another survey asking them to list the top six reasons why they cycle. We sent the same survey to the parents asking them why they believe their kids cycle. We did not provide any suggestions for reasons in the survey - the reasons were purely voluntary. By the end of November, we received 34 surveys (12 teenagers, 8 pre-teens, 14 parents) from which we compiled results.

The information that we obtained was very enlightening on what attracts youths and their parents to our program. Also, it indicated what we should emphasize in our program to retain members.

Here are the five top reasons our boys participate in cycling:

1. To be with teammates, friends, and social aspects
2. To have fun
3. To stay in shape
4. For the excitement of competition
5. To be "cool" - identity factor

For our girls:

1. To be with teammates, friends, and social aspects
2. To stay in shape
3. To have fun
4. To get exercise
5. For the excitement of competition

Our juniors did not rate "fun" as the number one reason as compared to the list by Foundations of Sport and Exercise Psychology. Nevertheless, the top reason is certainly no surprise to us. Perhaps "To have fun" incorporates teammates and the social aspects of other sports, but with our team, "teammates/friends/social" is important

enough to the juniors and their parents to be cited separately. In the articles that Coach Kelli and I have written, we emphasized the importance of social considerations for youth cycling programs. As stated in Creating and nurturing a Youth Cycling Pipeline - Series 3, "We have found that all team members share a connection and they thrive on peer associations. It is our observation that having a peer age group and having fun are crucial for most youth cyclists to progress in this sport. As a result, a training program must incorporate the social needs of the youth cyclist." The survey confirmed our perceptions.

By the way, here are the top five reasons our parents believe their kids cycle:

1. To have fun
2. To be with teammates, friends, and social aspects
3. To stay in shape
4. Family activity
5. To be "cool" - identity factor

You will notice that our parents' view is a combination of the junior gender results with a notable inclusion of "Family activity". Not surprisingly, our parents highly value family togetherness in cycling.

In looking at our junior survey results, there is a slight difference between the genders. The importance of "Individual and Team Identity" seems more important to boys. Girls rate "getting exercise" with more importance than boys.

The differences between the genders is very important to how your program is designed to address both sexes. We noted some behavioral differences between girls and boys in our article Creating and Nurturing a Youth Cycling Pipeline - Series 3. For example we noted: "Girls are more likely to quit the sport than boys". Naturally this issue is a concern for our program and something we are determined to solve. Participation by girls (and women) in competitive cycling is significantly lower than boys (and men) across the nation. We really cannot afford to lose any of those girls who have joined cycling. Within our own team, we have seen girls who have medaled nationally leave our sport. Typically, this has happened when the girls enter high school.

Obviously, we strive to find solutions to all issues related to keeping all juniors in cycling throughout their lives.

We plan to survey our team every year for their top reasons for cycling. Changes in our team dynamics may affect the reasons and what we need within our program. We suggest that you survey your team, too.

Hopefully, our survey results will be helpful to you. Also, if there is any information that you would like to share that could help keep juniors in our sport, please let us know and we can document it in a future column.

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. ●