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Working with Parents

Working with the parents of your junior cyclists is just as important as working with your juniors. Anyone who is coaching or who has coached juniors is without doubt aware of this fact. Of course, your coaching philosophy is important for the relationship with your juniors, but it is critical in how you work with their parents. Remember that the parents are your clients, too. It is vital to engage the parents of your athletes and earn both their trust and commitment to the goals of your program.

Your philosophy influences your strategies in every race in which your juniors participate. It is very important to communicate these strategies with the parents such that they understand the connection. Often it is easy to overlook or forget to communicate with the parents because the task of coaching juniors and getting them to understand and execute your instructions can be challenging and time consuming. Even so, explaining your goals for the team and strategies for races to the parents is imperative. Not only does this communication help avoid misunderstandings and potential questioning of your coaching decisions, but when you keep the parents informed, they will feel that they are a part of the team, too.

Part of keeping parents in the loop includes explaining details about the team strategy prior to each race. This is especially important for parents who are not familiar with our sport. One of these parents is quoted in our manual and offers this advice to junior coaches, "As you review the race with the juniors, include the parents so they gain an understanding of how it all works... Be sure to explain to the parents when there is a designated winner, or a person that everyone in race is working for... Parents also may have a difficult time understanding how a team functions in a race, the concept of a domestique, for example, is a good one to explain early on".

Informing the parents of your team strategy is something you can do as a group, but for individual issues, you must establish separate lines of communications. You need to communicate directly with the junior athlete for his/her questions and concerns. Similarly, you need to communicate directly with the parent to respond to questions and concerns. The juniors should come to you to ask questions or bring up concerns related to team events; they should not use their parents to act as their spokespersons. Likewise, parents need to address their concerns and questions with you, directly. They should not have their child come to you acting as their representative. In both situations, whether communicating with the junior athlete or with the parents, you must have direct communication to the party involved to avoid the potential of misunderstandings that can occur with indirect communication.

Sometimes there will be cases where either the junior or the parent will not accept your coaching philosophy. If you are starting a junior program, it will be hard to turn away a prospect. You will be tempted to take on the new member. But in this situation I can tell you from experience, it is best to not bring on this member. Also, there will be cases where initially the junior and parent accept your philosophy, but change their position. For example, a parent may perceive that his/her child is not progressing quickly enough with your program. Your USA Cycling Level 2 Coach Manual makes a very good point, "Having the right chemistry is crucial to being able to coach well... At some point during the coach/athlete relationship, it may become apparent that an athlete needs to begin working with a different coach or combination of people that can fulfill individual needs." We say, "Ditto for parents!" Your team is better without having a teammate or parent who does not share your objectives and coaching philosophy. Even minor discords can interrupt team harmony, but major issues can result in a crisis.

Involve the parents in various team activities, functions, duties, etc. Encourage them to participate and practice with the team. Invite them to non-biking team activities. The parents will bond and feel like they, too, are part of the team.