

Whole Athlete: Kids learn balance in sport, life

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"My personal goals were secondary. I just wanted to set a good example," said Fredrick.

The team of 22 16- to 23-year-olds focuses on mountain and road cycling. Though young, the majority have been involved in the sport for years. With the development in the last few years of the NorCal Mountain Bike League, in which Drake High School participates and on whose advisory board Fredrick serves, a number of teenagers have gotten a chance to try cycling who wouldn't have before.

"These kids are all pretty serious. This is not an intro-to-cycling team," said Fredrick.

Fredrick selects the riders for his team, though anyone is welcome to contact him about joining. He emphasizes that there is no litmus test for acceptance and that results are not the most important thing. "The most important criterion is attitude," he said, which he attempts to gauge by polling the rest of the members of the team and talking to other coaches in the area.

After the team forms in the off-season, October through December, Fredrick hosts a training camp over a long weekend in January and an orientation and meet-and-greet. Twice a week the teammates come together for rides and the group is given a training calendar they can follow. All the kids are also given free bike fittings, testing and analysis at Whole Athlete, services that would run close to \$1,000.

"We train together a lot. We communicate well. We go to races together," said Fredrick, emphasizing that the junior riders come from all over the Bay Area and as far away as Arcadia. "It crosses schools and geographies."

Next year, Fredrick hopes to include people from other states and expand the team nationally.

Next year, Fredrick also hopes to re-create the national championship experience they had this year.

The championship races were held in Colorado at 9,000-foot elevation. To prepare, Fredrick took the team to Tahoe for two weeks to train right, eat well and let

their bodies acclimate to oxygen deprivation at high altitudes.

With the help of the Velo Development Foundation, which raises money for junior development programs, Fredrick was able to offer this camp at no cost to the kids, he said. He added, though, that he had to serve as the driver, cook, maid, mechanic and coach.

Since Lance Armstrong came onto the scene and into the American consciousness nearly 10 years ago, there has been a boom in adult cycling. In recent years, Fredrick said, there has been another huge increase in junior cycling, which he thought may signal a generational shift.

"This is the biggest I've ever seen junior-level racing. We really need to nurture that. It's an opportunity," he said.

He's taken this opportunity to develop his group of talented riders and instill the principles he's taken from cycling in his 20 years in the sport: dedication, integrity and fun.

"If they can balance those things, then they're doing it right," he said.



Left, Will Curtis rides to an eighth-place finish in the 17- to-18-year-old division at the Mountain Bike National Championships in Colorado. Right, Dario Fredrick stands at the top of the podium after his win in the 40- to-44-year-old division.

Photos courtesy of Dario Fredrick