



## Junior Handbook Series

# *The First Race*

### **Introduction**

If you are reading this there is a good chance that your child has voiced an interest in bicycle racing. If you both decide to pursue this path, your child will join millions of cycling enthusiasts in a sport that not only is recognized internationally as a healthful recreational activity, but also boasts amateur and professional competitions held throughout the world.

This handbook series will answer some basic questions and give you a good working knowledge of bicycle racing. But this is merely an introduction to this exciting sport; for additional information, the internet can be an excellent source of information. Perhaps the best resource is your local club. The club system and how to find one that is right for you is discussed in Book 2 of this series, *The Next Steps*.

Children begin bicycle racing to have fun. The intent of this guide is to help you assist them in achieving this goal. Not every cyclist becomes a world champion, but everyone gains from the cycling experience—including the parents who support the racers. It is important to ask questions of your coaches, officials, and fellow parents, for with the right attitude and a good understanding of what is involved, everyone will have the best possible experience in competitive cycling.

The benefits your child will derive from bicycle racing will last a lifetime. Cycling improves agility and coordination, and can be used to maintain physical fitness throughout life. Your child will learn the skills necessary for good bicycle handling and racing, managing time, and participating safely in training and competition. Your child also will develop good sportsmanship, self-confidence and discipline while enjoying the camaraderie unique to cyclists; many cycling pals become life-long friends.

In an age of alarming rise in negative health statistics and increasingly stressful sedentary lifestyles, the sport of cycling can provide your young athlete with a lifetime of benefits.

Research has shown that involvement in youth sport :

- Develops lifelong fitness benefits
- Develops skill and coordination
- Enhances self-esteem
- Fosters friendships and builds social skills
- Teaches teamwork
- Provides travel opportunities and exposure to positive role models
- Reduces involvement in negative behaviors
- Develops coping skills and life skills
- Enhances critical thinking skills

KEEP IN MIND...

In order for a young athlete to benefit from his or her sport experience, it is crucial that they participate in a *safe, supportive, healthy, and development focused* environment.

As the parent of a participant in youth sport, it is YOUR job to understand an athlete's needs and to provide the structure and support necessary to make his or her sport experience all it can be.

## **Safety**

Accidents will happen - however, a large percentage can be avoided or rendered less severe by observing the following guidelines:

- \_ Wear a helmet!
- \_ Be visible.
- \_ Ride defensively, and anticipate others' mistakes.
- \_ Use proper equipment that is well maintained.
- \_ Be predictable.
- \_ Obey all traffic laws.

## **Equipment**

Before your child gets to his first race there are some essential items to have in order to ensure a fun and productive day at the bike race:

***Bike***— Your child's interest in a particular area of cycling will determine the type of bicycle needed. If you haven't purchased a bike yet, talk to experienced cyclists to find out what shops they patronize and why. Once you have chosen the type of bike you want, it is most important that your child be properly fitted to it. Never buy a bike that your child "will eventually grow into." Many problems can be caused by riding an improper size frame, including injury.

***Helmet*** — All bicycle riders should wear a protective, securely fastened helmet that complies with the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) Standard Z90.4 or Snell Memorial Foundation Standard B84 or B90. ALL races require that a helmet be worn at all times when participating at an event, including before and after the race. Anytime you or your child is on a bike at an event, you MUST have a helmet on.

***Shorts and Tights*** — The best type are lightweight stretch shorts that allow ease of leg and hip movement, and have a reinforced crotch of chamois or synthetics to reduce chafing. They can be any color; however, black is often the color of choice because it hides grease and soil stains. Full-length tights should be worn in cooler weather (below 60 degrees), and must fit snugly around the lower leg, not interfering with the chain.

***Gloves*** — Gloves (short-fingered for warm weather and long-fingered for cold weather) help absorb road shock and prevent numbness and blisters. In the event of a fall, gloves will protect the hand from scrapes.

***Jersey*** — The name comes from the knitted fabrics once used for cycling tops. Today the fabrics tend to be synthetic, which fit snugly to the body, wick away perspiration, help maintain optimum body temperature, wash easily, dry quickly, and are very durable. Bright colors are recommended for better visibility.

**Shoes** — A sturdy pair of athletic shoes is acceptable for the beginner; however, for the most efficient application of power, shoes with a rigid sole and cleats should be worn.

**Glasses** — They protect the eyes from airborne debris caused by winds or passing cars, and they can also guard against damage from ultraviolet radiation.

## Entering a race

Your best source of road race information in Colorado is the American Cycling Association, <http://www.americancycling.org>. Racing calendars that list dates, locations, and contacts for all races in a particular area for a season are generally published in regional cycling newsletter, which is sent to clubs, bike shops and licensed or subscribing riders. It is advisable to print out the race flyer that contains race directors and all the specifics on a given race. Also print a registration form and have it filled out to smooth the registration process. These flyers can be found at the ACA website or other organizations websites. Race organizers, most of whom are amateur racers and club members like your child rather than professional event promoters, appreciate pre-registration (and prepayment). It also saves a racer time on race day. But in most cases, race-day registration is available for an additional charge. Check the race flyer to be sure. In order to race in a junior category race a rider must purchase a license. Rider can purchase annual licenses OR one-day racing licenses for a small additional fee to the race entry fee. If you purchase an annual license ahead of time, please make sure to have it in hand at registration, even if you pre-register.

All racers should create a checklist of equipment, clothing and supplies to help prepare for an events (pack the day or evening before the race, not on race day). Each rider will eventually develop an individual list of "must-have-items", but most will include the following:

**Equipment** - Bike, floor pump, basic tools, extra tubes, and water bottles.

**Clothing** - Helmet, sunglasses, jersey, shorts, short-fingered gloves, socks, shoes. Some riders like a T-shirt underneath the jersey for additional warmth (and for protection in the event of a spill). Depending upon the weather, your racer may need additional clothing, including a long-sleeved jersey or jacket, arm and leg warmers, tights, long-fingered gloves, a cycling cap and rain gear. For after the race, riders should bring a complete change of clothing. Personal hygiene dictates that cycling shorts be worn only while riding, and wet clothing should be removed immediately after a race to prevent chilling.

**Other**-Sunscreen, food, cold water and fluid-replacement drinks or mix for after any race (and for during long events).

## Race day

A written pre-race schedule, which is developed by working backward from the actual start time, and listing everything that must be done before the gun goes off, can be very helpful for the beginner. It allows the rider to focus on the race and avoid being distracted by panic situations and missed starts. A schedule should include:

### **Pre-race:**

- Arrive at race site 90 minutes before start time.
- Go to registration table. If pre-registered, pick up numbers and safety pins.

- Ask where the officials want the numbers pinned. If not pre-registered, present or purchase license, pay fee, get numbers.
- Prepare bike (pump tires, inspect brakes, etc.)
- Bathroom stop(s) in designated areas only. Riders relieving themselves inappropriately give the sport and its athletes a bad name – and often prompt complaints that lead to race cancellations.
- Fill water bottles and drink copiously - before, during and after the race.
- Change into race clothing.
- Warm up.
- Arrive at start line five to 10 minutes before start.
- Race
- **Do your best, observe and learn.**
- Post-race
- Change clothes.
- Drink water or fluid-replacement drinks.
- Eat. Consuming carbohydrates within 15 minutes of an event helps speed recovery.
- Think about the race while waiting for results to be posted. What did you learn?
- How will you race "smarter" next time? Rehash the event with teammates, your coach and other riders.
- Congratulate yourself for entering and finishing.
- Plan your next race.

## Conclusion

Now that you and your child have successfully made it through your first race you are beginning to see what the sport of bicycle racing involves. The second handbook in this series, *The Next Step*, outlines where to go next, assuming your son or daughter enjoyed their first race and are ready to try racing again!

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