

HCMTB EXPECTATIONS

“Information You Need to Know”

For Parents and Athletes!

The Humboldt Composite High School MTB Club (HCMTB) is a brand new team created to develop opportunities for high school athletes to participate in bicycle racing in Humboldt County.

Overview: Like other NorCal League schools, our program seeks to strike a balance between being a competitive individual and team sport while retaining some gentler recreation club qualities. For athletes new to cycling, immediate immersion into training, racing, and the pressure to perform may be intimidating. This is the reason the League has carefully designed individual racing classes so beginners, intermediate and advanced riders are pitted only against peers of similar ability and experience. Each school's coach does their best to carefully place riders in the following categories: freshmen, sophomore, junior varsity, and varsity.

The five League races are all in Northern California, most a 4-6 hour drive away. The HCMTB team will “caravan” to these events. Riders are scored individually and on a team basis. Girl's scores and boy's scores are added together in the team computation.

Why cycling? Cycling is a family-friendly fitness activity that can be done lifelong, with great social qualities. Groups of cyclists (except when climbing difficult hills) can talk, joke, and some even sing as they ride. Enthusiasm for cycling as an alternative sport and healthy lifestyle is at an all-time high, especially here in Humboldt County with so many good places to ride.

Training and racing with a team provides life lessons in self-discipline, teamwork and sportsmanship, along with the fitness and camaraderie. Some sports tend to favor certain body types. Cycling is different. The bicycle is an equalizer, showing little favor to any particular body type by adapting to each rider with correct frame sizing, adjustment of seat height and stem length. Since good “bike-fit” is important, be sure to consult with team coaches before purchasing a new or used bike!

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 in contrast to downhill bike racing, the average speed is usually around ten to twelve miles per hour. This is an endurance sport where the fittest athletes win. Each year, the League collects data on injuries from every team. Typically, for the whole League combined, there will be one or two broken bones, some sprains, a few cuts, some bruises, lots of nicks and scrapes, but little else. Statistically, we suffer fewer serious injuries than most other mainstream sports, especially contact sports.

We do our best to minimize the risks to your athlete. Certain risky behaviors are discouraged or forbidden, the League 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. Even with our best efforts, crashes and injuries can occur. HCMTB requires all athletes in every sport to comply with certain athletic eligibility rules, including that the athlete have personal medical insurance.

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 if we split the team. Occasionally, circumstances arise where this is not possible. In this instance, we will designate and equip a student/athlete who we believe is adequately mature, responsible and capable in the ride leader role.

How We Build Our Team and Train: We don't have tryouts. If you try, and keep trying, you're on our team. Athletes who are already in good condition (like cross-country runners) adapt quickly and do very well. 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.

The training scheme is a carefully planned schedule of training rides that gradually increase in distance and difficulty over a four-month timeframe. The timeframe must be long to insure that the athlete progresses at a rate gradual enough to avoid injury, and long enough to achieve peak fitness by season's end and the championship final race. The "progressive periodization" based training scheme cannot be artificially compressed into the normal sports season timeframe without diminishing its effectiveness.

The training is choreographed in three basic phases so that everyone is adequately prepared once the racing begins. The first is the "Base" or endurance phase where we ride at low speeds, teach handling skills (for safety) and gradually increase the ride duration to build a solid foundation of cardiovascular fitness. The second is the "Build" phase to add strength and power by increasing the amount of hill climbing. The last is the "Peak" phase where we add fast-paced race simulation.

Once the actual riding starts, we split the team workouts into fitness-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 scheme for each rider appropriate for his/her level of experience, fitness, and personal ambitions. Groups are coed where practical.

Each year, new riders and parents are often surprised when we tell them that by season's end they will be able to easily ride a full four hours in hilly terrain, or do a hundred-mile road "century" 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 will soon find themselves struggling to keep up.

Practice will not take place each weekday like some sports. For fitness sake, three one-hour rides do not equal one three-hour ride. Longer rides are much more effective in creating the endurance and fitness we need. If your athlete ignores our schedule and trains intermittently on his own, he/she will likely fall short of potential. Accordingly, we do our most essential training ride on Sunday afternoon at 10am.

Starting in December, the team will practice on Tuesday, Thursday at 4pm and Sunday at 12pm, starting from Redwood Park in Arcata and other locations that will be announced.

Each athlete will need to continually monitor his/her own fatigue level and discuss it 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.

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 to be expected. 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. Do not use any of the popular "high this, low that" fad-of-the-month diets. Nutrition will be discussed more as the season progresses.

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. The NorCal League puts on two-weekend rider camps held in February. These are fun, very instructive, and remarkably inexpensive and strongly encouraged for newer riders. Road trips to the races (camping if weather allows) are the best of all. You will discover that the other teams in the League are full of delightful 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 even racing. Some of the races have adult divisions and your help is critical in helping the team travel to each venue. Families who were introduced to the sport through participation in the NorCal League described the experience as incredible, eye opening, and lifestyle changing.

We will ride on some of the most beautiful trails in California taking advantage of the easy access trail systems of the Arcata Community Forest and special trips to outlying trails such as those in Lacks Creek, Redwood National Park and others. We will only be riding on trail systems open to the public and that allow mountain bike access.

How Communication Happens: We use email and texts to communicate with parents and athletes, using the Teamsnap app. This method is used because word-of-mouth, flyers, and phone communication has proven time-consuming and ineffective. Facebook posts 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. We also have a website that has links to all relevant documents.

About Commitment: If your athlete regularly misses workouts, especially the Sunday rides; they will not progress at the same rate as fellow athletes. I guarantee that this will 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.

We promise to treat your athlete like a responsible young adult. Accordingly, we will interpret a habit of missed practices and a pattern of disinterest as a signal to be dropped from the team and email communication. If your athlete is unable to attend any of the agreed-upon practice rides because of school homework, job schedules, family commitments or other concerns, it is really important that they consult with coaches so we can create an alternate plan to keep the season on track.

Some athletes may want to try and do two sports at once. We recognize that our long training time-frame may create an unavoidable overlap for part of the season. This is ok. We believe however, that once the season really gets going that trying to do two sports at once is a recipe for frustration and failure at both, may lead to exhaustion and sickness, and can impact academic performance. We discourage this idea.

The club is a race team and, as such, each participant should try at least one race. If, after this experience, the rider determines that they are not into racing, then they won't be forced to continue racing. However, this is strongly discouraged and students who join the team must be open to experience racing.

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 Humboldt Composite MTB Club 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.

Helmets are mandatory, as is friendly trail manners.

Community Service: As part of being on the team, we will undertake community service during the year. Service can be done with a local organization or by assisting with team and NorCal League activities.

About Academics: The goal 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.

You'll Need Some Equipment: Your athlete will need an appropriate bike, cycling clothing and other items. Please consult with the coaches 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. We also have free gear people have given the team, and other things available to loan. Let us help you find what you need.

Cost of Participating: All riders and coaches must register with Norcal League. This may involve paying for NorCal League registration (\$25), a USA Cycling license (\$20), and entry fees to each of the six races and travel costs (each race can cost up to \$50). Coaches will also be required to complete a background check and on-line training. The team will do fundraising to offset many of these costs and scholarships are available to those who need it. **No student will be denied participation due to a lack of resources.**

Required Forms: To participate on the team, riders must return completed forms to the coaches prior to the first training practice.

Team Sponsorship: We will be pursuing grant funding, sponsorships and bike shop discounts through the year to develop a strong financial foundation for the club. We are sponsored by Revolution Bikes and Adventure's Edge, both of whom have offered generous discounts on bikes and equipment. Please talk to me about purchasing new gear.

Assistant Coaches and Team Officers: Every year, for the kids 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 helper-coaches. Returning 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, advice on training and racing, and lots of encouragement and reassurance from those who were beginners not very long ago. If your returning rider would like to be formally designated as a mentor in some specific area, let me know. I am also looking for parents who would like to be trained as assistant coaches and 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. I ask that riders planning to be on the team register before the first training practice.

Sincerely, Coach Sean Robertson

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