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Juniors, racing and things that they need to know

Taking care of the Athlete

Taking part in any sport can be a real challenge. Even sports we learn as children become a bit more difficult when we try to participate in them competitively. Sports require mental and physical training in order to develop the skills needed to do well. The sport of cycling is one of the most complicated activities because it not only involves the mind and body working perfectly, but using the body with a machine at the same time. As any racing cyclist will tell you, there is more to training and competing than just pedaling a bicycle really fast. You need to know yourself as an athlete and take care of yourself like an athlete.

Personal hygiene is an area often overlooked by juniors, especially junior men. However, learning proper hygiene makes for better athletes and improved performance. Here are a few things to remember about training and racing...

1. Always wear eye protection, gloves and a helmet.

If the athlete does not protect their eyes with some type of glasses, they run the risk of having objects hit their eyes. This can not only cause injuries, but may cause them to lose control of their bike. There are many sunglasses on the market designed specifically for cycling. Almost all are shatterproof, provide protection from ultraviolet light and are optically neutral. Some even come with the option of having prescription inserts.

Gloves should be worn not only to improve hand grip of the handle bars and provide comfort against shock, but also to protect the skin in the event of a crash. The natural tendency when we fall is to put out our hands to protect us from injury. Hitting the ground with the palms protected by good cycling gloves can often change severe road rash into just an unpleasant impact. In cold weather, the athlete can experience severe cold that reduces their ability to shift or use the brakes. Having a variety of cycling gloves may seem like a needless expense, but protecting a pair of hands is worth the money.

The single most important piece of protective equipment is of course the helmet. Parents and athletes should be aware of the fact that it is not a matter of if their child will ever crash, but when will they have their next crash. Just as tripping and falling is a part of every soccer game, so crashing is with cycling. No matter how good a bike handler the athlete is, sooner or later every cyclist crashes. The majority of cycling injuries are very minor, but hitting an unprotected head on the pavement is never minor. A properly fitted helmet should always be worn whenever the athlete rides their bike.

2. Do the laundry, change your clothes and do the laundry....again!

Cyclists perspire a lot. When they warm up. When they race. When they cool down. The athlete gets dirty and so do their clothes. Athletes should never wear dirty cycling shorts or socks. Always wash cycling shorts and socks after each ride. This not only keeps the athlete from getting infections, but insures there will always be clean riding clothes available for training or racing. Cycling shorts have a chamois. This padded area can be made of a wide variety of materials. However, all these materials serve the same purpose; to protect the athlete's

anatomy and act as a cushion when riding. Because cyclists do not wear underwear with cycling shorts, all the perspiration soaks into this chamois or pad. Wearing dirty cycling shorts is like wearing dirty underwear.

Many athletes like to wear some type of t-shirt or liner under their jersey. This t-shirt not only acts as an additional layer of protection in the event of a crash, but with the newer fabrics available it can wick perspiration away from the body quicker. This t-shirt or liner should be washed after every use.

3. Clean the athlete.

It is important to change and clean up right away after training and racing. Even if the training ride was not that difficult, athletes still perspire and need to clean up and dry off as soon as they are done. At races it may be impossible to completely clean up or shower, but simple steps should be taken to have a minimum clean up kit in the car. Make sure the equipment bag has some kind of wipes and a towel for cleaning up and drying off. Racing or training in the rain not only gets the athlete soaked, but can lead to a severe drop in core body temperature. Wet cycling clothes should be removed as soon as possible and the athlete should get into dry clothes right away. Wet cycling shoes should be dried out completely before using them again.

One additional note related to cleanliness: Many junior athletes race on sponsored teams. Those sponsors look forward to their supported athletes doing well and they enjoy seeing pictures of their logo on the podium. It is a poor reflection on them and the team if athletes do not take care of their appearance and behavior.

4. Common sense safety.

Listening to music while training or warming up can be very helpful to the athlete in order to maintain focus. The tempo, lyrics or meaning of the song can often motivate an athlete to do better, regain their focus or keep their mind off the many distractions that occur while preparing to race. However, it is strongly recommended that athletes NOT use headphones when actually riding on the road. There are too many warning sounds which cannot be heard over the sounds being pumped into the athlete's ears.

Some general guide lines for doing laundry, etc;

Because they are in direct contact with the athlete's skin, cycling shorts, socks and T-shirts used as a liner under a jersey should be washed after every use.

Jerseys, cycling tights, shoe covers and helmet liners that got wet, dirty or damp from perspiration should be washed after use.

Cycling gloves should be washed every two weeks, or if they become dirty, wet or soaked in perspiration.

Helmets should be wiped out with a damp cloth every two weeks or after every hard ride that caused the athlete to perspire.

Cycling shoes should be aired out after every use and the liners or insoles removed to improve ventilation. Insoles should be replaced at least annually.

Water bottles should be cleaned and rinsed after every ride. Fill the kitchen sink with water and a few drops of bleach. Soak the bottles for a five minutes to help get rid of unseen impurities. Water bottles that begin to discolor or get black spots on the inside should be disposed of.

Carefully check all the equipment that you wear or put on your bike to make sure it is clean, properly adjusted and working correctly.

As for you parents and coaches, Good Luck!