
STARTING A MiSCA TEAM **UNDER CONSTRUCTION**

Scholastic cycling is modeled after the successful collegiate cycling system. In this system the focus is on the individual as part of a larger team and while very competitive the atmosphere is much more relaxed than the usual Michigan mountain bike races. This more relaxed atmosphere is a result of participants that are relatively new to racing as well as the fact that participants do not compete in the normal mountain bike categories but rather compete for their school in more generic skill-based categories.

MiSCA offers cycling as a legitimate sport to many students who would not otherwise know it existed as a 'real sport.' In other words we bring new people into the sport of cycling. We also give students disenchanted with the other school sports teams a chance to excel.

What is required of me to start a team?

Extensive cycling experience is not necessary. Learning as you teach can be one of the most effective ways of both learning and teaching. One should simply have some cycling experience and the desire learn more about the sport while sharing what they know with school students.

You should however have some spare time. It doesn't have to be a lot. Existing teams meet anywhere from one to four times per week during the racing season and in the off-season they meet anywhere from once a month to three days per week. Consistency is what matters when you are working with students. It's important to follow through with the plans that get made – Start small and let things grow each year.

You should enjoy working with students. Your main objective should be about having fun and riding bikes. If you are not an employee of the school district you may need to become a registered volunteer, get finger printed, and have a background check done by the school or district. You will also need to register as a Coach with MiSCA.

How do I start a team?

Forming a high school cycling team is easier than you probably think. Here is a basic outline of a few key steps along the way to starting a successful high school cycling team. (This information is aimed at adults looking to form a team, as any student team will need an adult sponsor and coaches along the way. If you're a student interested in forming a team, your first step should be to team up with an adult cyclist in the community or find a staff member at your school with a passion for cycling.)

1. Get Permission

Talk with school administration / get approval to recruit

Before doing anything, it's always a good idea to talk to the school administration first. This is not to gain permission to form a team so much as to simply do a litmus test, gauging interest among students. If you already have a small group of interested students you may be able to skip this step however it is also a good way to initiate the conversation of high school cycling with the school. It is also a good time to ask what it takes to form a new team at that school.

How Can I Convince My School Administration?

There are ways of approaching administrators that are more likely to lead to success than others. Simply asking a Principal for approval may lead to a quick end to your hopes. Once you get a 'No.' It may be hard to proceed. Principals have a lot of authority but ultimately we hope their decisions reflect the will of their communities.

One should first find out where they can find support within the community or school. It might be amongst teachers, board members, or other active community members (Students parents). When you approach the Principal it should be to first introduce yourself and tell them the kind of program you want to build. Ask them if they'd be willing to look into things, if they foresee any problems.

Be prepared for the question of liability to come up and do not argue that it is a safe sport. It's not a question of how your perception of the sport may differ from theirs (many perceive it as dangerous). It is a question of whether the school can include it as an activity within their policy. Many districts have a business department that does risk assessment and is responsible for making these decisions. Becoming part of MiSCA offers many benefits, including insurance opportunities to help mitigate these concerns. See our insurance overview [here](#).

It is also best to be prepared to answer the most commonly asked question so read through these FAQ's and our other materials carefully and bring two copies with you, one for the administrator and one for you to use as reference. It is best if you do not expect an immediate answer and do not overwhelm anyone with too much information or an overly defensive approach.

Another thing to realize is that most schools require student teams to have an official faculty moderator who is an employee of the school. You as an outside volunteer however can make this moderator's job very easy by establishing a structure and plan and then volunteering to do most or all of the grunt work while keeping them in the loop.

Finally, it may help to share with the administrator that high school cycling is growing quickly throughout the country and that official middle school and high school leagues exist in more than 25 states through the National Interscholastic Cycling Association, Washington Student Cycling League, New England High School Cycling Association, and more.

Remember: think like an administrator and the conversation should go very well.

2. Gather Support

Find interested students

Forming a high school team is always easier if there is interest among existing students. Chances are good that whether anyone knows it or not, there are at least one or two students interested in some form of cycling, whether it's Road, Mountain, Cyclocross, Track, BMX, or casual rides with their friends or family. Remember, cycling is not yet the coolest thing in high school (but it will be), so many students do not make their interest in cycling obvious; find those students and make cycling something they can be proud of. Additionally, high schools tend to be student-focused (for good reason) and are therefore most responsive to student interest, so if a group of students want a cycling team, the school will be more apt to listen.

How can I recruit students?

You are now ready to make cycling accessible to the masses. Make sure you are ready for what's to come. Make sure you have a clear idea of what you want to do and are able to do as your team begins. While it's you who think you are excited, wait until the students arrive with their dreams of full suspension downhill bikes, jerseys, and full sponsorship. The students know what they want but often don't have the experience to know how much work is required to achieve certain ends.

Other recruitment ideas include:

- Use the school PA system for announcements
- Post the announcement around the school (try to get some students to do this for you).
- Get an article in the school paper.
- Show a promotional video on the video announcements showing mountain biking races.
- Many schools also have email lists which are used to make announcement to the student body, parents, and community.

When first starting a team the goal should be to get the word out to everyone. It may become difficult to initiate a team that has enough participation to support regular activities. A critical mass is required for the students to feel comfortable and a part of something that's important and validates their interest. Try to generate a crowd realizing that it's unlikely the team will be too big to handle in its first year. There is a natural fall off as students become involved in other activities. The number of students who become active participants is generally about half the number of students who attend the first meeting. Students who disappear are mostly busy and involved with conflicting sports and activities.

Find interested and supportive parents

Just having interested students isn't enough, though. Parents with a vested interest in their child's participation in the team are essential to the short- and long-term success of the team. On an even more basic level than volunteer roles to help structure the team, supportive parents are necessary for the logistics of signing their child's waivers, getting them to practices and races, and financially backing their child's new hobby, especially with the cost of equipment.

Find interested adults in the community

Local cyclists willing to lend their experience and sport specific knowledge, as well as hand-me-down equipment are a great asset to any team. In the ideal case you have a group of interested students and some parents and adult volunteers willing to help with the structure and organization. It is helpful when the interested parents and students have the additional help and resources that can be provided by these other adults in the community with cycling experience.

Find an interested staff or faculty member

Most schools require a school employee to serve as an official team sponsor for any team or activity to be officially sanctioned by the school. It is even possible, in some cases, for schools to allow this person to be a moderator in name only while parents, students, and other qualified adults actually run the team or at least do the 'heavy lifting' of running a team.

We have the meeting planned now what?

If you happen to be a teacher at the school meetings could take place on school grounds during regular school hours. Most classrooms are available at lunchtime. Try to find one you can use regularly. A local bike shop may be willing to host an informational meeting and may end up becoming a team sponsor.

If you think you are excited wait until the students arrive with dreams of full carbon bikes, jerseys, and full sponsorship. The students know what they want but often don't have the experience to know how much work is required to achieve certain ends. Have a plan for the meeting and be sure to outline some of the plans for the school year but be sure to start small with things you can follow through on. Also be ready to acknowledge their ideas and dreams, they serve as the impetus for achieving the single most important goal: Getting the students out riding their bikes.

Be prepared for the first meeting and keep your goals simple. In addition to introducing yourself and a loose idea of what the team could become (cross country mountain bike team), you should walk away with a list of names, emails, and a stack of surveys to help you understand the potential members of your team. Knowing their experiences and interests will help you

move forward smoothly and cohesively. And having their names and email will make it easy to make announcements and hold subsequent meetings.

How Should I Structure the Team and Constitution?

Before you structure your team make sure you know the schools guidelines and requirements for teams. Most schools require a constitution which includes the meeting time and place, the officers, the mission statement, team goals, and most important – the rules. Involving the students in this process is their first opportunity to make the team something of their own. The objective of the second meeting could be to initiate this process.

Formulating a mission statement will help you clarify your own objectives for forming a team. Instead of an election, taking volunteers might be more appropriate. It's important to think about your own role and how much responsibility you want the students to carry. If you had the role of coach in mind, it's important to realize most sporting teams are essentially run by the coach. In this case a team captain might be the most important role. It should be taken by someone who feels comfortable taking on a leadership role. While the President, Vice Pres., Etc. become more honorary positions new and small team, the students granted these titles should however be prepared to help carry out some of the work. On the other hand, if you hope to see a more student driven team, where they do the majority of the work, it may be important to carefully define the roles and responsibilities of the various offices.

Having Your First Parent Meeting

If your team seems to be gaining momentum and has reached a critical mass it might be good to have a parent meeting. Keep the meeting short and to the point as their questions alone can extend the meeting for hours. Have an informational packet to hand out. Introduce yourself, explain who you are and your cycling experience. Explain why you started a team and what you hope to achieve. Describe the structure of the team, the schedule for rides, when the season starts and ends. Have a short presentation on mountain biking, a short video can be worth a thousand words. Be sure to explain the logistics of your riding plan as well as the risks. It would also be a good time to get the waivers signed. Get any missing emails.

Have a Regular Meeting Place

Meeting off school grounds has several advantages. The students won't be distracted by their peers, they won't cause problems on campus with their bikes, and the rides will be more likely to leave on time. Try to find a central meeting place everyone can safely get to and that is close to your nearest trails. Some additional things to think about are the following:

- Finding alternative off-road rides (dirt roads, residential streets with big hills, spinning at YMCA)
- Manage a range of abilities beyond waiting at intervals, One way to manage a range of abilities is by finding a short loop and have groups do laps. Having groups go in opposite directions (if safe to do so) also allows for interesting possibilities.
- After school- recommend 1-2 hour rides
- Weekends – recommend 2-3 hour rides

Record Keeping

Be sure to keep organized from the beginning. Paper will quickly accumulate – start out with some binders before things become a mess. Use students to help with data entry to organize the roster and information from the survey gathered at the first meetings. You should print out and copy the roster for the whole team to have. Set up your email account so you can email the whole team at once. You'll want to keep email lists for students, parents, and coaches and you can choose which group to communicate with. Once your team is up and running, you can utilize the SportsSignUp Play application to send emails and text messages to those on your roster.

Register with MiSCA as an official team

Registering the team with MiSCA is a key part of the process for many reasons. Being an official team with Michigan Scholastic Cycling Association can add legitimacy to the team in the eyes of students, parents, and administration. Official MiSCA teams have access to our general liability insurance and all registered coaches and students are covered. Follow the instructions for registering your team in the [Registration Guide for Coaches](#). *Congratulations! You have started a scholastic cycling team!*

Equipment You Will Need

Having rules and a policy regarding equipment is essential to avoid problems. The students in your team will own all different kinds of bikes, from expensive high end bikes to low end department store bikes to no bike at all. It's important to assess each child's bike situation.

To avoid a disastrous first ride, assessment and some equipment counseling needs to come before you ever hit the trail. It may seem a little invasive, but requiring that each student get their equipment checked before they can ride will ensure that everyone has the minimal equipment required, and that their bikes fit, are well maintained and safe. Give their bikes a check over. If you are not comfortable doing the bike check yourself then a local bike shop is usually happy to do it for you, especially since they are likely to receive additional business.

A dry chain or a loose brake can be easily addressed. Most students are not best known for their meticulous bike maintenance. When it's clear that a child's bike is not appropriate for your teams activities it's important to immediately involve the parents. Don't be afraid to call and explain the situation and that you'd like to help the child get the equipment required to succeed. Most parents will be glad that you called so long as there is no pressure. There is no need to suggest buying a bike. It's best to have a list of other possible options and if they are able to purchase a bike they will assert this possibility. Talk about helmets, shoes, and clothing as well. Don't assume a student knows not to come to the first ride in big baggy jeans, because they often don't know.

What Happens If a Student Does Not Have a Bike?

If funding is available, you may consider owning one or more team bikes to be loaned out to students in need. A list of places to find cheap or free bikes:

- Borrow a bike from: family members, relatives, and friends.
- Talk to other local organizations (ex. Boosters, YMCA, churches).
- Talk to local bike teams.
- Talk to local bike shops.
- Visit bike swaps.

Facilitating Team Rides – Safety Is Number One

The leader of team rides must set the tone for safety. A leader must realize that the tone of the rides is entirely set by your acts. If the leader shows off then so will the students, if the leader does not discourage competition the students will compete, if the leader takes risks then soon there may be students who have injured themselves (if the leader goes down illegal trails then the students will follow). The tone for safety can also be set by having a required safety meeting before any rides occur. This meeting can focus on the rules of the trail AND the road, because inevitably you will find the team needs to ride on the road together. Establish ground rules for conduct and ride formation. Point out hazards such as car doors and wet roads. Don't assume the students know any of the things you have picked up over the years. Register to attend a ride leading clinic and watch our informational webinar at www.miscabike.org/coach.

Considerations for Ride Leaders

Ride Leader Equipment

1. First Aid Kit
2. Cell Phone
3. Emergency contact info for each rider
4. Mini-tool, pump, spare tube, etc.
5. Another adult to ride with the group

Ride Leader Safety Procedures

1. Think safety, teach safety, act safety
2. Plan your route(s)
3. Establish “bail-out” shortcuts home
4. Note other shortcuts back to civilization for emergencies
5. Appoint a second ride leader
6. Make sure each rider has adequate hydration, food and sufficient clothing for the planned ride duration and “worst-case” expected weather.
7. At the start, ask/test if each rider’s equipment is functioning
8. Keep the group(s) together as much as possible
9. Establish familiar re-group destinations
10. Monitor each rider’s condition during the ride
11. Be flexible, and prepared to change plans if appropriate
12. If an adult cannot escort a student/rider leaving the group early, circle the entire group back. (The group can always do more miles after the escort)

Conduct a Skills Clinic

Mountain biking is more than just fitness, it’s being able to ride over rough terrain efficiently, safely descending steep and rough trails, and sometimes trying to get over obstacles such as a fallen tree. The teaching of “technical skills” is only just maturing into a common practice. Register for a Basic MTB Skills clinic at www.miscabike.org/coach.

Having good technical abilities and being able to teach them are two different things. In a two-hour course you could quickly discover several bad habits and learn techniques for correct braking, gear usage, balancing, turning, riding straight lines, and getting over obstacles. You also learn how these skills could be taught. Many of the drills are very simple. The following is the basic outline for a basic skills clinic, although we highly recommend attending a skills clinic conducted by a professional before conducting one on your own.

Basics of Coaching – Are you the coach?

There are a range of motives one might have for starting and leading a high school cycling team. Some teams are based more upon cycling advocacy, bicycle maintenance, or to bring together occasional fun rides, in these cases the motive may not involve competition. A leader of a team may encourage training and competition but if the team is small and the commitment level of members is low – you might not feel like you are playing the role of “Coach.” Even as your program grows you may not feel like you are “coaching,” especially since our conception of a coach is often someone blowing a whistle out on the field, or barking orders from the sidelines. On the other hand you might already think of yourself as the coach and have one or more members who have competitive goals they are trying to obtain. It might be a goal of your own to help bring some of your athletes to a national level.

Whichever is your case, there are some basic things to know about coaching that will help lead teams of various levels. By virtue of bringing together and guiding a team you can consider yourself “the coach,” and there are a wide range of issues you should be prepared to deal with. As students are not likely to seek out the advice and guidance they need, coaching does require pro-active involvement. By having of regular attendance on the rides, holding meetings, and making frequent announcements via email, you can give the guidance that will give the program its shape. Eventually individual programs for the more advanced riders can be tailored. There is much to know about coaching a group of students that are not sport specific. These include:

- Keeping students motivated
- Instilling a sense of sportsmanship
- Preventing burnout
- Dealing with intense parents
- Coping with the stresses of coaching

There is a book published called “Coaching Kids For Dummies.” It is easy to read and will familiarize you with the basics of coaching. Visit www.miscabike.org/coach for a complete outline of MiSCA’s coaching program and the training available.

Utilizing Parents in Your Team

To run a fully operational cross country mountain bike team can be a handful of work. One of the best resources for assistance is the parents. Allow the parent to volunteer for specific tasks, the ones with enthusiasm and time will step forward. It’s best to avoid vague job descriptions such as “Parent Coordinator” which could mean different things to different people. If someone volunteers as the “ride coordinator” it’s clear what they have volunteered to do, and that you can call upon this person for coordinating rides to races.

The following is a list of duties parents can volunteer to do. Don’t expect to fill all of the positions:

Administrative Relations: This responsibility is most easily carried by the sponsoring teacher. It’s important to find out who oversees team activities and learn what is required of school teams. As the activities of a bike team are varied, off school grounds, and have the risks associated with sports the team coordinator may not be the most appropriate person for advice. A principal or vice-principal (given that you have approval – see getting approval) should know the best people for you to speak to. PE and Athletic Departments may also be consulted. (It may useful to know that the PE department and Athletic Department can be two very separate bodies. PE department oversees regular PE courses for all students where as the athletic department is concerned only with after school competitive sports.

Public Relations/ Alumni Relations: You won’t find some of the best sources of support for your team, they will find you. But they won’t know about you without good public relations. A public relations should be someone comfortable and savvy with all or some of the following: making a pamphlet to convey what your team is all about, writing press releases to get newspapers and television stations interested in featuring stories about your teams activities. Managing a database of community members and leaders, media connections, or even building alumni associations of cyclists who at one time attended your school. (See sample press release, sample pamphlet, managing email)

Bike Shop Liaison: It’s important to be on good terms with a local bike shop – even if they do not officially sponsor the team. A shop can make a big difference when it comes to solving mechanical problems and equipment shortages. This person ideally worked at a bike store and understands that bike stores owners are not very wealthy and should no demands or expectations for discounts or free stuff should ever be made. Most shops will be most eager to help when it becomes

clear that your team will have a policy regarding shop usage. When the bike shop has problems or complaints regarding the conduct of your team members it is essential that there is an adult to call upon.

Coach's Liaison: Of the fundamentals of coaching students, it should be known that the parents concerns and opinions are at times going to be difficult to manage. It may at one point even become a source of discouragement and frustration. If this is the case it may be useful to have a coach's Liaison. This would ideally be a person of the parent age and understands their concerns, but who has racing experience and understands your coaching philosophy. Since this person may be hard to find it may be best to understand that most often if you simply acknowledge the parents concerns or opinions (instead of debating or trying to explain why you don't do what they are suggesting) and that you'll see what you can do to address it – you can then move on with business as usual.

Fundraiser Organizer: There are many creative ways to raise money. Nearly all of them require a fair amount of organizational work. This is a great job for enthusiastic parents.

Grant Proposal Writer: There are huge opportunities for funding through both public and private grants. If you can find someone willing to research available funding and write proposals you are almost guaranteed some money to help build your program.

Sponsor Liaison: Someone should be responsible for both obtaining sponsorship and keeping up good relations with sponsors. It's important to share the team's accomplishments with the sponsor, often in the form of emails or mailing, and to thank the sponsors at the end of the season.

Event Planning (BBQ's Etc.): Non cycling events can really bring together the team and get parents more interested in supporting it.

Equipment Manager: The equipment manager should be someone who plans on attending most or all of the races.

Treasurer: When you obtain some funding someone needs to be responsible for the budget. You will be asked (usually by team members, parents, or the source of your funds) about the money and if you cannot account for the money spent people can get very disgruntled and you may lose your funds.

Scholarships: If you have students who are economically disadvantaged, have a policy for assisting them. It may mean waiving team dues, or you may have funds designated for purchasing equipment. The person in charge of scholarships should assess need. It's important to first communicate with the family.

Lunch after races planner: Having someone take care of this detail is hugely appreciated when the race is over.

Handbook Production/Distribution: Having a team handbook for parents at the beginning of the team will help with a variety of things. It's convenient for everyone to have a team binder that can be added to as the season moves on.

Recruitment Planner: While a school bulletin will recruit the majority of your riders. Getting the word out to the students at a younger age may have some long term benefits. In addition to getting students excited to be in high school and join the mountain bike team, it may inspire some students to start riding or even training at a younger age.

Roster Manager: Keeping track of your roster and everyone's contact information can be handed over to a parent.

Carpool Coordinator: Some parents are more supportive or able to give support than others. While some parents will never miss a race, some will be unable to drive their child to the race. Have someone coordinate rides so that nobody gets left behind. This can be done via phone or e-mail.

Uniform Design: This should be left to someone with professional experience with graphic arts. Try to find someone to donate their time. Many jersey companies offer these services.

Uniform Ordering/Distribution: Order forms and deposits should be collected prior to your jersey order.

Volunteer Coordinator/Trail Maintenance Coordinator As a team grows it may become highly beneficial to a variety of causes. Mountain bikers should all do their part in helping to maintain local trails. Coordinate with your local trail council. A team may also earn free entry to races by volunteering to assist organizers with the work required to put on a race.

Web Site Author/Maintenance: A web site can become important to a team. The students enjoy seeing their results and pictures on line. This could be an adult project or something the students take on.

Team Photographer: Parent often take many pictures at the races. You may suggest one of these parents becomes the team photographer. Some schools have photographic equipment available for check out. Using a digital camera makes it easy to support your web site.