

Racing Philosophy from a past Rider

On Racing

If you are a new parent or Rider, please consider this section required reading. The following race observer report from a former state champion Rider and team captain captures so much of what it means to be on the Drake team... why Riders race, how some Riders handle stress, how Riders can change throughout the years on the team, and what keeps Riders and parents coming back:



"I am sorry about the lateness of this. After the race I had a busy week working, catching up with friends, spending lots of time with my family, and trying to rest when I could. I am now on an airplane flying back to school, and finally have some time to put into this 'spectator report'. Sorry as well if this is long. Hopefully it is useful and interesting for you all.

It's really odd coming to a race and not having to deal with everything that comes with racing. I didn't have to worry about eating, hydrating, my race time, by bike, my competition, and all the other stresses associated with these events. Although going to a race without having to worry about racing sounded perfect to me as someone who wasn't ever the most competitive racer (I always treated races as fast, sometimes really fast rides), it wasn't as ideal as I initially thought. I had the most amazing time this past weekend, but I surprised myself with how much I missed the stresses and difficulties I used to resent.

When I wrote my race reports as a racer I always knew what I would write about. I would explain how my race went, talk about the difficulties I encountered and the amazing times I had, and then compliment the team on what an impressive job we all did. I figure that because I don't have a race I participated in to talk about, I will talk about the things I have learned as a racer these past four years and as someone who tried to involve myself with the team to the fullest extent possible.

First some background for those of you who don't know me. I joined the team as a freshman who had spent very little time on a mountain bike before high school. After returning home from my first long Sunday ride I decided that mountain biking probably wasn't the sport for me. I was worn out, starving, was barely able to lug myself (and my monster tuck of a bike) up Mt. Tam, and wasn't sure if it would be worth sticking with this sport. After a few more practices I got a little more comfortable and decided to stick it out through freshman year. After participating in my first race I was hooked. I didn't start out as a fast rider or someone with any cycling or racing experience, but I knew the team was the place for me and biking was a sport I loved. I spent the last two years as one of the team captains, and have ridden enough that climbing Mt Tam doesn't hurt quite as much as it used to. I have also participated in quite a few races outside of the league. Hopefully I am qualified to share some of what I have learned in these last few amazing years!

The first thing worth mentioning is stress. I know... you all hear everybody talking about stress and how to deal with it, and get so many conflicting ideas on how to deal with it, but it is something that effects everyone so its worth thinking about. I got very stressed out before races, even after four years of racing a somewhat non-competitive mindset. Although I am probably just adding to the pile of 'stress solutions' you have heard: Here are three things I did that helped lower my stress levels. The first was to spend all my time when I wasn't warming up or preparing for my race staying distracted. I would cheer as loudly as I could, talk to all the other racers and parents and coaches, and do anything and everything to forget about racing. I raced in the afternoon for 3 of my 4 years on the team, so finding a way to keep my mornings occupied helped immensely. The second way to relieve stress, which came most in handy while warming up and waiting on and around the start line, was to imagine I was in a more peaceful, relaxing place. While doing things I enjoyed prior to racing; such as skiing, wakeboarding, hiking, cooking, watching TV, or anything else that was relaxing for me, I would imagine myself about to start a race. I would associate these relaxing times with the most stressful parts of racing. Then, while at the start line of my races I could imagine myself doing an activity I enjoyed. It didn't remove all my stress, but it helped a lot. The third technique that will always work is to just start racing. The moment Vanessa finished her countdown as the race started all worries would leave me. Keep reminding yourself that once you cross the start line you will just be riding, which is what we are here for and is something we all love doing.

Another thing that I learned after my time on the team is that being competitive isn't the best way to race. I spent most of my sophomore year (racing JV) committed to becoming the fastest racer I could, with the goal of finishing ahead of my competition. I trained harder than I ever had, got a light bike and set some pretty optimistic goals for myself. Although I ended up having a successful season, it wore me out. I discovered that trying to be faster than others was not as healthy or fun as trying to be faster than my past self. The

next year racing varsity I decided that instead of trying to be faster than my fellow racers I would work on improving on my past times, while keeping a good attitude and having fun (the reason why we all bike!). I spent my next two years smiling and saying howdy to everyone and chatting with other racers and other teams' coaches and parents while riding and ended up having an amazing time. Staying positive and treating races as fun, fast rides didn't prohibit me from doing well in races, and helped me make a lot of great friends from all different teams. We all ride to have fun - so why not treat races just as fast rides with lots of friends we get to see every other week?

The third thing I will mention is the team itself. The Drake team is full of some of the most amazing people you will all ever meet. We are an institution. We are fast, we have fun, we are well respected, and we are a family. This sport and this team have so much to offer. Like most things in life the more energy and time you put into the Drake team, and the mountain biking community in general, the more you will get out of it. I am going to urge everyone to involve yourselves as much as you can. You don't have to be a team captain to be a leader and help unite the team. You don't have to be a coach to help lead rides and pass on information and skills you have to other riders. You don't have to be a Redwood or Woodcreek or Cycling Development rider to get befriend Redwood or Woodcreek or Cycling Development (A/ec) riders. You also don't have to be fast or competitive, all that is expected from all of you is to try your best and have fun. Regardless of your level of seniority on the team and speed you ride and category you race in, you should involve yourselves as much as you can. Put everything you have into this team, and it will make your high school experience so special.

One last note about the Drake team: Because we are so large and successful and respected other teams and riders look up to us. While out riding and racing let us all work to keep the great reputation we have worked so hard to build. Don't be afraid to talk to riders and parents and coaches from other teams. When you want to pass during a race, be polite and say please and thank you and if you are in a difficult place to go by someone, wait it out. Losing 2 or 3 seconds is much better than crashing during an unsafe pass or upsetting a fellow racer. The same goes when you are being passed; pull over and wish good luck to the person passing you. Also, when riding around Marin don't be afraid to talk to others out riding or hiking or horseback riders. Make sure you stay on the right of the trail, and keep your speed in check. If you see someone else with a mechanical issue, ask if they need help. If karma exists, these are all easy ways to get it.

Also, during my last two years as team captain trail access was something I focused my time and effort on. I know the trails in Marin can get boring, but I want to remind everyone that the best way to get more trails for bikes opened is to set good examples as bikers. Keep speed in check, be polite to other trail users, and stay off illegal trails. Us bikers are gaining respect (albeit very

slowly) among the hiker and equestrian groups, but any bad publicity will quickly set us back. If you want to work to get more trails opened, either contact me, and I can get you in touch with some great people who would always love help and support with their cause, or talk to Vernon and Robin Huffman from San Domenico. They are some of the leaders of the political action committee Access for Bikes and they work tirelessly to open more trails for us. They love having high school students help them advocate for the trail access we need.

I am so proud of everyone on the team and all your work and dedication to the team is clearly paying off. I can't wait to be back for the NorCal championships and states!

Roll Pirates!

-Ben [Enbom]"