



Quick start guide to attending a NICA event

(Spanish version found here: [NICA event quick start guide - Spanish translation](#))

Welcome to interscholastic mountain bike racing!

To help you get started with the basics of organizing for the race season, NICA has assembled this quick start guide. It's based on over 10 years of parents and kids asking coaches, "What am I supposed to bring?" "Where am I supposed to go?" "When do I need to be there?" We hope that you find this guide helpful as you prepare for your first racing season. If you have any additional questions please visit the league website.

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1. Planning a successful racing season

League registration - All league riders must register with the league online prior to the event. Each registered rider receives a number plate that is linked to the rider's information. These number plates are affixed to the rider's bike at each race with twist ties and are to be used for the entire season. Riders can use their race plate numbers to search for race results, race photos, etc. on the league website. If you lose your number plate don't worry, you can go to the registration area at the race and pick up a replacement number plate.

Parent comment - Take off your race plate right after the race and keep it in your race bag. The most common way to lose a race number? Blown off a car-mounted bike while driving on the freeway.

Race schedule - The league race schedule will be announced as early in the season as possible to provide as much time for planning as possible. The schedule will be posted on the schedule page of the league website, and announced in the league newsletter.

Race cancellations - Races can be cancelled due to weather conditions such as rain, snow, heat, etc. If a race is cancelled it will be posted on the league website and announced via email to all league coaches, riders, and registered families, etc.

Lodging and reservations - Making reservations for lodging in advance eliminates stress at the event. Reservation info for partnering campgrounds, hotels, and local hosts will be included with pre-race information. Generally our partnering hosts will provide discounted room rates for event participants so be sure to ask.

2. Preparing for a league race

League races - The league prides itself on producing high quality, professionally-produced events. These events can sometimes be larger than people expect. League races are open to all riders, and teams registered with the league. In addition to the riders and coaches, each team generally has several volunteers to help with setup and logistics. League staff and a small army of volunteers provide setup and logistics support for everything from parking and registration, to course setup and marshalling, to awards ceremonies and race results. With all of the riders, coaches, volunteers, spectators, sponsors, and supporters, the total number of participants at an event can range from 100 to as many as 2,000+. The better prepared you are for the event the more fun you will have.

Parent comment- "I didn't know the races were so big!"

Traveling to races - Race venues that provide high quality courses and are able to accommodate the number of riders, vehicles, etc. are very limited. The venues are geographically distributed to minimize travel as much as possible, but travel of 2-3 hours might be required for some events. Many families choose to come up the night before and spend the night because of the amount of travel required and the relatively early start of race registration.

Parent comment - "Riders and parents ultimately need to take responsibility for their own preparation. From packing the right gear, to printing out directions, to getting to the starting line on time."

What to pack - When preparing for a league race there are three main categories; riding gear and equipment for warming up, racing and relaxing after the races; weather gear in case of rain, heat or cold conditions; and food, snacks and water.

Parent Comment- "spare towels for cleanup, camp chairs to sit in, warm up blankets if it's cold, clothing to stay warm when you're waiting around, rain gear, thermoses of coffee, and hot chocolate, water, food and snacks, ice, change of clothing, bike parts, sunscreen/ hats/ sunglasses, garbage bags, paper towels, first aid kit and camera."

Riding gear and equipment - The basics every rider must have for a day of racing include shoes, socks, riding shorts, jerseys, gloves, water bottles, and helmet. In addition to these basics, extra riding layers, sunglasses and hydration packs (e.g. Camelbacks) are pretty standard. [Student-Athlete Pre-Race Checklist](#)

Weather - Weather can be quite variable. Wind, rain, and snow, to intense heat, sun and dust are all possible conditions that you might experience. Bring extra layers, sunglasses, sunscreen, umbrellas, etc.

Parent Comment- "Bring towels and plastic bags for wet clothes."

Environmental conditions - Mountain biking is an outdoor activity and the environmental conditions for each venue can vary. Depending on location and season, pests including mosquitoes and ticks, or vegetation like poison oak, blackberry, or cactus, or animals such as snakes or bears might be present. Information on environmental conditions will be included with pre-race information.

Food and beverage service – On-site food and beverage services and local restaurant information will be provided with the pre-race information. Generally food and beverage service is provided at leagues races but is not always available. Parents and riders are encouraged to bring extra food and drinks to ensure they are prepared in any event.

Caffeine rule – Caffeinated products of any sort are banned during race-day for all competitors. Riders are responsible for knowing the ingredients of their energy gel, drinks and bars. See the handbook for a complete list of banned substances.

Down time – The races do have down times. If you are like many parents you might want to embrace these down times by relaxing and enjoying yourself.

Parent comment-“Bring something to fill down-times. Ipod, book, newspaper, etc.”

3. Race day

Race day schedule – Racing takes all day. Typically teams start arriving around 8:00am to set up. Teams typically set up a tent and create a zone for their team and riders. Races typically begin at ~10:00am and end at ~3:00pm. Racers should know their start time and arrive at the start area at least 10-15 minutes before their race. Races are grouped into categories according to their number plates and started in ~5 minute waves to spread riders out on the course. There is a maximum time limit rule for all races, to ensure that the overall schedule for the day stays on time. Awards ceremonies are conducted after all of the races have ended and the results have been recorded. We encourage teams and riders to stay through the ceremonies to support their fellow athletes.

Student comment-“Race day is bigger than just a race, it is about sharing a great experience with hundreds of other riders, coaches and families.”

Event parking – General parking is available on-site for all races, as close as possible to the event area. Parking in the pit zone area is highly restricted and based on the discretion of your head coach.

Event information – Race information, course maps, and day-of registration information can all be found in the information booth near the entrance to the pit zone.

Team setup – Setup period in the morning is from ~8-10am. Vehicles are allowed into the pit zone to unload gear and equipment during this period. Limited vehicle parking, according to each venue, will be available in the pit zone. After the setup period vehicles are not allowed in or out of the pit zone area until team takedown.

Team takedown – Vehicles are allowed back in and out of the pit zone during team takedown.

Helmets – **HELMETS ARE REQUIRED FOR ALL RIDERS AT ALL TIMES** while riding during events – this means during races, pre-rides, warm-ups, and even casual riding at the race site.

Music players – Student-athletes are not allowed to race or ride with headphones or other portable musical devices. Headphones are permitted while riding a stationary trainer.

Authorized trails only – Ride only on authorized trails. League riders found to be riding on illegal trails at ANY time, whether on team rides or on their own, will face consequences. It is the rider’s responsibility to know which trails are legal for bikes.

Positive sporting attitude – Parents, coaches, and student-athletes are expected to display an excellent sporting attitude during all league events and should treat other riders, coaches, spectators, and officials with respect. Fair play and respectful, kind, supportive behavior is expected of all league athletes. Profanity in any situation is not acceptable.

Restrooms – Restrooms and/or porta-potties will be available at all race locations. Please use these facilities and respect the venue.

Team radio channels – Families using Motorola type radios should be aware that teams are assigned frequencies. These frequencies should be reserved for important team communication. Ask your coach for your team’s channel.

Dogs on leash – If dogs are permitted at the race venue, they must be kept on a short leash at all times.

Pack out all trash – Help the league keep costs down by packing out all your trash that does not fit in the bins provided. Do not pile up trash around park trash bins.

4. Event zones

Medical zone – The medical zone is an area designated for emergency medical services (EMS) and ambulance parking. Please make sure you know where this zone is in case of emergency. If you get injured, or are assisting with someone who is injured please report the injury to the medical zone. If you are looking for someone who might be injured please check with the medical zone for information.

Parent comment- “As a mom I was glad to see EMT services.”

Pit zone – The pit zone area is designated for team setup and preparation. The pit zone has limited parking based on the venue. Typically teams set up an easy up tent, bike rack, wind trainers, etc. to help riders prepare for races.

Neutral support zone – The neutral support zone is an area designated for riders to service their bikes and equipment to safely complete the event.

Student comment- “Make sure your tire pressure is dialed in, your chain is lubed, bolts are tight, brakes are solid and the shifting is smooth.”

Feed zone – The feed zone is an area designated for providing riders with hydration and nutrition during the races in a safe, controlled manner. Designated coaches, riders, and volunteers can enter the feed zone and hand off food and bottles, sunglasses, jackets, etc. to riders as they pass by. This is the only area on course where support can be provided. See the NICA Handbook for detailed feed zone rules.

5. Racing

Helmets – **HELMETS ARE REQUIRED FOR ALL RIDERS AT ALL TIMES** while riding during events– this means during races, pre-rides, warm-ups, and even casual riding at the race site.

Pre-race preparation – Proper sleep, nutrition, hydration and training is the best way to prepare for a race. Eat a good meal with liquids prior to the race. Visit the neutral support zone for a quick bike setup and tune.

Warming up – Warming up generally includes stretching, visualization, spinning, etc. Be careful not to expend too much energy while warming up – try to remain relaxed and focus on your goals.

Pre-riding the race course – Pre-riding is encouraged to learn the course, plan your race strategy and reduce accidents. If you are going to pre-ride make sure to leave yourself enough time and conserve your energy.

Race starts – Racers are gathered at the start zone and grouped into waves according to their category based on their race number. Races are started in waves with at least 5 minutes between each wave to spread out the riders on the course.

Pacing – Starting safely and in control will allow you to establish a stronger pace. Staying in control of your heart rate and breathing will allow you to stay in control on your bike. Controlling the bike will allow you to ride faster.

Student comment- “If you have a lull in your energy but have been at practice, have eaten and drank like you were told, you will come back.”

Passing – Passing during races is a critical area of riding etiquette. It is the responsibility of all riders to call out when passing someone. Riders who are being passed must yield to the rider passing them.

Coaches comment- “Hold your Line, be assertive with commands ‘tracking left, tracking right,’ before you pass on the left or right”

Finishing – Finishing strong is important for a successful race. Pacing yourself in order to have energy left to cross the finish line is not always easy to do. Having the energy for a final kick at the end of a race can mean the difference between a personal best and a place on the podium. You need the energy to finish strong and in control.

Coaches comment- “No matter what, each race experience is important and is a learning experience. Set aside time to reflect on your performance, what you could have changed, how to prepare, how to focus, what will go differently next time.”

Time limit rule – Because of time limitations and risk management factors, there is a time limit rule that governs all racers. Racers that do not meet time limits are pulled from the race but are scored in their current position. *Course closures may be announced at any*

time and are determined day-of based on factors including but not limited to weather conditions, length of course, and difficulty of course.

Sweeps – Volunteer sweepers are roving course marshals who may be seen on bikes on the race course during the actual races. These race officials monitor riders' behavior and respond to emergencies should they occur. Riders and parents are expected to follow instructions provided by these individuals during races.

Race rules and governance -The chief referee governs the race and has the final say on all rulings.

Parent comment-“there are rules, but more than that there is a sense of honor and goodwill to handle the gray areas. It takes a few races to figure that out.”

6. Results and awards

Results – Race results are posted in the pit zone after each race is completed, and each racer receives a time and finish ranking. If you see any errors in the results let your team coach know and he or she will discuss the issue with the timing officials.

Awards – Awards are given for the individual top finishers in each category and for top combined team scores. It might mean a later departure, but staying for the award ceremony is a great way to support young riders.

7. Tips for spectators

Watch what other people are doing – It takes a few races to take in the full experience. Experienced riders and volunteers know the ropes; where to get the best views, where to take the best pictures, when to cross the course, where to stand for the starts and finishes, etc. Pay attention and ask more experienced spectators for advice and you will have a better experience.

Parent comment-“Parents need to know where is it ok to stand and watch, where the start and finish lines are, when and how to cross the race course, things to say and do as riders pass by, how to be positive and support all of the teams and riders, until the last rider crosses the finish line.”

Listen to course marshals – Course marshals use whistles to signal that riders are approaching – please yield course to riders at all times. Listen to course marshals' instructions for crossing the course and enjoy the action.

Things to say and do – Always try to encourage your riders with your comments, and be courteous, if not encouraging, to other riders and spectators. Cowbells are fun and motivational and may be available at the league store.

Photos and videos – The league maintains a huge database of photos and videos. You can contribute any photos or videos you take to the league database for all to enjoy. Please see the league website for more information.

Authorized riders on course – During a race, no one may ride (or run) on the course in the proximity (within 200 meters) of any competitors.

8. Volunteering

Volunteering formally and informally is highly encouraged and there are many ways to get involved. Informally, when you are at league races, any time you can lend a hand to assist riders, coaches, parents, and volunteers helps make the whole event more enjoyable for everyone. Formally, you can sign up in advance to be a league volunteer and choose what you would enjoy doing or you can sign up on the day of the event. There are many volunteer opportunities from course setup and takedown, course marshalling, timing, race sweeps, photography, etc. Go to the league website to learn more.

Parent Comment-“Everyone else is working. I know nothing about this. What can I do to help?”

9. Rules

The official NICA Handbook has a complete listing of all rules and consequences for rule violations. The NICA Handbook also details procedures for addressing rule violations, scoring and timing issues, etc. The NICA Handbook is downloadable from the league website.

10. Glossary and terms

Bonk – Bonking is a term used to describe physical exhaustion after intense physical exertion. When a rider bonks it does not feel good, the muscles ache, energy is low, and the rider generally feels jittery and/or dizzy. If you are feeling like you are bonking or you are caring for someone who is bonking the best remedy is rest, drink fluids, and eat.

Hydration – Hydration refers to the amount of fluids that you lose and must replace while exercising. More often than not the main risk is becoming dehydrated, which can lead to heat exhaustion, bonking or worse. It is also important to avoid taking in too much fluid, which can lead to cramping, indigestion, and in extreme cases dangerous swelling.

Technical riding – Technical riding refers to rides, trails, and trail sections and features that require a higher level of skill, concentration, and effort to ride. Technical could refer to steep, rocky, sandy, narrow, twisty, and /or awkward elements of riding.

Cadence – Cadence refers to the number of pedal rotations a rider completes per minute.

DNF – DNF stands for Did Not Finish. A DNF is not a badge of dishonor, it simply means a rider did not finish the race either due to a mechanical like a broken chain or flat tire, a crash, or because a rider wisely listened to their body which was telling them to stop riding.