



SPORTS

Mountain biker seeks to create new high school club

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For the Record Gazette

He described the nervousness, the excitement of sitting poised, ready at the start line, waiting breathlessly for the sound of the start gun. The sudden rush of adrenaline as he and his competitors leapt forward on their bicycles, pedaling hard down the mountain course.

"I love the adrenaline rush in racing. You just keep pushing each other all the way to the end," said Nick Schultz, who represented Beaumont in the Interscholastic Southern California Cycling League last spring.

As a freshman at Beaumont High School, he had an impressive first season, earning second place out of all So Cal freshmen and sixth place in the state championships this past May where 500 mountain bikers converged on Grass Valley, Calif.

"The trails were just beautiful and it was a really fun and technical course at the same time," Schultz said. "It was difficult to go to a place where everyone else knew the trails and had an advantage."

Schultz's sixth-place finish qualified him for nationals. However, a lack of funds and time prevented him from competing.

Schultz mostly trains around Beaumont and Cherry Valley, though he makes an occasional venture out to the hills around Yucaipa.

"They have some nice trails out there," he said.

Schultz trains three days a week, putting in one-and-a-half intense hours each time.

"I put all my energy into those rides and I'm usually sore for about two days," Schultz said. "During the off-season I do longer rides of 30 to 50 miles just to keep my endurance up."

Schultz also participates in summer mountain bike leagues such as the Rim-Nordic summer mountain bike race series, where he took third place two weeks ago.

"It was the most technical trail I've ever done," Schultz said. "It was pretty intense especially with the



Photo for the Record Gazette by David James Heiss
Beaumont High School sophomore Nick Schultz is co-founder of the school's nascent mountain bike team, which made its debut on the racing circuit last year.

altitude there.”

The 15-year-old, who is going to be a sophomore at Beaumont High School this year, was inspired to ride by his grandfather, Greg Barker — himself a long-time mountain biker — and Ryan Odle, a fellow student who races in various local mountain bike leagues.

Schultz has only been pursuing mountain biking for a year, but the sport has captured his lifelong interest, he said.

“I just love riding bikes. It’s the funnest thing I’ve ever done,” Schultz said.

Proponents of cycling argue that the benefits of cycling extend well beyond the high school years.

“Like swimming or perhaps running, cycling is a lifetime sport. You can do it when your 80,” said Matt Gunnell, director of the So Cal League.

Mountain biking is also a “self-perpetuating” sport, Gunnell said. In other words, those who participate in mountain biking get others to do so, in particular, their relatives, which makes mountain biking become a family affair.

“Most of the coaches come from within the ranks of the riders’ families,” Gunnell said.

Greg Barker participated in the league’s coaching program, which he described as “extensive,” so that he could serve as his grandson’s coach.

“It’s been a remarkable experience for my wife and I, and for Nick, to go to these races and see the talent of these kids,” Barker said.

Barker said mountain biking adds a new element to traditional high school athletics.

“This sport is different than the kinds of sports you find in most high school competitive athletics and it’s becoming more and more popular with kids,” Barker said.

Gunnell also pointed out mountain biking’s broad appeal to today’s youth.

“This is a great program. We’re getting a lot of kids into sports who otherwise would never have tried athletics,” Gunnell said. “It’s less restrictive than most traditional high school sports. If you are willing to put in the time, then you can race.”

It is also a sport that makes participants think, Schultz said.

“It’s not like having a coach in football who tells you what to do and when and where to do it. I have to self-coach, use heart monitors and I read magazines and books all the time to find out how I can train better,” Schultz said.

The sport also has the potential for future career opportunities.

“People don’t realize how big mountain biking really is. Colleges give scholarships to mountain bikers. This is a sport that can take you all the way to the Olympics,” Barker said.

Mountain biking is also both a solitary and a social event. This past season Schultz rode as an independent rider in the So Cal League. But he would love the opportunity to ride as a member of a team.

“The benefits of a club are having other people your age to race with. You get a team name and you

can race as a team, earning points as a team," Schultz said.

He pointed out that Yucaipa High School took first place in the So Cal League.

"They won as a team, altogether," Schultz said.

High School mountain bike clubs are not as rare as some might think. Yucaipa and Hemet high schools both have mountain bike clubs. Yucaipa's Alex Bagg beat Schultz in the So Cal series, but Schultz said he beat the Thunderbird in the Rim-Nordic summer race series just two weeks ago.

"That was pretty exciting. He's a really good rider. He's faster than me downhill, but I can beat him uphill," Schultz said.

Gunnell said San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbra County both formed countywide teams. Eventually, as the teams grow — and Gunnell said he is sure they will — they will split up into individual high school teams.

"In their first year teams typically have only five to seven riders. But these teams don't go away. They grow. New teams spring up every year," Gunnell said.

The So Cal League is two-years young, but boasts 19 teams and 205 riders, nearly double the amount of riders in the league's inaugural season.

"It would not surprise me at all if next year we're over 300 riders on 25 teams," Gunnell said.

The So Cal League is a part of the National Interscholastic Cycling Association and a sister chapter league to the 10-year-old Northern California Interscholastic League. The national league also boasts Texas and Colorado as members.

"The league wants to expand throughout the nation," Gunnell said.

To form a high school mountain bike club an interested student or parent must find an on-campus sponsor to bridge the gap between his/herself and the school. Barker is willing to serve as the connection to the league, but now he needs a connection at Beaumont High School, as well as a few supporting adults to act as club lead riders. The next step is to get the word out at the school then it is just a matter of registering with the league. Teams are forming now and practice begins in December. The four-race season opens in February and concludes in May with a fifth race, the state championships.

Those interested in joining or supporting the creation of a mountain bike club at Beaumont High School should contact Matt Gunnell at (510) 524-5464 or matt@socaldirt.org or Greg Barker at (951) 294-4230. For more information about the league visit the Web site www.socaldirt.org.

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