



# PERFORMANCE CYCLING CONDITIONING

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## From Frazier Cycling #15: USAC Junior Coaches Conference, Oct. 22-23, 2011 - Real Junior Development Programs

*Ralph Frazier and Kelli Rogan-Frazier Cycling*

*Frazier Cycling's Atlanta-based Junior Development Program was developed by Ralph Frazier and Kelli Rogan. Ralph has over 35 years of cycling experience as an endurance and marathon racer and a coach. Kelli has 10 years experience of coaching juniors and masters as well as an impressive track and race racing career. Frazier Cycling has a mission to develop the next generation of cyclists with an appreciation for the sport, life-long physical fitness, sportsmanship, teamwork and commitment. As the southeast's largest junior development program, they have been recognized by USA Cycling News as "an excellent model for other junior development initiatives" ...focusing on "character as much as athletic ability." The 2008 Frazier Cycling Juniors team holds 9 state championships and 9 national medals, including 2 national championship titles.*

*Kristen is a certified Category I USA Cycling coach and a level 2 United States Track and Field (USATF) coach specializing in endurance training. She has coached at the high school, collegiate, masters, recreational, and elite levels.*

*She is an assistant professor of athletic coaching education in the College of Physical Activity and Sport Sciences at West Virginia University. Kristen received her Ph.D. in exercise science with an emphasis in exercise and sport psychology from the University of North Carolina Greensboro and her M.S. in physical education with an emphasis in sport psychology from the University of Idaho. She is a Certified Consultant (CC) with the Association of Applied Sport Psychology and is recognized on the USOC Registry of sport psychology service providers. Currently, she serves on the USAC Coaching Education Advisory Committee, and is the sport psychology editor for the Performance Conditioning Cycling. Her areas of consulting and education concentration include performance enhancement, talent development and overtraining and underrecovery issues.*



Kelli Rogan



Ralph Frazier

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MTB** **O**n the weekend of Oct 22 and 23, 2011, I attended the inaugural USA Cycling Junior Coaching Conference at West Virginia University in Morgantown hosted by USA Cycling. Kristen Dieffenbach, Ph. D., was the presenter. The conference focus emphasized juniors from 14-18 years old, recreational through competitive.

It was certainly refreshing to connect with others who dealt with coaching junior cyclists. In particular, sharing views and experiences was both enjoyable and educational.

Many relevant topics arose during the conference and many I would like to discuss in future articles, but before first I think it is appropriate to review the current status of junior development. So a few days after the conference, we sent this question to Kristen:

### **What is the status of junior development today?**

"Great question. It really depends on how you define junior development. Junior development and junior racing are not necessarily the same thing. The real junior development programs focus on fostering the individual physical, social and psychological of young men and women in a way that helps them become the best they can be both now and in the future in whatever things they



choose to pursue. Unfortunately, too often and in too many programs the emphasis on 'devo' is on immediate outcome and 'elite' juniors, which is a bit of an oxymoron, really. However, there is a movement brewing both at the grassroots level and from the top down that is really striving to do things differently and to do things in a way that is truly in the best interest of true junior development. The irony of this is that true talent development actually will foster a system that will also allow for more young riders to really do well in bike racing." - Kristen Dieffenbach

I completely agree with Kristen's answer. It seems there are plenty of "junior racing" programs, but fewer "junior development" programs. Frazier Cycling persists to be the later; however, as our program has grown over the years and our juniors have achieved athletic successes, there are temptations to focus on immediate outcomes. As I warned in my article of August 2010, "Rewarding Your Athletes": be careful not to create a "monster". Hype and recognition usually accompany success. We must be careful not to add fuel to this fire. To the contrary, we must remain grounded.

What is not easily recognized by athletes, parents, and even some coaches is the reality in Kristen's remark that "elite" juniors is a bit of an oxymoron. Indeed, "elite" juniors are "elite" among their peers and perhaps some regional racers, but they are far away from being "elite". It's fine for your athletes (and their parents) to have dreams of being a professional cyclist, but reaching that level takes years of maturity, training, and improvement far beyond what can occur during the junior years.

You must try to bring these kids and their parents back to earth. Temper adulation by instilling humility, humbleness, and long term perspective. Despite your best efforts, inevitably there will be athletes and their parents, who impatiently rush to find programs promising opportunities to compete at "the next level". They will be convinced that a new program will offer more opportunities, prestige, and success.

As stated by Kristen, too many programs emphasize the immediate outcome and really don't foster true development. Indeed, these programs pursue and attract the kids and parents that I described above. More often than not, it becomes a revolving door as these juniors search for "greener" pastures and change programs almost every year. Unfortunately, many will continue the process with little further talent development and with a huge risk of disappointment.

The good news noted by Kristen is that "there is a movement brewing both at the grassroots level and from the top down that is really striving to do things differently and to do things in a way that is truly in the best interest of true junior development". Of course, we strive to model our grassroots program this way and of course, I'm biased in saying so. But there is another junior development program that I want to mention that is fulfilling this movement. It's the BYRDS, Boise Young Rider Development Squad, ([www.byrdscycling.com](http://www.byrdscycling.com)). The BYRDS is a program that introduces youth (ages 6 to 18) to cycling. Their goal is to provide junior boys and girls the training, and the understanding of equipment, rules, safety and the benefits of cycling as a lifelong sport. Their program, under the guidance of Coach and President Douglas Tobin, has been very successful in bringing kids to cycling with more than 140 young members.

In summary, with respect to Kristen's remarks, as coaches, we owe our juniors "real development programs that focus on fostering the individual physical, social and psychological of young men and women in a way that helps them become the best they can be both now and in the future in whatever things they choose to pursue."

**Chain Link:** Click [HERE](#) for an article by Kristen on how get started coaching juniors.

**Got a Youth Development Question?** If there is a particular topic you'd like us to discuss or if you would like to share a junior coaching experience or ask a question, contact us at 770-513-8640 or [info@fraziercycling.com](mailto:info@fraziercycling.com). We will publish your requested information in the next issue as space allows.



Kristen Dieffenbach