

Adults sometimes doubt their potential to be a NICA coach because they don't consider themselves to be "a really good mountain biker." At NICA, we want you to know being a NICA coach is about so much more than your personal mountain biking skills. NICA is a youth development organization dedicated to developing its core values of strong body, mind and character in an inclusive and equal environment. Youth development is our goal and mountain biking is the tool.

Ask yourself: Are you enthusiastic about mountain biking? Are you positive, reliable, committed, and passionate? Do you communicate well? Would you be a good mentor? Would you prioritize rider safety? Are you patient, humble, empathetic, self-aware, and sincere? Do you genuinely care about and enjoy young spending time with young people?

Next, consider the top five things young athletes say they want most out of their coaches:

- Respect and encouragement
- Positive role model
- Clear, consistent communication
- Someone who listens
- Knowledge of sport

**You will be a great NICA coach if you prioritize these five elements and possess the character traits and values mentioned above.** Being a skilled mountain biker is great, but certainly not necessary. However, as a NICA coach, your central responsibilities are safety and character development in the student-athletes you coach. There's a misperception in youth sports that a coach must be a great rider/player or have extensive tactical and technical knowledge to coach effectively. When young people are asked why they play a sport, the number one answer is "fun." If you can create an environment that is enjoyable, safe, motivating and supportive, your student-athletes will succeed. Through NICA training events, continuing education opportunities, Leaders Summits and field work you can easily increase your technical and tactical knowledge of mountain biking skills and racing techniques.

### **Coach Responsibilities**

As a NICA coach, you are assuming responsibility for your athletes' well-being and character development. Although this may at first be overwhelming, keep in mind coaching takes practice, patience, trial, error and time. All coaches make mistakes. Your central job as a NICA coach is to keep yourself, your riders and your community safe. If you focus on managing risk, on progressing your riders appropriately you are already coaching with purpose and care.

A few other questions to ask:

**Do you like kids?** To be a good coach you must like kids! Coaching requires taking the time to understand their challenges, their daily lives and respect that they are not just small adults. Your

primary motivator for coaching should be to help young people grow, mature and develop into successful, well rounded and respectful adults. This requires communication and curiosity about who your riders are as people.

**Can you coach for the right reasons?** Successful coaches practice athlete-centered coaching. This does not mean always doing what your athletes want. It means always having their best interests as your priority. If you coach to boost your own ego or to always be in control, your athletes will not trust you. If you are coaching to prioritize your own racing or fitness goals, you will be unable to truly put your athletes needs first. If you cannot put your athletes needs first, you can't be a good coach.

Stay focused on teaching your riders proper values such as discipline, hard work, overcoming fear, rising to challenges, taking pride in themselves, their teammates, their bikes, goal setting and self respect.

**Can you prioritize safety and risk management?** A coach assumes the responsibility of doing everything possible to ensure the riders on his or her team will have safe, enjoyable experiences. Teach your riders and fellow coaches how to inspect their equipment before each ride and make sure each rider has the proper equipment and clothes. Teach riders to always ride with a riding style of respect. Set a high standard and don't let riders develop unsafe habits. Make sure that you and all volunteers have emergency medical information for each rider during every practice. Always be prepared. [NICA's Risk Management](#) webinars will give you the information needed to prioritize safety and risk management.

**Can you be a role model, leader, and mentor?** Sometimes, the hardest part of being a coach is saying "no." It's understanding you are a coach, not a friend. You most certainly should be friendly! But, know this distinction. Don't be like your athletes. Don't copy their language, behavior or body language. You are the adult and they are looking to you for reliability, consistency and boundaries. Act, dress, speak and ride the way you would like your riders to ride. Model good behavior.

**Can you be organized?** Head coaches need concrete, workable plans for individual practices and the overall season. Head Coaches should determine what the team should accomplish every practice. Assistants and ride leaders must understand the plan to help execute. Coaches should collaborate to create a team culture that respects and promotes organized practices and races.

**Can you be enthusiastic?** The thought of working with your riders should motivate you and get you excited about what they are accomplishing. Enthusiasm is critical to coaching young people.

**Do you know how young people define fun?** The number one reason kids drop out of sports is because it wasn't fun. Remember this as you design your practices and interact with your team and fellow coaches. Don't assume you know what fun is! Depending on their age, kids identify "fun" in over 80 ways. Fun is not just goofing off. Kids like to learn. They cherish the feeling of improvement. They like to see and feel progress. They are also in organized sports to socialize, to

be with their friends and to do something they like and they feel good at doing. Make sure you provide the opportunity for your riders to feel and measure progress every day.

**Are you patient?** Every great athlete had a mentor who had the patience to teach the fundamentals of the sport. Remember, they are kids, not adults and do not have the same memory recall or attention spans as adults. The ability to go over things again and again, never losing enthusiasm is a must for a solid coach.

If you think you have what it takes - and we suspect you do - please get involved! Visit [NICA's Coach Licensing Page](#) to get started or reach out to your local team's head coach or you area's league director.