

# Practice Ideas for Early Season or New Team

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## Step #1: The Informational Meeting

This is usually done prior to the first practice and should be the first thing you do to get your team started. This meeting is for students and parents that are interested in participating on your team, to come together and ask questions about your program. It's a chance for you to answer questions and get the excitement started for the season.

It is best to do hold your meeting at a place where you can all gather together in one room. Ideas on locations could include a local restaurant with a banquet room, a library or office area with a conference room, maybe even a local business that might want to help out and offer up a space to hold a meeting. It would be ideal to go over practice days and times, talk about the League and the history of the League and your team so parents know more about what the program is all about. Allow both the students and parents to ask questions and try to get the students excited about what your team is about and what your plans are for the current season. Give the parents all the information they need for getting their student registered online. This is also your chance to set the expectations up front of what is required for the season.

## Step #2: First Official Team Meeting or First Practice

After you have held your informational meeting, make it a priority to help your students and parents with online registration. **Reminder**, all students must be registered by legal parent or guardian. Also, students (and coaches) cannot participate in any organized team practice or event if they are not registered online and listed on your team roster. Emphasize to your students and parents how important it is to get registered or they cannot practice with the team.

After your students are registered then, it is time to hold your first practice!

### Some ideas for a first practice would be:

Meeting at a gathering place indoors and go through each student's bike to ensure that it is working properly and that each student has a proper fit on the bike so they are the most comfortable and as safe that they can be.

If you have other coaches who are comfortable with working on bikes, create a couple work stations, and have a couple people help with going over basic bike safety on every bike. This is also a great opportunity to engage your local bike shop and have them attend to look over bikes.

### Things to check:

- Proper air in tires
- That brakes are working properly
- That their chain is lubed and in good condition
- That their cranks are tight
- Check that quick releases are tight and properly installed
- Check shifting to make sure drive line is working correctly

During this first meeting or practice, it is ideal to be inside so the students can stay warm as you work on bikes. Turn this practice into an opportunity for the students to get know each other and talk before they are on their bikes. A fun welcoming environment for all of the students, will assist in gaining comfort amount one another.

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## Step #3: First Outdoor Practice

Once you have gone through all of your students' bikes and you are confident that they are ready to ride outside, you will want to organize your first outside practice.

Pick a location that has very mild terrain like a park to start out. Remember that you probably have a wide level of riders on your team. Some students may have very little to no mountain bike riding skills. It is very important to start out on mild terrain and with shorter practice times so the students can ease into the training. If you start out on more technical terrain, and ride for long periods of time, it is very possible that some students might lose interest with the team, due to feeling overwhelmed or embarrassed by their fitness or skills level. Always start out lighter and gradually add time or skill level to your practices.

### Skills Practices Ideas:

Riding logs - set up several logs on the ground starting with very small, medium and higher heights. Start everyone at the small log and then have them progress in height of logs as they can clear each log.

Riding skinnies - set up different widths of boards spread apart that start wider and move to smaller, start with everyone riding the wider boards first and moving to smaller boards as they can clear wider boards

Riding drops - create a drop prop that can change heights. Start with a very low drop and increase drop as riders can clear smaller drops.

### On the Trails:

You want to start your practices at locations that start out on easier trails and work up to more advanced trails as the rider's confidence and ability improve. Do not take new riders to advanced trails until they are ready. Doing this will likely scare the newer rider and make them possibly lose confidence in their ability to ride. It could set your riders back and impede improvement.

To keep your more advanced riders engaged when riding easier trails, have them ride ahead with a ride leader, working at a harder pace and then have them turn around and return to the group. Continue to do this throughout the ride. This gives those riders interval training which will challenge them.

Another option is to ride trails that have loops. Create a loop and have the more advanced riders ride that loop several times while the beginners ride that loop once. This will give the more advanced riders more ride time as they are allowed to ride at their pace. Make sure to keep a ride leader with all of the groups.

Also encourage your more advanced riders to partner up with a newer rider. Have them help encourage/mentor the newer rider by riding with them and showing them the good lines on the trail. This builds good team comradery by helping all of the students to get to know each other better in the process.

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## Practice Time Suggestions:

Ideally have the first few practices at least to an hour to hour and half in duration. Make sure to get in a good 10-15 minute warm up by riding easy and allowing the students to spin their legs.

After a good warm up, then have the students pick up their pace, but ensuring to keep the pace at a reasonable level for all of your riders. The more advanced riders will be faster and will gap the slower riders quickly. Make sure to have a coach or ride leader with each group so that no student is left behind or allowed to be so far off the front/back that they could get lost.

You may choose to split your team into groups, allowing each group to go at their pace, again making sure there is a lead and a sweep ride leader with each group. This is a great way to allow the students to stay within their limits and have different levels of groups.

All of the groups need to make sure to stop at every trail intersection. Make sure that every student has made the correct trail, and nobody gets left behind or lost.

After completing a couple of practices, you should have a pretty good feel of the various levels of all of your students. Do your best to keep practices at a length that will challenge each student but will not be too long in duration for new or beginner riders. Know that newer or beginner students will need more rest than the more advanced students. Allow them to rest, or they could end up having a bad experience and may discontinue with the team.

Note: the shortest race distance for middle schoolers and beginners will be 30-40 minutes. Advanced Middle School and Intermediate categories will be 45-60 minutes. JV will be 60-75 minutes, and Varsity 75-90 minutes. Keep in mind that practice times should reflect race times per skill level. So, if you practice for one hour, with multiple stops you will likely have approximately 30-40 minutes of ride time. And if you ride 2 hours you will likely have 75-90 minutes of ride time.

Try not to have beginners starting out with 2 hour practices. This will likely be too much for them to start with. Work them up in distance/time over the course of the season. Keep them wanting more!

The number one goal of this League, is to introduce students to the amazing sport of mountain biking and help to make them lifelong cyclists. Try to create an environment within your team that helps to develop this and keep it fun and challenging in a relative way based on the level of your students. If you stick to these core ideas, and suggestions, you will have every opportunity for a successful team and program.