

by Jamie Bate

Wholistic Athletes

The Whole Athlete development team is developing mountain bikers in a holistic, NorCal fashion



Happenstance didn't lead a handful of California kids across the country this past summer to race against the world's best mountain bikers.

There is a driving force behind the growing junior development program known as the Whole Athlete Cycling Team, and his name is Dario Fredrick. Fredrick is a regular guy with a super-human passion for cycling and helping young people. That combination is paying off for kids in Marin County, California, who are interested in taking their cycling to a higher level — and the investment could pay future dividends for mountain biking across the U.S.

Going into its second full year in 2010, Fredrick registered the Whole Athlete squad as a UCI trade team. The goal was to expose several of his junior and U23 riders to European competition at the World Cup final in Windham, New York. And it wasn't coincidence that Whole Athlete members Sofia Hamilton, Will Curtis, Tony Smith and Zach Valdez comprised half of the junior contingent selected by USA Cycling to race at mountain bike worlds at Mont Saint Anne, Quebec, in early September.

"To have four riders selected is fantastic. I'm overjoyed," Fredrick said, adding that two more Whole Athlete riders — Max Houtzager and Nick Newcomb — raced the Windham World

Cup a week before mountain bike worlds.

Expectations out of those events were tempered, with Fredrick explaining that the main goal was to have his young riders experience competition beyond the NorCal and SoCal high school mountain bike leagues where they dominate. Case in point: Curtis is the 2010 California high school state champion, edging out Valdez, who was the SoCal league champ.

Even before Windham and Mont Saint Anne, Fredrick, the reigning Cat. 1 40-44 national cross-country champion, had taken his team up and down the Golden State and into Colorado to race. Because, while USA Cycling has its junior development program for mountain biking, it is somewhat limited in the number of riders it can take to Europe to compete. Colorado-based programs like Tokyo Joe's and Durango Devo also cultivate young mountain bikers, but Whole Athlete is the only UCI-registered junior development program in the country.

Nonetheless, Fredrick emphasized that all the programs have the same goal — to give young people the opportunity to race. Fredrick noted that in countries such as Italy and Australia, national federations fund cycling clubs.

"I realized what's been lacking is the opportunity to really develop junior athletes, partic-

ularly on the dirt," Fredrick said. "That's why we're lagging behind other countries in cross-country. You can look at other countries and see what they're doing and it's really different."

The success of high school mountain bike leagues in California is spreading to other states. Those efforts will expose hundreds, if not thousands, of young people to mountain biking. As with the long-standing team sports of football, baseball and basketball, a few kids with cycling potential will shine. But the established sports have outlets at either the collegiate or professional levels.

And that's where development programs like Whole Athlete can complement the efforts of USA Cycling or programs like Fort Lewis College in Durango.

"I've gotten to know the (NorCal) league and there are already a couple of standouts who didn't have the opportunity to progress," Fredrick said. "We can get them started with all the right resources."

Those resources flow out of Fredrick's other pastime, running Whole Athlete, a Marin County coaching and training business. And just as Fredrick is a lifelong cyclist, he's just as passionate about the big picture. At his junior cycling camps the focus is not just on the bike; he and his coaches use their decades of experience in yoga, nutrition and biomechanics to ground riders.

"Aside from riding bikes fast, we provide the multiple ingredients that are essential to becoming a successful athlete," he said. "Simply stated, our approach is holistic."

But in a country where state subsidies for amateur sports are all but nonexistent, junior development efforts are often limited. While the Whole Athlete junior program is supported on various levels, there is always a need for more money, Fredrick said. He and his staff, which includes two sport psychologists and a number of coaches, have set up a non-profit to help fund the Whole Athlete Cycling Team's junior program — the Velo Development Foundation.

"I just don't have the resources to help everyone," he said, noting that Northern California-based bike manufacturer Specialized is a team supporter. "We're doing a lot with very little."

And that's an understatement considering the results posted by Whole Athlete riders. From the Sea Otter Classic and Bonelli Park in California to the mountain bike nationals and Pro XCT race in Colorado, Fredrick's disciples are all over the podium.

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