



{note: this communique has immediate relevance to 24 Hours of Moab racers but it is relevant to mountain bike racers everywhere, so it is being sent to all of Granny Gear's racer contacts. Feel free to pass this on.}

Have you ever heard of an "Expert" runner?

Many years ago, at the beginning of the sport of mountain bike racing, we set ourselves up for trouble by creating ability classifications (e.g. Sport, Expert, Semi-pro, Pro). The intention was a good one: slice the pie into more pieces so that there would be more delicious racing for everyone. The problem is that there was never any real definition ascribed to these classes and no unified, fair way to track what racers were in what classes. So what we are left with are huge gray areas, lots of opportunities for both intentional or inadvertent sandbagging and lots of dispiriting experiences, grumbling and accusations. NO FUN. the sport of running doesn't have these problems. You can be 1st-place or 5,000th. There's no such thing as a 1st place "Sport" runner, though granted, they do often race in age categories.

What's the solution? Short of tracking the results for every racer at every race, grading them all on a curve, and automatically upgrading a racer based on some sort of predetermined criteria or mathematical formula, there isn't a perfect solution. Alternately, we could trash the old system and simply race in open categories by age, like in running races. But if we are to preserve the history and culture of the sport and keep this inherently flawed-but-fun system, we have to remind ourselves of the original intent of this system and honor it by racing in integrity with it.

The original intent was to encourage growing race participation by creating different levels within which one could race. The expectation was that mountain bikers would self-police the classes by moving themselves up into the next class when, or even well before, the time came, thereby honoring themselves and honoring the sportsmanship embodied in the sport.

Yes, to believe that the every single racer will always be honorable in their respect of these self-policing classes is naive. But to think the ethical foundation of our sport can't be upheld by the vast majority of its participants is cynical. The degree of personal responsibility, intelligence, sportsmanship and integrity that characterizes mountain bikers says a lot about our sport and about ourselves.

I am a stand for continuing the tradition that has been part of our sport since the very beginning and honoring the intent of this tradition to inspire others to participate. Cultural traditions like these, in some measure the soul of our sport, need to be preserved, protected and perpetuated on an on-going basis. We need to communicate these traditions in conversation with new participants and we need to remind ourselves that sport and sportsmanship are at the heart of this great sport of ours. No single person creates this sport, it is the sum total of all of us, who we are, how we are, our values, our commitments and our integrity. *{And by the way, we are not the only self-policed sport. Look at Ultimate Frisbee, where contact fouls, turn-overs and out-of-bounds calls are all self-called. Very cool.}*

Let's be straight about it. Sandbagging is cheating. And, even if we eliminated ability classifications and the possibility of cheating by sandbagging, there could still be cheating by lying about one's age, or short-cutting the course. So, if we can play fairly in these ways, we can play fairly on all counts.

Here are my requests:

1. That every mountain bike racer take stock of the importance of fairness in creating a sport that is worthy of our participation and is appealing to new comers.
2. That everyone look closely at your race classification and your team's classification and search your soul about whether or not you are racing in the fairest way.
3. That if you find that you are indeed in a gray area at all, if, in your heart of hearts, there is any question, that you take the high-road and move up a class.
4. That everyone re-commit themselves to the pure fun of racing with great sportsmanship and to "doing the right thing" regardless of what other people do.

Will we eliminate cheating? Of course not. We are fallible and imperfect human beings and there will always be those of us who have not yet developed the character and personal integrity to compete fairly. In the larger scheme of things, cheaters always lose. How can anyone truly appreciate a "victory" tarnished by cheating? The only true victory in sports is the victory that is ours when we play hard, play fair and have fun.

I honor you for paying close attention to this issue and doing what it takes to have your team racing fairly. Granny Gear will waive any late change fees for changing your team's class or for making a rider change that will have your team racing fairly. And please do so ASAP. Call us at our temporary Moab offices at 435-259-5583 to make these changes. Ask for Moriah.

Keep in mind that:

Semi-pros are considered to be Pros in Granny Gear events.

5-person Co-ed allows only one expert man per team

5-person Men's and 5-person Women's classes allow only one expert racer per team.

Ability classifications do not apply to:

1. Pro classes (Solo, duo, Co-ed Pro/Am) (you can race in any class above your ability)
2. Age classifications (Junior, Vet, Masters, Grand Masters) which are open by ability
3. Just-for-Fun class, which is open to all classifications (gender, ability or age)

For my part, I will continue to staunchly promote and defend fairness. I will research any concerns brought to me, in advance of the race. (And I encourage folks to alert me to any concerns they may have before, rather than after the race.) I will adjudicate any formal protests brought during the race.

Also, we will be reviewing all of our race classifications this winter to find better ways to accommodate all classes.

The recent creation of the 24 Hour National Point Series has brought this issue to the forefront because the negative impact that "over-qualified" teams can have on teams that have been vying for the Points Series Championship. Consider the situation where several Men's Expert teams have been racing the National Series, traveling across the country, racing their hearts out... and it all comes down to Moab. Points-wise, the win at Moab is vitally important. Even a second or third place finish could make the difference for one of these Point Series teams. True enough, Moab is likely to have a large gene-pool of legit experts but consider what happens when the top slots are un-attainable by any legit Men's Expert team because the caliber of the fastest competitors is well beyond Men's Expert level. It's spoils the Points Series chase for everyone.

Such a situation exists, going into this race, this year. The teams in the Points Series chase have battled hard in at least two other hard-fought 24-hour races and they have everything at stake, coming into Moab. They deserve a fair playing field. And with your cooperation, I trust that they will get it.

Thank you for your time in reading this. Thank you for making fairness and sportmanship the penultimate values that you bring to the sport of mountain biking.

Best Regards & Happy Trails,

**-Laird Knight
Race Director**



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