

Hello, Missouri NICA Community!

The MICL's inaugural season has officially ended, our final team practices wrapping up earlier this month. A huge thank you to every one of our student athletes, coaches, staff, and those in between who helped to make our first season fun and successful despite everything going on in the world. We are so grateful for you all! NICA looks forward to many more seasons in the state of Missouri. Although our collective team practices and activities have ended, we encourage our student athletes to continue their riding safely, and our coaches and those involved to continue planning and inspiring. Enjoy your holiday season, MICL family!

Outtakes from our League Director

To get the scoop on all things surrounding our first NICA season in Missouri, I talked to our League Director, Chris Mileski. As our guiding force, Chris coordinates with NICA on a national level and is involved with every step of planning for the Missouri League.

Just like many aspects in our lives, COVID thoroughly changed the way things went throughout our inaugural season. However, Chris was quick to tell me he still witnessed many highlights this year, **"If I had to choose one, I would say it's the way our communities rallied around the MICL. In spite of COVID, 147 trained coaches and 259 student athletes certainly exceeded my expectations, especially once the pandemic started."** As a NICA coach and parent himself, Chris was also super excited to see all of the student athletes display growth and skill enhancement under our dedicated coaches.

Although we faced big issues with COVID, including no racing and a later start to the season all around, Chris told me about the effective ways our league decided to use this time and energy. **"The league made the decision in late July to focus our**



attention in three areas: support and training of the league coaches, small group activities such as GRIT (Girls Riding Together), and focusing on experiential activities such as NICA Adventure during team practices." These development activities proved to be quite successful, as seen through our GRIT events held throughout the season (previously featured) and exciting Adventure Challenges set up weekly by our Adventure Coordinator, Annie Schwartz.

Because of this year's adjustments, with most of us looking forward to 2021, I was quick to ask Chris about everything in store for the coming season(s). He excitedly told me that one big thing we can look forward to for next year is more large scale events - including racing.

Events in the works include:

- **April**

- 1:**

- Preseason activities

- like

- bike

- fits,

- mechanical

- workshops,

- fun

- rides,

- and

- skills

- clinics

- begin

- **April**

- 17-**

- April**

- 18:**

- Coach

- and

- Leadership

- Summit

- in

- Columbia,

- MO

- **May**

- 14-**

- May**

- 16:**

- NICA

- race

- training

- weekend

- at

- Broemmelsiek

- Park

- in

St.
Charles,
MO

- **June 26-27:**
Missouri & Arkansas League Adventure weekend in Neosho or Springfield, MO (TBD)
- **July 1:**
NICA regular season begins, which may include practices up to four times a week
- **August 28-29:**
MICL race season begins, kicking off at Indian Camp Creek in Foristell, MO

Along with these larger events and key league dates, Chris says we will see Adventure, GRiT, and Teen Trail Corps events as well. Although there are some

questions with COVID as we enter the New Year, Chris explained that, come our next fall season, NICA as a collective will have battled this virus through three separate seasons: spring and fall 2020, and spring 2021. He displayed confidence given NICA's previous actions and current protocols, that we are very hopeful for racing next season. He was quick to remind me, however, that things could look a little different (i.e; perhaps no mass starts) and that the health and safety of athletes, coaches, staff, and anyone else who may be around or involved with our events is continuously the priority. Chris noted that league preseason events **"should provide excellent training opportunities for coaches and league staff, and be a ton of fun for student athletes!"**

When reflecting on the MICL's inaugural season, Chris said he was quite happy with the sheer number of people the Missouri NICA community gained, despite the pandemic. He discussed what he believed was the pivotal moment in MICL's growth: **"The build-up really began in the fall of 2019 when league staff criss-crossed the state on it's annual *Dirt Tour*, recruiting a foundation of awesome coaches and spreading NICA stoke!"**

Carrying the momentum into the New Year, Chris told me one of the major goals for the MICL will be expanding into areas and communities that didn't field teams this year. **"We are hoping to add teams from cities such as Rolla and Ironton," he said, "and add additional teams from the Kansas City and St. Louis Metropolitan areas."** He also excitedly mentioned the league's first Illinois team confirmed for 2021, the Metro East Composite Phoenix.

Speaking of the 2021 season, Chris told me, **"Our 2021 goals are lofty: 24 to 26 teams, 400+ student athletes, and 200+ coaches. The Missouri Interscholastic Cycling League will continue to make a concerted effort and prioritize the recruitment of more female and BIPOC student athletes, coaches, and league staff."**

After hearing about everything exciting to come, I had to ask what Missouri communities can do to assist the league getting more kids on bikes. Chris was quick to say he was overwhelmed with everything our coaches have done so far and how well they adjusted and remained flexible in the face of the MICL's "soft launch." In addition, he advised using the off season as a time to celebrate successes, discuss areas of improvement, address team growth, and make any changes with respective coaching staffs. **"Most importantly, coaches need to recruit more coaches for the 2021 season. Coaches are the lifeblood of any NICA league, and as our coaches found out this year, you can never have too many people helping out!"**

As far as our athletes, Chris advised they continue to ride their bikes while honing in on specific mountain biking skills. Similar to our coaches, he wanted to remind league kids to bring along their friends next season; it can make their own time more

enjoyable and help to expand our ever-growing mountain bike community. Chris also mentioned being consistent on the bike, regular bike maintenance, and maintaining respect for other trail users while riding. These tips can make the mountain biking experience better for any rider and those around them.

A huge thank you to our League Director Chris Mileski for allowing me to interview him for this addition! Your hands-on approach and hard, dedicated work through every aspect of NICA and our own MICL does not go unnoticed. We cannot wait to see everything in store for our 2021 season!

That being said, thank you for reading this special holiday issue! A huge thanks again to MICL student athletes, coaches, volunteers, and core staff. We appreciate all of you and are beyond excited to continue to grow during future seasons.

**Catch you on the trails,
The MO NICA Team**

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