

# AusCycling and State Institute Rider Development Principles

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## The Pathway to Performance

Guidance for Riders, Coaches, Parents and Selectors  
on what matters most in the U15, U17 and U19 rider  
development journey.



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## The Pathway to Performance

AusCycling has bold high-performance ambitions: to remain a top three cycling nation at the Brisbane 2032 Games and beyond. This is no small task. The global bar continues to rise across every cycling discipline, and our success will depend on how well our performance pathway identifies, confirms, and equips riders to meet ever-increasing international standards.

The riders route to excellence is a deliberate journey. It's sparked in vibrant local clubs, refined through regional academies, elevated within State Institutes, and perfected in the 'finishing schools' of our National Centres of Excellence. Seamless rider progression through the pathway depends on a united philosophy, with every layer aligned, purposeful, and preparing riders for the demands of the level above.

Our Rider Development Principles are developed by the AusCycling Performance team in collaboration with State Institute of Sport, Coaches and Clubs, Parents, and Selectors involved in junior development. They provide a shared compass for the junior rider journey (U15, U17, U19). These are the critical progression years that underpin the development of our medal winning champions for decades to come. The principles serve as a touchstone to bring out the absolute best in Australia's brightest cycling talent.

Just as importantly, they instil the mindsets, routines, and high performance habits that prepare riders for the highest levels of sport.

Great development coaches set the bar high while staying deeply invested in the rider as a whole person. They focus on embedding strong foundations with a long-term view – producing riders who are fully equipped to win races on the world stage in their twenties and thirties, not just dominate their age group today. They are also deeply committed to improving themselves, actively seeking feedback and continuing to upskill ahead of their riders' development.

### In Practice

- Look for development coach/es that possess technical and tactical expertise with emotional intelligence, engage parents, understand education demands, and maintain a long-term development focus.
- A rider's long-term interests come first – if a rider's development exceeds a coach's capability and/or knowledge and the coach won't upskill; new support is the right call. The best development coaches stay ahead of the rider's talent by leaning into their own development and be open to mentoring.
- Progression through a coaching chain is normal, with different coaches providing different expertise and perspective at different stages. Matching coaching expertise to the rider's stage of development is essential.
- Development coaches collaborate well with Performance Support Teams, using strong planning and communication to deliver developmentally appropriate training and competition.

## 2. MASTERING SKILLS THE FOUNDATION OF EXCELLENCE

### Overview

Underpinning every world-class rider is an unrivalled repertoire of skills, developed and refined during the junior years. Bike handling, positioning, and race craft dictate how effectively power is applied, how efficiently energy is used, and how confidently riders adapt under pressure.

That is why the smartest early investment in the pathway is skill development – ahead of training volume, expensive equipment, or early results. Exposure to multiple disciplines accelerates technical growth and sparks creativity: BMX skills can sharpen track bike handling, mountain biking can improve road bike handling skills, and cyclocross can develop

## PURPOSE

The Rider Development Principles aim to give everyone in the performance pathway a clear picture of what matters most in the U15, U17 and U19 development years, and why.

They capture the core tenets of how world-class riders progress: the skills to be mastered, the environments that shape growth, and the experiences that accelerate potential. By applying these principles consistently across the whole pathway system, we can give every talented rider the best possible chance to go as far as their talent and ambition allows – whether that is state champion, national champion, or wearing the green and gold and winning on the world stage.

## 1. DEVELOPMENT COACHES WHO SHAPE PEOPLE & PERFORMERS

### Overview

The single greatest influence on a junior rider's trajectory is their development coach. These specialist coaches shape the skills, physical qualities, and tactical nous that underpin elite cycling careers.



resilience and adaptability. These crossovers give riders a deep and versatile skill set to draw on in later years, while also keeping them fresh, motivated, and prepared for the demands of long, high-level careers.

### In Practice

- Riders prioritise bike handling, race craft, and technical mastery in training and competition before chasing volume or intensity.
- Pathway camps to emphasise skill development and technical refinement under a variety of conditions, including competition.
- Coaches are equipped to deliver training sessions that support the learning, development, and execution of skills.
- Riders are encouraged and supported to engage in multiple disciplines to broaden and refine their technical skillset.
- Competitions are treated as skill and tactical laboratories, with coach–rider debriefs and post-race analysis driving continuous skill and tactical improvement.
- Competition calendars incorporate cross-discipline racing opportunities to stretch skill sets and race intelligence.

## 3. PLANNING TO PROGRESS – PLAN THE RIDE, RIDE THE PLAN!

### Overview

Progress does not happen by chance – it's planned, executed, and reviewed. One of the most powerful habits a developing rider can build is co-creating an annual plan with their coach, anchored in longer-term goals, not short-term wins. Strong, written-down plans set clear objectives, structure training blocks, balance cycling with study, social development, and recovery and review points – all essential in the teenage years. This process builds ownership, accountability, resilience and the habit of being coachable.

When riders, parents, and coaches align around the same objectives, the plan is visible and understood, everyone pulls in the same direction, mixed messages are avoided, and the rider benefits from consistent support.

### In Practice

- Riders are encouraged to co-create their annual plans with their coach that include short and long term goals, competition targets, training blocks, recovery, and balance with study and social life.

- Plans are visible and shared with parents, teachers, performance support teams, and key supporters so objectives and success measures are understood.
- Coaches and riders commit to regular reviews, using progression data and simple tools to track strengths, areas to improve, and adjustments required.
- Plans remain flexible, adapting to feedback and stay patiently anchored to long-term goals.

## 4. RACING TO PROGRESS – NOT JUST TO PLACE

### Overview

Competition is where training meets pressure – the arena that tests skills, fitness, decision-making, and resilience. It shows how well habits are embedded and whether riders can hold composure when it matters most. In the junior years, racing should be developmentally appropriate – less about results, more about rehearsing execution across different formats, conditions, and levels of opposition.

Over anyone year, a balanced mix of competition experiences is critical: events above your level (to stretch and reveal gaps), at your level (to test yourself and fight for results in the close ones), and below your level (to build confidence and practise leading). Junior World Championships may be an important milestone, but it is not the destination. Many Olympic and World Champions were neither standout juniors nor international medallists at that age.

### In Practice

- Competition is used as a learning laboratory – refining skills, tactics, and decision-making under pressure.
- Junior World Championship selection is treated as another development milestone, not a final predictor of long-term potential.
- Season calendars should balance events that stretch, test, and build the riders confidence in equal measure.
- Event include structured debriefs, with lessons captured and applied to future training and racing.
- Growth is celebrated through intent, courage, and tactical progress as much as placings or medals.



## 5. VALUING EFFORT OVER EQUIPMENT – BUILD SKILLS AND ENGINE FIRST

### Overview

World-class cycling is a blend of engine, skill, and equipment – but the sequence of development is crucial. At junior level, the greatest gains come not from shiny new bike tech but from mastering core skills, building base fitness, refining race craft, and embedding disciplined training habits. Riders who invest in these foundations early are best placed to fully exploit high-performance equipment later in their journey. At elite level, advanced technology becomes a decisive asset – delivering the marginal gains only when built off a strong, well-prepared base.

### In Practice

- Progress is measured through improvements in training quality, skill execution, and resilience rather than technology.
- Riders develop self-sufficiency by learning basic bike maintenance and mechanical skills.
- Investment in advanced equipment occurs only when aligned with the rider's development stage and needs.

## 6. THRIVING IN TRIBES – SQUAD ENVIRONMENTS THAT SPARK BELONGING AND CONNECTION

### Overview

Great riders rarely progress in isolation. Development accelerates when riders are part of a thriving squad and/or club that provides critical mass – bunch drills and racing, training partners, and healthy peer pressure all sharpen skills and builds teamworking skills.

The best squads and clubs are vibrant and aspirational, blending high standards with fun, trust, and friendships. They evolve into true “performance tribes,” where riders feel supported, challenged, and motivated to keep progressing. Beyond results, these environments anchor riders in the sport for the long term, forging friendships and networks that endure throughout the journey and well beyond competition.

### In Practice

- Riders are encouraged to train in squads and/or clubs that provide energy, positive culture, and quality coaching focused on skills and progression.
- Shared rituals – warm-ups, debriefs, travel, celebrations – are embedded to strengthen connection and accountability.

- Squads are designed to support riders through transitions, setbacks, and key growth stages, ensuring long-term engagement.
- A strong sense of identity and pride is cultivated so riders feel part of something bigger than individual results.

## 7. DEVELOPING CHARACTER FIRST – MINDSET, HABITS, AND PROFESSIONALISM

### Overview

Talent opens the door, but character keeps it open. Riders who transition from juniors to senior medal contenders are those who build strong mindsets, discipline, and professional standards from a young age. Professionalism is not just about results – it's about consistency, respect, and the ability to show up every day with intent.

Riders who develop resilience, accountability, and humility alongside their physical abilities are better prepared to handle the demands of high performance and the pressures of international racing.

### In Practice

- Training ethic is demonstrated through commitment, and consistency.
- Riders take responsibility for their development, showing initiative and accountability.
- Professional behaviours are evident in respect shown to coaches, teammates, officials, and our sport itself.
- Resilience is reflected in how setbacks and feedback are used as opportunities to grow.

## 8. WIN WELL – MORE THAN A BIKE RIDER

### Overview

Only a small number of riders will reach the pinnacle of the sport. For those in development phases, it is essential that “Plan B” is a deliberate part of the performance plan – whether through continuing education, vocational training, or broader interests alongside cycling. Carrying something else in your life load builds identity beyond the bike, provides perspective, and protects wellbeing. Far from being a distraction, complementary pursuits beyond cycling are proven to enhance performance – helping riders win well and sustain success over the long term.

### In Practice

- Riders are engaged and are encouraged to remain in school, tertiary study, or vocations alongside their cycling development.



- Broader interests are actively encouraged to support identity and a win well approach.
- Weekly schedules incorporate space for study or work, supporting balance and discipline.
- Coaches and mentors provide guidance that values whole-person growth, not just rider outcome.

## 9. PARTNERING WITH PARENTS – RIDING THE SLIPSTREAM

### Overview

Parents carry enormous influence on a young rider's journey. When engaged, supported, and educated, their role becomes a powerful slipstream – maximising efficiency, steadyng the ride, and giving riders the confidence to push forward. Parental encouragement help juniors commit to the process and stay the course, making parents a vital part of any annual performance plan.

As riders mature, the parental role must evolve. Early on, parents may ride 'close on the wheel' – providing guidance, structure, and reassurance. Over time, they 'ease back in the peloton,' creating space for the rider to take the lead, build independence, and strengthen the coach–rider partnership. Clear communication and process-focused praise keep parents aligned and ensure support fuels progress.

### In Practice

- Parents and coaches maintain regular conversations to ensure clarity on progress, expectations, and support.
- The parental role evolves over time – providing scaffolding in early years, then stepping back to foster independence.
- Parents are onboarded to riders annual plans so their support complements training and competition.
- Parents praise focuses on effort, progression, and consistency, reinforcing behaviours that underpin international success.
- Home environments protect recovery, balance, and wellbeing, giving riders the space to recharge mentally and physically.

## 10. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHOICES – NEVER GUARANTEES

Our pathway offers many opportunities and choices but never guarantees. No one can predict who will become a world-beater, but we do know the experiences, skills, and habits that optimises a rider's potential. Riders, coaches, and parents who treat every moment as a chance to learn and lay strong foundations give themselves the best chance of long-term success. Some days bring breakthroughs, others bring setbacks – all are part of the journey.

### In Practice

- Riders are encouraged to take ownership and responsibility for their journey early, working hand in glove with their coach.
- Every opportunity – whether a race, camp, selection/deselection, or feedback session – is treated as a platform for growth, reinforced through the language and behaviours of coaches, parents, and selectors.
- Choices about transitions across the pathway are made thoughtfully, with expert guidance from coaches and pathway staff.

