

EASTERN YOUTH CYCLOCROSS DEVELOPMENT FUND - HELPING THE REGION'S YOUNG RIDERS TO GAIN BELGIAN RACING EXPERIENCE

When Dave Copland lost his bike last year, many kindly gave money to buy a new one for him - but he found it again! Mark Wyer and Mark Fraser offered to return donations, but were left with a good chunk of money that they decided to put to use to help develop youth riders in the Eastern region. Mark Fraser put together a steering committee of 4 other parents of current riders, and they (Youth Development Fund Committee - YDFC for short) decided to use the money for something not otherwise on offer: to help youth riders gain racing experience in the spiritual home of cyclocross - Belgium.

The money will not go directly to paying for travel to Belgium - that will still be down to riders and their families. The YDFC believe it will be more helpful and valuable to pay for expert advice and experience on how, where, and when to race there, and other logistical advice and potentially training & preparation. The region's own Sean Dunlea benefited hugely from racing in Belgium as a youth rider, and he and his coach Mark Walker have kindly offered to act as advisors to the new initiative, as well as others who have experience of developing cycling through carefully chosen overseas racing opportunities. We are grateful that they are so willing to share their experience & advice to help develop today's generation of ambitious young Eastern cyclocross riders.

The fund will help to pay for their time and use of facilities to support families and youths as they plan races in Belgium in the 2014-15 season. YDFC expects that interested racers will travel together (along with families) in a group to races. There may be two separate groups: U14s and U16s travelling to different sets of races, according to the Belgian calendar and the most appropriate races for each age group. It's likely that racing visits will take place over the school Christmas/New Year holidays.

Criteria for participation are currently being determined, but the fundamental requirements of youth riders and parents are likely to be:-

- a clear understanding of how Belgian racing experience would help the youth rider's development.
- contributing some effort and energy to the initiative - e.g. what can you do to support your fellow riders and parents?
- being prepared to write a short piece after a racing trip, in order to inform and encourage other young riders.
- youth riders & parents alike acting as great role models for others to follow.
- a commitment to prioritising the preparatory sessions.

To get the ball rolling, at an Eastern Cyclocross race early in the coming season (yet to be determined), a short information session will be held to go over the objectives of the initiative, how to take part, and how it will work. It is then expected that the first session including specific information about the opportunities and races in Belgium will be held at Writtle College with Sean and Mark during October. It's likely that this will be combined with a practical skills session too.

Please keep an eye out for announcements about both of these sessions on the Eastern League's website and its Facebook page.

The committee is: Peter Hall, James Asker, Paul Miller, Geraint Davies, and Mark Fraser (all dads of current U10 to U16 riders). If you think you might like to help, just get in touch with any member of the team.

Geraint Davies

28th July 2014