

## **NEW RULEBOOK BANS CAFFEINE FOR HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETES**

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The NorCal High School Mountain Bike League (the League), which recently released a new rulebook for its 2008 racing season, is banning the consumption of caffeine at their competitions. This progressive stance is motivated by concerns for high school athletes' health, as well as in response to a tremendous surge of new caffeinated energy products and related marketing seen thus far in the 2000's.

Caffeine is a dependency-forming stimulant that is being marketed as if it is totally harmless; it is also being marketed for its performance enhancing qualities. Much of this marketing is directed towards teens and young adults. Over the past few years, the League has seen an increase in caffeine usage amongst its athletes; some even strategizing with timed consumption of caffeinated products on the final lap of the race. As an organization dedicated to positive youth development and the promotion of cycling as a sport, this is a performance-enhancement-based mentality the League would like to nip in the bud.

There are also health-related concerns associated with teenagers' caffeine consumption. Dr. Richard Stein, director of preventative cardiology at New York's Beth Israel Medical Center and a representative for the American Heart Association, said, "What five years ago was considered outrageous doses of caffeine is now well within the range of expected doses. We will soon find out the effects of prolonged usage in high doses starting at an early age. In the past, that's always been a formula for poor health and mental outcomes." The bottom line is that research has yet to demonstrate that a high amount of caffeine intake is safe for young people.

For Matt Fritzingler, League founder and director, "the conversation began when I was approached for the second time by 'Brand X'. 'Brand X' said themselves that youth, originally, were not in their marketing plan – but that 'Brand Y' (a leading coffee shop franchise) changed their minds. The marketing representative made it clear, they wanted "product in hand." I realized this is a lot like the cigarette industry was; they get the free samples out there, and then they can count on a percentage of life-long addicts. Though less harmful than cigarettes, the strategy is the same."

"Over the next couple years I spoke with many high school athletes and coaches. Some athletes admitted they were already 'addicted' to certain energy drinks, and I found that coaches were supportive of the ban. At the 2007 coaches conference we brought up the idea and found that we had tremendous support, and since then other audiences have met the idea with standing ovations."

"There have been questions about enforcement. It's true that we do not have a test, but nor can we afford a test for steroids or EPO. However, we have a 3-to-1 ratio of dedicated adults working with the athletes and with good coaching and education kids usually make the right decisions. On the other hand, those who try to get a boost, might get penalized if we find the wrong products during our random pocket-checks."

Gurana Root, Taurine and Creatine have also been banned. Text of the entire rulebook is available at <http://www.norcalmtb.org/race/rules.htm>

The League's 2008 race season commences March 2<sup>nd</sup> near Monterey. League events include a Coaches Training Conference, winter and summer riding camps, and the six-race series. Matt Fritzingler founded The NorCal High School Mountain Bike Racing League in 2001. The League is a non-profit organization open to students from both public and private schools. The League has turned mountain biking into a high school sport which currently has 40 participating high schools and has provided coaching and camaraderie to over 800 students.