

Sisters youth set free on mountain bike trails

By Andrew Loscutoff
Correspondent

Jacob Polachek has only been in Sisters for two years, but it didn't take long for Jacob to dive right into a new sport he's fallen in love with: Cycling.

While many other teens are chasing the ball around a soccer field or cracking pads on the gridiron, Jacob is pedaling through the woods, enjoying the freedom and thrills that mountain biking provide. He enjoys being on trails, not confined to lines on a court. Two wheels rolling along a single-track set him free.

Jacob tried the traditional youth sports — soccer, basketball, and even martial arts. None stuck with him like cycling. The challenges he's overcome have taught him how to be resilient. He has endured, learned how to push himself outside the comfort zone; something he says helps him with everyday obstacles. The closer he gets to his limit on the bike the more alive he feels. Jacob's self-inflicted tests of resilience make the minor annoyances others lament and complain about easy to handle.

The Oregon XC series is a cadre of races throughout Oregon in the spring season, wrapping up last weekend in grand fashion at the Sisters Stampede. Jacob raced them all, and proved his endurance and grit are second to none, becoming the overall

points champion for the series junior division. Not bad for a neo-racer.

When asked his favorite event, he noted the Coast race. It featured a track full of ups, downs, mud pits, and rooty descents. It seems as if Jacob is always seeking out a new challenge. Next year, he is hoping to upgrade and race longer courses, with tougher competition — a decision that others might eschew, in order to complacently ride their successes at a lower division.

One day, Polachek hopes to be a Category 1 racer, with the "really fast guys" he emulates now.

Why aren't more kids out riding like Jacob? He believes a lot of the others just follow the norms laid before them; they do baseball, and football, etc. His advice to others is to just try it, have fun,



PHOTO PROVIDED

Jacob Polachek has found his athletic niche on a mountain bike in the woods.

and embrace the challenge. His perspective is kids aren't willing to push themselves into discomfort, a prerequisite for success in cycling.

It's hard for him to find others to ride with. His peers aren't interested in pushing themselves with no extrinsic

reward; no one is spectating in the woods, no coach present to cajole effort, no compromising when the terrain puts a hill between the rider and the route home.

It's too easy to turn away from hard effort, to say they tried their best, and to give

up. When things get hard, what will be the outcome? Give up, complain, throw a fit? All of these are easy, but won't get someone up a hill and over a rock.

Polachek knows this, and has proven he's a top up-and-comer in the state XC series.

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