

Mountain Home 2023

The Eureka team was stoked for the second race of the season after their surprising 3rd place win at Spring Hill a few weeks before. Points are awarded for both performance and community service in NICA, so the kids put in tons of extra time clearing trail and teaching 1st graders how to ride bikes in preparation for the second race. Riley Chapman and Winona Milwagon were at the Passion Play every single day - both clearing trail and riding trail and they were joined by loads of team members over the weeks.

The second race of the 2023 NICA season was held at the relatively flat course in Mountain Home. Last year the Eureka team camped onsite despite warnings of "possible torrential rain." For once the weather folks had it right, and numerous members of the team woke up to flooded tents as the near by creek overran its banks. This year Coach Miller was not willing to risk a good night's sleep, and so the team changed gears at the last minute and stayed at a local motel after forecasts of hail, gusty winds and heavy rain came out. There was only one motel available at the last minute – and it was not ideal....we will just leave it at that.

The course was completely transformed by the night of heavy rain. What had been a relatively easy winding path through the woods the day before, was now a wet and muddy mess. The athletes had a lot of laps to cover, and the course got progressively worse as it was ridden over and over again. The coaches were concerned about the slippery trail and the tight turns around trees, but everyone finished safely with just a few bumps and bruises. Our kids must have enjoyed playing in mud because almost every rider went up significantly in placement.

Ronan Manus and Brayden Cox both completed their very first NICA race. Brayden had to start in the last row, but he passed over 35 people to come in 15th in JV2. Next time he won't have to start in the back. Chase Linder, Cesar Estrada, Oen Evans, and Melanie Smith all completed their second race of the season and all moved up in placement. It is incredible that only 2 months ago these kids could barely finish a 1/2 mile lap at the school trail. Now they are riding over 10 mile races in the mud with chaos going on all around them and they are rock solid. Jenna Erickson fought hard to keep her 5th place podium spot in the 9th grade girls division. She spent the whole first lap in 6th place, but was able to move up to 5th right at the end when it counted.

Abi Killion and Janelle Anderson both crashed but were able to put their chains back on their bikes while on the side of the trail and covered in mud. Janelle had to spend 4 minutes talking the Course Marshall into letting her back in the race because he thought she was hurt. Abi actually went OTB (over the bars) and then had a middle school kid go OTB on top of her. Abi says that finishing was the hardest thing that she has ever done but that she is so glad that she did....and we are so proud of her! Avery Meyer, the team's only female senior, also had a very tough race but still managed to keep smiling and finish in the top 10.

Amber Kirk and Aubrey Huntley hit the last turn of lap 2 and slid hard in the mud. Amber's leg got all tangled up in her bike and she lost quite a bit of her lead. Seeing the numerous mud pits ahead, both girls made the split-second decision to run their bikes over the next 50 meters instead of trying to get back on and ride through the mud. The crowd went wild at the cyclocross like racing. Amber Kirk went

on to win 1st in JV2 again while Aubrey Huntley got on the podium for the first time in 4th place, moving up from the 9th place that she received at Spring Hill. Shiloh Goodman rounded out the trio of Eureka girls on the JV2 podium – jumping all of the way from 8th place at Spring Hill to 2nd place at Mountain Home.

For the second race in a row, other riders crashed directly in front of Riley Chapman in the starting shoot, significantly slowing him down (mostly because he is very nice and stops to make sure that everyone is alright). In both races he was able to come back to 33rd place. Riley also leads the team in trail core hours with a whopping 24 hours.

In the more competitive JV3 division, athletes had to complete 4 laps. Kyler Erickson's dedication and training paid off as he moved from 17th place to 11th place among an incredibly fast field. Third year veteran rider Alex Tapia kept cool under pressure and rode a crash free race in the front half of the pack. Winona Milwagon had a much better race and moved from 7th place to 3rd place. She rode comfortably behind a Siloam Springs rider for 3/4 laps – drafting and talking and conserving her energy until her mother yelled at her to get going. Rowan Beattie has stepped up to the challenge of being in the harder JV3 division and has ridden to a solid 11th place in both races.

At the end of the day, the Eureka team defended the 3rd place overall title in the High School Division. They turned in a solid performance score as well as #1 in trail core. Most importantly, our athletes dug deep and discovered an inner strength that they didn't know they had. Every athlete was proud of themselves for finishing – AND they had nice exfoliated skin from the mud bath.

NICA races are a magical environment. Everyone cheers for everyone, members of different teams are excited to see each other and hang out, families bring food, and athletes are celebrated for more than just being on the podium. Our team is known for being enthusiastic and welcoming and always ready to lend a hand. At the end of the day our athletes were exhausted, but they still volunteered to help take down the course and assist other teams with moving their heavy loads out of the Pitzone. I could not have been prouder to be a Highlander.

A special thanks to our coaches Nicholas Anderson, Larry Harrison, Daniel Erickson, Ricky Waggoner, Amanda Haley, Betsy and Chris Gaines without whom this season would not be possible. Thanks to our parents for sending us with food and our school for sending us with a bus and trailer! An extra special shout out to our wonderful bus driver Jason Armer and his helper Angie (sorry about the mud).

Shawna Miller – Head Coach

9/27/23