

Louisburg Trailcats offer cycling option for area middle and high schoolers



The Louisburg Trailcats, coached by Elizabeth Ellis (center), is a middle and high school mountain bike team that competes in different races throughout the state.

Riding a bike is something a lot of kids grow up doing, and it is a pretty common site to see around a neighborhood.

What those kids or families may not know, is they have an opportunity to use that bike and compete and against other riders across the state of Kansas.

Two years ago, the Louisburg Trailcats were formed thanks to the efforts of Elizabeth Ellis, and her husband Chris. They started the team in 2022 as they competed in the Kansas chapter of the National Interscholastic Cycling Association (NICA).

They wanted to provide a different type of opportunity to the youth of Louisburg and so far it has been a success.

“It has been fantastic,” Elizabeth said. “It is great to see another sport option for kids in our area. To be on a team, but also complete individually is pretty empowering. We have had some pretty fantastic coaches and have provided great support.”

Elizabeth and Chris are two of five coaches on the team that includes Troy Buset, Galen Werth and Chris Zammit, and have worked with the current 9-member team.

The Trailcats is a Miami County based NICA mountain bike team for middle and high school age students. When the Ellis' heard about the Kansas chapter starting in 2020, they began the training it took to start their own program.

"That first year, we took the training to be coaches and we chickened out starting our own team," Elizabeth said. "We raced for a team out of Lawrence and we learned the first year.

"At the same time, we wanted to be a part of something that was closer to home and eventually took the leap and started a club here in Louisburg. Needless to say it has been a lot of fun."

The Kansas Interscholastic Cycling League was founded in 2019 as a non-profit (501(c)3) Emergent League of the National Interscholastic Cycling Association (NICA). They facilitate the development of high school and middle school teams/clubs for grades 6-12 and provide the education, training, licensing, and insurance for coaches and volunteers.

According to their website, they also produce high-quality mountain bike events and races that emphasize the value of participation, camaraderie, positive sporting behavior, and well-being over competition.



Logan Buset is one of several riders for the Louisburg Trailcats as they competed in five races earlier this year.

Elizabeth and her team has certainly saw a lot of success in 2022 and that continued this past season. This year, the Trailcats recorded five first-place finishes, five second-place honors, two third-place and one fourth and fifth-place finish.

The Trailcats competed in five different meets throughout the season that included Wilson State Park (Russell), Topeka, Lawrence, Fort Scott and Beloit.

“These courses are all different lengths, with different features,” Elizabeth said. “Courses were anywhere between two and four miles and you are trying to get as many laps as possible in the allotted time.

“We have definitely made a name for ourselves. We have a lot of eighth graders that will move to the freshman slot for next season. We turned a lot of heads I think. All the kids are competitive but having a great time. We have kids that are placing and doing really well and improving. They are also

making connections from all over the state.

Getting the program started wasn't always easy as it takes time to introduce a new sport to an area. However, for the Ellis' and the rest of the Trailcat coaches, it was time well spent.

"Cycling is a new concept in our area," Elizabeth said. "Not only are we coaching about the sport, but teaching the families about the culture that they never knew existed. That was the big challenge was just about slowly changing a mindset in the community."



Gracie Werth rides down a trail during a race earlier this year.

There are currently 10 teams across the state of Kansas and the sport continues to grow for those middle and high school riders. The season begins in mid February with practices and race weekends are held in April and May.

The team will travel out for pre-rides on Saturdays to get a layout of the course and then will compete Sunday.

The Trailcat team practices twice a week, whether in Louisburg or in surrounding areas. They are currently taking new team members

“Getting into the NICA, all they need is a safe bike to ride that is mechanically sound,” Elizabeth said. “I know not everyone may have a bike or a helmet, but we have had a youth that needed a support, and older cyclists in the community were generous and we have had bikes. If they don’t have a helmet and can’t afford one, we are going to make it happen to where they can compete.”

Ellis is looking forward to promoting the sport of cycling around the area and believes it can be something that is long lasting.

“This is a life-long sport as far as competitiveness goes,” Elizabeth said. “This is just one of those sports, even when your prime is in high school or college, there are competitive cyclists that competed well into their 30s or 40s. I think it is a good message to share, to be able to hop on a bike and exercise. Definitely a life-long sport.”

Members of the 2023 Trailcats are Logan Devenny, Logan Buset, Bryson Leslie, Titus Ellison, Preston Walton, Calvin Stuckey, Gracie Werth, Santiago Medina and Lucas Carlson.

If you have a child that is in grades 6-12 and wants to participate, contact the Trailcats through their Facebook or Instagram page. You can also contact Elizabeth Ellis at 620-224-6336.