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Front Page **NEW**

## Cycling growing in Copper Country with new team

By K.D. WARVIE, DMG Sports Writer

HOUGHTON — With all the snow still on the ground, it's hard to get excited about the warmer weather that lies ahead.

Eighty degree days don't seem possible right now. Still, for the outdoor enthusiast, that time can't come soon enough.

One group that is really looking forward to the summer months is the Red Jacket - BlueSky Health Cycling team. The team will take part in its inaugural racing season this year.

The idea to form a team had been floating around for a while. But it didn't begin to take shape until a group of current team members went to Marquette for the annual U.P. CycleCross Series race.

"I thought we really have to get this going," team president Chris Schmidt said of forming a team.

So this past fall the plans to found a team were set into motion. Sponsors for the team were found and a total of 15 people signed up to be team members.

This season the team will compete in a total of 30 races. Most of those races will be held in Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota, but team members may occasionally compete out east or down south.

Still, it's not all about the competition for the Red Jacket team. There are a couple of more reasons the squad was originally formed.

First was the chance for the members to get together at the events. This helps establish a camaraderie among team members.

And that is why Schmidt and his group formed a team instead of having a club. There isn't as much personal contact between members of a club as there is for members of a team.

"We wanted to form a tightly-knit group," Schmidt said. "We wanted our members to train and travel together.

"The big thing for us is being able to exist as a cohesive unit."

Schmidt also hopes that establishing a team will get more people involved in cycling. But he wants those racers to take the sport seriously.

"We are interested in getting people who are committed to racing," he said.

And being committed to the cause is key to increasing interest in cycling. It would also help Schmidt achieve his most ambitious goal.





Schmidt would eventually like to become affiliated with the governing body of the sport, USA Cycling. But in order to do so, the team must host one sanctioned event every year.

Still, Schmidt sees that happening sooner rather than later. He thinks an event can be held here sometime this year.

"We're hoping to host a couple of U.P. CycleCross Series races this fall," Schmidt said.

For now though, the Red Jacket team will just have to wait out the elements. Team members have been outside a couple of times.

But those days have been few and far between. Most have stayed in shape for the upcoming season by cross country skiing or riding a stationary bike.

Still, sooner or later the weather will break. And that's when the Red Jacket team's initial season officially starts.

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