

Why are athletes required to qualify for the Youth Elite and Junior Elite Nationals?

The short answer is *demand*. Participation in the draft-legal national championships has been growing at a rate of 20%+ per year since the first Junior Elite National Championship in 2002. In 2009, the race experienced its first sold out field and the next season USAT introduced “eligibility” standards. While these did increase the quality of field in 2010 and 2011, they did not slow the growth rate. In 2011, many athletes found themselves on a wait list because there was no qualification pathway after registration closed. One fair way to allow entry now is through a direct qualification process. This insures that spots can be earned “in season” and are available to athletes who may be entering the development pathway later than others.

Are the spots offered held until the qualifiers?

Yes. USAT has apportioned the qualification spots across four events in 2012. Those spots will be held for the athletes to earn at each qualifier. Athletes will have a specified time period after each qualifier to claim their spots by registering for the championship.

Why are some athletes allowed to qualify based on their 2011 results?

In 2011, USAT recognized the Top 30 finishers at the prior year’s Junior Elite championships with early entry into the subsequent year’s championship, based largely on the fact that these athletes had already established their “eligibility” and that early entry would honor their commitment to the event. It would also help ensure a high quality of field. As we transition to a direct qualification system in 2012, we have continued this practice of honoring top performers and ensuring that the quality of field remains very high. In addition, many of the athletes who have earned direct qualification will have other racing obligations for USAT in 2012...including the North American and Pan American Junior Championships. These races are critical to our ability to field teams at the World Championships. It may be necessary for some of these athletes to bypass qualification races to prepare for, and/or finance, their participation at the international races on behalf of USAT.

Why aren’t more Youth Elite athletes allowed to qualify for Junior Elite based on their 2011 results?

When we designed the formula that would determine who qualified based on 2011 national championship results and rankings, the goal was to invite roughly 30 athletes to advance. We first started with the Top 30 Junior Elite finishers and assessed how many were 19 and, thus, aging out of the division in 2012. What we discovered was that we had very few 19 year olds racing in 2011; so the returning Junior Elites claimed most of those 30 spots we were aiming to fill. We next looked at the Top 20 Youth Elite finishers from 2011 and discovered the over 50% of them were 15 years old and aging up. Combined, these two factors alone provided the field we sought for the initial round of qualification. As an added measure to include any top ranked athletes who had mishaps at nationals, we added the Top

10 nationally ranked Junior Elites to the formula. At this point, we stopped because the quota or exceed.

Will you adjust this formula next year?

Yes. We will analyze the age breakdowns and likely tighten the criteria as athletes will have had a full season to adjust to the direct qualification model and we hope to increase the emphasis on in-season qualification going forward.

Why doesn't your protocol account for the 12 year olds who are age-eligible for Youth Elite in 2012?

It is important that young athletes transitioning from non-drafting to draft-legal racing do so in a progressive manner. The progression USAT is building for these athletes is through Youth F1 and Youth Elite Cup races (not directly to the national championship without any prior experience). These races will provide a less intense, more forgiving environment than nationals to gain experience in the draft-legal format and will introduce them to the qualification pathway. Athletes who qualify for nationals out of these events will have proven they are ready for the championships and enhance the quality of field.

Can I register for Youth Age Group 13-15 now and transfer my entry to Youth Elite if I qualify?

Yes. We understand you may be anxious to secure a spot at nationals and plan your travel. Keep in mind that the Youth National Championship takes place on Sunday, while the Youth Elite National Championships take place on Saturday. The mandatory meeting for the Youth Elites will be Friday afternoon. Plan your travel accordingly.

Why isn't there a qualifier in my region?

Building a national series requires that we not only locate suitable race courses (no easy task), but that we find willing race directors, communities able to endure a day of road closures, and local amenities – such as adequate hotels – sufficient to service our athletes and families. Our goal is to have at least one qualifier in each “zone” of the country – East, West, and Central – until such time as these events have reached full capacity and we can add more. To have athletes actually experience drafting on the bike, we need to be confident that the event will draw a large enough field. Too few athletes = limited drafting experience for everyone. Similarly, having too many events dilutes participation and reduces the likelihood of a relevant draft-legal experience. Right now, the tipping point is four national-level events. Each year we will evaluate and add when and where we can. If you know of a suitable draft-legal venue, let us know!

Why doesn't USAT consider non-drafting results and rankings in the qualification process?

Simply put, draft-legal racing requires a different set of skills than non-drafting and while results may be indicative of future success in draft-legal, they are not enough to justify qualification to our national championship.

I tried to register for Youth Elite/ Junior Elite Nationals but the system wouldn't accept my USAT number.

USAT is using a new registration system powered by Active.com. Before an athlete can register for the "elite" championships, USAT must upload his or her USAT number into the system. After each qualifier, USAT will upload the numbers of the athletes who have qualified. If you have not qualified, the system will reject your number. If you believe there is an error, please contact us immediately.

Are there other National Championship opportunities for 13 to 19 year olds if I don't qualify for the Youth Elite / Junior Elite championships?

Yes. Athletes 13 to 15 can compete in their age group at Youth Nationals. Athletes 16 to 19 can compete at the USAT Sprint Nationals. And, athletes 18 to 19 can compete at USAT Age Group Nationals. The latter two also serve as qualifiers for the ITU Sprint and Age Group World Championships. There are no world championships for 15 and under. All three races are non-drafting.

What is a wild card spot?

USAT recognizes that some athletes encounter special circumstance that prevent qualification, but are otherwise deserving of an opportunity to compete at nationals. Hardships might include crashing out of a qualifier while in contention for a spot or having a family emergency prevent attendance at a qualifier. Athletes applying for a wild card spot will need to provide current benchmark testing data in addition to relevant race history and a narrative explaining their particular hardship.