

RAPHA ROADMAP

SHORTEN THE CALENDAR  
TRANSFORM THE TEAMS  
CONSIDER THE FRANCHISE  
CHANGE THE GAME  
OPEN THE PELOTON  
ENHANCE THE COVERAGE  
EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY  
BROADCAST ONLINE  
STOP IGNORING WOMEN  
RAISE THE STAKES  
TACKLE THE REPUTATION  
DIVERSIFY REVENUE  
SPONSOR DIFFERENTLY  
MIX LOCAL AND GLOBAL  
REDUCE THE COSTS  
REFORM THE GOVERNANCE  
JOIN THE CLUBS  
FOLLOW SOCIAL  
DEVELOP THE YOUTH  
CRASH THE PARTY  
CONNECT THE DOTS

*Rapha.*

# RAPHA ROADMAP

*A vision for the future  
of road cycling*

AN EXPLORATION OF the challenges facing professional road cycling in the modern era, and a vision for its future. Compiled with input from the most influential figures in the sport and informed by a thorough examination of cycling's position in the 21st century, the Rapha Roadmap was commissioned to guide the company's involvement in professional cycling and to spark broad, honest debate about the future of the sport.

# AUTHORS

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## A ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

CYCLING STANDS APART. It is a means of travel; a mode of transport ubiquitous around the world, unbound by creed or class or gender that connects millions of people to their communities every day. And it is an elite sport; a global entertainment industry built on an unparalleled history of perseverance, suffering and achievement. In sport and activity, these two identities collide. Arenas erupt on roadsides in Europe, the Americas, Asia and beyond as cyclists - professional and amateur - gather to ride and to race. Occasionally, they create enough noise that the world takes notice. Grand Tours, great races and gold medals are won or lost; new feats of human achievement are written into history and old scandals return to undo them; stories of personal triumph, collective commitment and sheer force of will are written and cycling's incredible appeal is restated.

Rapha was founded with a deep respect for that appeal. The company believes cycling can and should be the most popular sport in the world and has worked since 2004 to demonstrate its commitment to the activity, inspiring participation and loyalty around the world. We love the sport and have dedicated significant energy in our business to working within the professional sport to promote its growth. For 15 years, through sponsorship of numerous professional teams and dozens of individual elite riders at the top of the sport, we have sought to connect with and champion the best of professional cycling. Since 2016 onwards, Rapha has embarked on an unprecedented research project in an effort to further refine our relationship with elite road cycling and define our strategy moving forward. The Rapha Roadmap was commissioned to help the business understand the state of the professional sport, and inform our involvement in the future. We believe there is an incredible opportunity for growth in the sport, and this research is our attempt to chart a radically new path for Rapha within a radically reformed sport.

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We also want to encourage honest and open debate about the state of the sport we love. Thousands of riders within our community are deeply passionate about the future of the sport and with this research we have sought to find and reflect opposing views on the opportunities and challenges facing cycling. We hope interrogation, counter-argument, feedback and robust debate will reveal new, unexplored areas of contention and potential reforms inevitably overlooked in this work. It is our belief that we can help to create momentum behind that discussion, ensuring the voice of the fan is heard when considering the future of the sport.

There is one conclusion that echoes most loudly from our research, in interview after interview; professional cycling is broken. Despite the obvious passion of countless stakeholders in the sport, and the hugely impressive strides made towards modernisation in some areas, the sport has failed to find new audiences or inspire younger generations of fans. Cycling has struggled to keep pace with the changes that have upended broader sporting, leisure and entertainment industries. The basic structure, format and presentation of the sport has barely changed since its inception. It is regularly argued that those involved have stuck too closely to the sport's heritage, missing opportunities for innovation. And as a result, the health of cycling has been left to wither on the vine. As the same tired narratives are retold and the same events replayed every year, the sport has failed to create new stories and elevate characters that capture the attention of fans around the world. That seeming inability to evolve is starting to show in its audience. While the number of people on bikes is increasing in every major region of the planet, engagement with professional cycling is stagnating.

Rapha believes that cycling is the toughest and most beautiful sport in the world. That it should be introduced to more people and that in so doing our sport can transform lives. Professional racing is the shop window of cycling and at its very best, can inspire huge swathes of fans to embark on a lifelong journey through the sport. This report was written with that aim in mind, designed to answer the question of how the sport can be made more engaging, more exciting and more accessible to better connect with fans and better encourage participation in the sport.

In so doing, the Rapha Roadmap seeks to guide Rapha's involvement in contributing to a better future, one built on engagement with opportunities afforded by technical, commercial and social innovation to drastically change how the sport is consumed. The following pages identify the primary obstacles to the sport's growth and offer solutions that would radically reimagine its offering. Based on the latest analysis of cycling and other sports and informed by dozens of interviews with industry influencers and experts, it seeks to build on cycling's current position to create the environment for even greater reach and value. The format and structure of professional racing, the economics of the sport, its media distribution and broadcasting, sponsorship and ownership as well as amateur, club and geographic dynamics

will all be considered. It should at once offer potential routes for realistic, meaningful reforms across the sport and encourage debate about its future. We have conducted this research in the hope that we might contribute and by way of inviting much broader participation in that discussion.

Our research was compiled over more than 18-months and draws on the experiences of the sport's most established stakeholders. As well as interviews with current and former leaders in the sport (a full list is available in Appendix 1), it was researched by Daam Van Reeth, a sports economist at the Research Centre for Economics in KU Leuven University, Joseph Harris and Steve Maxwell, part owner of VeloNews and together co-editors of *The Outer Line*, a US publication dedicated to the advancement of professional cycling, and Oliver Duggan, Head of Media and Copy at Rapha. The recommendations for reform and commitments for action from Rapha outlined below are based on our research for the Roadmap, but they are not universally endorsed by all interviewees. Their thoughts were invaluable but these are Rapha's conclusion alone. The work identifies and addresses a broad set of problems for the sport:

- A failure to grow the sport as a whole, resulting in far too little revenue across the board and therefore a lack of investment in initiatives that could make professional cycling more exciting and more accessible to more fans.
- A weak financial model that is almost entirely dependent upon unpredictable commercial sponsorship, leading to a constant state of economic instability and ultimately creating an extremely poor model for meaningful growth.
- An out-of-date and regularly changing competitive structure, with an overloaded and overlapping calendar of races at the elite level that make it increasingly difficult for fans new and old to enjoy the sport.
- Outdated models of broadcast production, content accessibility, viewership measurement, and media distribution systems, as well as failure to champion characters and narratives within the sport on new platforms and a challenging media cycle focussing on doping and safety.
- Under-investment, under-development, and inconsistent focus on women's professional cycling and youth development programmes, as well as a staid approach to team and athlete management with a lack of emphasis on engagement.
- Systematic failure amongst almost all stakeholders in the sport to encourage and facilitate fan access and participation in the spectacle of professional cycling.
- A confusing and often conflicted governance structure, which does not have the resources necessary to oversee the sport and which has given rise to conflict at the centre of the sport's organisation.

Recommendations for reform of the sport are therefore focused on five main topics that seek to stimulate debate over its potential future; 1) alterations that could be made to the format and structure of the racing calendar,

2) changes that could be sought to better connect teams and athletes to their fans, 3) improvements to the sport's organisation and governance to facilitate deeper connections between professionals and amateurs, 4) transformation of the media produced around the sport to better broadcast the personalities within it, and 5) reorientation of the economics to reduce instability. Each of these suggestions has been designed to work both together or individually to create an environment for growth within the sport. The central findings of the Rapha Roadmap suggest:

- 1.) Professional cycling must fundamentally reform and shorten its calendar to create a season-long series of linked races that reward individual triumphs throughout the year
- 2.) It must find new ways to judge riders' success, revolutionising traditional models of racing and winning to promote combative and aggressive racing across the season in new locations and formats
- 3.) It must promote team structures that elevate rider stories, rewarding riders as much for their roles as ambassadors as athletes and moving beyond performance as the sole motivation
- 4.) It must become the most transparent, media-friendly sport in the world, creating content that champions the human stories of the sport at every conceivable opportunity and building communities out of fans
- 5.) The production and distribution of entertainment must be integrated into the heart of the sport, giving fans more access, creating more content and evaluating success by engagement
- 6.) Teams, events and stakeholders must pursue solid links with wider participation in cycling, integrating with clubs, infrastructure lobbyists and broader fitness initiatives and taking on leadership roles on safety and environmentalism
- 7.) Coverage of the sport must be enhanced with the adoption of cutting-edge direct-to-audience broadcast models and episodic, free-to-view content creation on a variety of platforms
- 8.) Women's racing must be promoted as aggressively as mens, with greater emphasis on building and promoting characters and commitments to parity to capitalise on a huge untapped opportunity
- 9.) Events and teams must urgently pursue diverse revenue streams, monetising opportunities around gate fees, marketing opportunities, merchandise, public rides, tiered-access content, fan access and more
- 10.) The sport must better monitor and develop its sponsorship proposition locally and globally, and the main costs associated with the sport - team budget, event organisation, television broadcast - must be reduced through shared resources and modernisation
- 11.) The UCI's role must be reconsidered in relation to the friction with events organisers as leaders in reform of the sport
- 12.) Long-term plans for youth development, including a radical approach to talent programmes that promote careers in the sport beyond riding must be developed.

In each of these areas, there is potential for Rapha to actively work towards potential reforms that could encourage change within the sport. Based on the research within this report, the business has committed to several major initiatives that will help shape the future of Rapha. As well as continuing to develop products and services that perfect the average rider's cycling experience, it will endeavour to promote the characters and personalities within the sport with major investment in its own media creation. Launching for the first time during the 2018 World Tour, Rapha's editorial content will go on to contribute rich, entertaining content around cycling that connects new fans to the sport in new ways.

Rapha has also overhauled its approach to team and athlete sponsorship from 2019 onwards, completely changing the way it has previously invested in the professional sport. Working with the most exciting riders, men and women, and combining with the passionate advocates for the sport, we will seek to create a new model for a professional cycling team that fundamentally changes fan expectations and ultimately the sport itself. The team approach will change Rapha's relationship with the sport to better promote storytelling and reform within the World Tour. Starting in the 2019 World Tour through a ground-breaking media partnership with Team EF - Education First, Rapha will seek to engage millions of new fans by creating and publishing the most innovative portrayal of pro cycling. The approach will see riders race beyond the traditional confines of World Tour events, exploring the outskirts of the sport as it currently exists to expand its horizons.

Following publication of the Rapha Roadmap, the company will make a sustained effort to lead innovation to build a better future for professional cycling, building on the research herein by inviting criticism and contributions from stakeholders and fans around the world and providing the space for those discussions.

In the sections that follow, the Rapha Roadmap will expand on the problems facing the sport and its position within an evolving social, economic and technological landscape, and offer specific suggestions on how cycling could evolve in the 21st century. Cycling must be revitalised to become more widespread and more popular and it must prioritise meaningful engagement with the audience above all else. A new direction and more robust viewership for the professional sport can lead to greater visibility for cycling across the board, and can help to draw in new participants. Cycling should endeavor to become the world's most inclusive recreational and widely accessible sport, in which all can participate. To do that, it must reform.

## 8 LESSONS FROM PROFESSIONAL SPORTS

Throughout the Rapha Roadmap there will be examples of reform in other sports from which professional cycling can learn. These appear where relevant in the text, but there are a number of key innovations that have broadly informed the research and our conclusions.

1 - Formula One has successfully reformed its racing calendar since its inception, evolving the structure and geography of motor racing to improve fan engagement and eliminate the inefficiencies and distractions caused by overlapping competition.

2 - NASCAR sought to reform the internal points system of its sport in a bid to encourage inventive tactics and enhance suspense to create excitement for fans. A new points system introduced to the sport helped keep spectators engaged over long periods of competition that has historically seen few points of interest.

3 - Major League Sports throughout the US have pioneered strategies to connect teams to specific regions and communities. Teams are moved to, or created in, strategic locations, chosen through an assessment of local heritage, the size of the available media market, local competition, and other factors. The result is invariably a sound economic base, contributing to their longevity.

4 - Media distribution, particularly via social media and brand-owned channels, is a major tool of modern fan engagement. The collaboration between the NBA and Twitter to deliver timely, exclusive content to the platform helps the NBA capitalise on fan engagement and reactions.

5 - In 2017, Amazon secured the rights to broadcast ATP events and NFL Thursday Night Football, while Netflix have upped their investment in over-the-top content for a variety of sports. These investments signal the increasing importance for cycling to be broadcast on the internet, supported by human interest stories and behind-the-scenes footage.

6 - The rise of women's tennis shows that equal pay and gender equality is achieved by a combination of action by race organisers, riders, and governing bodies. The reward of investment in opportunities for women and equal prize money is a healthier sport with a deeper talent pool.

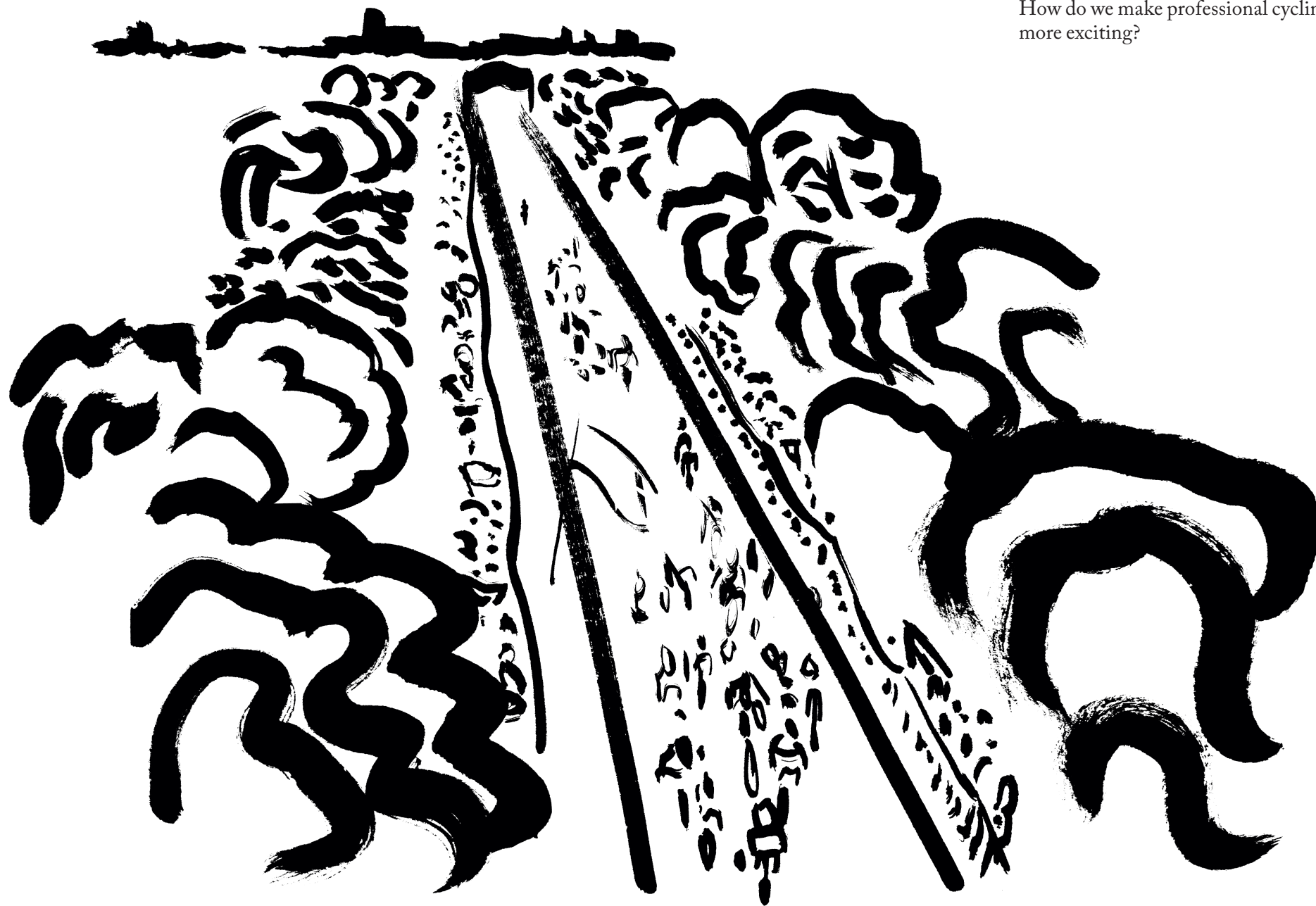
7 - The potential of merchandise as a major and consistent economic driver for teams, athletes and races, has been demonstrated by major developments in the marketing of on-the-road sports, such as marathons and triathlons.

8 - Streamlined broadcasting – with a regular cast of presenters, crew, and content segments – is necessary to create consistent, high quality broadcasts, as shown by the success of F1's race coverage. Compared to the current approach to broadcasting races, with race organisers having to coordinate their own coverage, a streamlined approach would offer significant cost savings in terms of personnel, equipment, and online broadcasting.



## TALKING SHOP

How do we make professional cycling more exciting?



PROFESSIONAL CYCLING HAS not done enough to attract, inspire and emotionally connect with new fans. It is run by ex-racers for racers and die-hard fans. It has stuck to its roots, placing too much emphasis on tradition,<sup>1</sup> even as other sports have evolved or expanded in new directions through reform.<sup>2</sup> There are a number of key changes, discussed below, which can be made to the professional cycling calendar, organisation, competitive incentives and racing formats to enhance its relationships with existing fans and to create a compelling narrative that might resonate with new fans. Rapha believes these changes will nurture more sustainable and longer-term commitments by global investors in key cycling markets.

In this section, we will explore reform of the most visible components of the sport; the races and the riders. Whilst the structure, economics and presentation of professional cycling are of vital importance, we must start with the sport itself - the calendar, the teams and the format of road cycling as a competitive activity. There are fundamental changes, advocated by some of the most experienced stakeholders in the sport, that could be made in all of these areas to make the sport more exciting and easier to understand.

Specific consideration of the format, marketing and broadcast of women's racing is outlined below and this research and its recommendations were compiled with the aim of parity between the two genders. The sport has the opportunity to advocate true gender equality and the roadmap within this document is equally applicable to men and women, including but not limited to an equal minimum wage for male and female riders. It has been claimed by those in the sport that there has been significant growth in the fanbase of women's cycling, owing to the development of teams and races within the sport. In more than a dozen relevant interviews for this research, it was clear that access and engagement remains a challenge. But those difficulties are not limited to the women's sport and it does not make sense to separate out the discussion of the sport by gender. Doing so may hinder the growth of both.

# SHORTEN THE CALENDAR

Professional cycling has one of the longest calendars of any sport, with no official on or off-season distinction.<sup>3</sup> The elite road racing calendar, including the best teams in the world, runs from January through to the end of October and with a number of active competition days unusually high for major sports. The top-level World Tour format alone includes 37 different events that cover a full ten months, equating to 178 racing days a year of spectator events at the highest level of the sport.<sup>4</sup> That annual offering has been more than a century in the making. The three Grand Tours – the Giro d'Italia, Tour de France and Vuelta a España – have expanded to run for a full three weeks each. One-day “classic” events, the most prestigious of which are known as the Monuments, and one-week tours have proliferated in the early months of the year (with the exception of the Tour of Lombardy, raced in October). Stage racing has been exported around the world as the Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) has sought to globalise the World Tour, finding (and losing) new investors to host one-week events around the world. Organising that eclectic mix of events into a single cycling season has been fraught with challenges. Senior sources in the organisation of the professional sport have described the ad-hoc bartering that has often determined the calendar of elite bike racing. A form of consultation takes place within the existing governance system, but the structure of the sport, with no single organiser or clear priority for expansion, has led to a calendar with no clear narrative and unnecessary complication. Races often clash, putting serious strain on team and organisational resources. Even the most committed fans now face a sporadic and overlapping series of events that have little to no relation to one another, making it difficult to recognise the best riders in the sport. Few other sports have this type of congested and impenetrable schedule.

The great races in the cycling calendar date back to the early years of the 20th century, when the pursuit of cycling was, as now, an exciting, yet accessible pastime. Some of the greatest tales of cycling bravery stem from this era and were told to the world through the pages of the newspapers which often organised the events, ostensibly to improve circulation. All of

the Grand Tours were established by newspapers, the first being the Tour de France, which was founded in 1903 by Henri Desgrange, editor of L'Auto (now L'Équipe). Such was the popularity of the race and the upturn in fortunes for L'Auto that the model was replicated first by La Gazzetta dello Sport in Italy with the Giro d'Italia and later by Informaciones in 1935, which founded the Vuelta a España. In the early years of the 20th century, cycle racing proved an irresistible draw for a public hungry for thrills. One hundred years on, the sport has become obese with bureaucracy, and the founding principles – to entertain – long forgotten.

It was simply a matter of time before someone attempted to introduce a seasonal structure to cycle races, and that came with the Challenge Desgrange-Colombo, which ran between 1948 and 1958. This attempted to arrange results from the Tour de France, Giro d'Italia and the biggest Classics to determine the best rider of the season and was run by the newspapers L'Équipe, La Gazzetta dello Sport, Het Nieuwsblad and Les Sports. Everything was going well until Classics specialist Fred De Bruyne took three consecutive wins. The organising committee, presumably concerned about the potential loss of readers, squabbled and the series was doomed.

Then in 1959 Pernod, the French distiller, expanded its involvement in cycle racing from its previous sponsorship of a season-long competition for the best French rider. The Super Prestige Pernod took the races of the Challenge Desgrange-Colombo and expanded the series to an international level.

Many of the riders in the cycling hall of fame won the series, including Jacques Anquetil with four titles in the 1960s before Eddy Merckx took it on seven consecutive occasions. Bernard Hinault won four years running from 1979 to 1982. Greg LeMond won in 1983 and Sean Kelly two years after that, before Stephen Roche in 1987. That year proved the end of the Super Prestige Pernod thanks to new French laws banning alcohol sponsorship in sport. It was already under fire, however, following the introduction in 1984 of the FICP world rankings, which later became the UCI rankings. Sean Kelly dominated these for the first five years, setting a pattern of mundanity compacted by a rolling format.

It was the UCI which eventually replaced the Super Prestige Pernod in 1989, with the UCI World Cup. This linked the Monument Classics and newer one-day races into a season-long points classification. Sean Kelly won the inaugural title in 1989, but the World Cup was treading on thin ice with its race programming, shelving historic Classics such as Gent-Wevelgem and Flèche Wallonne in preference for little-known new events such as the Wincanton Classic and the GP de la Libération team time trial. The idea was to fit World Cup races into weekend television schedules to maximise viewers while also growing the sport internationally.

The UCI called time on the World Cup and UCI rankings at the end of 2004. The calendar was a mess and team hierarchy almost non-existent. Out of the ashes rose the UCI Pro Tour from 2005, with a reformed calendar.

The intentions of the Pro Tour format were to make the biggest races a draw for the best riders. By 2004 the Giro d'Italia had become a race for Italian teams. The big names, meanwhile, such as Lance Armstrong and Jan Ulrich sat out the early races, keeping their powder dry for the Tour de France in July.

In encouraging the biggest riders to take part in all of the important races, the idea was to take the popularity of cycling beyond Europe while adding a stable platform for teams and sponsors. The two divisions of the World Cup became the Pro Tour and the Pro Continental Circuits respectively. All 18 Pro Tour teams were guaranteed entry to the Tour de France, diluting the power of the ASO which previously had autonomy over team selection. With the advent of the Pro Tour, the ASO was given just four discretionary invitations.

The Pro Tour structure led to further clashes with the ASO, organisers of the Tour de France and a number of the Classics, and also with the organisers of the Giro d'Italia and Vuelta de Espana. By 2008, the three Grand Tours had pulled out of the Pro Tour altogether, as well as five of the most prominent Monuments: Paris-Roubaix, Milan-Sanremo, Liege-Bastogne-Liege and the Giro di Lombardia. The disputes came to a head in July 2008 when the 17 Pro Tour teams taking part in the 2008 Tour de France announced they wouldn't be seeking licenses for the 2009 Pro Tour season. While they all eventually signed up, the damage was done.

UCI World Ranking was introduced in 2009 following agreements between the UCI and race organisers. Concessions were made: Grand Tour organisers retained the right to choose teams for their races and teams were able to choose not to race certain events. The Pro Tour was abolished in 2011 with all races on the World Calendar which count towards UCI World Ranking falling under the umbrella of the World Tour. Since then the World Tour has ballooned. The 2011 World Tour consisted 27 events; 14 stage races and 13 one-day races. In 2017 a further 10 races were brought into the calendar, bringing the number to 38. The theory behind the addition of more races is one rooted in making the World Tour economically viable to sponsors and fortify team finances. More races should offer a bigger platform.

The modern cycling calendar, which does not build toward a season finale, risks losing the interest of dedicated fans, alienating new audiences, and makes it difficult to maintain and promote an annual sporting 'narrative'. Professional cycling has never truly had an end-of-season grand finale event with which to wrap up the calendar. Traditionally, the last major race of the year was the Giro di Lombardia. However, over the last 25 years, a desire to shift the sport's focus to a World Tour points model led to the World Championships being moved from August (following the Tour de France), and into a spot just prior to Lombardy. The World Tour points championship has in turn struggled for credibility and the UCI World

Championships often don't feature all the star riders, for whom the Tour de France is a primary racing objective, and who essentially end their seasons prior to October. As a result, the crowning of a "World's best rider" and "World Championship Team" is all but impossible. Without a developing narrative and a more coherent calendar, professional cycling cannot build to a crescendo and the sort of "victory parade" or end-of-season finale that characterises most other sports.

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#### THE CALENDAR AT A GLANCE

The men's 2018 World Tour calendar consists of 37 races, of which 20 are one-day races, 14 are multi-day races around a week in length, and three are three-week Grand Tours - all told, men's World Tour teams could compete at the elite level for 178 race days in 2018, starting in mid-January and ending in late October. By comparison, the 2008 Pro Tour calendar, the predecessor to the World Tour, required teams to attend just 15 races (owing to disputes between race organisers and the UCI over inclusion of certain events in the Pro Tour), with teams exercising more choice in filling the gaps in their race calendars.

Aside from their designation as WorldTour races, there is a de facto hierarchy within the calendar, with the oldest races possessing a special status - these races are referred to as Classics, with the five oldest, hardest, and most prestigious one-day races referred to as Monuments: Milan-Sanremo, Tour of Flanders, Paris-Roubaix, Liège-Bastogne-Liège, and Tour of Lombardia. The last major change to the professional calendar came in 1995, when the Vuelta a España moved from August to September to alleviate the congestion of staging the three Grand Tours between May and August, and the World Championships moved from late August to late September.

The women's World Tour calendar runs from early March through to late October, and in 2017, had 20 events, 14 one-day races and six stage races, with 46 days of racing in total.<sup>5</sup> A comparable hierarchy exists in the women's calendar, with older races considered Classics and Monuments, although there are no races longer than 10 days in length. In 2018, no new races were added to the men's calendar, while the women's expanded with new races in Spain, Belgium and China. Both men's and women's World Tour teams will also race at non-World Tour races, either as preparation for bigger races, to appear in 'hometown' races, or due to sponsor commitments.

This calendar fatigue affects the sport's fans in a number of ways. The increased number of events, proximity between events, and overlap of events creates the risk that fans become overloaded and forced to prioritise what events to follow. In the case of television coverage, the length of the season, the traditional "long format" of the current races and the preferences of digitally-native sports fans, have led to a reduction in overall viewership, an increase in the age of the average viewer, and stagnation in the value of licensed professional racing content. Even in Flanders (Belgium), where cycling is amongst the most popular sports, viewership drops significantly as the season progresses. According to research by Belgian sports economist Daam Van Reeth, on Sporza (a public TV network), before the Tour de France, the average TV audience is close to 600,000; after the Tour de France this drops to 300,000. Before the Tour de France, 13 out of 18 World Tour races are broadcast (72%); after the Tour, only four out of eight are broadcast (50%).<sup>6</sup> Race organisers have complained of the difficulties of selling broadcast rights and attracting roadside audiences. Team owners, managers and riders have complained that the length and breadth of the calendar raises the risk of injury and detracts from the development of their own fan engagement strategies. Journalists and broadcasters have said it is difficult to maintain interest in a sport so over-supplied with racing that does little to add to the season's climax. It has been claimed in interviews for this research and elsewhere that organisers regularly give away rights or pay for their own broadcast,<sup>7</sup> that media organisations refuse to negotiate for access because there is so little competition and that events live or die based on the charity of a single sponsor. In several criticisms of the earlier Pro Tour – the World Tour's predecessor in name – top team managers such as Marc Madiot and Jonathan Vaughters cited the length and breadth of the calendar as being key reasons for withholding riders from certain events, skipping events, and the escalating costs of participating at the sport's highest level. The problem was illustrated by the rise and fall of the Tour of Beijing, a race which was added to the calendar in 2011 and was cancelled after 2014. It was added as a legacy to build on the 2008 Beijing Olympics and to build cycling's international popularity; however, the costs of adding cross-global travel costs, the late slot in the calendar (and the necessity for many teams to field tired star riders in the race), and the lack of sponsor interest led to strife between the UCI and the teams. These problems are even more pronounced beneath the World Tour level.

In short, the racing programme has become too long, crowded and unfocused. But there is huge potential for reform to move cycling towards a more contemporary calendar that makes the very fabric of the sport more exciting.<sup>8</sup> Learning from its own history and the successes and failures of others, we could redraw the cycling calendar to better engage a new generation of fans. There are a number of principles that should inform those changes.

Future reform must, in its most basic form, be based on making the

sport more entertaining and more engaging, responding to broader trends in audience preference and presentation. The calendar must therefore be shorter, prioritising consistency in the scheduling of events across the year to allow habits to form in a global audience and championing variety in styles of racing, moving beyond traditional point-to-point parcours to generate excitement amongst fans with a clear break from the past. It must allow a competitive narrative to emerge over the course of the season by creating opportunities for the best cyclists in the world to compete in the same races as often as possible. It must be possible for rivalries to emerge and play out weekly, rather than at random times of the year dependent on team and sponsor priorities. It must be easier to understand how the season unfolds, how races relate to one another and how fans should prioritise their viewing. A reformed calendar must elevate the impact of the most prestigious races, and it must discard the most irrelevant. It must be possible for a fan to discern the best cyclist at the end of each season, and for them to understand how the sport values in its riders' performances.

The format of races themselves should also pursue simple principles for reform, as has already been trialled in some events<sup>9</sup> with the addition of hill climb, criterium and circuit stages to traditional UCI level races. Grand Tours should seek to build on these developments to encourage more combative racing styles, with organisers experimenting with alternatives to the time-elapsed jersey model for judging performance and more varied stages. One day and one-week multi-stage races should follow suit, prioritising those strategies that make racing more exciting and bring fans closer to that excitement.

Further reform of the formats of professional cycling should find and engage potential communities of fans in under-exploited locations. In a bid to overcome much of the criticism levelled at multi-stage World Tour racing, professional cycling should develop and expand criterium racing to revitalise the sport and broaden the fan exposure, co-opting and expanding upon models trialled at the lower levels of the sport with considerable success. Shorter events fit the modern entertainment model. Criteriums and circuit races in downtown urban settings could provide spectators a live first-time or drop-in experience far more engaging than 200 kilometer point-to-point road races.

In addition, city centre lap race venues, and also cyclocross courses, are tailor-made for television production teams, closely linking the broadcast and human resources to deliver content more cost-effectively, in parallel with local prime-time coverage.<sup>10</sup> The predictability of lap times makes it possible to time the finishing sprint with the broadcast opportunities, increasing the probability of viewership, and hence creating greater opportunities for sponsors to engage with potential customers in a meaningful way. This type of racing should increasingly be structured around other types of entertainment, bicycle clinics, and product expos that can keep fans engaged throughout the entire race day.



There must also be a consistent effort to expand race locations beyond the traditional European strongholds of the sport, pursued with far greater emphasis on local preferences and cycling culture. All World Tour events should therefore be coupled with tourism opportunities and mass participation events to capitalise on opportunities for engagement, recognising that the combination of cycling as a sport and an activity could be a major driver for growth. Major event organisers have already experimented with tourism around key races in the World Tour calendar and these efforts should be pursued across the board in more diverse locations such as Asia and Latin America.

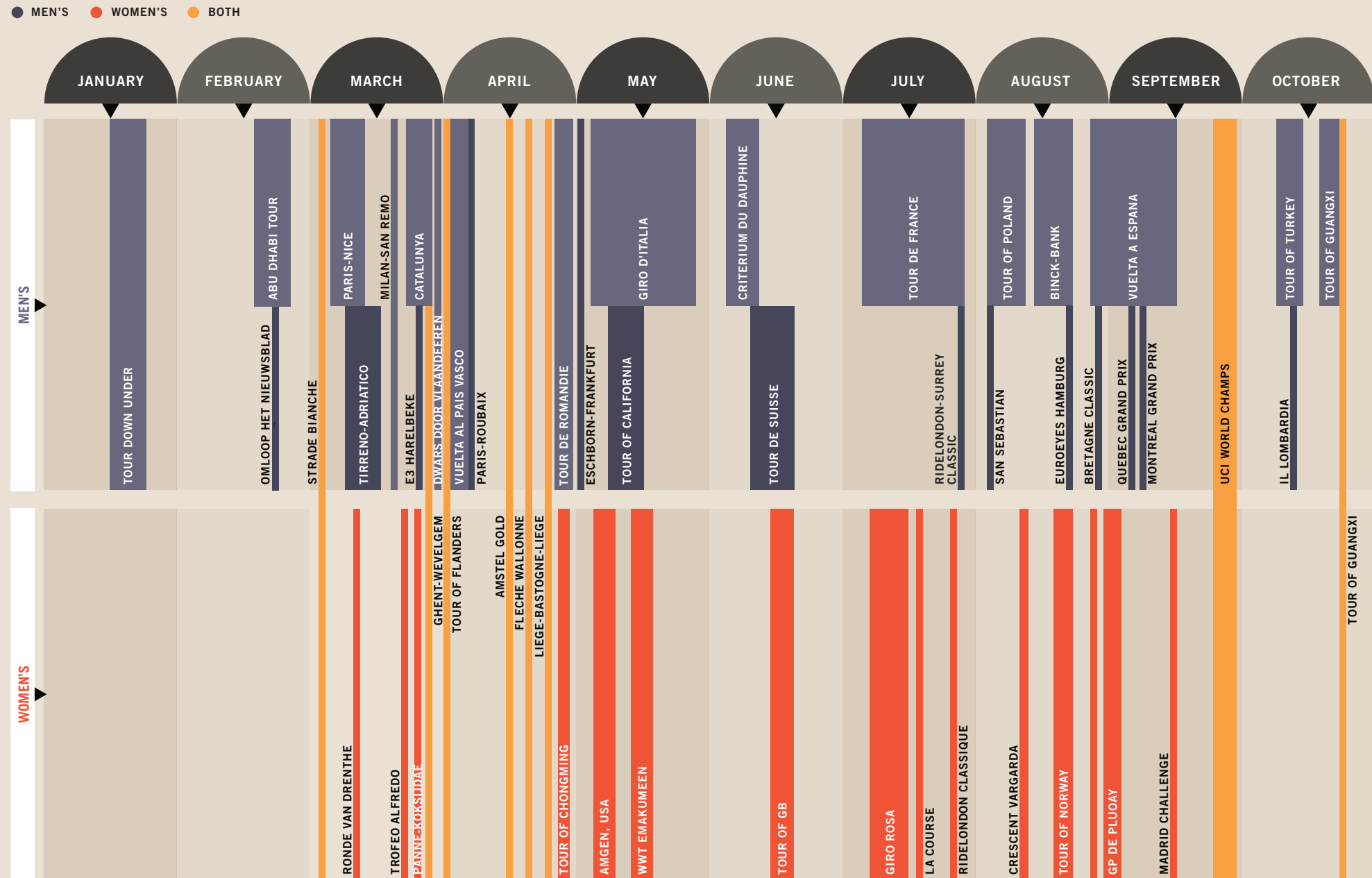
Based on the above principles and collating insights from each of the interviews conducted for this work, we propose the World Tour be split into two divisions, each with 15 teams, and World Tour events divided into two distinct racing series. Division One, comprising the 15 best cycling teams in the world, would replace the current World Tour status afforded to 18 teams in 2017.<sup>11</sup> Division Two would be made up of the next best 15, taken from the current pool of World Tour and pro-continental squads. Promotion and relegation between the two divisions should be earned through performance in the racing calendar. Division One teams should be obliged to compete in two series in the cycling calendar; a One Day Series - renamed the Classics Series - and a Grand Tour Series. The Classics Series should include 14 one-day races, held every Sunday or on alternate Sundays between January and May around the world, depending on logistical and physical challenges presented by geographic spread of races and frequency. It should include all five Monuments (rescheduling Il Lombardia to fall between February and May) as well as seven other one-day races located in different regions around the world; Asia-Pacific, North and South America, Africa, the Middle East and Europe. It should mirror the F1 model; creating a recognisable infrastructure for one-day racing that is truly global and informed by local character on each stop of the tour, touring the world with a consistent presentation and timetable. There should be added consideration of the route and format of each race, favouring a timetable that encourages competition across the series. Riders wishing to compete in the Classics Series should be compelled by the event organiser to commit to racing all 12 events; it should not be possible to cherry pick one-day races without incurring a penalty, thereby ensuring racers regularly compete against one another and building a narrative into the season. Points should accrue based on performance in each race and a Classics World Champion should be crowned at the final race of the one-day season, in mid May annually. Every race in the Classics series should also include an equivalent women's race as standard, junior events and a mass participation event in the same weekend. This should include a parcours with finishing circuit with ticketed entry. These weekends of racing and riding could be further expanded with junior and family-orientated events.

The Grand Tour Series, which would begin as the Classics Series finishes each year, would include the three existing Grand Tours as well as three optional one-week warm up tours scheduled before each of the main events. The Giro and the Vuelta should be shortened to two weeks each, and the Vuelta moved to before the Tour de France. Riders should not be required to race all three Grand Tours, but ensure they have accrued enough points to qualify for a place in the Tour de France, in which participation would be restricted to the highest performing riders of the year. A Grand Tour series would therefore conclude in August or September, with racing continuing at lower ranks, particularly in a second division of the World Tour, and providing space for other disciplines, particularly cyclocross and mountain biking to move to the fore during a clear off-season.

The current balancing of the Grand Tours - both in length and scheduling - denudes the Tour de France of its obvious position as cycling's most important event. Whilst most sports ladder their season towards a climatic annual finale, professional cycling has organised a calendar which bookends its sporting pinnacle with less significant races. In so doing, it challenges fans to endure the remaining events of the season rather than reward them for their investment in the year to that point. The Vuelta and Giro should therefore be shortened, running before the Tour, and classified as a form of qualification for the season-ending Tour de France, which raises serious implications for the timetabling of these events that are likely to be resisted by event organisers. By the same logic, the road race of the UCI World Championships should be cancelled. The event holds little significance for fans or riders and primarily acts to confuse the presentation of the sport; participation is not linked to performance in the calendar in any way, riders race for their country of origin rather than their usual teams and there is a general failure to explain why fans ought to care about its existence. Within the Grand Tour Series, further reform should be sought to make the events themselves more engaging. Each stage of the race should be capped in length to no more than 160km and there should be a minimum number of hill climb, time trial and criterium stages. There have already been attempts to shorten and thereby excite racing in Grand Tours stages in recent years and interviewees regularly cited these as being largely successful. The image was often raised of a swelling peloton riding for hours on end through the French countryside as the greatest advertisement for the failure of professional cycling in the 21st century. A far more varied run of stages within Grand Tours, including city-centre circuits, very short stages and more creative use of the mountains coupled with the traditional use of longer stages to build suspense and intrigue, could be an antidote. Race points should accrue based on performance in the Giro and Vuelta, dictating qualification to the third and final Grand Tour; the Tour de France. All 15 teams in Division One of the Grand Tour should be invited to compete in the Tour de France, but they should be restricted in rider choice to those

## THE CALENDAR AT A GLANCE

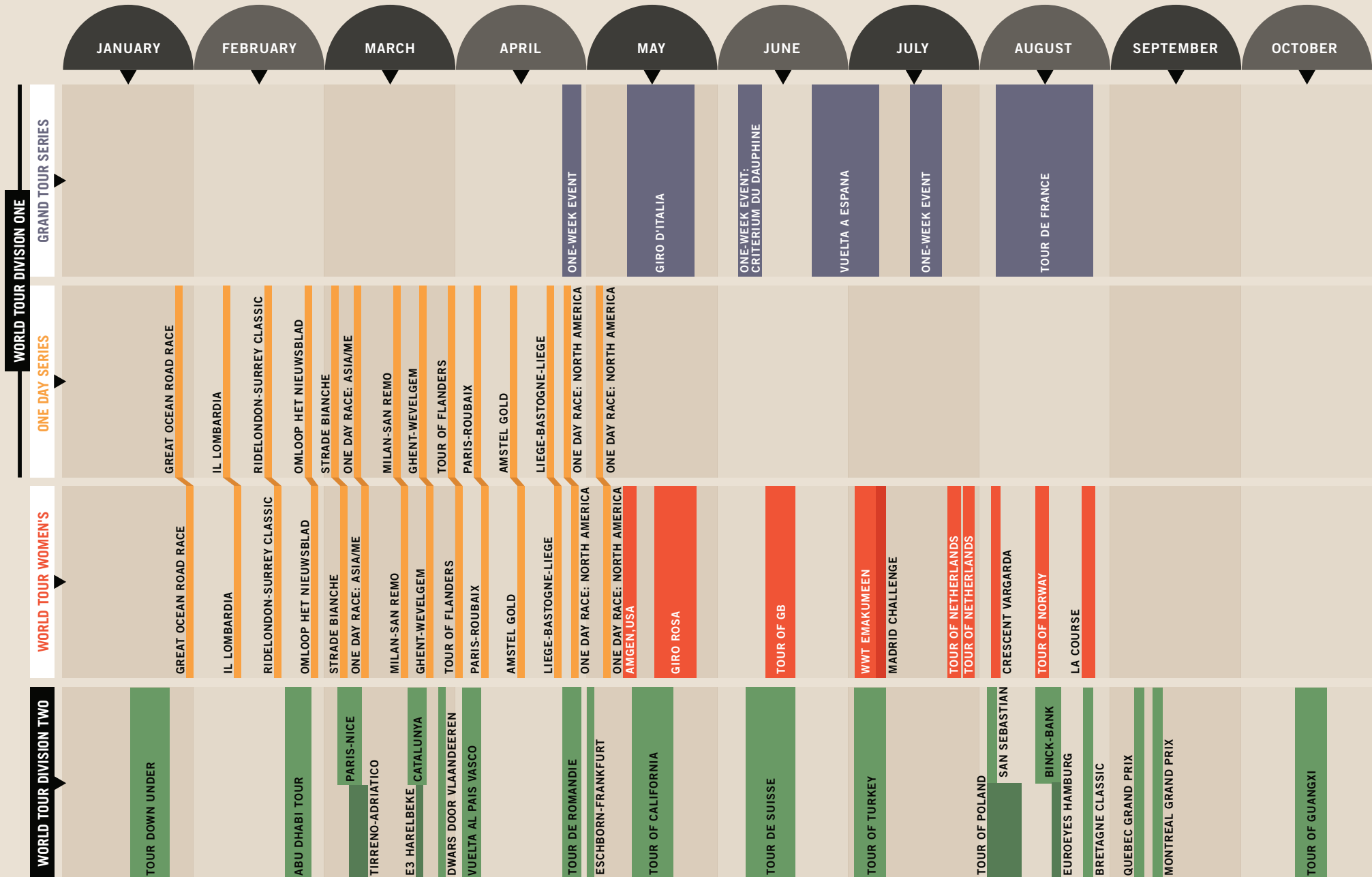
The UCI World Tour calendar includes 37 men's races with 160 days of competition and 23 women's races with 52 days of competition. The calendar of the professional sport is regularly criticised for its apparent lack of organisation, with races often overlapping and unevenly spread throughout the year and around the world.



## A VISION FOR A REVISED CALENDAR

Redrawing the World Tour calendar could introduce two tiers of racing between division one and two, and a further organisation between a one-day series and a world tour series. Learning from other sports, these races could be evenly spread and

performance in each interrelated. Additional opportunities for men's and women's races with accompanying sportives and festival arise.





who accrued a certain number of points in the Classics Series and preceding two Grand Tours. There is a fundamental need to link events within the calendar, both to ensure riders regularly compete against their rivals and to reward fan engagement with an ongoing storyline in the calendar. Using a points model to determine participation in more prestigious events, and ultimately decide champions, is one way of doing that. It may also make the racing itself more exciting. It is worth noting that it may be necessary in such a system to introduce some form of 'wild card' provision allowing teams to select riders barred from accruing points through injury or illness.

The time-elapsed model for awarding victory in Grand Tour racing has also contributed to a culture of conservative riding, in which teams are orientated around conserving resources rather than using them. This has ultimately dulled the spectacle of professional cycling. There should be a debate therefore about how the winner of the Grand Tour Series, and the individual winners of the three Grand Tours, is decided. It may be necessary to structure a reward-model that is based on more than the simple "least time elapsed in the race" model that currently decided Grand Tour winners. Such a model could use much more dramatic time bonuses or point tables to make the race more competitive. The winners of the Classics Series and the Grand Tour Series should command the largest prize purse in the sport and race organisers could also be required to maintain heightened safety standards, timely payment of prize money, and to cultivate associated lower-level races in order to maintain their privileges and licenses as part of this calendar.

The remaining events of the existing World Tour calendar should become Division Two events, wherein the second division teams compete for promotion to the top league and access to the Classic and Grand Tour series.

With a narrowing of the World Tour calendar, more focus could be placed on events designed to build a narrative in the sport over the course of the year. Where the current calendar consists of largely unrelated and unconnected individual events, a revised structure could see races paced and weighted to emphasise the rivalries and performances within the sport. An alternate calendar could retain a strong connection to the sport's rich history by maintaining cornerstones of the Grand Tours, the "Monuments" and other historically significant events but change where they fall within the year to avoid overlap as well as rider and fan fatigue and create the space for more radical innovation around the world.

## MOTORSPORTS AND REDRAWING THE CALENDAR

Nearly every arena-based professional sport follows a calendar that builds from an off season, through a regular season, to playoffs followed by a championship. These calendars aren't easily applicable to road cycling, but more suitable models can be found in the world of motorsports.

Formula 1's season is a calendar of prime events in which individuals and teams collect points, which gradually build to well-defined and highly anticipated championship. A similar model is followed by NASCAR, but in addition to NASCAR's prime draws, smaller events are held for drivers to test equipment, sharpen their skills, and build anticipation for headline races such as Daytona or Talladega. In recent years, NASCAR has experimented with an evolution of the tradition points-for-placings model, designed to create more compelling races and to develop stronger narratives (see next panel for more).

Below motorsport's highest tiers, there is a host of minor championships, each defined by geographic reach and car class. These championships often feature as supporting races for higher calibre races, and serve to develop talent for the sport's top teams - the structure of these championships, and their dual roles of talent development and under-card support, offers a model for the relationship between World Tour and ProContinental/Continental teams.

A new calendar could better geographically balance important legacy events in Europe with the possibility for existing or new races in emerging markets like Australia, China, Great Britain and North America. In its initial form, the calendar proposed above would offer considerably fewer racing days than the existing World Tour, but these would be more evenly spread geographically and across the season. (For a comparison of the existing and reformed racing calendars, see pages 30 to 33). The calendar's improved sequencing and elimination of overlap could also reduce the logistical costs and travel impacts on the teams and athletes. Flexibility to adjust the calendar to meet changing fan demand going forward could also be preserved. Some top division races might be added or replaced by other established or newly emerging events, in countries like Colombia, Norway or South Africa, which have or are developing strong cycling cultures.

The racing calendar beneath the current World Tour is also in need of reform. The majority of interviewees for this work complained consistently that sub-World Tour racing was failing fans and riders around the world, despite being amongst the most accessible presentations of the sport and a vital talent pathway towards the elite ranks. There is reportedly a failure in both the organisation of events from a stakeholder point of view and the facilitating of events by national and regional governing bodies, both of which are regularly excused by severe lack of resources. As a result, there is

a worrying decline in amateur road racing, particularly in Europe and the United States,<sup>12</sup> despite participation in cycling as an activity increasing. Between 2010 and 2015, the total number of races in Belgium, France, Italy and Spain fell from 194 to 161. This decline is especially visible in Spain where in 2015 only 20 races were scheduled down from 36 in 2000.<sup>13</sup> This is explained in part by the broader economic model of the sport, discussed in more detail below. A side effect of the reliance on sponsorship as the near-sole source of revenue has been an over-investment in teams compared to races or events at the sub-World Tour level. The elite ranks have largely been able to survive this inequality, albeit with chronic instability, but the appeal of team sponsorship opportunities over race sponsorship opportunities has created a calendar beneath the World Tour that is almost incomprehensibly complex, unpredictable and which sees events appear and disappear with remarkable frequency.

## TRANSFORM THE TEAMS

Beyond the structure of the professional cycling calendar, the format of the races and the crowning of champions, professional teams themselves hold huge power to grow the sport in the 21st century. But to date, evolution of the World Tour team structure has been limited. Whilst there are examples of successful outreach initiatives, an overwhelming focus on traditional models of performance and ensuring (particularly title) sponsors' return on investment has too often had a negative effect on fan engagement. There are several reasons for this. The economic model of cycling teams, with near total reliance on a sole sponsor for funding, shifts focus away from the broader fanbase of the sport and channels resources towards somewhat myopic 'activation' strategies. Short-term sponsorship deals, on which all World Tour teams rely for existence, are regularly cited as the single biggest barrier to executing strategies for sustained audience engagement. The prevalence of teams focussed solely on performance is also a problem.

These teams, who judge their success on results at one of half a dozen events in the calendar, create a "feast or famine" culture within the sport, where efforts are directed intensely at preparation around and execution at these moments. Consistent fan engagement, aimed at building predictable habits in their audience with the potential to be monetised, is sacrificed as resources are invested into these single moments of success or failure. The result of these phenomena has been teams with strikingly short lifespans compared to most other major sports and regardless of performance (see page 44), compounding problems with engagement by creating within the audience an expectation that teams will not endure long enough to make fan loyalty worthwhile.

Where growth has been achieved, it has regularly proved unsustainable. Team budgets for top teams have increased since the 1980s at a yearly rate of about 10%, in line with many other sports, but that growth has proved economically feasible only if the sport grows at the same rate. Cycling has not experienced the worldwide growth secured by other sports, and since team budgets mainly cover rider salaries, this means a sponsor has to pay, on average, 10% more on sponsorship each year for a sport that is not offering any greater return on investment.<sup>14</sup> The sport, as a result of this and broader presentational problems around doping, runs the risk of becoming less attractive to investors every year despite being a sport with a relatively cheap cost per impression.

Overlapping events, and events which are too close in proximity to each other, create further difficulties for World Tour teams. They are regularly forced to hire duplicate services and carry the inventory costs of redundant equipment to ensure they are covered for busy periods of the calendar. Team sizes have had to expand so that riders can be fielded in all World Tour races; team staff have likewise swelled to support the increased number of riders in line with CIRC-related requirements of support staff/rider ratios. Multiple team vehicles must be maintained to transport staff and equipment to each race. Additionally, the medical and oversight requirements have added to the administrative investments, putting even further economic strain on teams. These financial burdens may be impossible to avoid in the future, but their impact could be mitigated if the calendar is reformed, if alternate revenue streams are sought for teams and if teams were orientated to focus more on growing the sport's potential market, offsetting rising costs by creating more meaningful engagement with fans and seeking ways to monetise that engagement.

In seeking potential solutions to these challenges, research for this document suggests future reform of professional cycling teams must be focussed on creating structures within the organisation that 1) help to make the riders in the team appear more entertaining, developing engaging characters and personalities and seeking new ways to present them to the public, 2) better connect fans to those personalities in person and online, including a regular

schedule of fan-interaction opportunities as well considered as the racing calendar, 3) give riders a stronger voice in their own progression through the sport and its wider organisation and structure, empowering them to plan and broadcast their own career 4) reduce the reliance on sponsorship as a revenue stream by seeking alternate income models such as monetised content, interaction and better merchandising, and 5) promote values of equality and diversity, seeking to connect in a more significant way with the community of riders who see cycling as an activity and pursuit rather than a sport.

Professional teams should ultimately be encouraged to favour engagement as highly as performance to increase the media value of the sport, ensuring riders are linked to amateurs and fans as regularly as possible. There are numerous examples of how this can be achieved and many of the interviewees for this research said they were already committed to exploring some or all. Teams should, for example, be encouraged to introduce minimum requirements for riders' media engagement and participation in public rides should be part of a rider's contract with a team. Team affiliated clubs should be formed to connect teams to grassroots cycling, along with home-turf races and events hosted and presented by local teams. As it stands, there is a basic failure within professional cycling to create world-renowned athletes who can promote the sport to a broader audience than that which currently watches World Tour racing. The legacy of the sport's troubled history with doping and its general failure to innovate its media offering (discussed in greater details below), has been a consistent failure to find and promote the sport's most compelling characters. If the sport is to thrive in the 21st century, this has to be overcome. To make the most fundamental difference, access to the World Tour should therefore be restricted to teams who can demonstrate commitment to fan engagement, riders should be recruited based equally on their ability to promote the best values of the sport and their prowess on the bike and they should work to make communities out of their fans, rewarding their loyalty with more and more access and welcoming new viewers to the sport. The creation of engaging and regular content around the sport is vital and teams and athletes are now uniquely well placed to introduce systems that make compelling media and access part of the basic offering of professional cycling. In doing so, they could create whole new revenue opportunities, including media partnerships, content sponsorship and monetised platforms. Performance remains a major driver in fan acquisition and loyalty but more could be invested in the promotion of successful riders within the sport.

Where possible, it may therefore be preferable for teams to be rooted in a physical location, where riders could train or live together and where established communities could be linked to the team more easily. Taking steps toward a more nationally or regionally based model, helping to reinforce fan loyalty to their "local" teams, and setting the stage for longer-term regional

investor relationships. Today, most fans tend to follow individual racers, even as they jump from one team to another over the course of their careers, and as teams and sponsors enter and leave the sport. Fan club websites and Facebook pages exist for each of the current World Tour teams, but there is considerably more engagement in fan club websites and Facebook pages dedicated to individual riders on these World Tour teams, and many other Pro Continental and Continental squads as well. For example, Philippe Gilbert has ridden for four World Tour teams in his career (Francaise des Jeux, Omega Pharma/Lotto, BMC, and QuickStep), and his fan club has essentially re-branded itself to support whichever team he is racing for, rather than remain fans of his former teams.<sup>15, 16, 17</sup> A new league model could encourage broader geographic distribution for at least some of its teams in a bid to build more teams with a regional or national identity, in order to connect with new audiences in those localities.

It is important to acknowledge that any regionalisation of existing teams will be somewhat artificial, especially for those that are already successful and well-known around the world. But that process, despite its obvious pitfalls, may still be preferable to making no concerted efforts to bring elite cycling into local communities. In the past, regionalised support of teams has been hard to see in professional cycling. Stable and long-lived teams, rooted in a particular area, would allow riders to compete on a single team for a longer duration. Instead of following individual racers, this would allow fans to build more enduring team loyalties – as is the case in other team sports. More stability on the roster, and a more clearly visible regional team identity, could increase the level of fan awareness and reinforce regional pride, driving greater overall public interest in the sport as local rivalries develop and mature.<sup>18</sup> This momentum could in turn build valuation for broadcast and advertising rights, and grow overall revenue. There is an argument that future reform of the sport as a whole should include a compulsion for World Tour teams to have a regional base.

**REGIONAL TEAMS:  
LESSONS  
FROM NORTH  
AMERICA**

Studies of US major league sports – Major League Baseball, the National Football League, the National Basketball League, and National Hockey League – support the idea that regional fan loyalty plays a large role in the success and failure of a sports team. The formula is this: fan interest combined with an uptick in results equals a better economic standing for the team through better ticket sales, merchandise revenue, and an increase in media rights value. The leagues' governing bodies and team owners assess potential locations for their franchises, basing their decisions on the size of a city's media market, local competition, and stadium funding agreements with local government. There is little evidence to suggest that relocated teams retain significant support from fans in their former hometowns – if anything, the opposite is true – however, teams can earn new fans with a well-managed move that is underpinned by a strong economic base and local media coverage. The move of the Seattle Sonics basketball team to Oklahoma City is an archetypal example of this: the move created much animus in Seattle, but the Oklahoma City Thunder proved adept at creating loyalty and community among fans in an otherwise underserved market.

Where regionalisation is impossible, the loyalty garnered by local identity could be substituted for loyalty earned with commitment to a single, well broadcast and rigorously-tested purpose for the team. "Single-issue" teams, known as much for their mission statement as their performance, have already been seen in professional cycling. Teams like Orica-Scott in Australia, Dimension Data in South Africa or Euskatel Euskadi in Spain, where regional affinity has been superseded by a global appeal born from the teams' conduct and purpose, have already demonstrated the potential of this approach.<sup>19</sup> Dimension Data was able to create an air of authenticity through their commitment to a charitable cause, providing a rallying point for fans and sponsors which helps to anchor marketing activation for uniquely African products and provides affiliated sponsors with access to an easily activated target market. For example, Deloitte Consulting's partnership with Dimension Data is providing that firm with valuable marketing presence on the African continent – one of the fastest growing consulting markets in the world.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, brands which co-sponsor Lotto NL and Orica capitalise on similar opportunities to reach target markets in the Benelux region and Australasian regions, respectively. Their focus on issues beyond performance builds sustainability, when managed in a responsible and professional manner, building the connection with fans who take emotional ownership: "This is my team."<sup>21</sup>

There are further opportunities for radical innovation in teams to increase opportunities to engage new fans. Historically, there has been very little

encouragement of multi-disciplined riding and genders have been kept separate. Both of these trends should be challenged. Rather than erecting barriers between the different disciplines of the sport by sticking rigorously to road races and designing events in isolation from other styles of cycling, teams and athletes should reach further into a variety of racing styles. The most engaging athletes in professional cycling (see page 71) are almost all multi-disciplined, competing regularly in cyclocross, mountain biking and other events. In doing so, they have a far greater potential fan base and the opportunity to promote road cycling to unfamiliar audiences. Teams have for the most part done little to capitalise on that potential, regularly prioritising the team's road scheduling over a varied and exciting individual calendar. There is therefore an opportunity to create a different team model that makes a collective of these athletes from across disciplines and allows each to develop an audience that transcends the boundaries of the road racing community.

Beyond the occasional experiment, there has been a similar reluctance within the World Tour to develop men's and women's squads within the same team. Team Sunweb and Movistar have challenged that trend, with the former launching a women's team in 2017 and the latter committing to do the same for the 2018 season. Mithleton Scott, Lotto-Soudal, FDJ and Trek have also made similar commitments to women's teams during and prior to the 2018 season. There are competing theories as to how successful this model will be for the teams and athletes involved, and questions as to whether coupling men's and women's squads will grow their relative areas of the sport in any meaningful way. There is at least a clear opportunity for collaboration and the sharing of best practice. CANYON//SRAM, for example, has developed and executed one of the most successful models of social media engagement anywhere in professional cycling and the internal structures in place could be adopted in the men's peloton with ease to boost athlete profiles across the sport. The team has also embraced social media's power to drive community engagement, driving participation in Rapha Women's 100 rides around the world. Likewise, the "single issue" team model has not been explored within the women's sport and the introduction of practices developed at Dimension Data or Orica Scott in recent years could introduce another access point in the women's side of the sport.



# CONSIDER THE FRANCHISE

Professional cycling's competitive structure – how teams are organised to compete with one another – must also be revised and modernised. Many of the sport's economic risks could be eliminated if there was greater confidence that individual teams would be sustainable over the longer term. Economic stability could improve, sponsor interest could grow and stabilise, and teams could know that they had a guaranteed place on the starting line of every top race if the structure and economics of cycling teams were reimagined. Other sports offer numerous models for greater structural stability and cycling could learn from the economic engine which drives almost every other major team-sport league.

There is an argument regularly offered that professional cycling should be franchised in the manner of a modern sports league, and adopt a new competitive structure to encourage competition for team and event licenses. It could easily follow the above recommendation of a top and second division of approximately 15 teams each, with licenses awarded on fixed-term or rolling contracts around the world to incorporate sponsorship opportunities along with other revenue streams to create a pooled income to stabilise the competitive model.

Currently, the 37 events in the World Tour put a huge strain on the capacities and the endurance of the 18 teams, which are expected to field a competitive squad at each event. With rosters now typically comprised of 25 to 30 riders, teams expected to field up to eight riders in an event, and with so many overlapping races, the teams are often overwhelmed.<sup>22</sup> The logistical and administrative challenges, the shortage of qualified team leadership personnel, and simple athlete exhaustion<sup>23</sup> can lead to situations where the whole sport starts to break down.<sup>24</sup> A franchise model within professional cycling, guaranteeing participation in the most prestigious races and exchanging broader league support for certain commitments from the team, has been proposed in the past as a potential solution to those challenges. A franchise structure could also more easily facilitate a system of relegation and promotion similar to other franchised league models, wherein a lower-performing team might be dropped to the second-division in favour

of up-and-coming or new teams. Any such franchise system would need to follow either an American or European structure. In America lower-tier teams are only able to join if they 'buy' a franchise that becomes available or if the number of franchises is expanded. The European structure favours promotion and relegation, based for the most part on performance. Franchises have obvious fan appeal and would help regulate performance in the sport. Races in a franchised league could typically invite approximately 20 teams, thus allowing five second division teams the opportunity to compete in top races as invited wildcard entries. In turn, this would provide valuable experience and points-scoring opportunities to trigger possible divisional promotion.

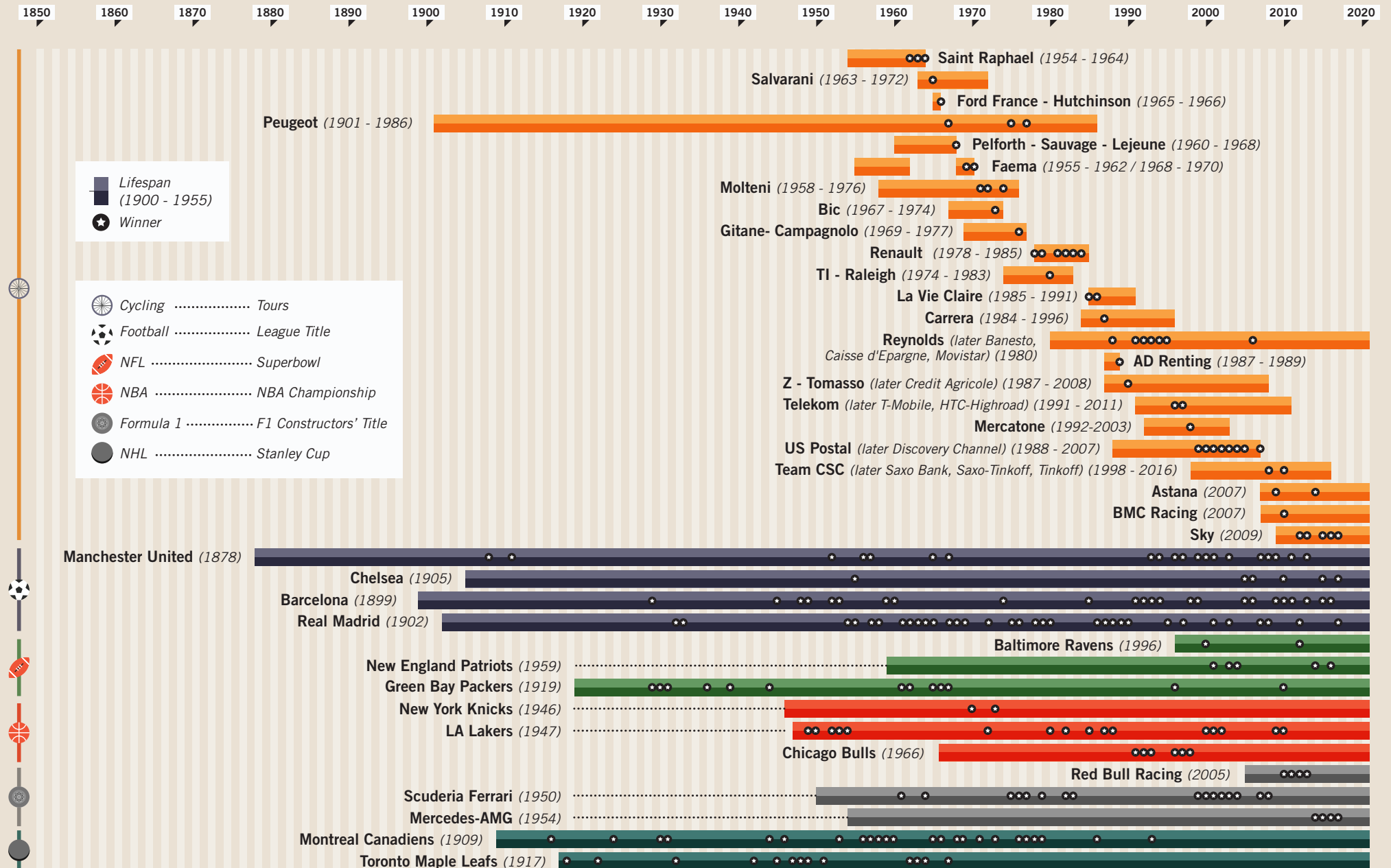
Depending upon the sport's market growth and the supply of top-level professional talent, it might be possible for the number of franchised top division teams to then increase – just as there have been "expansion teams" in other professional sports leagues in a bid to broaden the sport's geographic footprint.<sup>25, 26</sup> A second division could also benefit from some elements of a franchise structure: a competitive system by which aspiring new teams could enter the system and replace bottom-end franchises which were not performing strongly enough. This would allow another route for new teams to work their way into the league, doing so would also help to establish a clear talent pathway into the sport, something which is lacking in road cycling. The development of a more "sequential" type of calendar could equally raise the value of lower-level events, invigorate the competitive environment for athletes and teams, and thereby increase the incentive for broadcasters to televise a more diverse selection of events.

In this model, each team<sup>27</sup> could be capped at 20 riders, implying a top league with about 300 riders<sup>28</sup> as opposed to today's World Tour contingent of close to 500 pro riders.<sup>29</sup> Teams could be expected to enter their top riders in as many of the calendar events as possible, helping to build greater fan interest in the sport through continuity of key athletes from race to race. There could be fewer spots available at the top level of bike racing, but those spots – for both teams and for riders – would be much more prestigious, and together with the other changes proposed here, would enable team franchise values, event income and rider salaries to increase. Renewed emphasis on developing the second-tier teams and supporting races would also help to diversify the excitement level and reach of the sport, while preserving much of its heritage by giving fans a narrative that extends beyond one level of performance or one season of the sport.

A new league could also provide an opportunity to put greater emphasis on rider safety, including the potential for franchise restrictions on racing conduct, including a reduced peloton size with fewer riders per team in all events and the expectation of increased investment by organisers in security. Other specific rider safety improvements could include stricter race neutralisation and bad weather protocols (or stricter application of World

## LIFESPAN OF TEAMS COMPARED

The instability of investment in professional cycling often sees teams with strikingly short lifespans compared to most other developed sports. Despite general classification victory in the Tour de France, many of the biggest teams in the sport existed for just a few years before changing their name or dissolving completely.



Tour-level protocols); the appointment of more experienced safety managers at events independent of the UCI and the race organisers to monitor and ensure required safety standards and regulations; race marshalling by more highly-trained and skilled personnel, and higher minimum experience requirements for both race automobile and motorcycle riders.<sup>30</sup>

And yet, there remain almost insurmountable objections to adopting a franchise model in professional cycling. There are few comparable international models from which to learn, with the majority of examples around the world limited to domestic leagues, and there has been considerable resistance from cycling's biggest stakeholders. Formula One is one example of an international franchise, proving it is possible to build a sustainable, profitable league structure in sports that transcend borders. Organisers, governance officials and team owners have all said a franchised league could not be created; the revenue streams are too small, the organisation too fractured and the incentives too few. When a franchise system is running, however, the opposite is likely to be the case - revenue streams would become more valuable, organisational structure would become stronger and as a result, incentives would be created. Stakeholders have confused the goals of a franchise system with the prerequisites needed to create one.

## CHANGE THE GAME

A new and easier-to-follow season-long programme of team and individual honours and awards must also be developed. Other successful league sports have clearly-defined seasons which lead up to a climactic season-ending, team-focused championship, with “most valuable player” and other key-stone individual awards as the hallmarks of sporting achievement. The reforms to the calendar and team organisation of the sport outlined above will help to build that narrative, but the prize structure of the sport must also be addressed. Professional cycling's current points system has changed often and become almost incomprehensible, creating a sporting model in which season-long performance is all but irrelevant. Building an equitable and meaningful points system to accurately track overall performance in

cycling is a challenging task, but rather than evolving in a coherent and easy-to-follow formula allowing race fans to track their favourite riders and teams, the system has changed frequently and unpredictably, leaving most fans confused at best. Certain races end up being worth more points than others, individual rider points accumulate at different rates for the World Tour and the UCI ranked races, and numerous, highly-subjective judgments must be made. The value of support “domestique” riders and most of the team-related aspects of the sport tend to be lost in any points ranking system.<sup>31</sup> While cycling participants and observers frequently emphasise the team nature of the sport, in reality, few fans pay attention to team performance or honours. For individual riders, points awards pale in comparison to winning races. Several past and present World Tour riders interviewed for this research said the points model actively promoted a fractured sport, introducing unnecessary complexity and fostering discord within teams and between stakeholders.

The complexities built into the sport make it difficult for a non-cycling sports fan to differentiate between the winner of the Tour de France, or the World Champion, without explanation. Those complexities also represent one of the sport's best opportunities to reinvent its image: great riders can win great races, but professional cycling needs to supplement this with a clearer and more widely-promoted system of recognising individual and team greatness which can build to a climactic season-ending conclusion. One attempt to do so, which experimented with a greater focus on team play than individual winners, was the “Hammer” racing format. This style of racing, developed by the team's advocacy organisation, Velon, mixes three different races over three days to determine a final winning team – where one team wins the overall race as the result of a cohesive team effort. This series has so far only been run a handful of times, with mixed results – due to confusion over how points are calculated, and the unfamiliarity of fans as to how the points were being scored on the road.<sup>32</sup> It remains uncertain if this format will be successful, but it represents one of many new ideas which could open the sport to new audiences.

There is, however, a fundamental debate about whether the sport should elevate the importance of teams within its points structure. In pursuing the ultimate goal of growing the fan base, it may be more appropriate to seek a simpler system that champions individual performance within races and across the season. Organisers could, for example, use a new points system to revise the awards associated with Grand Tours and one-day events to incentivise combative and explosive racing, creating more opportunities for individual success and reducing the chance for domination by a single team. It has been suggested that the “time elapsed” model for determining the winner of Grand Tours does little to create compelling entertainment in the modern era. Race organisers should be encouraged to experiment with alternate methods of judging success. In the past, time bonuses have

mostly been used for flat stage finishes or alongside intermediate points sprints, and hence favored the sprinters hunting prizes like the Green Jersey. However, upgrading the bonuses to 15, or even 25 seconds, and stripping away the sprinters' points, could rewrite the stage racing script. Placing these time bonuses at mid-points of climbs, or along tough stretches of traditionally long and monotonous transition stages would give teams additional incentives to attack the race, raising the excitement of individual stages and drawing more fans into the season-long points narrative. With a revised Grand Tour and Classics series calendar, it may be possible to increase engagement with the sport's most historic races by moving away from traditional racing. A revised points structure linked to the above calendar reforms could also be used to guarantee particular elements of sporting entertainment are present throughout the season; rivalries between top riders and peaks and troughs of performance could be illustrated far more consistently than in the current system.

An appropriately scaled points system could underscore and reinforce the sporting narrative and emotional character of the calendar, and ultimately lure more fans into the sport.<sup>33, 34</sup> The Tour de France will always be a major event, and individuals will of course continue to win races, but by placing an increased focus on combative riding rather than conservative team performances, on a series champion rather than one-off performances, the sport can redefine its competitive model and enhance its marketability. The exact composition and structure of a reformed points system that elevates the appeal outlined above is an urgent question for reform of the sport.

New incentives for participation could also be used to ensure the top talent of each team is a constant at every race. For example, points reform could be used to link participation in a series of events throughout the calendar to qualification for the Tour de France. Whilst it is preferable that all World Tour teams compete in the Tour, it may be possible to use a points system to restrict the riders they can select for their squads to those who won a certain number of points in races earlier in the calendar. Doing so would ensure regular participation of star athletes in a varied programme of events, and would better link performance across races. Further reform could see points used to compel riders to compete in a minimum number of events in order to qualify for individual awards or participation in the most prestigious races. Points standings, regularly refreshed and widely published, would also help to build a season-long narrative for fans, creating additional talking points around the sport.

A significant increase in prize money for series results could also help develop engagement with the sport. Such a change would create huge incentives for the sport's sponsors to become more engaged in building the profile of the series and rapidly shift the focus of both the athletes and the fans. Incentivising season-long participation in a series both encourages regular rider and team performance helps build a habit-forming predictability

#### **NASCAR, BASKETBALL AND PLAYING FOR POINTS**

The points system used by NASCAR, which helped to build the popularity of the sport to record height in the '80s and 90s, is an example of how points systems can create compelling competition and boost fan engagement. NASCAR has expanded its calendar in recent years, and encountered some of the same problems found in professional cycling: fans fatigue at too long a season, too many events of similar character, or dead-rubber races if a champion emerges early in the year. To counter these critiques, NASCAR introduced a 'playoff' system in 2012, and in 2017 recast the points structure - some races are split into 'stages', essentially breaking races into three mini-races, giving more opportunities for drivers to score points, encouraging inventive tactics, and creating more excitement for fans. Some have critiqued the changes to NASCAR's point structure, but as popular driver Danny Hamlin has put it, "you don't need to know how to build a watch. You just need to know what time it is." As in road racing, drivers cannot perform well in the standings without the dedicated support of a talented team - although in cycling the team's supporting workers ride alongside the star rider. Sports such as basketball, ice hockey, and soccer don't reward individual glory to the same degree, although star players feature prominently in each sport. LeBron James may win the Most Valuable Player award in a season, but few Lakers fans would prefer this to their team winning the NBA playoff finals. Whether it champions individual riders or teams a similarly clear points structure in cycling could broaden appeal.

amongst fans and may help to build more varied competitions, challenging the hegemony of dominant teams. Significant series-champion prize pots would also discourage riders from regularly missing races without the need for a specific points penalty for skipping events.

Tweaking the points system, which would of course require root and branch reform, could also allow proper individual classifications and awards for the sport's top climbers, strongest time trialists, fastest sprinters, even the most effective domestique riders, with the potential for significant new prize monies and merchandising opportunities around each of these categories as well. Alternatively or in tandem, a new points system could reward the most diverse riding talent by weighting rewards to recognise achievement across multiple disciplines. There are myriad options for reform. All that is needed is a clear priority of what the sport is seeking to reward. Given the ongoing trend for riding styles that 'suffocate' the race of any explosivity, it seems likely a revised points structure would seek to create incentives for disruption by introducing more opportunity to score. Attack, rather than defence, could be a focus for the sport's points system that may drive greater fan engagement.



# OPEN THE PELTON

In all, the way spectators experience live bicycle races has not changed much over the past 30 years.<sup>35</sup> Preview, live and reported coverage of the sport's biggest events continues to follow a well-worn format. Written reportage and analysis has moved online and broadcast has been supplemented by slightly improved on-screen graphics, but the fundamental presentation of the sport has not developed at the pace seen in other sports. And yet in contrast to other sports, almost every cycling event has a unique character – due to location, history, length, course topography and other factors – that could lead to huge variation in presentational styles. This diversity must be appreciated and honored, while at the same time allowing fans to expect and enjoy some of the same experiences each time they visit a race.

Several simple cues from other sports could help fans feel more connected at the actual race viewing venue, combining with reforms in each of the above areas to create a far more compelling live sport package. The riders' names should be printed on their jerseys with a greater emphasis on visibility, for example, and a permanently-assigned season-long race number would provide even novice fans with cues to spot any racer in the pack – and make it easier to track the action as it happens.<sup>36</sup> The UCI still retains several archaic regulations regarding how sponsors are to be named, where logos can be placed on a jersey, and so on. In most cases, given the size of the primary sponsor logo on the jersey, and with all of the secondary or tertiary sponsorship insignias, there is little room left to put the rider's name on the jersey. Team Sky has experimented with small rider names on the jersey because its primary sponsor largely overwhelms its supporting sponsor names, thus making it easier to free space for the rider name. This balance should be redressed to prioritise ease of viewing. These reforms are so small as to barely be worth mentioning, and yet they are the basics of modern sport presentation that professional cycling still resists.

Making the new calendar easier to follow and publishing more understandable team and individual standings would also make the sport more accessible to the very newest fans attending their first race. These kinds of simple, but often-overlooked changes could actually be important steps towards engaging a much larger circle of potential fans. Road cycling is

regularly derided for its complexity, even at the amateur level, and the prevalence of the so-called “Rules”, written and published by the so-called Velominati, Keepers of the Cog, has not helped lower the barriers to engagement for new fans. A simple, exciting and unpretentious explanation of the sport at its most basic level is vital to connect the peloton to larger audiences.

Some race organisers and broadcasters have developed tracker applications for smartphones and other mobile devices, but most of these are focused on providing a connection to the event for fans that are not on site. More of these apps should have “locality-enabled” functionality, with additional information and spectator maps and guides, integrated real-time race timing and mapping for fans to plan a roadside viewing itinerary, interactive alerts, mobile-friendly video feeds and other supportive information. Akamai Technologies and Verizon Digital Media Services, for example, provide live event video streaming for organisations as big as the Olympics, and the content can be skinned with other coordinated data and graphics feeds like rider biometrics and position on course.<sup>37, 38</sup> For longer races, remotely staged big screens at multiple “fan zones” with food, drink and other entertainment activities would provide viewing opportunities, and incentives to stay and follow the race from start to finish.

Professional cycling should also evaluate other new opportunities from the broader entertainment industry to encourage race attendance. Race staging sites should be constructed and appropriately designed so that fans can get close to the athletes. Race start sign-in areas and finish podiums could be better designed with fan-friendly zones and still maintain appropriate security. In that way, race winners and celebrity cyclists could better interact with fans, arriving early or staying afterwards to sign autographs and take pictures with the fans who admire them — particularly children who can be inspired toward taking up the sport. This ability to interact and get “up close and personal” in professional cycling is one of the sport's unique attributes and strengths, and it must be maximised. Organisers should take care to develop appropriate event layouts, and teams should be required to make their riders available for various fan interaction occasions, just as other sports do, with particular success in ball sports in the UK and US, and at which point the individual characters of riders are encouraged rather than managed into obscurity. There are numerous encouraging examples from race organisers attempting to create more reasons for fans to watch live bike races. Interviewees have championed the importance of festival-style events, maximising accessibility and variety in entertainment and creating a diverse offering beyond cycling. The Tour Down Under, the Colorado Classic, some of the Classic one-day events and smaller criteriums such as the RedHook and Nocturne series have experimented with varying success in this area.



## DRESSING THE WINDOW

How do we build from the outside in?

PROFESSIONAL CYCLING'S VIEWERSHIP has consistently declined over the past 20 years, even though the sport has retained its traditional fanbase in Western Europe.<sup>39</sup> Whilst there are regular reports of increased audience numbers for prestige events, particularly the Tour de France, there is little evidence that the global rise in cycling participation has been matched with meaningful engagement with the professional sport, especially beyond its most well-known races. Several high profile event organisers have complained of the poor value of television broadcast rights and cited the parallel challenge of maintaining in-person attendance at bike races as a major challenge for growth. In the women's side of the sport, these problems are even more pronounced despite a general uptick in the fanbase from an extremely small base at the start of the 21st century. This trend highlights one of the sport's key strategic weaknesses: cycling has simply not done enough to become more understandable, exciting and accessible to a wider and younger fan base.

Where the sport has been successful in growing its audience, it has failed to document that success. As a result of the extremely fractured organisation and governance of professional cycling (discussed above and below), there is a lack of reliable data on which to judge performance in terms of audience growth. The information poverty even amongst the most senior stakeholders in the sport was cited in numerous interviews for this research as a significant problem. But taken as a whole, the below changes to the structure, focus and marketing of professional cycling could start to revitalise the sport, positioning it as a leader in forging strong links between fans, participants and the racing community. As we discuss in this section, by increasing the entertainment value of broadcast content, presenting this content in newer and more compelling ways, more strongly promoting diversity in racing and creating real-life opportunities for access and participation, we can enhance the chance for growth in the global popularity of cycling.

Numerous examples pepper sports business literature as to the organic growth in popularity of team sports. The obvious example of soccer set aside, volleyball, basketball,<sup>40</sup> cricket, baseball, and field hockey are among the most recognisable team sports played globally; each grew out of a regional version of the sport originating in a nation and spreading to the

rest of the world. In many cases, a sport's popularity in a satellite region can overshadow the region in which the sport was first incorporated,<sup>41</sup> which is true of cricket (developed in England, but most popular in the Indian subcontinent). Each of these sports offers lessons from which cycling can learn when seeking to develop a more exciting and easy-to-understand offering. Throughout the research conducted for this work, there was a near universal acceptance that the sport had failed to capitalise on its potential in this regard. Teams, event organisers, governors and sponsors have all experimented with better models for fan engagement, some of which have

#### THE VIEWERS AT A GLANCE

Outside of the Tour de France, professional cycling does not draw many fans to their TV sets or the roadside. Media revenues for other 'prestige' races, such as the Critérium du Dauphiné or Paris-Nice, are limited - to sell media rights to these races, the rights owner often bundles them in with the rights to broadcast the Tour de France, thereby ensuring that they make the airwaves. In the US, the Tour averages a Nielsen Rating of 0.3 to 0.5 - meaning only +/-300,000 tune in to the race each day. The highest daily Nielsen rating in the US was 1.2, at the height of the Lance Armstrong years - about the same rating expected of a weekday afternoon baseball game. US-based TV executives tend to view any race before July as a warm-up for the Tour, and post-July races as second chances for riders who failed to impress during the big event - while this may be an exaggerated characterisation of their views, the Tour does hold an outsized importance for broadcasters, often at the expense of smaller races.

The Amaury Sports Organisation (ASO), owners of the Tour, claims that 10-15 million people see the Tour in person every year, roughly 500,000 to 700,000 per stage. Belgian media researcher Prof. Daam van Reeth puts the per-stage TV viewership of the Tour between 20-30 million, and from these numbers we can infer that around 98% exposed to the Tour de France each year do so through TV coverage. A complicating factor in these calculations is the availability, or lack thereof, of the Tour on TV outside of its traditional heartlands. Free-to-air broadcasters cover the Tour in Europe, but fans in the US have had to negotiate hard-to-access programming on niche channels, and the demise of the much-bemoaned online race-streaming channel Cycling.TV has further contributed to this. In light of Eurosport's 26% increase in Grand Tour viewership in 2017, a question remains as to what the state of cycling viewership in the States would be if the market was served by a high quality, reliable broadcaster. The former Coors Classic race organiser, Michael Aisner - who experienced notable success in broadcasting his race in the 80s - stresses the importance of human interest stories and behind the scenes footage in interesting US-based fans.

been successful. But many interviewees agreed a more holistic, systematic and global approach was needed, aligning those stakeholders around one plan for growth. Fundamentally, the sport must refocus on an audience-first strategy, judging its success by how it enhances a fan's connection to cycling. In so doing, each of those stakeholders could capitalise on the above structural reforms to build more and more reliable revenue streams based on monetising that engagement.

Just as teams could do more to promote the most appealing characters in the sport, so too can those involved in the broader presentation of professional cycling. There are countless examples of compelling storytelling throughout the history of cycling. But the combination of under-resourced and funded media organisations, overly-managed athletes incentivised to prioritise performance over engagement and a generally sluggish response to the challenges of new content platforms and formats has seen much of that storytelling disappear. Save for noteworthy innovations in podcasting, prestige publishing and a handful of YouTube content creators, the media around professional cycling does little to promote the sport.

The reform of that promotion must therefore be based in better broadcasting the personalities and characters in the sport, creating and reporting more habitually on the "human interest" stories of racing. It should seek narratives across a season, building an entire entertainment package around the sport and its stars with an ambition for cycling to break beyond its traditional confines. The collective ambition should be for cycling's biggest riders to transcend the sport, engaging new fans on new platforms, and media and athletes should seek to forge season-long partnerships to achieve this. Organisers, teams and brands should work to build the media around major events and races themselves, recognising the power to self-publish allotted by digital innovations and prioritising mobile content. Ultimately, it should be possible to be a fan of the sport on any platform and at any time - before, during and after events, during the on and off-season. Cycling should further seek paths to broader cultural relevance, including partnerships with non-traditional entertainment formats such as E-sports and gamified training platforms, both of which can already be seen around the fringes of the professional peloton. Finally, in seeking greater diversity in media offerings, organisers/license holders should operate on the principle of a more relaxed usage rights model, sowing the seeds of a more profitable product by subsidising the creation of digital content that caters to modern viewing habits. Under such a system, highlights and short, pre-approved clips of race footage could be made available with free-usage rights with a requirement to credit or link to the event or teams main channels. Riders themselves should create more content to build the value of their personal brands and reforms at team and broadcast level should be based on monetising that content. A fundamental refocus on the marketing of professional cycling should see a major commitment across the sport to creating far more engaging media content.

# ENHANCE THE COVERAGE

It's not just live racing itself that needs to be more exciting. Much of the coverage of professional cycling has proven not to be very interesting or inspiring. Whilst there are instances of compelling content in live coverage, and a clear appetite to innovate as emerged from interviews for this research, live cycling media as a whole lags behind most other major sports in the 21st century. Beyond traditional television broadcast coverage and some basic internet streaming services in established cycling markets, live presentation of the sport is often prohibitively difficult to find. Where coverage can be easily accessed, it remains overly traditional in its format and styles. As a result, there is an overall failure to reap the potential value of the media and access rights around the live sport and opportunities for more sophisticated monetisation of content are not being exploited.

Television remains how about 98% of fans watch cycling<sup>42</sup> and yet despite the popularity of the Tour de France and certain other events, overall cycling TV ratings have been going down. Many stages in multi-day races are four or five hours long, often with little drama until the last few kilometres and the sheer length of the broadcast, with relatively little intrigue for the vast majority of it, is regularly cited by fans as a disincentive to watch.<sup>43</sup> Hence, we suggest that the sport refocus one of its greatest untapped assets to revitalise race broadcasting – the personalities and experiences of its riders. An emotional connection to the individual athletes could better capture the imagination of viewers, particularly casual ones, helping them to identify with the sport's personalities and encouraging a deeper interest in the sport.<sup>44</sup> At the same time, it could help to create sporting celebrities that transcend cycling, finding new audiences and offering riders new sources of income. Television has thus far largely failed to bring the personalities of cycling to the viewer. By and large, there are very few human interest stories produced in television coverage of cycling. Opportunities are frequently missed during incidents, for example the Chris Froome vs. Bradley Wiggins controversy in 2012's Tour de France; or emotionally charged episodes like Alberto Contador's recovery from a broken kneecap to win the Vuelta a Españā in 2014; reality segments which follow the experiences of several

first-time Grand Tour riders over the course of the Tour; or similar stories from inside women's professional cycling.

The most compelling moments of cycling's biggest events, when the sport is covered more widely by the non-cycling press, often give rise to human interest stories that are carried by character rather than performance. Punishing defeats or moments of triumph, shock results or flared tempers, should be times when the sport capitalises on its wider exposure. But too often these opportunities are managed away from media engagement.<sup>45</sup> These moments of more compelling dramatisation of characters within the sport was promoted in the majority of interviews for this work as a key way to connect with more fans. Journalists and broadcasters in the field, as well as athletes and organisers, regularly reiterated the importance of personality and celebrity in sports promotion and two common themes emerged in conversation. First, non-endemic media has inadvertently created and compounds a narrative around professional cycling that overwhelmingly focuses on rule violations, chiefly the use of performance enhancing drugs. They have not struggled to find stories to maintain that narrative and there is a significant challenge ahead in attempting to break free of that media cycle. Beyond the emergence of particularly impactful athletes, such as Lance Armstrong or Bradley Wiggins, coverage of professional cycling in the mainstream press looks destined to focus on doping unless a major shift in tone within the sport is promoted universally. Second, access for media to riders is already remarkably good compared to most other major sports. Most interviewees involved in covering major events said access to riders for the generation of content was not a problem. Rather, the content gathered once access was granted was so carefully curated it regularly became un compelling. That second phenomenon makes the first more likely. For as long as athletes and teams fail to tell compelling stories around the sport, the vacuum will be filled with content that already has a proven pull with audiences; allegations around specific and general use of drugs to improve rider performance. The sport must reckon with that reality, and work to create a more exciting media package to shift focus back to the character of professional cycling.



# EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY

There are many new and existing technologies that can be better exploited to make televised racing more exciting and much can be learned from digital innovations pursued by other major sports. In the world of motorsports, NASCAR has done a commendable job of incorporating in-car cameras, pit cameras, audio feeds, and car data to paint a dynamic view of the action for fans. At any given moment, the broadcaster can switch between multiple views inside the action as it happens, overlain on a backdrop of the current race standings for each driver. More importantly, this view is consistent in every televised race, with no variations of the data or its display from race to race. In professional cycling, aspects of these innovations, including biometrics, have been incorporated in some race broadcasts but not in a consistent way. Each race organiser's production team has the leeway to build its own version of a sports entertainment show, making it difficult to stage a consistent experience for the fans. On-board cameras, power meters, physiological monitors and GPS tracking units to follow individual athletes during the race are widely used in other sports, but cycling has not uniformly integrated these existing technologies to present viewers with a compelling "racer's point-of-view" experience.

The recent efforts by both Velon and ASO to deliver on-bike video streams should be celebrated, but only demonstrate how far behind the sport really is. None of these approaches are new; on-board digital cameras have been used around races since the start of the 21st century, and Computer Sciences Corporation developed a true GPS tracking service for the 2007 Tour of California. There were similar technological opportunities made available during European races at a similar time, but these were not - and have not been - exploited to a great enough extent. No consistent version of enhanced and integrated live content has been presented to television viewers to date. Broadcasters presenting other sports have moved vastly further considerably more quickly. Critically, the sport needs to learn from others in creating a consistent standard for the viewing experience - specifically the kinds of camera shots and the display of enhanced data such as dynamic time splits and performance metrics that other sports, like NASCAR and MotoGP, have already exploited and perfected.

Cycling can better connect with an increasingly diverse, young and digitally-savvy sports entertainment audience by making better use of these

kinds of technologies — one which increasingly has less time to watch a full bike race, but which demands more engaging options while viewing the most important content. It is unclear why these steps have not been taken, but it may be partly due to the limited value found in cycling broadcast rights. Event organisers and broadcasters are not incentivised to invest in improving the viewing experience of live bike racing provided the value of the product is low and the cost of improvement high. The fractured racing calendar, the lack of cooperation between event organisers and the dearth of highly-technological skill sets in the sport all contribute to that reality.

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## NBA AND THE FACES OF THE SPORT

The National Basketball Association (NBA) is adept at supplementing coverage of its games with human interest programming. This content takes the form of short segments broadcast during breaks in the game, and longform programmes on NBATV, the league's affiliated channel, all with the aim of retaining fan engagement, build audiences for future broadcasts, and creating a deeper bond between fans and players. According to media researcher John A. Fortunato, the NBA segments its audience on variables that express the fans' level of interest in the sport, as well as traditional demographic variables - the result is a slate of programming that includes the lighthearted and comical Shaqtin' a Fool, airings of classic games for diehard fans, and recap programme NBA Inside Stuff for casual viewers. Since 2016, the NBA has partnered with Twitter to create content specifically designed for integration into Twitter conversations, with timely delivery of highlight and reaction clips. This strategy developed as a way to legitimise and capitalise on behaviour that fans were already exhibiting.

Both Amazon and Netflix have achieved success with sports content, and each are set to invest heavily in both live sports and supporting content for their streaming services. The cult success of cycling-based internet shows such as Beyond the Peloton, focusing on the Cervelo Test Team, and Jeremy Powers' Behind the Barriers highlights the appetite for behind-the-scenes storytelling among cycling fans.

# BROADCAST ONLINE

Professional cycling needs to do more than just develop and produce more compelling television broadcast coverage. It also needs to explore and embrace new approaches and technologies for promoting and distributing that improved content. Most of the World Tour races are televised in some manner. Monuments and Grand Tours are often televised around the world, depending on the licensing rights which various national networks can acquire. For example, the Tour de France is broadcast in almost every region of the world. On the other hand, Milan-San Remo and other similar one-day races aren't universally available, but can be seen on most European cable and satellite broadcasts. Newer races, like the Tour of Poland and other emerging World Tour events, are often only broadcast live in their own country, available as condensed productions for the web, and often only via the race organiser's own website. Meanwhile, entertainment delivery outside cycling is rapidly shifting from bundled subscription packages and traditional television broadcasting to on-demand, internet streaming of single showings and multi-use season pass models that are available across continents and with regional presentations. These new technological opportunities have been exploited to great success by other sports, creating a sophisticated consumer who expects similar variety in other sports distribution. Professional cycling's stakeholders must listen and learn – and move the sport in similar directions, decreasing reliance on traditional TV rights licensing, and maximising the opportunities to connect directly with new audiences.

In relation to other professional sports and sports entertainment, cycling has been slow to update its visual product or how it is offered to fans. Cycling needs to move toward the emerging over-the-top (OTT) broadcast model in order to continue connecting with new fans and build a stronger economy. In broadcast, OTT content is audio, video or other media delivered on the internet without the need to subscribe to a traditional cable, terrestrial or satellite TV service. Service delivery partnerships are the key to hitting the market faster, as no race organiser has the roughly \$1 billion on hand to build or buy a robust, live-sports capable OTT platform.<sup>46</sup> The new Olympic Channel, quietly launched online by the IOC with technology partnerships at the end of the Rio Games, may be the prototype of this future state. The IOC could increase the webstream license premiums for

## UFC AND THE FIGHT FOR OVER- THE-TOP

Major sports entertainment brands like the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) still cooperate with cable and satellite television providers to deliver content like pay-per-view (PPV) events, but increased subscriptions to its "Fight Pass" over-the-top streaming service for specialty programmes like exclusive events, content, and replays has multiplied the brand's profitability. The UFC has innovated in broadcasting and business strategy to expand revenues. The cable and satellite content has a low entry cost for consumers, allowing people to tune in to watch shows like "The Ultimate Fighter" as part of their normal subscription package – but once the consumer is drawn into the narrative, there is a higher likelihood they will purchase future value-added programming like PPV events and championship matches.<sup>48</sup> The UFC has built its revenues to \$4 billion since adopting this format.<sup>49</sup>

its broadcast partners, which would increase its overall revenues, or just stream its Games and take the revenues directly.<sup>47</sup>

Research predicts that worldwide OTT revenue will reach \$65 billion in 2021 – double that of 2015 (\$29 billion).<sup>50</sup> Many traditional cable/satellite service providers now have more internet connections than cable subscribers, and they are racing to acquire content libraries and customers. From a broader business perspective, OTT technology is also the driving force behind huge mergers in technology and entertainment. For example, AT&T purchased DirecTV to acquire the huge subscriber base of DirecTV's satellite TV business, and is converting these customers to AT&T's online content platform. It then recently bid \$85 billion for Time-Warner, aiming to acquire that company's vast content library. These moves will help AT&T retain and grow its customer base, market new content as it is produced, target advertisements to those customers, and sell value-added services and technology to maximise what each customer spends. Disney, owner of sports entertainment network ESPN, also acquired a \$1 billion stake in a live streaming content distribution company which may soon allow it to bypass its cable/satellite distribution partners in the wake of massive cable viewership losses.<sup>51</sup> Simply put, content is now driving the media value chain – and OTT is driving the business. There are significant growth opportunities afforded by these developments that cycling should seek to exploit.

Adoption of OTT would allow cycling to offer a small number of content licenses to an elite pool of competitive bidders, thus maximizing the value of its broadcast content rights. A smaller number of licensed cable/satellite and OTT broadcast partners, but with a larger overall distribution footprint and more advanced technology, would allow cycling to command a higher overall content valuation than all of the individual races combined today.<sup>52</sup> Traditional cycling hotspots like France, Belgium and The Netherlands

would continue to receive coverage of the major races as they have historically, but could be complemented with new and additional content. More importantly, racing fans in other parts of the world could be presented with an unheard-of value proposition: sign up once, choose your preferred level of service, and enjoy a full season of professional bike racing.

This kind of distribution model, with legitimate broadcast licensing and subscription tiers, provides the opportunity for the sport to collect “gate” revenue from the fans. And the improved consumer data from online sign-ups would help spur much more innovative and lucrative marketing strategies. Delivery of cycling’s most valuable content by OTT can also help drive the sport’s overall future growth. Even though the majority of professional cycling’s viewership takes place for free, diehard fans outside of its traditional markets have the proven financial means, access to technology, and emotional connection to the sport to pay a premium to see exactly the races they want, and in the format that is easiest for them. How the sport connects with and values that growing and affluent fan base will have a big impact on professional cycling’s profitability in the future.

If properly managed, packaged and marketed, a new league model and calendar could be an ideal vehicle for promoting a new season-long broadcast product. That offering could be licensed as a consistent and uniform programming package or entice high uptake of an online subscription product. For the frustrated cycling fan accustomed to tapping into choppy and often legally blocked video streaming sites on foreign-language websites, the ability to purchase a season-long package comprising all of the races over the internet or a single cable TV channel could hold considerable appeal. Interview research for this work unearthed several further opportunities for episodic, made-for-mobile content with reduced rights fees and enhanced access. Riders, teams, major event organisers and governing bodies all expressed their desire to facilitate better episodic content creation with the sport, finding and promoting the characters within professional cycling that can connect with a new generation of fans. The importance of that regular promotion of an iconic figure within the sport cannot be overstated. According to senior figures within USA cycling, Lance Armstrong’s personal rise to the top of the sport facilitated a massive, continent-wide growth in road cycling participation. It has been claimed his downfall subsequently led to a dramatic and continuing fall in membership of the organisation.

A newly-proposed calendar could also justify the creation and negotiation of a totally new set of comprehensive broadcasting rights (discussed below) even though it will be comprised of fewer and more select events. Some other highly successful televised sports have relatively few events or games during a full season, including Formula 1 or American football. Fewer but more significant and higher-quality races, in which all of the top racers participate, could help cycling to develop more of that elusive “scarcity value.” This would constitute a significant economic change that would, in turn, increase the value of sponsorship investment and broadcast revenues.

A final opportunity implied by increasing television revenues is the eventual ability to share that money with the league in order to build the value of individual teams and enable a more competitive, financially sustainable and entertaining sport.<sup>53</sup> From the perspective of the league, this shared revenue would also allow the construction of an incentive system under which the teams could be required to meet certain desired performance and participation criteria in order to share in the pool. The revenues will initially be small, and the general approach will be opposed by those who pocket most revenue and profit of the sport today. However, there are encouraging signs that some race organisers are open to considering different alternatives,<sup>54</sup> and the large organisers must be convinced that a slightly smaller piece of a much bigger pie will be to the benefit of the entire sport.<sup>55</sup> The lesson from other major sports is clear – when television revenues grow and are shared across the teams, this builds financial stability, improves the investment atmosphere, and provides the long-term foundation from which the sport can grow.<sup>56</sup>

To go further, professional cycling should experiment with e-sports and virtual participation. Soccer is just one sport that has experienced an explosion in engagement through the success of EA Sports’ FIFA series and the viral popularity of local teams dramatised online. Cycling should look for what’s next. The technology already exists to integrate live races with home trainers, and companies like Zwift have led the way in connecting indoor workouts with a wider community. The future of the sport may lie in mass online participation, allowing anyone training at home to virtually take part in any live or historic race, or it could be found in the massive successes of e-sports, digitally rebuilding the most iconic roads for new fans across the globe. Arenas are filled by online gamers around the world and their attraction has proven that the live audience for digital sports is growing considerably quicker than their traditional predecessors. Key figures within the e-sports business have explained their desire to build more sophisticated content into alternative platforms, capitalising on the fitness community already engaged for long periods of time due to the activity on offer. It is understood companies like Zwift will continue to develop content hubs within their platforms and associated with their core offering. These could be seen as a boon or a threat for the traditional sport, depending on perspective. Event organisers and teams should do more to act on the opportunities made available by rapid growth in this area. Two teams, CANYON//SRAM and Dimension Data, have already experimented in this field. Both have offered some form of professional rider contract to talent spotted and tested on the Zwift platform. They have also used their own channels and associated media, such as the Global Cycling Network (GCN), to record and promote the process. Regardless of the performance impact, their willingness to experiment with new forms of talent pathways and innovative outreach should be promoted more widely in the professional peloton.



## NETFLIX AND THE DRAMATISATION OF SPORT

Cycling's next phase of broadcast development may come through media partnerships with non-traditional content providers to bring the sport to a younger audience, including digital providers like Netflix, Amazon, Sony, HBO, Vice and others, as well as exclusivity partnerships for traditional content with free media including YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Weibo, Periscope and others. It could and should move beyond race broadcasting to documentary-style series created for non-cycling audiences, learning from the success of *Last Chance U*, *All or Nothing*, *Iverson*, *The Battered Bastards of Baseball* and many more, and new formats for covering live events that are considerably shorter and more mobile friendly. Major over-the-top content creators and distributors have begun experimenting with live sports broadcasting and have cited the success of sporting documentaries as proving a digital OTT audience for sport on non-traditional platforms and channels. It has been rumoured that these companies are actively considering bids for major media rights around the most well-known sports properties.<sup>57</sup>

# STOP IGNORING WOMEN

An important but often overlooked way to advance interest in the coverage of cycling is to better manage and promote the women's side of the sport. While it is possible to follow women's racing, it is very difficult to obtain broadcast coverage and its exposure is still only a fraction of what the men receive. Too often, women's racing is minimised, diluted, or completely overshadowed by coverage of a parallel men's event. Only 25% of the Women's World Tour could be seen on television as of the 2017 season, and only four races are broadcast live: *La Course*, *Tour of Flanders*, *Women's Tour of Great Britain*, and the *RideLondon Classique* at the time of writing.<sup>58</sup> (Coverage expanded in the 2018 season). That has a major impact on the development of the women's sport. The relatively tiny fraction of race days available for viewing keeps the audience small and reduces the incentives for sponsors to enter the sport. As a result, the finances of women's professional cycling are in particularly bad shape. Team budgets are many times smaller than in the men's sport, events regularly rely on volunteers to ensure they run and it is believed more than half of women riders work a second job to secure a living wage.<sup>59</sup> The typical cost to run a UCI "Elite" professional women's team is as little as US \$100,000. An estimated 51.6% of female pro cyclists also have to pay back parts of their salaries to their teams, in order to pay for basic necessities such as equipment, travel costs, and the services of a coach.<sup>60</sup> There has also been a worrying trend for allegations of sexism and bullying in the women's side of the sport, which with under-investment and regulation threatens to dominate the narrative around women's racing.<sup>61, 62, 63</sup>

And yet many veteran cycling observers insist that women's racing is every bit as exciting and dramatic as the men's and lament the general scarcity of coverage. The quality of media coverage was cited by every female athlete interviewed for this research as amongst the most important factors affecting growth of the sport. There is also evidence that regular broadcasting of women's racing can help to create an audience for the sport. Flemish TV, for instance, started broadcasting women's cyclocross competition two hours before the men's race and after three years, TV ratings have steadily grown

to around two thirds of the men's ratings. However, stakeholders are divided on how best to pursue enhanced coverage. For some, coupling men's and women's racing is the most practical approach, allowing pooled coverage costs and encouraging cross-promotion of the races to dual audiences. For others, there is a significant risk in growing the audience for women's cycling in the shadow of men's and a more radical break with tradition is promoted as the best way forward. Whichever approach is favoured, there is a general acceptance that major advances have been made in the last decade and there are several examples of compelling content creation around teams and athletes. This has been reflected in the increased individual reach of female riders. However, this has often been as a replacement for traditional coverage rather than to supplement it. There remains a startling resistance to promoting women's cycling amongst some of the most influential stakeholders in the sport and there is an acceptance within teams that athletes must promote themselves if they are to attract any fans at all. This has had the effect of developing some of the most sophisticated social media strategies in professional cycling, but their effect in growing the total audience for the sport has been lamentably small. Many believed the sport is missing a major opportunity in not pursuing broader promotion of women's racing on a similar scale to the men's.

Research into gender splits in purchasing habits<sup>64</sup> suggests women's cycling can capitalise on many new and different sponsorship opportunities, rather than relying on the end-market and customer categories which have traditionally driven the men's sport.<sup>65</sup> There is a unique opportunity here for the right companies to capture the attention of a sports viewing population – a more educated and higher-income female audience that either spends money, or influences the way in which money is spent.<sup>66</sup> There is some preliminary evidence that there is a significant potential audience for episodic content about the women's sport with targeted sponsorship. The Cycling Podcast's regular *Feminé* episodes average around 60,000 plays, just marginally fewer than the core show, and its audience has grown to almost 12% in the past 12 months. There is also the opportunity to deepen relationships with spinning and other online fitness communities, which could provide the incentive for women to participate in all manner of virtual cycling activities.<sup>67</sup>

Existing races and events in our proposed calendar could capitalise on related or parallel women's events, driving new revenues that would be unique and separate from cycling's traditional models. Models are already there in other women's sports, from which cycling can learn. The growth in women's tennis, for example, led to the creation of many new tournaments and series which became self-sustaining, marketable, and highly profitable. Many of those involved in women's cycling have recommended a less disruptive approach in the presentation of their sport as distinct from men's racing, but given the animosity in some areas between riders and organisers

a similar split may be inevitable. The ability of women athletes to transcend their sports or to connect in a meaningful way with women who enjoy the sport is something which professional cycling must facilitate. Reform of women's cycling has the potential to outshine men's and change the sport's business model in the process.<sup>68</sup> Greater visibility of the women's sport, more focus on the individual athletes and their personal stories, and increased investment in women-specific products and forums could attract many new participants, and foster long-term growth in cycling overall.

Raising the profile of women's racing should go hand in hand with an end to glamourising the sport with "podium girls". Professional cycling should follow the example of Formula 1 and professional darts and end the use of women as promotional tools, a move that started to be adopted at some of the largest races in the 2018 season. The practice of scantily-clad females presenting podium winners with champagne, flowers and cuddly toys is regularly derided as outdated and has no place in modern sport.

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#### TENNIS AND THE BATTLE OF THE SEXES

The rise of women's earning power in golf and tennis demonstrates how athletes' earnings and marketability benefit the sport as a whole. In tennis, parity between men and women has developed in a piecemeal fashion since the infamous 'battle of the sexes' between Bobby Riggs and Billie Jean King in 1973. King's victory fostered a change in perception of women's tennis, and this was matched by a gradual movement to equal pay for women – the US Open awarded equal pay from that year, and the other Grand Slams edged towards near-equal pay from that moment on. The impact of equal pay is diffuse, and is arguably more important for the women lower down the rankings. The example highlighted in issue six of *Mondial* magazine is Agnieszka Radwanska, ranked tenth in the world, who has earned more than £13 million in her career yet has never won a Grand Slam. By creating a system in which women, like men, have viable careers without needing to be once-in-a-generation talents, the overall level of competition improves, and talent is allowed to develop over time by reducing the need for overnight success. Women's cycling, unlike tennis, has not experienced a steady journey to parity. The high water mark for women's cycling was the mid-80s, when most major races in the US had a women's counterpart (a rarity today), and sizable prize purses meant strong fields. As in tennis, the strongest moves towards equality from women's cycling haven't come from a top-down approach by the sport's governing body, but measures taken by race organisers and team owners – see the award of equal prize money at several of the US's largest cyclocross races, or the recent success of the women's Tour of Britain.

This is demonstrated by the scandal that erupted after Peter Sagan made a pinching gesture towards the backside of a podium girl in the 2013 Tour of Flanders and similar outrage at a poster for E3 Harelbeke the following year, which appeared to reference the Sagan episode. Nevertheless, shocking moments of careless sexism continue. During last year's Tour de France, Belgian rider Jan Bakelants said by way of a joke that he would be taking "a packet of condoms as you never know where those podium hostesses hang out." As of publication, the UCI has announced no blanket plans to end the tradition of podium girls although the Tour Down Under ended them last year and the Tour de Yorkshire prefers to celebrate local businesswomen. Some women have spoken out against a ban on ring girls and flag girls. They claim the work is well paid and a ban would affect women's employment opportunities. One female MMA fighter went so far as to say the Octagon girls were paid more than her.

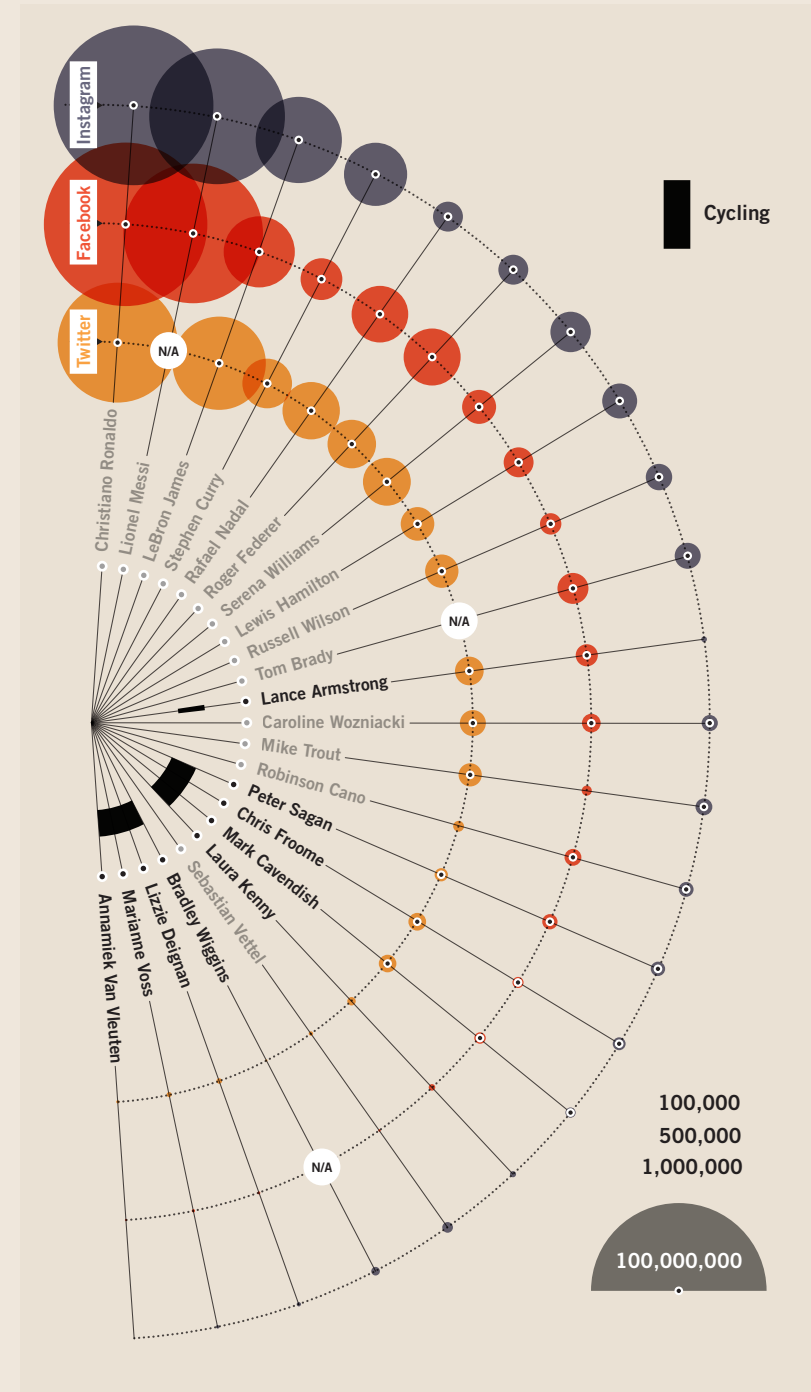
## RAISE THE STAKES

Although both formal and informal betting on professional cycling is widespread in Europe, gambling and the sport have historically had an uncomfortable partnership.<sup>69</sup> If administered in a responsible manner, organised betting has the potential to both advance the visibility and the financial stability of the sport. But to date (outside of Japan's Keirin track racing)<sup>70</sup> pro cycling has done little to explore the possibilities of developing and integrating organised betting hosted by online sports agencies. Unibet.com, Ladbrokes, and other European-based betting agencies take wagers on pro cycling major events but these markets are limited and their existence rarely acknowledged.

Cycling has gone so far as to chase one sponsor (Unibet.com) out of the sport, while retaining state-owned lotteries by France, Belgium, and the Netherlands as team sponsors. Given a revised calendar structure, a new points system, stronger regional loyalties, and new broadcast outreach, there could be an opportunity to foster responsible and well-controlled betting options for fans.<sup>71</sup> Everything from fan-based fantasy leagues, to

### ATHLETE SOCIAL MEDIA REACH COMPARED

The individual reach and celebrity of star athletes within any sport offers insight into the overall fanbase of the activity. In professional cycling, Lance Armstrong remains the athlete with the largest social media reach. But even this pales in comparison to the social footprints of competitors in other sports.



betting lines on specific race outcomes and season-long standings could potentially take on a new importance in building visibility and relationships across a new spectrum of fans. The former, fantasy leagues, deserve their own attention. Sports around the world have deepened engagement to unprecedented levels through the development of rich fantasy league environments, creating new revenue streams and generating their own compelling strands of content.

It is estimated that last year's Super Bowl event generated some \$500 million in official betting — but also nearly \$4 billion in unofficial and unlicensed betting. Sports-related gambling worldwide is estimated to be as high as one trillion dollars every year. Moving professional cycling towards official betting with responsible strategies and secure offerings could capture some of these potential revenues while connecting the sport to many new, non-traditional followers. The sport needs to carefully investigate options here that could allow greater visibility and growth in a responsible manner — and then apply the right format, with appropriate partnerships and incentives to tap into this clearly growing sector of the sports entertainment economy. Doing so may also help to drive reform in the name of simplicity, with betting often requiring an easily understandable sport to drive participation.

#### THE TIMELINE OF A SCANDAL

The history of doping in cycling is a succession of scandals, each marked by headline-grabbing positive tests, police raids, and fervent denials. Trying to make sense of this murky world is made difficult by the peloton's culture of *omertà* — a code of silence borrowed from the mafia — and the lack of reliable accounts can reduce even the most ardent fans to an ambivalent shrug and a lingering, generalised suspicion of all riders.

Many point to the early-90s emergence of Erythropoietin (EPO) and blood doping as the nuclear moment of the doping arms race, partly because of the effect on the peloton's speed was so noticeable and their use was more or less ubiquitous. But the physiological effectiveness of EPO is only one part of the story — the other is the political and cultural framework that allowed for the prevalence of doping practices.

Throughout the Cold War, state-mandated doping problems touched almost every Olympic sport. These programmes were systematic and quasi-scientific, with coaches and doctors working together to achieve a competitive edge for their athletes — although the athletes were often unaware of the substances being administered to them. This culture is markedly distinct from contemporaneous accounts of doping in cycling, in which riders dosed up with stimulants, steroids, and occasionally champagne, but rarely with any systematic vigour.

As road racing became steadily more professionalised through the 1980s, teams became wise to the insurance offered by a carefully considered doping programme — 'prepared' riders got better results, the thinking went, pleasing sponsors and thereby securing a team's financial future. As a consequence,

the practice of doping became more serious, borrowing ideas and techniques from state-sponsored doping programmes. Prominent doctors earned huge sums by designing and administering team-wide programmes.

This is the model that operated through the early '90s, with Team Telekom being one of the most advanced practitioners, all the way through the Festina Affair and the Armstrong years. This era is also noted for the lack of accountability for teams and riders. The UCI, fearful of tarnishing their product, shied away from going after riders, and followed anti-doping policies such as the '50% hematocrit' rule, which were so easily sidestepped they became known as intelligence tests rather than genuine anti-doping efforts — only the most careless of the peloton were caught out. The press corps, whose success depended on genial relations with the peloton and access granted by teams, had little incentive to expose scandal. Long into the 2000s, the only serious investigation into cycling's doping problems came from national police forces in France and Spain.

It is thought that the team-sponsored system of doping has gradually fallen from favour as the political cost of doping has increased — that is, corporate sponsorships have been lost as a result of doping scandals, and teams can be served sporting punishments if two or more riders test positive in a season — and as Europe's laws have increasingly cast doping as a criminal matter. The wide-ranging fallout from Operación Puerto, an anti-doping investigation by the Spanish police against a notable Italian 'dope doctor', Eufemiano Fuentes, has given rise to a new chapter in the story of doping: solo riders, or small groups of riders and coaches, organise and pay for their own programmes, reducing the risks inherent in a team-based system with many people 'in the know'. Other notable trends are the use of research chemicals in the early stages of medical testing (AICAR and GW1516 are two examples, both of which have poorly understood and potentially disastrous side effects), the use of opioid painkillers during races, and the abuse of Therapeutic Use Exemptions to use otherwise banned drugs with apparent approval from the anti-doping agencies.



# TACKLE THE REPUTATION

A powerful opportunity for attracting broader audiences is to make professional cycling more trustworthy by improving its public perception and reputation. Fairly or unfairly, much of the broader population views professional cycling as a “dirty” sport – one that is widely populated by dopers and cheaters. There is a fundamental problem with the narrative around professional cycling in its most developed geographies, as alluded to above. Coverage of cycling in the non-endemic media is dominated by two types of content. First, when considering the activity of riding, content is overwhelmingly focussed on safety and issues associated with shared road usage. The ongoing battle between road users and the collateral damage it inflicts dominates the public’s conception of cycling as a means of transportation. For many experts, this represents the single largest barrier to a significant increase in cycling participation. The issue, and the ways by which road cycling can tackle perceptions of safety, is substantial enough to warrant its own body of research and is beyond the broader scope of this work. Second, when considering the elite sport, coverage dramatically increases when focussed on doping and related rule violations. Professional cycling has had a near fatal reputational problem as a result of decades of doping scandals. If the sport is to grow with any sustainability, it must tackle this problem. It is debatable whether this reputation is warranted. Professional cycling has done more than most other professional sports in recent years in attempting to understand and eradicate doping problems.<sup>72</sup> Senior figures throughout the sport continue to claim that professional cycling is the cleanest it has ever been. Nonetheless, the image still exists in the minds of many less informed casual or non-fans that the sport is dirty and it is quietly acknowledged within the professional peloton that teams continue to push at the limits of permissible methods for improving performance, using every conceivable advantage with manageable risks of a rule violation. Suspicions often fall on the bikes as well, with many convinced of the widespread use of mechanical doping, or technical fraud. Bikes are already subject to thorough tests around professional races but it has done little to dampen speculation.

There remains significant distrust and disagreement amongst the sport’s key stakeholders on how to tackle doping and how the motivation to cheat is born. Past offenders have cited the instability at the heart of professional cycling as a major driving factor. Assuming these is not an a priori motivation amongst athletes to use performance enhancing drugs, they claim the packed and overlapping race calendar, commodification of rider performance and economic instability of sponsorship income encourages an atmosphere of urgency and desperation which can result in sporting misconduct. The sport has to squarely face this challenge, if it is to ever win over disaffected fans or connect with new fans.<sup>73, 74</sup>

A number of recommendations have been suggested in interviews with athletes, teams, organisers and governors for this research. To start, cycling must devise and implement new monitoring, policing and certification systems to better address its historical doping challenges, building on developments already made in this field by implementing the recommendation made in a series of major anti-doping studies.<sup>75</sup> The ethical training and expectations of competitors and team management personnel must be hardened; safety standards must be raised and financially supported by race organisers; legal medications and the doctors who prescribe them must be more closely regulated; and anti-doping regulations must be strengthened and coordinated across multiple agencies to minimise future impacts to the sport’s reputation.<sup>76</sup> It has also been recommended that the UCI divest itself of all anti-doping policing, given the challenges within the organisation, and allow the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) to oversee these activities. Likewise, governors argue that individual teams and events must set tougher standards and testing requirements. The ease with which therapeutic use exemptions (TUEs) can be acquired and their clear potential for misuse should also be addressed with particular urgency. Failure to keep accurate and detailed medical records of legal drug use should more severely punished.

Beyond regulation, some believe the sport needs more prominent and consistent flag bearers for clean cycling. These figures might be formally recognised and incentivised, associated with specific teams or events, to act in pastoral and outreach capacities to ensure the issue of doping is not left to fester without attention. There may also be further need for a broader discussion about the continued use of drugs in professional cycling. Several of the most recognisable figures in the sport have called for a public process of truth and reconciliation within the sport, in which a kind of amnesty for historical transgressions is exchanged for root and branch examination of doping practices and controls. The facilitation of a prolonged investigation of practices could act as a release valve for the issue, they said. However, significant attempts at a similar process have been attempted in recent years and many stakeholders acknowledged a fatigue around the issue within the sport.

Special mention should be made here of doping in the women's professional peloton. Owing to issues around resources afforded to anti-doping controls in the women's sport, riders undergo far fewer tests than their male counterparts. Athletes have privately predicted that up to 50% of professional riders could go their whole career without facing anti-doping controls on more than a handful of occasions due to the way riders are selected for tests. The same model, of testing only those with suspicious or consistently strong results, is used for anti-doping control in elite men's cycling beneath the top levels of the sport. This bifurcated testing model presents a challenge in addressing the reputation of the sport and further compounds the risk of rule violations at every level.



## MAKING MONEY

How do we make professional cycling more profitable?

AMONG THE MOST OBVIOUS differences between cycling and almost all other sports is its venue. Most other sports are played in stadiums or closed circuits, where owners or organisers sell tickets and charge admission, creating a revenue stream that supports the sport. Athletes, teams, organisers and even governing bodies regularly share in the profits, directly or indirectly through the creation of an expectation that the spectacle is worth paying for. Yet along 200 kilometres of roads, there is no gate fee. The very nature of traditional road racing means that this source of revenue has not been available. For this and other reasons outlined below, cycling has always wrestled with massive financial challenges. Throughout its history, this has made the sport almost totally dependent upon commercial sponsorship for its financial viability. A privately distributed report by Repucom, a marketing firm, described the sport's revenue streams as being derived primarily from air time, with approximately \$2.1 billion realised in total advertising value, although the exact revenues for the sport's key race organisers like the Amaury Sport Organisation (ASO) are difficult to extrapolate because these are private, family-owned ventures. That figure is also a hugely unrealistic way of valuing the sport, since it is based on how much it would cost to these sponsors to buy a similar amount of commercial airtime, at the rates dictated by the TV channels. Estimates of media rights value around events and professional value in teams are also difficult to present with any intellectual confidence (see "estimating value in professional cycling" on page 83). With that in mind, even the most generous approximations of the value of professional cycling yield a number in the hundreds of millions, compared to the multi-billion pound valuations of single properties or franchises in others major sports (see pages 89 and 90).

The sponsorship-revenue model has created a series of significant problems for growing professional cycling and ultimately imposed a natural ceiling on making money in the sport. Historically, elite cycling is only as valuable as the sponsors it can attract. The key challenges to fan engagement imposed by the sponsorship model are:

- The creation of an additional barrier to loyalty, where the sport's growth is linked to the public perception of the brands, companies or organisations that secure sponsorship of professional cycling's largest assets. Title sponsorship in particular, which can see world-class athletes riding under the banner of sovereign wealth funds, major media conglomerates or obscure financial services, may act as a disincentive to fans supporting specific teams or attending events.
- The short-term nature of investment, with the financial future of athletes, teams and events partly or wholly reliant on poorly monitored



sponsorship return on investment of the ongoing charity of a handful of cycling fans with control of significant marketing budgets.

- The disparity in investment focus between teams and events, with the former regularly proving more appealing to sponsors than the latter. This in turn creates vast inequality between World Tour teams and significant under-investment in the development of compelling events and races.

- The reliance on specific people for continued sponsorship of major professional cycling teams or events, creating a risk that the departure of key individuals from specific lynchpin roles could see withdrawal of major sponsors from the sport and subsequent collapse of careers or calendars.

This unstable financial atmosphere has led to a state of perpetual economic uncertainty that affects those in the sport and discourages new investment. There are numerous examples. Belkin, which took over the sponsorship of the Rabobank team in 2014, rapidly exited the sport in just one year due to its lack of a truly global market reach.<sup>77</sup> In 2016, two more major sponsors and patrons of pro cycling left the World Tour. One was the Swiss financial services firm IAM Investments. Its team owner and longtime pro cycling supporter, Michel Thetaz, cited rising costs and the inability to secure a secondary sponsor as primary reasons for ending his involvement in the sport. The level of investment did not match the returns.<sup>78</sup> The other, the Tinkoff Bank cycling team's eponymous owner and controversial figure, Oleg Tinkov, spent nearly all of 2016 burning bridges between his team, the World Tour, ASO, and the UCI by giving multiple interview statements and Twitter messages describing the unprofessional state of the sport's economics, its unprepared business managers, and his take on both the leadership of the UCI and the owners of ASO.<sup>79</sup> He cited the inability to build the value of his team as a property or a franchise and sell that at a profit, due to the closed nature of the sport's economics and dependence on sponsorship funds.<sup>80</sup> A similar fate almost befell Cannondale-Drpac towards the end of the 2017 season, when the team sought to fill a multi-million dollar funding shortfall.<sup>81</sup> The modern history of professional cycling, from the widespread introduction of title sponsorship at the elite level in the mid 1960s, has been marked by teams with short lifespans regardless of sporting success (see pages 44 and 45), due in large part to the sponsorship model.

Races come and go, sponsors sign up only to disappear a year or two later, and team managers must constantly focus on the hunt for new funding. Teams with limited budgets or marginal results appear and disappear. Riders, staff and management face insecurity about whether their team will survive. The uncertainty, turnover and underlying sense of financial anxiety was described by several top racers in their tell-all accounts of their careers,<sup>82</sup> with many interviewees for this research claiming the same volatility creates an environment that makes doping more attractive. Cycling must explore and develop new ways to generate revenue around both live events and its broadcast content. It must also develop stronger means of

attracting and retaining more global and dependable sponsors and, over the longer-term, it must find creative new ways of diversifying itself away from this historical dependence on sponsorships in a bid to increase stability and allow fans to engage with a more predictable roster of teams and events.<sup>83</sup> Ultimately, professional cycling must reduce its reliance on sponsorship as a primary revenue stream, prioritising reforms that introduce alternate incomes and recognising that increasing the fanbase is the most important economic driver of the sport. Research suggests there must be a complete shift in economic priority, away from the acquisition and retainment of title sponsors and towards engaging and monetising new audiences. Any sponsorship model that remains should be built on ensuring better return on investment with more engaging and prolific media content, better options for activation and more strategic use of cycling's fundamental values to reach new audiences. The sport should prioritise building alternate revenue streams above reforms of the economic structure, including revenue shares or franchise models. Organisers should seek to collect gate fees for professional cycling, and broadcast media should include subscription and premium content options. Reform should be based on greater review of economic conduct, including better promotion within the industry of new opportunities and risks. Reform should be based on the principle that fans are willing to pay for sport, even cycling.

These principles for reform could help the sport to become more financially stable and economically self-sustaining, and in turn allow it to build a larger market share of the global sporting audience. They could support and build upon each other, making cycling more attractive to sponsors, and improving the financial strength and viability of the sport. In this section, we examine how some of these important changes can begin to occur.

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#### ESTIMATING VALUE IN PROFESSIONAL CYCLING

Each year, Forbes releases a list of the 50 most valuable sports franchises in the world, although the use of the word 'valuable' is misleading – Forbes calculates the price of teams, assigning a dollar figure that should be within spitting distance of the cost of owning teams outright.<sup>84</sup> To generate this figure, Forbes analyses assets held by the teams, merchandise and media revenue, gate receipts, EBITDA, and other hard-to-gauge factors such as liquidity and market momentum.

These calculations are famously difficult to verify, and this is mostly down to the quality of information: ownership transactions are infrequent, geographic differences are hard to account for, and the guesswork behind the earnings of private companies makes the figures unreliable. Add to this that the market is skewed by the premium that buyers are willing to pay for the privilege of owning a sports team, and the picture becomes quite murky.

Of course, performing these calculations on cycling teams is further confounded by the idiosyncrasies of the sport. There

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are no gate receipts for cycling teams, no assets such as stadia that hold equity, and limited access to broadcasting revenues. Despite this, some interviewees argue that cycling sponsorship is historically undervalued. He points to three areas of under-realised value: the trend for younger audiences to participate in sports and their 'orbiting cultures', which cycling teams are poised to exploit; the opportunity for sponsors to create meaningful content about the sport, with high levels of access to the sport's stars; and that sponsors are effectively making an ad buy within the sport – which is presumably more effective than an ignorable TV ad.

A comparison between the economics of professional cycling and other potential sports reveals some of the ways that cycling teams could become more valuable after reforms to the sport. Teams are almost solely reliant on title sponsor revenue for their operating budgets, making them inherently unstable, and therefore less valuable. Establishing a system in which teams shared a portion of media revenue, enjoyed better opportunities for content creation and market activation, and changed their merchandise strategy, teams would both become more valuable and reduce their reliance on title sponsors.

So: where would cycling teams rank in relation to Forbes' list of the 50 most valuable sports teams? A thorough calculation of cycling team values would consider media value, media reach, fan engagement and interest, fan demographics, and competition, but a rough approximation of this figure can be found by expressing a team's value as a function of revenue.

The revenue multiples found in the Forbes list range between 2x and 4.3x. To apply a revenue multiple to cycling teams means making some key assumptions, including: that teams have been historically undervalued, as argued by Jonathan Vaughters; that teams would have higher potential values if they had access to more revenue streams; and that niche sports teams are better value than major sports teams because buyers put less of a prestige premium on ownership. In an attempt to provide some context to the value of professional cycling, research for the Rapha Roadmap took a similar approach to estimating value of current World Tour teams (see page 88). These estimates, compared with estimates as to the media rights values of cycling's premier events available elsewhere, start to create a general picture of the total value of the sport. The accuracy of this picture remains, without better sharing of information, a major challenge for the sport in planning and measuring growth.

# DIVERSIFY REVENUE

There are many ways in which cycling can develop other means of generating revenue.<sup>85</sup> Creation of a new and more sustainable league structure would itself create opportunities for developing new revenue sources,<sup>86</sup> but even without these structural changes, cycling could begin to evolve into the 21st century in terms of media content and distribution rights, and develop other new sources of revenue to carry it forward.

Our proposed restructure of calendar and team organisation enables many new revenue sources, including broader merchandising rights, diversified VIP experiences and associated ticket fees. The model could also include larger fees charged to start and finish towns in the major stage races because of increased marketing value, event and season winners' jerseys, and so on. It could also include official bicycles, clothing or equipment lines (as well as official beverages, lead vehicles, and other co-marketed products), hospitality events at the start and finish lines, "fantasy camps," co-branded public rides and Gran Fondos, and other parallel-participation events associated with a professional race as well as digital integration with platforms like Zwift.<sup>87</sup> Some of these fringe opportunities are already being explored by event organisers and teams. The addition of more considered tourism and hospitality options around major World Tour events have been seen and it is expected these will become more prolific in the coming years.

There are considerable opportunities to aggressively market a range of services and products around a well-paced sporting calendar, some of which are already being exploited in the sport. For example, the popular Etape du Tour event, which features a private citizen ride of the Queen Stage of each year's Tour de France, typically sells out quickly and generates significant revenue. The Hamburg Cyclclassic, Cape Argus Tour, and Ronde van Vlaanderen sportifs each attract more than 16,000 paying riders, while the Paris-Roubaix, Dolomiti Stars, and Ride London events also regularly sell out with several thousands of riders in each.<sup>88</sup> As suggested above, any reform of the calendar and format of professional bike racing should seek to build on these opportunities for mass-start public participation rides with greater access to the elite ranks of the sport. Triathlon, marathon and Iron Man have already made significant progress in this regard and are reaping the rewards with major expansion in the Far East and elsewhere and supplementing traditional sponsorship revenue with associated merchandise and paid access.<sup>89</sup>

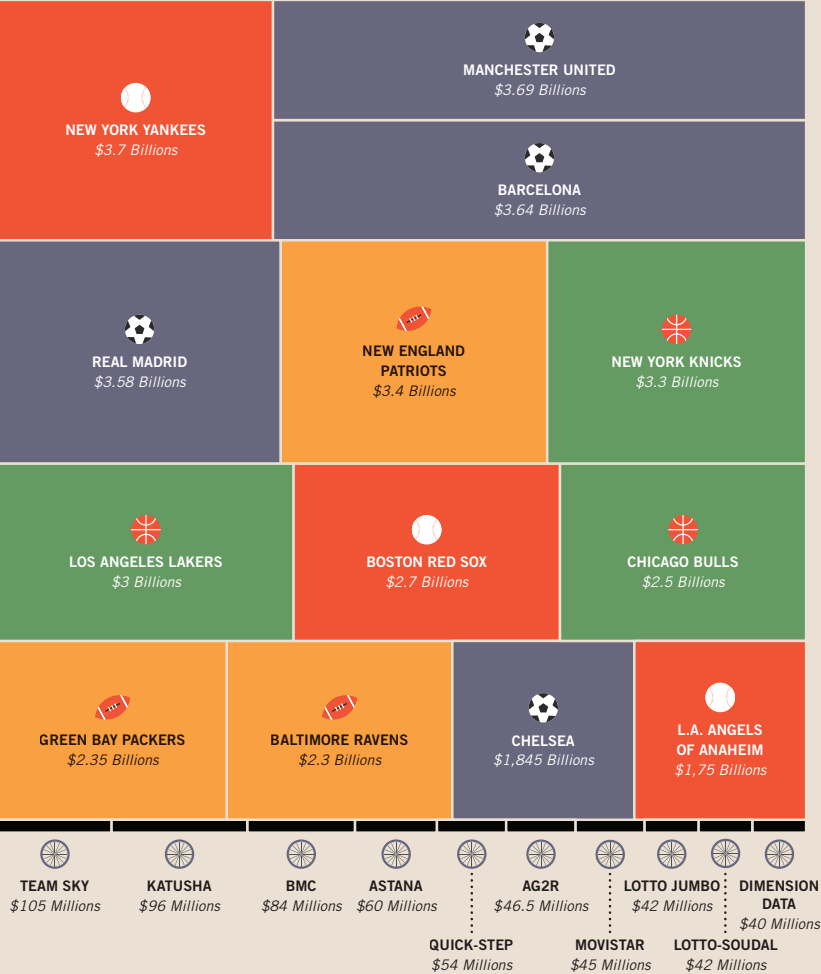
## THE POWER OF MERCHANDISE

Major sports and sports enterprises earn billions of dollars from official merchandise. Much of this merchandise is created by simply creating a brand association, licensing manufacturers to produce the official products, and prominently featuring teams and star players in marketing campaigns. Again, there is much that pro cycling can learn from other sports, particularly when it comes to leveraging the appeal of sports brightest stars. Other useful case studies can be found in the 'played on the road' sports such as marathons, Iron Man triathlon, and XTERRA™ off-road triathlon. The merchandise of these sports is pitched as a badge of honour and identity, and celebrates the participatory nature of these events. The money generated from official merchandise may never contribute a large percentage of a cycling team's or event's bottom line, but it can form an important part of a diversified revenue stream, as well as an opportunity to build brand identity and awareness.

Efforts have also been made to diversify revenue around live events. Whilst there are intrinsic challenges in collecting gate fees from road cycling, there are opportunities for a semi-ticketed model that could generate significant revenue around professional racing and have not been widely exploited. The introduction of finishing circuits in traditional events, city centre circuits in major Grand Tours or criterium and hill climb series' all present opportunities for gated and ticketed spectator access. Some events, such as the Colorado Classic, have demonstrated the potential for gate fees at bike races to form a significant revenue stream and adding value to sponsorship and broadcast pitches. Further exploitation of tiered ticketing, season-long access passes or festival-style event organisation could reveal a host of diverse revenue streams available to stakeholders in the sport.

### ESTIMATED TEAM VALUES COMPARED

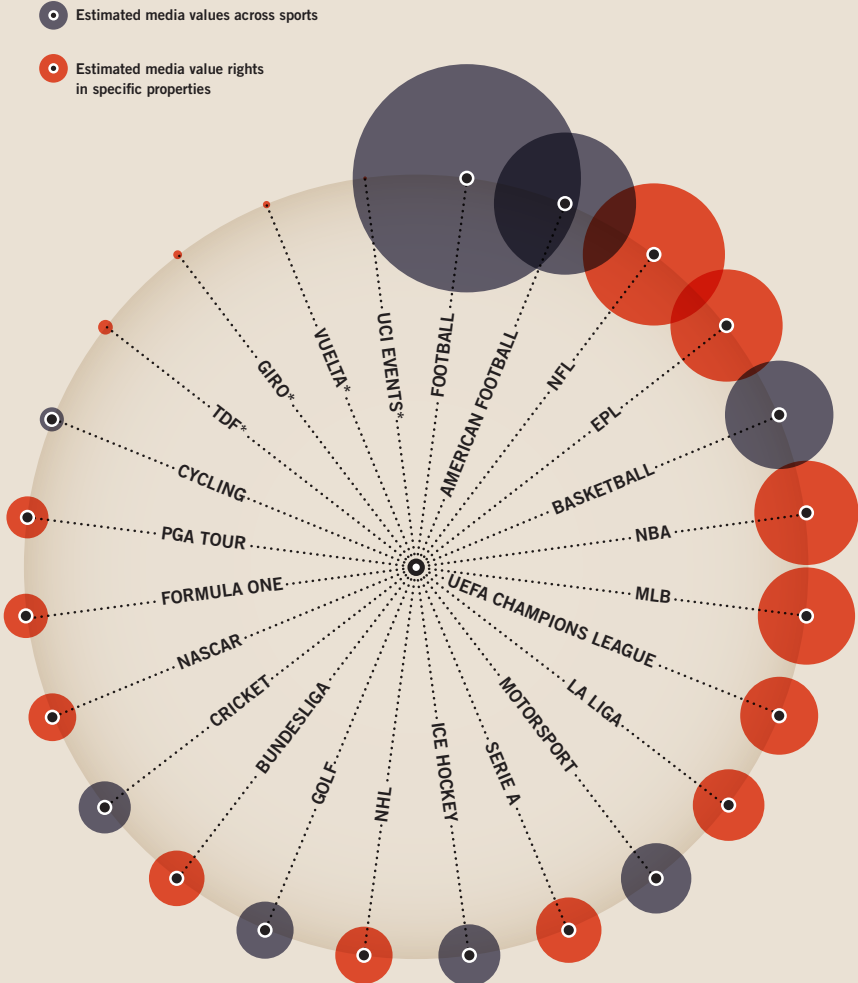
The overall value of professional cycling is difficult to quantify but the estimated value of each major team gives some indication of the sport's size. Leader boards for team values in different sports around the world are often produced and rarely if ever include World Tour cycling teams. For more information see “Estimating value in professional cycling” on page 83.



\*source: For New York Yankees through to Los Angeles Lakers, Forbes' The World's 50 Most Valuable Sports Teams 2017  
\*source: Rapha's estimates for potential value of professional cycling teams in the UCI World Tour, based on similar revenue multiplier model applied in Forbes' list. See Estimating value in professional cycling on page XX for more details.

### ESTIMATED MEDIA VALUES COMPARED

It is widely assumed that the Tour de France is the most valuable media property in professional cycling, with estimates suggesting global broadcast rights are valued between £60m and £100m. The Giro d'Italia and Vuelta a Espana are estimated to be worth considerably less and the remainder of the World Tour an even smaller amount. For more information see “Estimating value in professional cycling” on page 83.



\* Estimates value on pan-European basis

# SPONSOR DIFFERENTLY

As well as key structural challenges in the economics of professional cycling, there is a relatively unsophisticated model of sponsorship pitching and fulfillment compared to other sports, with little shared expertise and few established measures on return of investment. Each of the above potential areas of reform – from the calendar to team organisation, athlete presentation to broadcast evolution, media distribution to alternative revenue streams – present additional sponsorship opportunities that could be exploited with better development of models for sponsorship engagement. In each, an experienced sports marketing team could identify, approach and engage with potential new global sponsors<sup>90</sup> and key sponsor programmes could be put in place, similar to The Olympic Partners (TOP) Programme of the Olympic Games,<sup>91</sup> wherein key international companies are given exclusive global marketing rights in their designated product category for a certain period of time – for example, the exclusive airline or sports drink company of a newly structured calendar, team or content stream.<sup>92</sup> There will also be valuable new advertising opportunities associated with new events, awards, and new prizes proposed above. It is important to note here that there are very few global companies with a marketing budget large enough to vie for sponsorship rights at events of similar size to the Olympics. There are also complexities in media and brand management that are introduced when sponsorship is encouraged at individual, team, event and series levels. But that said, these revenue opportunities exist and it is incumbent on rights holders to do more to use them to grow engagement in cycling.

It is believed that professional cycling attracts one of the wealthiest, most educated and environmentally-aware audiences of any televised sport, particularly in its emerging markets in North America, Britain, Australia and parts of Asia.<sup>93</sup> There are many product and service providers seeking exposure to that demographic – healthcare companies, providers of natural foods or nutritional supplements, tourism companies, communications and technology companies, for example. These sponsors must be made more aware of the great and largely untapped opportunities in cycling<sup>94</sup> and the sport should seek to associate itself with their audiences in turn. Cycling sponsorships can be effective at developing brand recognition, at a low cost per impression, but how that brand recognition is converted into brand equity determines whether a sponsor considers the investment worthwhile

and historically the sport has been poor at demonstrating to these sectors how it will achieve that conversion. There are, however, new opportunities afforded by aforementioned technological advances that have not yet been routinely introduced in the broadcast and presentation of cycling. Television delivery and streaming technologies mentioned earlier could be leveraged to promote impulse product buys, for example, and the delivery of specific content to better targeted consumers opens new potential to brand partnerships. Similar relationships could be sought where appropriate between episodic content creation by individual athletes and teams and complementary brands and organisations far more regularly.

The sport also needs to better understand and respond to the viewing habits and interests of modern sports fans. It must create appropriate measurements and indicators to better understand the value of sponsorship and guide its economic activities in this environment. In the past, cycling sponsorship assumptions, metrics and reports have been inaccurate and oversimplified; here again cycling must learn from more sophisticated sports.<sup>95</sup> Sponsorship feedback can be directly measured through consumer interaction and polls, which can help to quantify brand awareness and effectiveness of a marketing campaign.<sup>96</sup> Longitudinally, a change in the sales of a product or service which is the direct focus of a cycling sponsorship can also provide a measurement. Garmin, for example, has effectively used its sponsorship in cycling to increase brand awareness for its wearable and fitness GPS devices, which helped it to increase sales in that product category by 32% in 2015 to US \$189 million.<sup>97</sup>

Professional cycling's opportunity for an unrivalled range of hospitality, networking opportunities and tourism, outlined above, also presents an additional chance for greater business-to-business marketing that could enhance the sponsorship proposition.<sup>98</sup> In expanding in this area, the sport could create opportunities for sponsors to realise greater value from their investments, in turn encouraging them to make longer-term commitments forged through their participation in the sport. In addition, and contrary to most other sports, a high percentage of cycling fans actually ride a bike. This has huge implications, particularly for endemic sponsors – firms that are selling bikes, components, equipment and apparel actually used by professional cyclists. It also cross-pollinates huge opportunities for companies in the healthcare, financial services, and professional services domains who seek to build high-dollar business relationships with new and existing clients, many of whom are fans and enthusiastic cyclists.



# MIX LOCAL AND GLOBAL

An important aspect of professional cycling's character is its regional variation and as mentioned above, the sport could seek to place more emphasis on this as a means of growing engagement around the world. Just as teams could be linked to regional identities to foster greater chances of prolonged fan loyalty, so too can the search for more sustainable revenue streams be split by region to cater to the specific needs and wants of professional cycling on different continents. While globally-oriented sponsors are highly desirable, there are also many sponsors interested in maximising their exposure to specific regional audiences. Close ties to communities can imbue races with regional character and longevity, but also provide sponsors more incentive to commit year-over-year support. Whereas national sponsors have often been temporary, regional sponsors may be more invested in and dependent on the local economy, and can build market value through a long-term, successful relationship with a race or a team. For example, at a regional level, the Vlaanderen Sport cycling team in Belgium (Flemish riders only) adopted a mission 20 years ago to provide employment, and support the local economy, for a number of promising young Flemish cyclists who have found it difficult to get a professional racing contract, but who would benefit from a UCI Continental-level talent development programme.<sup>99</sup>

The link between local and global consumer mentalities is a phenomenon few other sports can exploit. Most enjoy success in one particular region or country, with all but the biggest sport able to export their offering around the world to build fan bases located huge distances from the venues where the sport is played. Professional cycling has already established a network of elite races on almost every continent and found organic audiences in each location of enthusiasts and participants, each connected to the global sport and local community. But to date, it has not exploited regional variations to build more stable sponsorship deals that can capitalise on that resource. The products, services and content offered by event organisers, endemic brands and teams could also better cater to the regional character of road racing in each of the areas that they operate. In US cycling, for instance, the widespread trend for gravel and dirt road riding (fuelled by technological advances in kit and equipment, the state of cycling infrastructure and existing adventure community),<sup>100</sup> presents a unique set of opportunities for products and services around professional cycling in that country.

Similarly, the increasing popularity of a particular type of road cycling in Asia that favours indoor training and sportive participation (created by a mix of growing health-conscious affluent communities, poor air quality in urban locations and bad cycling infrastructure), could give rise to a bespoke range of events and outreach strategies within the sport targeting that form of participation.

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## DIMENSION DATA AND HAVING A MISSION

One example of a team that has created a more compelling network of sponsorship partners in today's World Tour is Team Dimension Data. Rather than just following the European blueprint of obtaining the usual sponsorships and building a team around a few star riders, team Principal Douglas Ryder chose to focus on a specific mission: improving the mobility of everyday South African citizens by supporting the Qhubeka charity. The clear focus on this objective, rather than direct monetary rewards or targeted victories in pro cycling, freed Ryder to adopt a unique team philosophy, set unconventional priorities, target different sorts of goals, and measure success differently to other teams at the top level of the sport.

# REDUCE THE COSTS

In most sports, television rights revenues are a major, if not the single largest source of income.<sup>101, 102</sup> But in professional road cycling (outside of one or two prominent events) TV revenues are virtually non-existent. Estimated revenue on televised hours is often incorrectly reported as income, but these figures are indirectly derived as ‘advertising’ value, as demonstrated in the Repucom 2013 report. The actual revenue taken in by race broadcasters, producers, and organisers is not well known, only inferred.<sup>103</sup> In fact, race organisers often have to pay broadcasters to cover their events, rather than the other way around. Many cycling events – particularly those in the United States – must purchase the air time to actually broadcast their event on a TV network. While TV channels compete with each other and pay huge prices for the right to televise more popular sports like American football, every race aired in North America’s cable/satellite market, except for ASO’s properties (covered under its licensing with NBC-Universal), is a time-buy. Indeed, the Tour de France is the only bicycle race broadcast in the US that commands a rights payment – although that payment is quite minimal. Even in France, the national TV station is believed to pay only about €32 million to the race owner for the rights to televise the Tour de France – a rounding error relative to the prices paid for the media rights in other sports, like European football. The Tour of California is rumoured to pay NBC-Universal upwards of \$250,000 for its annual time-buy, according to numerous interviewees.

Cycling is also almost prohibitively expensive to televise.<sup>104</sup> The sport must seek ways to make the broadcast of live racing more profitable, even in light of the technological advances explored above and which present additional opportunities for direct, online distribution. It must pursue a strategy of merging more cost-effective production technologies with (the previously-discussed) compelling entertainment content and improved broadcast distribution techniques. As a sport run “on the road,” cycling has historically required a huge array of specialised equipment and personnel – helicopters, motorcycles, mobile high-def cameras, satellite uplink trucks and TV relay aircraft across massive geographical areas. To become more

economic, organisers and broadcasters must be aggressive in evaluation and investigation of new ways to control costs. The sport must leverage new technologies such as drone cameras, miniaturised video production systems, rapid video encoding for broadcasting, and cellular bandwidth transmission – innovations which can make the race cheaper to produce but also more exciting. These types of technologies require a smaller footprint of hardware and are largely software-driven, allowing content producers to rapidly assemble a range of programming for fans. Everything from interview features to in-car feeds, to personalised click-to-demand feeds from individual riders’ on-board cameras are all made possible.

## F1 AND STREAMLINED BROADCASTING

TV production costs for live races are significant, but there are opportunities to streamline the costs and logistics of broadcasting. Currently, race organisers source their own TV production resources, resulting in a patchwork of expertise and equipment spread unevenly across the world of professional cycling, and wide variances in the production quality of broadcast races. This is very different to the state of affairs in Formula 1. A TV production crew is a central part of F1’s travelling show, as much a part of racing as the teams and race officials, and their coverage is known for its consistency and quality.

Kent Gordis, a cycling TV producer from the US, puts the rental cost of specialised camera and broadcast equipment required to cover a bike race at \$30,000 per day. The Tour of California requires a minimum of three motorcycle/camera pairs, a transmission-relay plane, at least one camera helicopter, custom wireless delivery hardware, TV production support trucks, and an announcer team – the total cost for this, including rental fees, labour costs, logistical support, and permitting, is around \$200,000 per day.

The F1 model offers significant efficiencies over cycling’s existing model: rental costs can be reduced through collective bargaining, expertise can be retained from race to race, and logistical costs and organisation can be centralised. New technologies can also contribute to lower production costs – devices like the NewTek Tri-Caster video production system represent huge leaps in miniaturisation, and have a one-time cost of \$30,000, while a traditional production truck costs as much as \$25,000 per day to rent. According to Kent Gordis, the 2017 Redlands Cycling Classic made use of some of these new technologies in its online broadcasts, with a total production budget of \$15,000. The Tour of California, with its traditional broadcasting practices and the additional expense of time-buying from TV networks, is rumoured to have production costs of around \$3.2 million.

Beyond sharing the large fixed costs of all the hardware, this could potentially benefit the quality and consistency of the coverage and could allow new television features to be introduced to the sport in a standardised and uniform way. This type of production approach could reduce costs significantly and would be much easier to implement under our proposed league structure than it would be under today's scattershot system of race organisation.

In sum, the sport must continue to explore new means of controlling costs while simultaneously making television viewing or internet streaming of the sport more appealing. Only by focusing on all of these requirements at once can the broadcast revenue stream start to grow more rapidly.

## REFORM THE GOVERNANCE

For many of the experts interviewed for this research, each of the potential reforms outlined above is made less likely by the internal structure of professional cycling's organisation and governance. Whilst far from the most eye-catching challenge facing the sport, the near-incomprehensible and often incoherent structure of the elite sport is hugely significant in considering future growth.

Professional cycling is officially governed by the UCI (see "governance at a glance" on page 97) but almost every major stakeholder in the sport, even senior figures within the UCI itself, acknowledges that much of the power in cycling lies within another organisation: the ASO. The French company, which holds stakes in several major sports and media organisations, owns the Tour de France, Vuelta a España and a host of professional cycling's other big events. It is by far the most powerful event organiser in the sport. It has, for many, done more to advance the sport of professional cycling in the 20th and 21st century than any other stakeholder. The organisation is passionate about the sport and has sought to encourage growth and reform in a number of ways. From innovations in format and structure of racing to the creation of more meaningful engagement and participation among fans, the ASO has sought ways to connect cycling to more people. And

### THE GOVERNANCE AT A GLANCE

The UCI is recognised by the International Olympic Committee as the governing body of cycling. The UCI oversees road, mountain bike, BMX, artistic cycling, track racing and para-cycling. There are numerous other governing bodies for cycling at a regional level, but none that have the reach of the UCI.

The UCI has jurisdiction over racing licenses and rules, world championships, record keeping, and anti-doping efforts. It is governed by a president, who is elected every four years by the UCI Congress of 45 delegates from continental federations. Europe sends 15 delegates to the UCI Congress, each other continental federation sends nine, except Oceania which sends three. The Congress meets twice a year, and its main roles are to sign off on the UCI's accounts, to ratify the decisions of the Management Committee, headed by the president, and to ensure that all UCI policy is in accordance with the UCI's constitution. It also appoints members to an ethics commission, and has final say on admitting and excluding National Federations to the UCI.

The Management Committee works to establish regulations for competition, awards the right to host world championships, and sets up Commissions to guide the development of the sport. Commissions are where much of the day-to-day decisions about the sport are made, and are generally made up of stakeholders from the sport and the cycling industry.

Five judicial bodies are called upon to arbitrate decisions for the UCI. These bodies are considered separate from the UCI, and cover disciplinary issues, licensing decisions, ethics, and anti-doping.

A significant source of the UCI's power comes from its recognition by the IOC. National federations must be affiliated with the UCI if they want to send riders to the Olympics, and the UCI has the final say on how riders qualify for the Olympics - as such, the UCI has the power to disqualify riders from the Olympics if they compete in non-sanctioned events, although this power is rarely exercised. There are a number of other bodies which seek to influence the UCI, to varying degrees: riders' unions, trade bodies, and affiliations of professional teams.

yet sources within the UCI and ASO have acknowledged that there has historically been some animosity between the two organisations, which has in the past seen rifts emerge at the heart of the sport.<sup>105, 106, 107</sup>

For many, the potential for disagreement between two major power brokers in the sport risks a fundamental - and often distracting - conflict in attempts to grow the sport. Some suggest professional cycling would be

a more compelling spectacle if organisation was simplified, promoting a model that grants the ASO sole control of a revised World Tour calendar. Others balk at the potential for monopoly control, claiming event organisers and others have been conservative in their approach to innovation. It seems unlikely that the extremes of either position would ever come to fruition, but many believe the governance systems inside professional cycling must adapt and evolve in order to facilitate the improvements and modernisation proposed above.<sup>108</sup>

Interactions between key stakeholders in professional cycling – the UCI (the Olympic Federation), AIGCP (association of team owners), AIOCC (association of event organisers), the CPA (association of riders) and others – can be claimed to have the inadvertent effect of limiting the economic objectives or competitive aspirations of participants. In their further interactions with and regulations of individual stakeholders, there is a risk of hindering the promotion and development of the sport and artificially limiting the potential reach of road racing as a whole. And yet, there are many proven ways in which all of the stakeholders can cooperate to build a stronger, more popular, more equitable, and more profitable sport and reform should seek to build upon these.<sup>109, 110</sup> Indeed, many of the most powerful stakeholders interviewed for this research has explained in detail their desire for better collaboration. There have already been considerable efforts made in this regard and these should be championed. Ultimately, the governance of professional cycling should be led by interests of the fans of the sport, and reform should be focussed on finding ways to better connect the sports' leaders with the views of consumers. Governance of the sport should seek to simplify complexities in the sport, focussing on regulating conduct rather than fighting for control of organisational structures. In doing so, the increasing influence of brands and private enterprise in modern sport should be reflected in governance reform; vendors should have a seat at the table. Governance should be orientated around connecting the sport to more fans, with regulation of conduct better based on whether it is good or bad for that simple aim.

In interviews for this work with key stakeholders, a number of practical changes to the sport's governance were recommended as means to create an environment that fosters growth. It has been suggested that a new constitution for the governance and conduct of professional cycling should be agreed by all stakeholders and published. If sought, its drafting should include submissions from the UCI, organisers, teams and athletes, media organisations and vendors and it should clearly state the ambition and priorities for the sport, outlining clearly where power lies in professional cycling and seeking to explain as clearly as possible the ideal roles of different stakeholders. It should, for many, limit the reach of the UCI, removing mention in the current constitution of the organisation's ambition to "control" cycling. Doing so would do little to limit the organisation's

position as a regulator of the sport whilst establishing clear boundaries between those involved in the daily production of professional cycling and those involved in monitoring its conduct. It should acknowledge the power of race organisers and sponsors in the sport's development in the modern era.

If such a constitution sought to build on the reforms outlined above to team and calendar structure, it could codify that organising rights for a revised World Tour (One Day and Grand Tour series) be licensed as a whole to a single organiser or a consortium of organisers. In a bid to introduce much needed stability, efficiency and uniformity in the organisation, format and presentation of professional bike racing, the sport could seek to award organising licenses for a whole series of events to a single organiser. Those rights could in turn be linked to basic contractual requirements, including the inclusion of women's races and a mass participation public ride for every event, as well as minimum media offerings and a clear strategy for digital and traditional broadcast distribution. As well as the allocation, oversight and management of those series rights, the UCI could refocus its efforts on 1) Facilitating independent anti-doping controls and imposing severe punishments for transgressions, 2) Regulating rider welfare through engagement with a stronger rider's union, and 3) Encouraging grassroots cycling participation and programmes in national cycling federations. It follows from those recommendations that the UCI should not host races, though such a recommendation would challenge its primary revenue source. The organisation's occasional position as race organiser, chiefly during the annual World Championships, muddies the existing structure of professional cycling by attempting to operate in the same event-sponsorship market that it regulates.

In addition to the reforms proposed above,<sup>111</sup> there have been regular calls for a better alignment of teams and race organisations, including a more powerful and cohesive voice or union for the riders. The existing rider's unions have struggled historically to be heard on issues of organisation and governance, owing in part to the complexity of coherently representing such a broad athlete body and in part to the serious limitations in resources afforded to the organisation. The UCI has been criticised by those involved for failing to offer meaningful involvement from key rider trade unions in relevant bodies and committees<sup>112</sup> and athletes and team managers interviewed for this research claim there is scant regard for rider welfare among the organisers of major World Tour races. Some have even called for a boycott of the most prestigious events to fight for reforms to the racing calendar and format. Proponents of a stronger rider's union suggest the collective will of professional athletes – broadly to make the sport safer, more financially attractive and more stable – would encourage reforms that would grow the potential for new sponsorship engagement and more long-term fan loyalty.



## BREAKING AWAY

How do we attract non-cyclists?



WITH THE STRUCTURAL, competitive and distribution recommendations proposed above, professional cycling can begin to appeal to more fans worldwide. But this is only the first step. By virtue of becoming more inspirational and accessible, the sport can help to encourage more people to start riding, encouraging more participants to tap into the camaraderie and sense of belonging which the cycling community can nurture. This must be included as the most enduring aspect of a plan for continuous growth in the sport. If professional cycling can build a greater emotional connection to both new enthusiasts and current cyclists, turning more and more people into active participants, this will in turn build broader interest and acceptance of the professional sport around the world and expand the cycling market.

The sport of cycling must become more accessible if it is to encourage this kind of global participation, lowering the barrier to entry and introducing the activity to younger and more diverse communities. The sport must recognise it lags far behind most others in capturing the imaginations of children beyond its position as the first means of local transportation for many. Lifelong relationships with sport often begin from the earliest ages and the most popular sports have created a cultural significance that sees children exposed to their activity as core milestones in adolescent development. The familial appeal of sporting celebrities, who are so often listed as childhood heroes as well as world-class athletes, further reinforces the relationship between a fan and their chosen sport. Learning to ride a bike, a childhood achievement with near universal resonance, gifts cycling a similar position within a vast number of cultures around the world. The professional sport, beyond occasional marketing drives, has historically failed to capitalise on this earliest mode of participation. There is almost no link drawn between one's first bike, their first ride and the potential stars that make a living from the same activity. If there was, the average age of viewers of the Tour de France might not be so high.

The sport also sits in a unique position as a tool for environmental and social activism and its popularity can directly influence global approaches to climate change and urban infrastructure. Tapping into the broader trend for more environmentally-friendly and socially-responsible living could further boost engagement opportunities for the sport. In turn, the increased overall presence of cycling can help to change how villages, towns and cities plan for cycling in their infrastructure and encourage cycling as part of overall regional economic interests and development, building participation in the activity into the development of urban communities.

New cyclists would also help transform the global cycling economy, with increasing bicycle sales, expanded accessory markets, technology innovations, and diversified apparel tastes. Rather than being a smaller second-rate sport, constrained in an economic corner by the size of its current market and business model, pro cycling can be the spark for greater prosperity for all the companies doing business today.

## JOIN THE CLUBS

The most obvious method for growing the sport's participation is to improve its existing local communities and to build new ones. Cycling groups or clubs of one sort or another are a global phenomenon – places where like-minded cycling enthusiasts band together to ride, socialise and express their love of the sport.<sup>113</sup> From the outskirts of Johannesburg to the suburbs of Tokyo, the American heartland to the Italian countryside, club cyclists show their passion for the sport every day in group rides, sharing their identity with custom-printed club jerseys. But the cycling club model has often been one of insiders speaking to insiders – particularly in many of the cycling hotbeds around the world and has evolved almost entirely removed from the professional sport. Rather than actively opening the door to new cycling enthusiasts and helping to connect them to the sport's identity and characters, many clubs are places where experienced riders only connect with each other. This has often contributed to a perception that cycling is exclusive, expensive, and elitist, further reinforcing existing perceptions that the elite sport is the same. Newer or less experienced cyclists often feel excluded, or find it intimidating or difficult to break into these sorts of communities. We must create change in the cycling club culture from one of riders seeking other riders to cyclists

encouraging more cycling.

There are several ways for existing and new clubs to change this perception and facilitate more meaningful connection to the sport. They could be used to leverage the club model to pull together like-minded fans of professional teams (see the earlier recommendation that more regional teams should start to evolve). Professional teams could encourage this change by dedicating time and funds to help such clubs form, promoting events like mass-start sportif rides, and holding meet-and-greet events with the team's riders as they travel around world. Event organisers could capitalise on this more participatory “gran fondo” culture by inviting clubs to compete against each other in these events – perhaps with special prizes for fastest times, most participants, and other challenges. As well as creating physical opportunities for connection, cycling clubs could become a lynchpin for digital engagement between fans, enthusiasts and the professional sport (discussed in further detail below). Building on experiments outlined above with Zwift-talent spotting and team-led content creation, a modern cycling club could provide a digital structure for fan and participant interaction with elite athletes, from shared professional training plans to e-rides, exclusive made-for-member content and more.

Another approach would be to invest in existing clubs, encouraging more outreach and inclusion of new riders in their communities and encouraging explicit links with local teams. New professional cycling teams could also be encouraged divert some of their sponsorship earnings and licensing revenues to helping build clubs which promote young rider development programmes, in turn benefitting from the creation of an owned engaged audience within an active cycling club. Funds can be shared with clubs to stage weekly enthusiast “come as you are” rides to encourage new participants. Just as importantly, funds could be made available for junior and women's development programmes, to help encourage and inspire new participants. Professional teams might also have a league-mandated responsibility to hold structured clinics with their clubs, occasionally sending out their pro riders to demonstrate tactics, safe riding or simply to spend time with younger riders to further their love of cycling.

Whether the cycling club is a new or an existing entity in a local community, the possibility of stronger funding for amateur development programmes would boost the entire sport. These programmes (perhaps funded in part by a professional team or event organisers) could create an unbroken rider development path, from a grassroots regional club to the very top level of pro cycling, mirroring the feeder programmes that are already well established in other sports. Critically, it can provide investment which helps underprivileged participants offset the often high expenses of obtaining a racing bike, and having the right equipment to start their competitive journey. The path into professional cycling is often unclear and many of the experts interviewed for this work said finding a manageable, sustainable

route to develop within the sport was a major barrier to progression. Talent development strategies vary from country to country, often dictated by sporting and funding priorities within regional bodies or government departments, with the growth of British Cycling in the 1990s and 2000s providing the most compelling case study in recent years (see "the rise of British cycling" on page 107). In attempting to build a sustainable future for the sport, it may be necessary to develop a more sophisticated global approach to talent development in the sport, and not just for the racers. There is significant human collateral in the process of finding elite competitors in any sport; for every single professional sports contract signed there are hundreds if not thousands of would-be athletes left disheartened and often disengaged. Efforts to build ongoing participation in the sport could see the development of an alternate talent pathway within cycling clubs, connected to professional teams, that educates and encourages new fans to pursue involvement in the sport at every level - in riding, organisation, promotion, governance and more. The numbers involved may be small, but there is a major chance to promote the sport beyond as a lifelong pursuit rather than a social activity, and create a beacon for progressive engagement between enthusiasts and elite sport.

On the other hand, other local cycling clubs can play the role of enhancing the experiences of enthusiasts who simply love riding their bikes, but who have no particular interest in trying to become a competitive racer or pursue any type of career within the sport. A well-developed club model which is increasingly integrated with the professional side of the sport can also provide sponsors or partner companies with opportunities to get involved in the sport at a local level.<sup>114</sup> This would help to diversify investment in the amateur and club structure of the sport, and help to fund activities including non-racing, inter-club competitions and joint events to improve cycling safety and cycling infrastructure improvements in those sponsors' key business regions.

## THE RISE OF BRITISH CYCLING

The history of cycling federations in the UK has a surprisingly cloak-and-dagger air - the National Cyclists' Union banned racing on the road in the early 1890s, leading to a succession of rebel groups who raced at dawn on codenamed courses, or sent cadres of riders off to the continent for their racing fix. The schism lasted until 1959, when the British Cycling Federation (later renamed British Cycling) was formed from a merger of other bodies.

The British Government changed its approach to funding for sports in 1997. Money from the National Lottery was to be awarded to sports based on their potential for Olympic medals, and British Cycling was uniquely successful in benefiting from the new funding scheme, and of complementing this focus on elite achievement with a boom in grassroots participation.

In 1998, British Cycling (BC) developed a 'playground to podium' system of talent development. A nationwide talent identification programme visited schools up and down the country, serving to improve awareness of cycling among young people, and identifying talented young riders who were invited to join regional development teams. A who's who of British racers passed through the 'Talent Teams', including multiple Olympic medallists Laura Trott and Jason Kenny, and they are still the main feeder of riders into BC's Olympic Development Programme.

BC also invested heavily in infrastructure. The Manchester Velodrome is the jewel in the British Cycling crown, but it is augmented by a number of other racing tracks and velodromes up and down the country. These facilities are a boon to amateur cycling clubs in Britain, as well as training grounds for elite talent.

One result of BC's talent identification efforts and infrastructure investment is that they were poised for any uptick in national interest in the sport, and capable of translating this interest into improved participation numbers. Since Jason Quealy won Britain's first gold medal of the Sydney Olympics, British riders have earned another 25 golds - a staggering feat. This accomplishment has been matched by a host of healthy signs from lower down the sport's pyramid: tens of thousands more women cycling for sport and leisure, 125,000 members of British Cycling, and record numbers of people riding to work.

# FOLLOW SOCIAL

Participation in the activity can also be increased through non-traditional outreach by the professional cycling community which leverage the power of virtual communities. Teams and clubs, as well as organisers and service providers, all share a responsibility to better engage with their audiences, as discussed above, by finding new ways and channels to communicate. Virtual communities are unifying forces for people who might otherwise never connect with each other and given the diversity of cycling's growing fan base, along with broad potential interest in cycling for fitness and transportation, social media could of course be a key driver of the sport's future success.

Either directly, or indirectly through its relationships with local cycling clubs, professional cycling can tap into these many virtual communities: communities of parents planning activities for their children, grade school or high school students, or simple fitness enthusiasts. There are networking communities of business professionals, many of whom socially ride. There are huge communities of people in health weight-loss programmes, seeking to add cycling to their fitness goals. And there are very specific competitive and virtual fitness enterprises, like Zwift, which could provide beneficial partnerships. But to date, the majority of professional cycling's stakeholders have been one-dimensional in their use of social media, creating owned channels as an organic home for team, event or athlete news and doing little to reward engaged fans for choosing to follow them. Compared to other sports, innovation in this field has been largely absent and it's hard to find examples of professional cycling-associated social media strategies that encourage active participation (see page 71). Notable exceptions include the now defunct 'Sky rides' campaign associated with Team Sky or CANYON//SRAM's regular promotion of 'Women's 100' and 'Festive 500' challenges. Far more could be done with consistent calls to action from professionals to amateurs and the vast majority of stakeholders interviewed for this research recognised their duty to better promote cycling to new and returning fans already engaged on social media.

There are additional opportunities to build cross-platform promotions using social media, fostering better collaboration between teams, organisers and content creators. In so doing, professional cycling could also explore

new developments in monetising social media, including micropayments for content that allow audiences to pay for access to particularly valuable media. This strategy should be a key component in the quest to attract more interest in cycling, and increase the value of the audience for professional cycling. With the right outreach, these new connections can first become casual enthusiasts, and later turn into diehard fans and participants.

# DEVELOP THE YOUTH

Another opportunity for professional cycling over the longer term is to build the foundation for much wider youth participation in the activity by investing in programmes which partner with grade schools, high schools, colleges and beyond to encourage cycling as transportation to school or for achieving physical fitness goals. The key is to create a positive atmosphere which presents cycling as a healthy activity, encourages safe riding habits, and opens the door to a lifelong appreciation for the bike. Particularly in areas like North America, there is a great opportunity to lift the visibility, status and funding of competitive collegiate level cycling. Interviews with the leaders of key outreach programmes across cycling disciplines revealed a potential model for growth in this area, with cooperation between experts at the elite level, regional facilitators and local community volunteers (see "mountain biking and young riders" on page 110). These opportunities for structural outreach, which could see elite cycling linked to youth communities through the infrastructure of education in key target areas, could have a massive impact on growing the sport by regularly challenging assumptions around the safety and appeal of road cycling before they are formed. That habitual exposure to road cycling as transportation, an activity and a sport could be further capitalised upon by ensuring the sport is exciting and understandable, as well as accessible, in line with the reforms outlined above. Cycling clubs could add further support, or help guide the

organisation of inter-school cycling competitions – perhaps not racing, but less competitive rivalries like mileage challenges, and the replacement of fundraising via candy sales with bicycle charity rides. In some regions, there is the opportunity to form school-level introductory racing events or add new investment into existing school racing leagues.

Road cycling will only strengthen its future if an international youth programme is built, learning from the feeder programmes of almost every reputable ball and track sport.

#### MOUNTAIN BIKING AND YOUNG RIDERS

The sport's youth development and participation programmes are lagging behind mountain biking, which through the National Interscholastic Cycling Association (NICA) in the US and similar programmes in Europe helps schools and colleges introduce off-road cycling into the daily lives of their students. The future of its cousin on the road can build on that, encouraging participation with major global tournaments and recognised feeder channels into the sport's elite.

NICA, which began in one US high school in 1998, was originally intended to be a road cycling youth programme. Demand from the target students forced those involved to shift focus to mountain biking and by 2003 the organisation has its first community league attracting 250 students in northern California. NICA's leadership expanded the organisation into schools in southern California and Colorado, and continued to add locations until they had a footprint in 19 states by 2017. There are an estimated 14,000 active students riding bikes in NICA programmes around the US, supported by a network of up to 6,000 trained adult instructors. There were around 130 NICA branded events in the last year, including camps and training sessions, and they have seen strong double-digit growth year-on-year for the least four years.

The organisation claims some anecdotal evidence that riders graduate into road cycling after leaving the NICA programme and there is an obvious opportunity to engage better with this audience. The model, of equipping community leaders with the tools needed to facilitate youth participation, is similarly applicable to road cycling and ought to be explored at elite ranks as well as amongst broader stakeholders.

# CRASH THE PARTY

There are a handful of new format cycling and entertainment events that have sought to bring the sport to new audiences. As mentioned above, evening racing events have been held in the downtown areas of major cities to attract interest in and support for cycling from urban communities and digitally-connected e-rides have been hosted to unite riders on home trainers around the world. Other stakeholders in cycling, as well as businesses outside of cycling, must be encouraged to promote these types of new events, which can bring the spectacle of racing and participation in riding to new fans in new regions by promoting and partnering with totally different entertainment propositions. There is, for example, an argument that stakeholders in professional cycling should seek to grow its potential reach by finding opportunities to piggyback racing on more established live entertainment events. The tendency towards the festival-style development of existing bike races, showcased by the likes of Red Hook Crit and at some key Classic events, has already moved the sport in this direction. The strategy could be even more explicit, with organisers collaborating across cycling disciplines and with other sports and entertainment groups to bring the spectacle of bike racing to new audiences. That plan must be developed to capitalise on potential new fans and new participants by further changing the amateur and racing formats to suit these collaborations, with an emphasis on making events more exciting in a broader entertainment context.

Whether directly through a network of clubs, or through indirect support by a pro cycling league, a toolkit of the best practices, planning and how-to instructions could also be developed to allow local entrepreneurs to help stage a well-planned, safe, and exciting race. In collating and sharing logistical experience, the cycling community could better provide investors with a blueprint for bringing the elite spectacle to new audiences.

Races like Red Hook can become more than just fast-paced evening criteriums. They can become lively additions to both recreational and competitive cycling's landscape, helping to give new enthusiasts their first taste of racing in a supportive community environment. They can also provide



experienced competitors with new local races to hone their racing acumen as they strive to become professionals. If properly integrated with the evolving landscape of professional cycling and broader entertainment trends, races like Nocturnes could become a fixture of the amateur or lower-level pro calendar, further building the diversity of the sport.

## CONNECT THE DOTS

Developed sports around the world - baseball, American football, soccer, ice hockey and others - have also sought to create one-stop shops for their fanbases. They have curated meaningful experiences for their new fans with TV channels, websites, apps and publications dedicated solely to their disciplines. The most successful give fans deep insight into their sport, their teams and their players, allowing them to track performance and analysis throughout the year. Their audiences are huge, and engagement considerable.

But they could go further. Cycling could become the first sport in the world to completely integrate the passive action of watching racing and the active participation of riding; the avid racing fan and the first-bike commuter. The sport could learn from the one-stop content hubs of others and radically expand them, revolutionising its content at the same time as building personal riding into its offering.

As well as integrated race and pro team coverage on and off the bike, cycling media, governors, teams and organisers could collaborate to provide the means to build a community in a professional cycling hub. Riders should be able track their trips, organise their rides, order their kit, build their fantasy leagues, and create their own clubs in the same space that they follow live races, learn about stage results, bet on results, listen to team radios, watch the latest interviews, analyse the best performances and even check the doping records of the sport's elite. In an increasingly congested market,

where sports and entertainment compete for the same time investment from the same consumers on the same screens of smartphones, tablets and computers, professional cycling must be at once convenient, comprehensible and compelling. Coupling the reforms outlined throughout these pages with a concerted effort to add value to the lives of fans and participants with a distinct and easy-to-use window on professional athletes could have a major bearing on the perception of the sport moving forward. The future of the sport, of all sport, is in the experience of the next generation through the gates - we should set out our stall to include everything the elite sport has to offer alongside the addictive appeal of riding, integrating the personal and the professional.

By drawing on the elements and recommendations discussed in this research, it is possible to begin to reinvent professional cycling, attract and inspire new participants at the professional, amateur and recreational levels, and bring the sport to a broader audience. By inspiring new participants and fans at the grassroots level, the top level of professional cycling can start to transform its own future. The downward spiral which has so frequently diminished this sport in the past can be reversed; changes and improvements at every level of the sport can combine to create a more exciting, economically robust and growing participatory sport.

This Roadmap seeks to present a plan to advance cycling everywhere - and for everyone. The bicycle is a universal symbol of fitness and freedom, and the professional sport must do more to reflect those principles, to build relationships with people around world and to encourage them to ride. Investment in cycling clubs, diversification of outreach programmes across the social media landscape, and encouraging people of all ages and backgrounds to ride bikes will help to increase the sport's visibility and participation rate. If we can connect to people who otherwise might not ride regularly, provide incentives which help them to feel included in the cycling culture, and enjoy the sport more as fans and participants, the sport can begin to eradicate many of the constraints which have held it back to date.

## ALL THE DIFFERENCE

RESEARCH FOR THIS project has taken us all over the world. We have conducted interviews with a number of the sport's most experienced stakeholders, snatching conversations at races, at training camps, at sportives, at music festivals, on university campuses, on planes and beyond. We have researched the state of the sport for almost two years for this work and we have barely scratched the surface. There are hundreds of opinions we would have been lucky to hear and thousands of points of view that could not be included. Each section outlined above could form its own study. Each interviewee deserves their own platform. Each recommendation belies the true scale of the potential.

But beyond the substance of these discussions, beyond the specifics of reality and reform which have formed the spine of this work, it is the meetings themselves that form most compelling sign of the incredible symbol for change. Professional cycling is overflowing with talent on and off the bike and there is no shortage of passion for the sport at every level of involvement. That passion, whether it was presented as anger and frustration or optimism and reflection, was evident in every interview for this work. Riders past and present agitated for a voice without exception. Team managers and owners all spoke candidly of their struggles for survival. The organisers of the biggest events revealed in unison the pressures driving their business. Governors, lobbyists and politicians have detailed as though scripted their shortcomings as well as their successes. We have spoken at length about the demand on riders, the structure of races and calendars, the value of media and sponsorship, the pressures of oversight, the realities of doping and the systemic, relentless failures to change perceptions. Nothing has been off limits and we have been presented consistently with the same image of the sport; it is too beautiful, too exciting, too completely bewitching to be so small, to leave so much on the table.

At the very least, it is a sport filled with people eager to talk and to talk candidly. With the fewest of exceptions, senior officials and figures throughout the world of cycling were willing to talk openly and at length about the challenges they face and the opportunities they see. In all, the eagerness to help with this research from each of those we met is amongst the most encouraging findings of this work. The viability or appeal of any one suggested reform in the text above could be contested and will likely form the basis of our debates going forward, but the appetite to work for those solutions across the sport is beyond discussion. Entire organisations of people appear energised to bring professional cycling to more people and connect more meaningfully with fans and participants. That is a remarkable asset and the only question, the central question for the Rapha Roadmap, is how.

Each chapter has attempted to frame the answer. There are fundamental challenges to reaching new fans posed by the very structure of the sport; the format of racing, the calendar of events, the organisation of teams and the process of reward. In Talking Shop, specific recommendations for reform to the sport itself detail the potential for a better organised race programme, a new approach to teams and more compelling formats. There are equally difficult questions surrounding the presentation of the sport; its broadcast on television and digital platforms, its presentation as a live spectacle and all its associated media. Dressing the Window attempts to locate some of the opportunities for connecting with new fans in new places and building meaningful engagement between the public and the sport, including the potential to enhance coverage across genders and disciplines in a bid to change the image of professional cycling. The undeniable financial weakness of the sport at almost every level is considered in Making Money and potential advances in sponsorship targeting, cost reduction and revenue diversification are outlined. Finally, the gulf between participation and those involved in racing at the highest level is addressed. Breaking Away suggests how riders, teams, events and sponsors could get closer to the cycling community and add value to their experience, shaping how cycling could learn from the successful initiatives of other sports to connect with more people.

In each of these areas Rapha has sought to identify chances to help. This research was commissioned at the end of our relationship with Team Sky to orientate Rapha's involvement in the professional sport and has led directly to a series of major business decisions. The Rapha Roadmap project was among the first steps towards a major 2019 teams project that will see Rapha working with a host of partners to create a truly revolutionary force in the sport, the concept and ethos of which are linked inextricably to the Rapha Roadmap. With these activities and more, Rapha is committed to helping grow the sport as a whole, connecting with more fans and building more meaningful connection with those already engaged.

The implications of this work for Rapha are already being felt. As we seek

to take a new position on professional cycling we are changing the way we work and will continue to champion reform at every level of the sport. Its impact, we hope, will be seen in a growing number of fans, an increasingly engaged audience and a willingness pursue radical innovation. Professional cycling must be made more accessible and more engaging. In reaching that destination, we will have to take the road less travelled.

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111. Further reading on each of these topics of organisation and governance of professional cycling can be found in Appendix 5.
- 112.
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114. This model is being built today by several clubs, but most successfully by BEAT Cycling, in conjunction with the Rebel Group consulting firm in Rotterdam, NL - <https://www.beatcycling.club/> retrieved July 12, 2017, <http://www.wielerflits.nl/nieuws/219220/vijf-vragen-over-beat-cycling-club.html> retrieved July 12, 2017

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1

In researching the Rapha Roadmap, the authors sought interviews - formal and informal - with key stakeholders who hold diverse and often conflicting opinions about the future of professional cycling. Interviews ranged in length and varied in topic, but all were conducted on the basis of confidentiality. The interviewees include riders past and present, team owners and employees, event organisers and sponsors, endemic and non-endemic media representatives, activist and lobbying groups and those involved in the governance of the sport. Their specific opinions and beliefs have been deliberately anonymised as far as possible in the text. As of publication, these interviews are also ongoing. The authors continue to seek the opinions of stakeholders unavailable or inaccessible prior to publication for inclusion in future editions and any parties interested are asked to email: [oliver.duggan@rapha.cc](mailto:oliver.duggan@rapha.cc)

|                     |                        |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| Alex Valdman        | Yan Le Moenner         |
| Richard Moore       | Peter Keen             |
| Francois Thomezau   | Mark Cavendish         |
| Dylan Casey         | Daniel Friebe          |
| Lance Armstrong     | Beth Duryea            |
| Simon Mottram       | Ellen Noble            |
| Dede Barry          | Molly Hurford          |
| Michael Barry       | Alena Amialiusik       |
| Joshua Robinson     | Alice Barnes           |
| Rhys Howells        | Elena Cecchini         |
| Derek Bouchard Hall | Tiffany Cromwell       |
| Guy Andrews         | Tanja Erath            |
| Eric Min            | Pauline Ferrand-Prevot |
| Hannah Barnes       | Lisa Klein             |
| Peter Walker        | Kasia Niewedoma        |
| Marco Pinotti       | Christa Riffel         |
| Jerry Pomije        | James Fairbank         |
| Austin McInerney    | Alexis Ryan            |
| Stueart Walton      | Leah Torvilson         |
| Jenn Dice           | Trixi Worrack          |
| Jennifer Boldry     | Ronny Lauke            |
| Tim Blumenthal      | Barry Austin           |
| Charlie Cooper      | Alessandra Borch       |
| Jonathan Vaughters  | Adam Coffman           |
| Nick Shuley         | Matt Stephens          |
| Bart Knaggs         | Brendan Quirk          |
| Brian Cookson       |                        |

## APPENDIX 2

The detailed UCI Points System is continually being refined and updated, and is very complex and detailed. The full current explanation of the points calculation system can be found in the UCI Regulations, version 01July2017, section 2.10.008 pgs 62-73 ([http://www.uci.ch/mm/Document/News/Rule-sandregulation/18/23/94/2-ROA-20170701-E\\_English.PDF](http://www.uci.ch/mm/Document/News/Rule-sandregulation/18/23/94/2-ROA-20170701-E_English.PDF) retrieved July 14, 2017).

For a more concise overview of the challenges and impacts of the UCI points system, see “What’s The Point,” Steve Maxwell, VeloNews, July 2013, pages 19-21, or <http://inrng.com/2016/01/new-uci-rankings-system/>

## APPENDIX 3

The links below provide just a few additional articles and more background information about the challenges and opportunities in women’s professional cycling:

<http://www.theouterline.com/the-status-of-womens-cycling-3-the-road-ahead/>  
<http://www.theouterline.com/the-path-to-parity/>  
<http://www.cyclingnews.com/features/a-blueprint-for-womens-road-cycling/>  
<https://cyclingtips.com/2017/03/opinion-time-bold-change-womens-cycling/>  
<http://www.uci.ch/womens-cycling/>  
[http://www.velonews.com/2017/03/from-the-mag/womens-worldtour-waiting-bigger-better\\_431580](http://www.velonews.com/2017/03/from-the-mag/womens-worldtour-waiting-bigger-better_431580)

## APPENDIX 4

There is a vast literature regarding the causes, impacts and influence of doping in sports, how to monitor and detect it, and how to police and control it. And indeed, there is also a large body of writing and research on the impacts of doping on professional cycling in particular. The links below provide just a brief listing of a few overview articles and information about the historical legacy of doping in professional cycling, underlying causes and effects, and different proposed systems for better addressing and regulating the issue:

<http://www.theouterline.com/nineteen-eighty-three/>  
<http://www.theouterline.com/changing-the-business-model-4-a-new-approach-to-anti-doping/>  
[http://www.espn.co.uk/sports/endurance/story/\\_/id/8639064/cycling-university-texas-professor-explores-cultural-phenomenon-doping](http://www.espn.co.uk/sports/endurance/story/_/id/8639064/cycling-university-texas-professor-explores-cultural-phenomenon-doping)  
 Vandeweghe, H., “Doping in cycling: past and present”, in Van Reeth, D. and Larson, D. (Eds.), The economics of professional road cycling, Springer, London, pp. 285-311  
<http://www.sportsintegrityinitiative.com/author/paul-dimeo/>  
 Mark Johnson, <https://www.velopress.com/books/spitting-in-the-soup>  
<http://ph.au.dk/en/research/research-areas/>

humanistic-sport-research/research-unit-for-sports-and-physical-culture/international-network-of-doping-research/

#### APPENDIX 5

The links below provide a brief listing of additional articles and information regarding the various governance and structural challenges and opportunities facing professional cycling.

Van Reeth, D., “The finances of professional cycling teams”, in Van Reeth, D. and Larson, D. (Eds.), *The economics of professional road cycling*, Springer, London, pp. 55-82.

Van Reeth, D. and Lagae, W., “The future of professional road cycling”, in Van Reeth, D. and Larson, D. (Eds.), *The economics of professional road cycling*, Springer, London, pp. 313-341.

<http://cyclingtips.com/2016/09/how-pro-cycling-is-inching-closer-to-a-21st-century-viewing-experience>

<http://www.theouterline.com/uci-scorecard-implementation-of-the-circ-recommendations/>

<http://www.theouterline.com/shifting-gears-how-a-stronger-union-could-change-pro-cycling/>

<http://www.theouterline.com/changing-the-business-model-6-rethinking-the-governance-of-pro-cycling/>

Rebeggiani, L., “The organizational structure of professional road cycling”, in Van Reeth, D. and Larson, D. (Eds.), *The economics of professional road cycling*, Springer, London, pp. 33-54.

<http://www.uci.ch/docs/UCI-Stakeholder-Consultation-Executive-Summary.pdf>





*Rapha.*