

Synopsis: A Roadmap to Repair Pro Cycling

Professional cycling, for all its faults, is a beautiful and compelling sport to experience. The colorful flow of riders at top speed on the open road, chasing a breakaway; the grace under pressure of a rider in solo pursuit; the explosion of joy at the finish line – these are the unforgettable images of the sport.

But also unforgettable are the images of Lance Armstrong and his like-minded conspirators, cheating the sport of its dignity. Daily reminders from on-going lawsuits and new revelations only reinforce the fact that cycling is broken. However, right now pro cycling has perhaps its best and last chance to “reboot” the system. The recently elected executives of its governing agency – the Union Cycliste International (UCI) – should seize this rare, once-in-a-generation opportunity and reinvent the sport. How many times has cycling falsely proclaimed a “fresh start?” Empty declarations and vague plans for change have been abundant. We propose a very specific, comprehensive and immediately actionable roadmap to repair the sport.

First must come a transformative truth and reconciliation process, to provide a catharsis for the sport that would include pardon for the many alongside penance for the few. This would include the riders, team managers, owners and regulators (some of whom are themselves former dopers and whose unwillingness to address the issue compounds the problem). Cycling's legacy of *omerta* could finally be broken, without fear of retribution. Although the process would not guarantee amnesty for everyone – amnesty is earned through truthful and complete testimony, not in exchange for it – its focus would be on rehabilitation and reconciliation, rather than retribution, to heal the damage from the doping era.

Second, we must develop a new business model that incorporates stronger economic incentives to drive future growth. Cycling must adopt a modified franchise model, similar to other pro team sports, and cultivate greater economic value by realigning its competitive structure and adjusting its elongated season. Pro cycling can no longer afford to rely solely on commercial sponsorship for its financial base, and it must diversify its revenue model and develop more lucrative TV rights. A revenue-sharing system between teams and organizers will eventually lead to a bigger economic pie for all stakeholders. Only then will team owners be able to build long-term value in a franchise, with a correspondingly greater economic incentive to invest in the future and protect the integrity of the sport.

Third, a solid foundation of ethical values must be formalized, providing the context for harsher but more consistent punitive measures. In what would be a first in pro sports, ethics training must become a mandatory requirement for holding a pro license. Drug testing must be delegated to an independent, scientifically-rigorous third party – and, once guilt is established, individual riders and perhaps entire teams must face a clear set of punitive sanctions, with potentially severe economic losses to team owners and sponsors. This would create a powerful incentive for both teams and riders to police themselves.

Finally, we need more effective governance and leadership. There is a growing consensus that the current structure of the UCI is no longer the appropriate governing entity for pro cycling; its

charter is too broad and fraught with potential conflicts of interest. Now is the time to spin off a new affiliated, but independent “pro league” focused *solely* on road racing. Cycling’s stakeholders should also collaborate to build a strong riders union like the NFL Players Association, which will provide more negotiating power to the bike racers, without whom the sport would not exist.

None of these changes will be simple and any proposed solution is bound to upset those who have built their lives around cycling’s traditional model. These twin concerns have stopped past reform efforts dead in their tracks. But complications or resistance do not diminish the urgency to adopt change and develop new solutions. Change is never easy, but it is often required for survival; pro cycling, with its vast untapped potential, demands transformative change.

The outer line is a path often taken by riders unable to break into the front of the race, but whose strength, resolve, and tactical sense can lead them to victory. The traditional path – staying the course on the inner line established by the old guard – will lead the sport further towards potential ruin. New leadership must listen to new ideas and take counsel from outside the traditional channels. It is this reliance on tradition, already deeply compromised with deceit and a lack of clear direction, which put cycling on the edge of the abyss to begin with. We urge the UCI to reinvent itself *and* the sport by the start of the 2016 season. By committing to this strategic roadmap, we can halt what has too often been a race to the bottom, and instead begin to create a race to the top. It is time to think big; anything short of this sweeping goal may be too little, too late.

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By Joe Harris & Steve Maxwell, November 19, 2013