

## Changing Pro Cycling: The Perspective of Hein Verbruggen

*Editors' Note: Hein Verbruggen ran professional cycling for most of the past thirty years – first, as President of the predecessor FICP starting in the mid-1980s, then as President of the UCI from 1991 through 2005, and he has been Honorary President right up to the present. Verbruggen ruled the sport with what many viewed as an iron fist, and he was often a lightning rod for controversy. However, the fact is that he oversaw pro cycling during a long period of increasing visibility and international growth. And despite the accusations of his detractors, no one has had more international executive experience in cycling.*

*Verbruggen recently initiated a dialogue with the Outer Line to express his opinions regarding our 2013 “Roadmap to Repair Pro Cycling” report, and then agreed to a detailed discussion and interview. Our interest in talking with Verbruggen was not to revisit the polarizing allegations surrounding Lance Armstrong, the alleged cover-ups, or his more recent skirmish with Jonathan Vaughters and the AIGCP. Those topics have already been given ample coverage, and we take no position on those issues here; our interest was solely to talk about the future of cycling.*

*Keeping in mind the historians' notion that “those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it,” we asked Verbruggen to comment on three general areas – the commercial structure of the sport, governance issues, and how to solve the doping problem. During a series of long conversations, he offered his perspectives on the current situation in pro cycling and how to grow the sport in the future. And in the course of this, he provided detail and insights about his clashes with Amaury Sports Organization (ASO, the owner of the Tour de France); the effect of specialized doctors coming into the sport at the time of the expanding doping culture in the 1980s; the general lack of trained business professionals throughout cycling; a new model for future race ownership and organization; and some innovative ideas about controlling doping in the future. What follows is a summary of our conversations with Hein Verbruggen – Steve Maxwell and Joe Harris.*

*Q. First, let's talk about the current situation in pro cycling, and the commercial and economic issues facing the sport. How would you summarize today's situation in cycling?*

Well, first of all, I would say that the overall situation in pro cycling is much more complex than in any other sport that I know of. And from my position as President of Sport-Accord (*the Association of International Sporting Federations - editors*) I know them all pretty well! After being involved with cycling for over thirty years, I believe that there are four main issues which pro cycling faces – challenges which have always been problems for the sport. Allow me to describe each of these challenges.

The first challenge is the traditional commercial structure of the sport, in which there are effectively three players – the race organizers – who are often also the race owners, the teams and the athletes. These are the key business players in the sport, and the problem is that there is really no organizing structure amongst and between them. Each group has a competing interest to make sure that pro cycling is successful, but none of them really have a meaningful

governing body. Yes, there is the loose affiliation of the race organizers, the AIOCC (*the International Association of Cycling Race Organizers*) but it doesn't really do anything. The ASO holds almost all the real power in this Association.

The same situation is true for the teams and the riders. There is the AIGCP (*Association Internationale des Groupes Cyclistes Professionnels*) to represent the team owners, and there is the CPA (*the Cyclistes Professionnels Associés*) to represent the riders, but neither of these groups has much real authority or decision-making power either. The lack of any common goals or a common vision of the future from these three parties means that change has come very slowly, if at all. And remember, the UCI is really outside of this three-party economic circuit – the UCI is really only a commercial player in the World Championships.

The second problem is that pro cycling generates only pretty low turnover – that is, low overall revenues. Because we cannot charge admission for tickets to the race, we don't have the same way to generate revenues that most other sports have, and hence there is not as much revenue to go around. Race organizers want to keep the revenues that they can generate, and they have no incentive to pay the teams to show up for the big races. The teams only have their sponsorship dollars, so they have to go wherever the races will allow them to compete; they have to agree to the organizers' conditions just to keep racing and keep their sponsorship arrangements going. Even when a team participates in an important Classics race like Paris-Roubaix, and even here they get only a couple thousand Euros to show up. And finally, the riders simply sign contracts with the teams for their salary; the prize money is negligible. In summary, there is not the potential for much revenue, and most of the revenue that can be generated tends to stay with the organizers/race owners.

The third problem – and this is a big problem – is that there is no television rights bundling. This is for sure the one place where there could be more money made. All of the broadcast rights are individually packaged for almost each race. There is something like 700 different race television contracts! All of the big broadcasters are laughing their heads off at how immature cycling is! If you look at almost any other global sport, the television rights are bundled, so that the broadcasters must create logical programming which takes into account all of the key races in the contract package. If this model could be instituted in pro cycling, it could greatly benefit each race organizer, all the teams, and the riders. But the only organizer with any real power to negotiate television rights – the ASO – uses its strong position (*as owner of the Tour de France, and now the Vuelta a Espana – editors*) as leverage to get better air time and more money just for the Tour and for their other ASO events. The fact that there is no solidarity between the other race owners/organizers has allowed ASO to consolidate its power, and focus only on its own races, in terms of television revenue.

And that leads me straight into pro cycling's fourth challenge – the overwhelming dominance of ASO in the sport. ASO is not really interested in cooperating with their perceived competitors, and unfortunately this blocks the development and growth of the sport's overall potential. Let's face it; the organizers essentially control this sport and of that, the ASO probably controls over 70% of the total TV revenues. They don't seem to want to build a bigger "pie," and they seem even more unwilling to share their revenues with the teams. They will not accept the logic of owning maybe 50% of a much larger market, rather than 70% of this smaller market – they

don't seem to be interested in helping to grow the overall television market. The ASO seems to be happy with their current revenues and profits, and they have no incentive to grow the global sport. Even the other major race organizer in the sport, RCS Sport (*owner of the Giro d'Italia and several other major Italian races - editors*) has in the past offered to bundle their races together with ASO for a commission, but the ASO turned them down. I was there when this happened.

Ultimately, for pro cycling to grow, we have to increase the visibility and revenue, and there is really only one significant way to do that – start to bundle the TV rights. And for this to happen, the UCI and ASO must eventually work together to adopt a new model. We have to be realistic, but we will eventually have to use the strengths of the Tour de France as leverage. The UCI needs to say to ASO, “This is your obligation to cycling!” ASO will eventually have to do that, because without a healthy sport, there are no races. Let's remember – it is also, to a large extent, the riders and the teams which make the Tour what it is.

*Q. These are familiar concerns, and they obviously represent a formidable challenge for the sport. But what are your recommendations for change? How can pro cycling build a stronger business model, and realize greater growth?*

Well, there are several things that I would like to mention. First of all, to grow the revenues of pro cycling, one needs to put together a series of events, like a “World Cup” or a “World Racing Series” around the whole world, which people can recognize – a number of them will have to be the existing races, but there should be new ones also. We need to put together a better system of team and individual rankings – and then go around the world with the peloton.

Think of the success of the Formula One (F1) sports model. We can learn a lot from Bernie Ecclestone, and what he did to revolutionize the model and focus on the sport as a business. He created a license structure for the races, so that new host cities or countries that were willing to pay some big money to promote themselves to the rest of the world – as a tourist destination, as a banking center, or whatever, could join the calendar. These places made big investments in infrastructure to host races. These races then get guaranteed top television coverage every year through the F1 model, and everyone from F1, the host city, the organizers and sponsors, and the racing teams benefits economically (*a good example of this is the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix - editors*).

The same can be done in cycling. The sport must develop relationships with new host cities or regions for new races, like we tried in Canada in the 1990s, and in China more recently. Cycling should go to new locations in the world which are prepared to pay a handsome host city fee for the right to build and host new events, with a clear objective for the city, region or country. Cycling can be great for this purpose because the TV coverage can really “show off” the country. Look what the Tour de France has done for French tourism!

*Q. Give us a little more detail on how the TV rights can be “bundled” and what advantages that would provide?*

This is a very important issue, and is really a central part of reforming and growing pro cycling.

The television rights for this proposed “World Racing Series” of cycling, or whatever we shall call it, have to be bundled into one large package. If the different major players in pro cycling could become better coordinated with each other, so that all of the key races were packaged together as one big television “series” and contract, it would provide much more leverage for the sport, and it could start to generate a lot more revenue. In turn, those greater revenues can then be used in various ways to grow the sport. This is the single most important change. I am worried that none of the other desired changes will be realized, unless we are able to realize the increased revenues and the potential opportunities that stronger TV rights can create.

A unified television rights model benefits the entire sport, not just specific races. Without this change, pro cycling cannot get exposure throughout the year to a global audience, and it cannot create a true World Racing Series that allows new races to be added, while continuing the popularity of the classical races. I think this could grow the overall revenues by as much as one hundred percent, or maybe more.

*Q. What are the other key means of growing the overall revenues of the sport?*

Well, there are many other ideas for how to generate new revenues, although they probably won't be as significant as the potential of new television revenues. There will be the increased revenues from host city fees. A more coordinated and better marketed World Racing Series would hopefully be able to attract major new international sponsors to the sport – for both teams and events – and that could also be a really major development. There could also be major new generic sponsors linked to the overall racing series. There are new internet distribution and social media opportunities that will grow out of this new approach to the sport. And there are all the other revenue sources that people talk about as the sport grows – more merchandise sales, VIP tours, Gran Fondos along the major events – those kinds of things. However, I have to again emphasize that it all starts with good TV programming through this bundling approach.

*Q. And assuming that these new revenue sources can be developed, what kind of revenue-sharing program would you recommend?*

A new model for the sharing of these growing revenues must also be put in place, in order to strengthen the overall sport. This represents a very critical and essential reinvestment in cycling. The revenues should be shared, and the teams should be the main beneficiaries of enhanced revenue sharing. The teams alone are too weak now – they don't have the reserves or the capital, they rely totally on sponsors, and they don't really operate as businesses. This has unfortunately been the model for the last 70 years. Revenue sharing would allow the teams to build up greater value and stronger balance sheets, so that they could survive the more difficult years, when they may have reduced sponsorship. Today, they just spend most of their money on buying riders, and they cannot develop an adequate business and financial structure.

*Q. What changes do you think need to be made to the current race organization and ownership model?*

This is the other very important part of the solution – our current race organization model needs to change. You have to remember that professional bike racing was originally built around the

organizers' objectives – cycling races weren't started purely for the sake of organizing a sports event. Many of the major classical races were started by newspapers, from *L'Equipe*, to *Gazzetta dello Sport*, to *Het Nieuwsblad* – and their objectives were mostly advertising and newspaper revenues.

Many people may disagree, but I don't believe that races in general should be owned and organized by the same company. Today, most of the big races are owned and organized by the same companies, but as I mentioned earlier, we must find a way for more new races to enter the sport – new host cities and new countries. Hence, in order to be successful, we must move to a model where the sport has more pure organizers, and start to eliminate the current ownership model. Think of the organizer as the agent who puts on and manages the race, but the “owner” should be the investors in the region or the city itself which itself hosts the race. In short, we need to move away from the model of having owners who also organize the race, because this tends to profit only one side, and limits reinvestment back into the sport.

We must respect the existing race owners/organizers of the major events, but in the future we should gradually move towards this type of model – where new races are licensed to new host cities or host countries. The UCI would be responsible to issue a four-year license to a new city or region, or hopefully a series of such licenses as new races were created in new parts of the world. And gradually we would change the system.

By the way, there is another reason why this is a difficult change to make today. In the case of many major races, the organizer is not only the owner of the race, but is also the owner of the primary newspaper covering the race! What does this mean? It means is that if you want to make any significant changes in the sport – such as changing the calendar, adding new races, or changing the TV rights and so on – you immediately have *L'Equipe* or some other newspaper coming out against you! Today's key owners have little incentive to change the model. Particularly in the case of the Tour de France, this tends to place the UCI and the ASO directly against each other, when it comes to making major changes.

*Q. What about the race calendar and schedule? How can that be changed or optimized to meet the need for growth and diversification?*

The pro calendar must be gradually revised as new races are licensed, and as the revenues of the sport increase. Yes, cycling will obviously need to balance the dates and scheduling of the new events with the legacy events – the Grand Tours and the Classics. But there is no other way to build interest in the new events without giving them a place next to the old ones. We have seen the UCI revise the calendar in small ways from year to year, but there is no underlying vision or strategy. A new calendar will take ten or fifteen years to develop. Some older events might disappear, and that will upset some people. However, like any other sport, cycling must change over time, and adapt to new circumstances and new economic challenges. Growing and balancing the calendar to support a true World Series type of model will help grow the TV rights by increasing the global viewership and, in turn, the sponsorship opportunities.

*Q. Once all of these changes were made, it sounds like you would essentially end up with*

*something like a modified franchise structure – similar to American sports leagues?*

No, I don't think so. It is easy for Americans to believe in the franchise model, as you have four big sports leagues that work that way, but this model is not so common or so popular outside of the U.S. Some of the current proposals for changes in the structure and governance of cycling, like those you discussed in your "Roadmap" report, are based largely upon the situation in American sports. However, you have to remember that most sports, outside of the U.S., are ruled by international and constituent national federations (IF and NF). These federations don't operate like private businesses, or like the leagues that control American sports. There is much more politics involved.

Personally, I believe that some kind of franchise model is the right model for cycling. This is what we tried to put in place, in a way, with the original Pro Tour in 2004. But this structure has to be somehow joined with the existing structure of the IFs. The international federations cannot just be ignored. We have to find a solution that takes into account, and works with the federations. This is a complicated challenge.

*Q. Expand a little on the complicating factors of the International and National federations in cycling, and how this impacts or constrains governance or economic changes in cycling.*

As I said before, most sports are ruled by an international federation (IF). These are not business organizations, these are political organizations. And that is the problem. An IF doesn't operate like a normal business. In business, people rise to the top based on merit and capability. And if the CEO doesn't do his job right, the shareholders will toss him out. It's different in the international sports federations; a lot is based on politics. The members vote for a President based on politics, and once the President is elected, he is there for at least four years.

In addition, the IFs are independent – there is no one above them. Business has laws and rules, but sport doesn't. In this sense, there is no "big boss" to regulate the IFs. Complicating this, of the many national federations (NFs) which are affiliated with the IFs, all of them want something different! What is good for the U.S. is bad for Cuba, what's good for Cuba is bad for the U.S., and so on. Most national federations don't look beyond their own national interests, and like the IFs, they don't really apply normal business practices to the organization of their sports.

Thus, in my experience, there are two major reasons why all of these federations cannot function like good businesses: (1) the IFs have "shareholders" – the NFs – who have different and often widely varying objectives, and there are often no clear guidelines for building a long-term vision; and (2) the IFs are run by management which is elected on largely political grounds, rather than on the basis of business competence. This makes for a complicated management situation; this is very important to understand, and is really the crux of the whole organizational challenge here. But we have to recognize that the federations have a big hand in the sport – we have to develop a business model for cycling that can work with this federation structure.

*Q. And what role do you see in the future for the UCI, or the governing agency overseeing the whole sport?*

A new governance model must also be created – one that takes into account all the changes which we have been discussing. I have referred to this as the need for an “adequate structure” – a body that is structured to operate more like a business, and less like a traditional sports federation. The UCI must keep an important role in making the rules and promoting the sport within this new model of pro cycling. The teams would become important stakeholders in the new model, and there should also be a role for the current owners.

As I have said, the calendar will need to be revised to welcome new races in new cities, like the Tour of Beijing. This should be the UCI’s role – to find, develop and help to promote interest in new places around the world. Once we have sorted out this “adequate structure,” the UCI can take more of a longer-term view – of what the sport should look like in ten to twenty years. However, we can only gradually make this change, with due respect to the existing owner-organizers and their events.

*Q. You’ve brought up the subject of China a couple of times. Why is this significant?*

Beijing has been the starting point of the new UCI race licensing model. It could have been the beginning of many of these changes I am describing to you. Here is a new race location, which saw the opportunity to promote itself for tourism and business, and a race that could help pro cycling reach new markets. If it works, then we would have a platform to create new races in host cities or regions around the world. This would naturally create interest and competition from other up-and-coming races. More new races, more investment in cycling! What is wrong with cycling gaining more money in this way from places like Russia, Colombia, Brazil – where there is great interest in cycling? It would lead to more competition, just like the Formula One model. More races will make for better competition and more diversified racing.

That is what we (the UCI) tried to do with the Tour of Beijing – a new race, promoting a new region and with more of the revenues going to the teams. But most unfortunately, this first Beijing race ended up in a dispute with the teams. They chose this event as a platform to protest an unpopular decision (*the decision to ban race radios in 2008/2009 – editors*) and it jeopardized the race – I think that the teams didn’t really understand the significance of this new model. Yes, they got what they wanted in the end, and the race did happen, but it damaged the relationships we had built to make it happen. I think it was a bad mistake, and it cost everyone.

*Q. You referred earlier to the current riders association – the CPA – as being relatively powerless. There are many examples from American sports, which suggest that a balance of power between the teams, organizers and athletes can be a good thing for the overall sport. Baseball and football are good examples of team sports that really took off economically and in popularity after the development of player’s unions. What are the prospects for a stronger riders’ union in pro cycling?*

Personally, I think it would be a good idea, but there is really no history of any ambition for a strong riders union, and I’m afraid that this will be wishful thinking for a long period into the future. This is because the riders are all employed by teams, and the teams do all the dealings with the sponsors and the organizers. The riders, with their guaranteed incomes, tend to stay

very far from this, and to my regret, most of them apparently feel no need for a union.

When I came into the UCI, I felt there was a need for both an organization of the team, and an organization of the riders. In France, they already had a union of the teams, and I told Cyrille Guimard and Roger Legeay that if they would expand into an international group, that I would give them a seat at the table. They did so, and they became part of the professional cycling council. We did the same thing with the riders, and we gave a seat at the table to the riders as well.

But there has never been much support for a rider's union amongst the riders themselves. The riders never had the discipline to agree to pay money into the union – to support an organization or a staff. They just weren't ready to work together. And the teams don't have an incentive to help develop a riders union, because it is a risk to how the teams are run, if the riders can exercise power over the conditions and salaries. By the way, this is the common situation in most other sports, with the exception perhaps of tennis, and of course the American sports.

Consider the current CPA, I think that Gianni Bugno is still its president. He is a good, intelligent guy. His problem is the same as that of his predecessors: there is basically no interest at the level of the riders who have joined the CPA. In the best case they attend a meeting, but one day after the meeting they are fully concentrated on their real jobs again and they have forgotten about the CPA. Ask the CPA if they are recognized outside the UCI, or if they have regular meetings with the teams, or the organizers.

*Q. So, one of your key themes seems to be that pro cycling needs to operate more like a business. Why hasn't this happened?*

In my view, there are two primary reasons. First is the near monopoly power of the ASO, as we have already discussed. (As an aside, I have to say that ASO is virtually the only professional business organization in the sport today.) But there is also a second problem. This is that there are very few people in pro cycling with any real business training, experience or background. Most managers in cycling know the sport of cycling, they know how to race a bike, but most of them don't really understand business management. They don't understand how to prepare a strategic plan, or how to calculate a return on investment, and those kinds of business concepts.

And in fact, it is even worse than this. Even some of the high-level business people that own the licenses nowadays are just cycling fans in the first place – and they behave like that. They act more like fans than like business men. And it's even true at the level of the sports administrators – at the bottom-line, most of us are just big fans.

I think that partly because of this, the teams have remained in a vulnerable situation. And not only financially. Remember that before the Pro Tour was started, there were some teams that couldn't even guarantee to their sponsor which events they would be racing in! Teams have to have a guarantee for participation in key races. Thanks to the Pro Tour – and after a very tough battle with the ASO – they now have that. But financially, not much has changed. Teams are still way too dependent upon their sponsors.

When we first organized the Pro Tour, we thought it might take five or ten years before all the licenses would end up in the hands of team owners and business people who would then unite themselves together, and negotiate – maybe with the help of the UCI – a better deal with the main owners/organizers. But that has not happened. Why not? In my view, it is because these people don't think like business managers.

*Q. Unfortunately, no interview about changing pro cycling can really be complete without addressing the doping challenge. Can you comment briefly on this, and give us your perspectives on how to address the problem?*

Well, let's look back at the history first. Doping has been in this sport since the very beginning, since the 1870s, but in those early days it was not really seen as doping. Such things weren't unusual in those days; factory workers with demanding jobs were often provided aids by their employers to help them work harder. Cyclists were viewed the same way. What we consider as the culture of doping today came into the sport in a very natural way, and it's always been there.

The Tour and the Giro and many other races were originally designed to be "spectacles" – events that would sell a lot of newspapers and create advertising opportunity. If you translate "spectacle" into "difficult or impossible race for normal human beings," that brings you easily to a number of ramifications – one of which is unfortunately the long culture of doping in cycling. Looking back, perhaps by wanting so badly to organize difficult and spectacular racing events, they have contributed to the whole doping problem in the first place.

But then in the 1970s and 1980s, doctors started to come into the sport. They started to study performance much more carefully, and started to introduce more sophisticated methods and products. Cortisones, testosterones, steroids, growth hormones, and then in the 1990s, EPO. And you have to remember that at the same time period, the whole society was becoming increasingly "medicalized" – chemical aids and enhancement techniques were starting to be used by everyone, not just by professional athletes. The background and landscape of the doping was changing.

At first, the EPO era was no different than the previous period – it was just a new and different product, but unfortunately it could not be detected. It soon became clear that EPO really worked, and so a problem quickly developed, and became quite prevalent. Doping had not really been such a prevalent and widespread problem before, because it was never so clear that the supposed "enhancement" products really worked. Not everyone used testosterone back in the 1970s – because its effect was not so clear, because not everyone believed in it, and because it was easily tested for. But during the 1990s, and in particular in the endurance sports, athletes started to think that doping with EPO was almost a necessity; not to cheat your opponents, but simply to survive. This is important – many athletes felt they had to dope to survive in the sport. Today, you will still hear Armstrong and others defend themselves by saying "I didn't really cheat, because everyone was doing the same thing." Although this is of course unacceptable as an argument, it does show how many athletes reasoned at that time.

I believe that there will always be a small group of willful cheaters in sports, just like in all walks

of society. I said this to the sport, and to the International Olympic Committee way back in 1998; there will always be people who try to cheat. (See [http://oldsite.uci.ch/english/news/news\\_pre2000/hv\\_990127\\_1.htm](http://oldsite.uci.ch/english/news/news_pre2000/hv_990127_1.htm) for an overview and summary of the doping challenge written by Verbruggen in 1999 – editors.) But even if there are only a few cheaters, sometimes the bigger group will see what is going on, and they will start to take the products or the PEDs as well, because they do not trust the others – because they feel “obliged” to take the product.

So what we really need to do is figure out a system to protect this much larger group of riders that prefer not to cheat, not to take products – to protect them against that small group of willful cheats. Most people don’t want to dope; sometimes they just feel like they have to. We have to develop a system where anti-doping officials are somehow closer to the riders. We need to have anti-doping officials and anti-doping doctors living right in the middle of the sport – officials in the peloton that know all the riders, and officials the riders can trust and talk to. Doctors or officials that live day and night with the riders can learn a lot – learn what suspicions the riders have against their colleagues or competitors. Then lots of new information would be learned, and eventually that small element of cheaters could gradually be identified and cleaned out.

*Q. This kind of “embedded” referee or judge process sounds like this could function almost like a sort of “moving” truth and reconciliation process?*

Yes, it could almost work that way. And although it may seem expensive, I think it could be cheaper than much of the testing and controls that we have today that don’t always work very well anyway.

Having said that, we obviously also need good anti-doping controls – procedures that the athletes recognize as thorough and robust, something they can trust. In this respect, I believe that cycling is second to none with its biological passport. In fact, the hematocrit controls, introduced in 1997 (after we had been informed by scientists that a reliable EPO test was still years away) was clearly the beginning of the road towards the biological passport. In a meeting with team directors and doctors on January 24<sup>th</sup>, 1997, the UCI announced that the blood samples would not only be used to determine the hematocrit level, but also to analyze other blood values for purposes of health monitoring. This databank became the basis for the biological passport.

But let’s talk about the future. What really has to happen to solve the doping problem is a change of mentality – a change in the culture. I am confident – with robust anti-doping controls and with the types of more creative testing procedures I’ve discussed – that this will indeed lead to a change of mentality. That change has already been starting to happen over the last ten years, and I think it will continue to take hold in the coming years. But it will take a few generations of new riders for the change to really achieve its full effect. We anticipated this back in the Festina days, and we tried to tell people how hard it would be to change a culture – you really just do not achieve that overnight.

*Q. You’ve made several references to the newspapers’ influence on cycling. What is your view of the role of the press in addressing the various challenges facing pro cycling?*

The broader press has to study and understand these important issues, and the requirements for future growth that we have been discussing. And then they have to present these ideas to the public. I think that the press has changed. Much of the press is focused on following the races and reporting on the riders, but I think they don't take enough time to study and understand these complex issues of sporting structure, governance and economics. I don't like to blame the press for this, and blame the press for that – but the press is not like it used to be. Today, they mostly want to go only for the exciting story, and the more complicated truth is not always so important. We want a juicy story, period. The press nowadays just works like that. Most papers aren't doing so well financially – and they need the exciting story. Stories, stories, stories – oftentimes about the doping problems, and then of course all of cycling pays the price. And now 200 million tweeters make it worse. More journalists need to spend the time to study and read and understand the real issues and real facts of the problems that professional sports face. Unfortunately, that is not the environment nowadays, and sometimes it takes away the right picture of reality for the public.

*Q. Do you have any regrets about how the sport was managed under your leadership? What would you do differently?*

Of course I have some regrets. It is always easier to see the right solution in hindsight. What would I have done differently? I would have better sold the organizers on the Pro Tour idea, but I should have done that differently. I should have had a better plan to organize a license system for the teams, like F1. The ASO promised to support the Pro Tour – I went for it, but maybe too fast. Then they reneged on me – I under-estimated the opposition of the Tour de France. That was a mistake.

Even when I first came to the FICP, I saw the big potential for cycling, and I think cycling is realizing a lot of that potential. Cycling needs a strong ruling agency in the UCI; otherwise it just turns into chaos. I know I have been accused of being a dictator, even though I always delegated things to many other people. But with its structure, its many different and often uncoordinated parties, and all of the other challenges in cycling, the sport needs a very strong and forceful leader. Maybe cycling needs a dictator.

*Q. In conclusion, what do you think is the most important thing that UCI can do to promote the future of pro cycling?*

The thing I worry about the most is – there is no clear vision for the long-term future of cycling. Just look at the election campaign of last year; everyone can say “we need more women's events,” or “we need more events in the Olympics,” but there is no one with a clear vision of what pro cycling should be in 2020, or in 2030. If you are the CEO of Coca-Cola or some big company, you have a vision, and then you make a strategy to move your company towards that objective. But we don't have that clear vision or strategy in cycling.

We have to make big plans, and then we have to implement them. When I was in the chair, I made a four year plan every year. We need to be more specific. We need to ask – where are we now, where are we headed, and what will it cost us to get there? We have to update this plan every year, just like a business. That's what the UCI must try to do, more and more.

But let's also remember to look at the bright side. The future situation for cycling is wonderful, compared to most other sports. Look at the Olympics in London. Look at track cycling; it's doing great. Cycling fits in perfectly with many of the major social and demographic trends we are seeing today – it is healthy, it's green, it's good for you, and it's not so hard on the body as other sports. It is getting bigger and bigger crowds, and more and more people are riding bikes. Cycling can be for everyone – zillions of people are cycling today. Overall, cycling has a bright future!

**DISCLAIMER:** *As with all postings on theouterline.com, our goal is simply to provide ideas and spur debate about what constitutes real change in professional cycling. If you have an opinion about how to repair and strengthen professional cycling, please contact us, and make your ideas or opinions heard.*

*By Steve Maxwell and Joe Harris, March 30, 2014*