

Executive Summary: Review and Audit of the Cycliste Professionnels Associés (CPA)

(Editors' Note: This article briefly summarizes a detailed independent review and analysis of the current operations and performance of the Cycliste Professionnels Associés (CPA) – professional road cycling's athlete representation organization. The full report is available [here](#).)

The Cycliste Professionnels Associés (CPA) was formed in 1999, to better coordinate professional cycling's pre-existing national rider associations, to “act as a reference point” in the case of issues which went beyond national borders, and more generally to protect the rights and interests of riders. Among its important early accomplishments, the CPA developed a “Joint Agreement” with the teams' organization – to help govern the relationship between teams and their riders; and a riders' “Solidarity Fund” – to provide limited financial support to certain retiring riders.

It was hoped that the organization would gradually gain political and financial strength, and that it would be able to speak with an increasingly influential voice for the riders. However, the CPA has struggled to grow or expand its influence in pro cycling over the intervening fifteen years. The retiring rider payment is no larger today than it was fifteen years ago, the Joint Agreement has not been revisited since 2012, and tragically, riders are still being seriously injured or even dying as a result of safety failures in top-level races. As we [reported](#) earlier, today's CPA consists of only two part-time officials supported by a small staff. Although its visibility has improved over the last year or two, many riders are barely even aware of the CPA's existence. The organization is technically governed by a “steering committee” – representatives from its eight member-nation associations. It derives its primary funding from a 2% share of the total prize money from major races, and a small annual bequest from the UCI, for a total annual budget of about €320,000.

The CPA has a set of by-laws to guide its operations, the key components of which are reviewed in our [report](#). While we found the CPA to be generally conforming with most of the standard administrative by-laws, it falls short in several other critical areas, including (i) membership criteria – in particular the inclusion of women's racers; (ii) the full inclusion of *all* professional male racers; and (iii) adequately addressing various specific concerns of the athletes, or what the CPA calls “necessary tasks.” In addition, the CPA apparently fails to comply with various financial controls, reporting and auditing requirements, as well as the general transparency of its operations. Most of the CPA's financial matters are conducted in the shadows, without the informed oversight of its own steering committee, and well beyond any public transparency.

To provide a broader perspective, we also benchmarked the CPA against the management and governance guidelines established by the *Sports Governance Observer* (published by the Danish Institute of Sports Studies). This document cites four different criteria by which to evaluate the governance of sports organizations – transparency, democratic processes, checks and balances, and “solidarity” or sustainability. The CPA performs poorly when judged against most of these external guidelines. Particularly in terms of the transparency and checks/balances criteria, the CPA does not conform to most of the recommendations. Nor does the CPA appear to meet *any* of the suggested checks and balances recommended for a sporting organization. There is no public information to suggest that the organization follows explicit internal financial checks or controls, or external financial auditing of the organization's books. There is also no specific ethics code, nor is there any mechanism to monitor or police management conflicts of interest.

Our review also looks at some of the larger and more established sporting unions, which provide models toward which the CPA might strive over the longer term. In particular, we look at the Major League Soccer Players Union and the NFL Players Association as two successful examples. While the CPA might

eventually grow to incorporate some of the standards illustrated by these more advanced unions, it clearly has a long way to go.

In fairness, there are several valid reasons why a strong and all-inclusive riders union has not yet developed within pro cycling. Professional cyclists come from a wide variety of economic situations and cultural backgrounds, they speak many different languages, and they have widely differing financial expectations. There has been no obvious source of consistent financing for the organization; there is no single entity with which the union can negotiate on behalf of the riders; and pro cycling's overall management remains so fractured and uncooperative that the CPA (or any alternative future union effort) faces a steep uphill battle in addressing these challenges. Yet, according to most athletes interviewed for this analysis, a stronger riders' union is needed more today than ever before.

There is one final, fundamental concern. At the end of the day, little is likely to happen on any of these issues until the riders themselves step forward to demand a louder voice. Unfortunately, there is still a largely unspoken but significant fear of standing up and speaking out. Riders still worry about being black-balled or replaced if they challenge their teams or the status quo. Worse, some riders appear to simply not care much about the whole issue. The tough Darwinian economics of the sport force many riders to focus strictly on themselves – their training, racing, and maintaining their employment. One can hardly lay the blame at the feet of the CPA if the riders are not themselves more involved and behind the effort. If things are ever really going to change, the riders must become more informed and more invested in future reform negotiations.

We argue that a stronger union would strengthen the overall sport, and would actually be good for the other key stakeholders in the sport – the AIGCP, Velon, ASO, and the UCI. Many other pro sports like football and baseball made their greatest leaps in popularity and revenue following the development of a more powerful voice for the athletes, which in turn forced rapid evolution in the business of those respective sports. Strong athlete organizations in women's sports like tennis and golf led to dramatic growth, and rapidly increased the earning power of both athletes and event organizers. A strong collective bargaining agreement, which clearly spells out binding expectations for rider and team ethics, combined with strict regulatory oversight and enforcement could also help the peloton to better police itself and help resolve the legacy doping challenge.

Pro cycling is one of the few global sports today in which the athletes do not have a direct vote at the governance table to determine the financial, safety, or labor standards of their profession. The UCI itself told us that the CPA is “one of the essential stakeholders as we prepare cycling for tomorrow.” But the CPA has to live up to that role. It cannot drive change by hoping that the governing body will read its memos and public statements. It must strive for equal footing – and the ability to negotiate with strong countermeasures – if it is to fully represent its athletes' interests and help to determine the future of the sport.

Given this background, we suggest the following recommendations:

1. The CPA needs to collect more timely data and develop a more accurate idea of where it actually stands with the riders today, before it can effectively map out a realistic longer-term strategy. Only by clearly understanding what is on the minds of the riders today can it map out a logical path to progress and growth.
2. The CPA must investigate new sources of funding, from all potential sources, to support and sustain a larger and more intensive effort – to begin to address the gaps and shortfalls mentioned above.
3. The CPA should work more aggressively to build more influential relationships with the other key stakeholders in the sport – particularly the UCI, AIGCP and Velon. At this point in time, the CPA is clearly the weak party at the table with these other stakeholders; it must find ways of developing

greater power at the highest levels and negotiating tables of the sport.

4. The CPA needs to put in place a full-time and more broadly experienced business management and executive team.
5. The CPA needs to develop a more formal strategic and tactical planning process.
6. The CPA should also clearly identify its three most critical current objectives – whether they be race safety, health benefits, post-career assistance or the like – and develop a short-term, specific and tactical plan by which it will make incremental progress on those singular most critical issues.
7. The CPA must find a way to better represent *all* the riders – to bring all professional level riders under its umbrella on an equal basis.
8. Finally, the individual members of the steering committee – as well as the riders themselves – must be encouraged to take a more aggressive role, to help force some of the above changes to occur.

*(Note: **The Outer Line** made several efforts to contact the CPA – both directly and through key intermediaries – regarding this review, but the organization responded only once, saying that it had no interest in participating or cooperating with any review of its operations or performance. Nevertheless, we have also offered the CPA an opportunity to formally respond to this article.)*

Steve Maxwell and Joe Harris, [The Outer Line](#), December 2, 2016