

Perspectives on Doping in Pro Cycling - 2: Inga Thompson

(Editors' Note: This article is the second in a series of in-depth personal narratives about the impact of doping on the lives of people within or now outside of the sport of pro cycling. This series presents alternative views of how the doping culture has proliferated in the sport; new revelations of how it has caused harm to the people, economics, and governance of the sport, and; why the Cycling Independent Reform Commission's charter needs to look farther back in time than 1998 to make a lasting difference. Through this, we hope to stir constructive debate about how the sport can come to terms with the past in order to find a new way forward. Watch for other articles and perspectives over the next several weeks.)

Mention the name Inga Thompson to a modern cycling fan, and you might get a raised eyebrow. "Inga who?" But to fans and observers of the sport from the 1980s and early 1990s, Inga Thompson was perhaps one of the most successful and influential women in cycling. From her meteoric debut on the American scene in 1984, to her final major race – a dominating victory in the 1993 US Women's National Road Race – Inga proved herself to be one of the greatest women's racers the sport has ever seen.

And yet right after that 1993 championship, Inga quietly packed up, moved away from her long-time residence in Reno, and for almost twenty years severed all ties with the sport and the people with whom she trained and competed. She didn't even touch a bicycle. The woman who dominated US cycling for nearly a decade, carrying on where Connie Carpenter left off after the 1984 Olympics – a woman who had lived and breathed cycling, and inspired others to take up the sport – simply hung up her wheels and vanished.

In 2012, Inga finally broke her silence of almost twenty years, first by contributing to Crankpunk.com; later, in an opinion written for VeloNews on corruption in pro cycling, she tersely stated her position on why she would never let her own son compete in the sport. While she now occasionally posts online in various forums, this is the first detailed interview with Inga since she decided to end her self-imposed exile, and comment publicly on the challenges facing the sport. (The following interview contains several deeply personal and confidential aspects of Inga's life leading up to 1993, and because of the sensitivity of the subject matter, some names have been withdrawn from print.)

The Outer Line recently caught up with Inga after she had completed an evening run around her home in eastern Oregon.

The Outer Line: *You don't even sound winded! Thanks for reaching out and agreeing to speak with us.*

Inga Thompson: Running has always been a love, but really skiing is where my heart is! It's really beautiful out here where I live, and sometimes it's hard to stop once I get going. It's like a mini-Switzerland here at our ranch in Hell's Canyon, with lots of snow-capped peaks looming right over the property, it's just so picturesque, and you can get lost pretty quickly! I can tele-ski right out my back door.

TOL: Inga, let's establish some early background – not many modern fans will remember who you are. When and how did you start getting interested in cycling? Competing? When did you really start to figure out that you were good at it, and that you might be able to turn it into a career?

IT: I was always athletic as a kid. I started out running – it was something I was just good at. I ran all through high school, mostly cross country, but also the mile and two-mile. By the time I graduated, I'd won nine Individual State Titles in the 3A school division, which was the largest school division at the time in Nevada. I think a few of my State records are still standing! I got a scholarship based on my running skills, and then went to Cal Poly SLO for engineering (*the California Polytechnical University at San Luis Obispo – editors*).

I kept running really hard through my freshman year at school. I got fourth at the Division 2 Collegiate Nationals, so I knew I was still progressing. But in my sophomore year, I started getting injuries and had to slow it down. My ankle was a bit of a mess. Some friends of mine I knew from High School – they were bike racing at the time – suggested that I start cycling with them. I used to ride around on an old 40-pound Schwinn on campus, to and from track practice. And I was so naïve at the time that I was still riding on the sidewalks! Anyhow, there was a long climb near where I was living at the time, and we'd be riding up that way together, so I'd drop them and then disappear behind my house. It's funny to think about that now; I'd just vanish at the top of the hill and they must have been a little curious! At first I was riding the bike just to keep fit, but then I began to realize that I was pretty fast compared to a lot of my friends.

Eventually I did get a nicer bike. One day I had to take it to the local shop and the same guys were there, and they suggested that I enter a race. I did, and I won that race. And I won the next one. And the one after that! I would just ride to the front, go really hard and hang on. I didn't know anything about tactics yet, but once I started switching to cycling, things all started to come together for me physically. In only my fourth race, I participated in an Olympic qualifier event, and my sixth or seventh race ever was the actual Olympic Trials Road Race. I was awarded the alternate spot for the 1984 Women's Olympic Road Team. It was only after Cindy (Olavarri) tested positive for steroids that I actually got selected. Connie (Carpenter) invited me to ride with her road team before the Olympics Trials to gain experience, and I remember we did a criterium in New York; it was the first one I'd ever done and I didn't understand the tactics at all. I suffered like a dog! It was a humbling day, but I was learning quickly.

I was recently reading some old articles on what makes the perfect cyclist. Some physiologists or coaches did some comparisons and basically laid out a blueprint of what you need to make the perfect rider. I went and pulled my old diaries after reading all this and realized why it just clicked for me. I was perfect for cycling: I love to keep my heart rate up at 190 BPM—I just seem to thrive there! I'm 5'10" tall, but I have super long legs, with really long femurs, about a 35" inseam. My resting heart rate was about 46 BPM, and from my old physical exams, my hematocrit was naturally 46.7% year-round.

So, looking back, I know I could have done more, if it was a level playing field, if the coaching and management were different. There are a lot of things that could have gone differently.

Where do I begin?

TOL: *Let's start with your experience with the coaches. Who were some of your key earlier coaches or mentors, and what impact did they have on you?*

IT: I had learned to be careful around coaches, even before I started cycling. Let me go back to that ankle injury in college. Cal Poly SLO was a really big school in track and field running, and the points the runners earned were important for our National ranking. My ankle had been hurt pretty seriously that first year, and it was slow to heal. I visited with the team doctor and was given a choice: rest it, then gradually return to training and competition, or take a corticosteroid shot in the ankle and run right through the injury.

My father was an orthopedic surgeon, and he was a fantastic resource for me whenever I need good medical information. So I knew the corticosteroid injection – I mean, right into the ankle – could do way more damage in the long run, to the bone, the ligaments, everything. I'd just be hammering damaged tissue and not really letting it heal. I was convinced that just plain rest would be the right thing for the injury. But the coach pushed on me hard to take that injection. I objected to it probably just as hard, and for my trouble, I got kicked off the team. At that moment, I realized that it was all about just adding "points." The coach, the Cal Poly SLO program – everything was about the points. The coaches seemed oblivious to my long term health, relative to an ankle that could deteriorate and leave me crippled when I was older; I learned right then that athletes can be disposable.

From that point on, I tried to be my own coach as much as possible – and I tried to do the same kind of thing once I took up cycling. I had some guidance from my father and my friends early on, but once I made the Olympic Team, it was almost the same situation as SLO. In fact, when I got to that level, there wasn't much interaction with the coaches. My first – and only – conversation with Eddie B. was: "You strong like horse, you work for Rebecca." (*Eddie Borysewicz, former US Olympic Cycling and Polish National Team coach, telling Inga to ride in support of then leading national rider Rebecca Twigg in the Olympic road race – editors.*)

TOL: *What are your early memories of riding for the U.S. National Team program at that time?*

IT: Even in 1984, my brief exposure to the National program just made me want to avoid that world as much as possible. I have the same impression now that I did then – I just wasn't ever going to be a "chosen one." And I believe it was primarily because I refused to take a blood transfusion before the Olympic Games – because they thought I was too independent or "strong-willed" or whatever – there's really no other way to describe it.

To explain that in a little more detail, I found out about the blood-doping plans during the Coors Classic earlier that year. That race was basically our last big tune-up before going to Los Angeles. One of the managers of the Levi's-Raleigh team, I don't recall who, told us that the national coaches would be coming around to ask us if we'd be willing to participate in the blood-doping. Well, I said "no." And I think that because of this – because I refused to submit to their authority on this – Eddie B. basically decided he would do everything he could to get me to quit. Those coaches didn't want anyone on the team who threatened to think for themselves.

Right after this, on the rest day of the Coors Classic, we were all tired, just dog tired and I was looking forward to getting a day off and recovering. The Coors Classic was a really hard race and it was my first real stage race ever. Well, at breakfast that day, one of the National coaches takes me aside and says, "Eddie B. wants you to motor pace today." I said, "Motor pace?" I'd never motor paced before in my life. So here we are, on the rest day of what was at the time, the hardest stage race for the girls, and I have to go out and do a motor pace session on the coach's orders? All the other girls get a day off, and I'm behind the motorcycle for I-don't-know-how-long. I went and did it, but it absolutely fried me; I was just completely run down from it. I don't know how I survived the rest of the race, but very soon after the Olympics I got really sick. I was in and out of the hospital for six months after that with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, which was misdiagnosed due to a cerebral inflammation and some kind of infection. In fact, I really didn't fully recover until 1985.

But the underlying message to me of this whole experience was, "if you aren't going to be part of our core team, and do what we tell you to do, then we're going to burn you out or run you off of the team." Some of the upper-level athletes get blood doping and rest, but for everyone else, they tried to burn them out, to get them to quit. I felt I was basically at war with the program because I refused to participate and play into the doping part of it.

My impression now is that Eddie B. was the father of the American cycling doping culture. But it wasn't all about Eddie B.; there were plenty of people already in place that *wanted* the doping to happen. These people had to go out and find Eddie, and even if it hadn't been him, it would have been somebody like him. I don't know if they thought, "This is what it takes to compete against the Europeans," or if they were trying to take a shortcut to catch up with the Russians before the 1984 Olympics – I can't say. But I was in the middle of it, and I think I paid for it, too.

When I think back to that time in my life, it reminds me of a recent dinner party my son and I went to. I offered a glass of wine to my son, and I got an earful from someone about giving alcohol to a minor – about how the law says I'm responsible for anything my son does to himself or other people if he's under the influence. So here we are today, in a culture where adults are finally responsible or frowned upon for giving alcohol to a minor. Fair enough. But in sports, if a coach is doping an under-aged athlete, there's no real ban or punishment for those people, or for the higher-ups who let it happen or encourage it. How is it that USCF (U.S. Cycling Federation) coaches can dope teenagers ([see this article](#) – editors) and have the evidence legally sealed, but a drug dealer would go to jail? And I could suffer legal repercussions for supplying alcohol at the dinner table? It makes no sense at all.

I think there have to be stronger penalties. Sport is a *privilege*, not a right. I was privileged to represent the United States, privileged to have competed against the best, ridden with so many incredible teammates, and to be able to prove myself. It's stunning that there aren't tougher penalties for the habitual dopers, the dealers, and the enablers. Those who encourage it seem immune to punishment. We're ready to blame that under-aged doper, but not the coaches and administrators who make it happen. That's what it was like for me. And it got worse.

TOL: *When did you see the doping culture begin to change?*

IT: I think about 1987. Certainly no later than 1988. I believe EPO began hitting women's racing right around that time, or at least the blood doping became more mainstream. The change was obvious; we had smaller fields, everybody knew everybody, you could tell who was doping by the size of their improvements.

I was racing really well in 1987 and 1988. I usually wasn't as fast in the early season, but I was almost always one of the strongest. I had been racing against Jeannie Longo for a few years already. She was always cutting-edge – she always had the lightest bikes and the latest equipment, and she was consistently a strong competitor. And that's the point: she was very steady at pretty much the same level for almost ten years. The only gains she made were things like disc wheels, or aerodynamic equipment, not her actual riding ability – until 1987.

Even though she was really good in the road races, I could out-climb her in any race. In the time trials, I could take a few seconds, maybe up to a minute out of her each time. But in the spring of 1987, suddenly Jeannie just completely exploded. We were at the Tour of Texas, I was putting my usual time gaps on Jeannie through the road stages, but when I went to Europe six weeks later, Jeannie was putting two and three minute improvements into me in the time trials, even when I was still putting a minute or more into everyone else!

I know what I can and can't do. I'm really proud that I had a steady career; I was at or right near the top for ten consistent years. I made steady gains here and there, but it wasn't easy, and I had to really work at it – racing with the men, racing against myself, learning from and working with my teammates. I have a lot of pride in being that steady person. I had no trouble competing against Cindy O. (Olavarri) or Jeanne Golay, even though both of them tested positive for steroids in their careers. I could always beat Golay in the time trials; steroids might make a person stronger, or help them recover faster, but it doesn't turn someone into an athlete that they aren't capable of being. But the change in Longo – someone who was already a decade into cycling with perfectly consistent performances – it was *ridiculous*.

TOL: *You made the 1988 and 1992 Olympic Teams too. Did the coaching climate change at all in those years? Did the sport improve?*

IT: No, it got worse. Even in 1988, at the Olympics, the women's team had almost no support. Ed Burke was put in place as our "advisor," but we had no dedicated mechanic, no massage, basically, nothing. Most of us were on our own, unless you were a "chosen one."

I don't know if it was exactly the same for all of the girls though, everyone had their own world. No one talked with each other much about the situation and I think we were all just trying to cope. Some of the personalities I definitely got along well with were Kathi Riggert, Leslee Schenk, Bunki Davis, Kelli Kittridge, Laura Peycke, and Rebecca Twigg.

I thought by 1990 that we might have turned a corner though. The USCF finally brought in a coach from Holland, Rinus Verboom. He was good, he really listened, and he got it. But the word from the top of the USCF was basically the same as before – that the people in charge wanted me out. Jiri Mainus (*the USCF's Competition Director from the early 1990s until the mid-2000s—editors*) told Verboom that I was too old, and that he should get rid of me. But

Rinus said no, he believed in me, and he actually told the Federation that he wanted to build the program around me.

Only a few weeks after that, Rinus was told by the Federation that there was no money to pay a women's coach; they let him go, and they brought Hennie Top in to work for— as we were led to believe— next to nothing. Interesting that there was no money for women, considering the USCF was, as I understand it, *rewarded* by the US Olympic Committee for winning World Medals. The Women's Team Trial Team had gotten second at the World's. Ruthie Mathis had gotten second in the World's Road Race. Both those medals were worth a lot of money and that money should have gone to the Women. But somehow there was no money for a coach?

It wasn't too long after Rinus was gone that the main focus of the women's program was put on Jeanne Golay. Jeanne tested positive for steroids in 1990, but was reinstated to the team as a "coach's selection," via Hennie. That really underscored the whole situation for me. They wanted her to be the leader of the team – not me – and they were quick to forget about her doping positive. And there were other signs that everything would just get worse; I remember at one of the National team training camps early that year, they were doing more medical tests than ever before, including analyzing blood samples. Jiri sat me down and said, "We've reviewed your tests and we don't think you have what it takes to be a world-class cyclist." He said that I didn't have the VO2-max that they thought I needed. Yet, they saw my natural hematocrit levels, they knew what that meant! I didn't understand the hematocrit level importance until years later.

There was one moment that stands out, which actually happened after the camp concluded. One of my teammates, [name withdrawn], met my mom after a race and told her, "You know, with all of the testing we do, I think Inga must be a genetic fluke." It's interesting that she knew more about my tests at the Olympic training center than I did at the time.

Looking back, I think the women's program was really dysfunctional. Just watching how the coaches and athletes interacted, I can see that a lot of elite athletes are often neurotic, or almost obsessive/compulsive. But I didn't live, eat, breathe, cycling like some of the other riders. I just didn't have those tendencies, or the neuroses to be a cycling "nut." Endurance sports often need an obsessive personality to go along with the talent. And I think many coaches are in tune with this and understand how to manipulate the athletes emotionally – to get them to do things they might not otherwise do to push themselves. Or dope. I wasn't disobedient or unable to follow orders, but I am able to think for myself and maybe a bit strong-willed, and that didn't play into the typical coach/athlete relationship. I can see how that game creates an environment where athletes can make bad decisions, and coaches can ruin lives.

TOL: Who do you think were the best or most successful totally clean riders during your prime racing years?

IT: Most of the US women seemed to be clean or so I thought. I'm hesitant to go here without proof. There were no huge spikes in their performances, except for maybe Golay. I didn't even think Jeanne was doping until she got caught. Maybe it was because I was still consistently beating her in our biggest races.

TOL: Were there others who stood out in this way?

IT: I thought that [name withdrawn] was on something. She was an awful climber, and then in 1993, in a tough Colorado race with a lot of climbing at altitude, she put something like five minutes into me on a long climb, at the same time that I was putting another four minutes into the field. I knew my form, and the form of the other girls in that field: you are *not* going to put minutes into me on a climb at altitude. It was completely night and day with that girl.

But there was one moment, one incident that absolutely hit home as to how bad the problem was and how far cycling's leaders would go to protect their world. [Name withdrawn], a multi-time champion and Olympian from [country withdrawn], was at my house in Reno – and I remember this so well, it's just so fresh and emotional – we were in my kitchen and she just broke down completely and admitted that she had just tested positive. She never told me for what drug. She was so worried that her life was over, crying and just totally distraught. I was silent for a long time, I think she was looking for my sympathy, maybe, but I was really angry because she was someone I respected – someone I had enjoyed racing with. She, of course, denied taking anything; saying, someone “must have slipped something” into her water bottle or food.

I expected it to hit the news, for her to be banned and maybe that would be the end of it. But none of that ever happened. Her Federation just buried the test. It was coming onto winter, she didn't race for six months and next year she just carried on racing as if everything was okay, and nothing had changed.

TOL: Let's switch gears for a moment, we've touched on the topic of doping several times now, and we get the sense that it was a big problem for women's cycling even in the 1980s. Back to the racing, what do you feel were the key accomplishments of your pro career?

IT: I don't think you can really separate the two topics. Maybe the doping wasn't as sophisticated as it got to be later, but I had to race against girls who were doing it, and in a system that basically expected and enabled doping to happen. Every time I raced, the impacts of doping in the women's peloton were present. I'm proud of my National championships and my World's medals – even more so because I was aware of the situation.

One of my best memories was at the Tour de la Drome in 1988. Everyone in cycling remembers Andy Hampsten winning the Giro that year in a huge snow storm, right? What most people don't know is that the same storm caught our race when we were in the Alps. It was a horrible day! To give you an idea of how unprepared we were, our coach at that race, Sue Novara, had us racing in basically our skinsuits. It was an overcast drizzle, yet warm in the valley when we started a two mountain pass stage. I got into a breakaway with Longo and her teammate, Valerie Simonet.

Well, the rain quickly turns to snow as we're climbing the first of the mountains. So I beg Sue to hand me my jacket, and she tells me, “oh no, don't worry, the snow will let up soon and this will all dry out.” At the top of the climb – and the snow is a complete white-out by then; the French girls are getting completely bundled up by their Directors at this point – I ask Sue for my

jacket again and *this* is when she tells me all of our clothes have been sent ahead to the finish! After the descent I couldn't even get hands off the bars, I was just frozen solid. My whole body was shaking so hard that I literally had to ask Sue to pre-chew my energy bar so I'd be able to get it down!

I out-sprinted Longo for the win, and right there in the middle of the street, the soigneurs and race volunteers stripped me down out of my wet clothes and wrapped me in blankets to warm me up. I was too cold to care, and hey, it's France, I don't think anyone noticed! But I remember Longo screaming at the organizers, "It's not fair, it's too cold to race!" I think that's what made the win so much better, because I didn't have any warm clothes or the support and still toughed it out.

Another race I look back on which still gives me a sense of satisfaction, was in 1992. It was a stage race in Epinal. Leontien van Moorsel— another girl whose performances in those years were also just completely night and day— was off the front. Longo was there, but she didn't counter Van Moorsel over a long gentle climb. So I just punched it over the top, and when I looked back I expected to see Longo, but she was gone. I put my head down and caught Van Moorsel, we worked together for a little bit, but I just rode her off my wheel.

That race was never in the news, but I won't forget it because I beat them. Maybe they were or weren't on drugs during that week, but on that day, I beat them. I didn't need or want the recognition from the press or the public, now that I think about it. I had done it. I rode them off my wheel. That race gave me a lot of peace and hope. The next week, we rode a fantastic Tour de l'Aude to set up our teammate, Julie Young, to win the overall.

***TOL:** We know a lot of people in the sport in 1993 were puzzled when you suddenly decided to retire. You won the National Championship. You were an automatic qualifier on the World Championship Team and then you abruptly disappeared. Can we ask you what happened?*

IT: This is the first time I've shared this in as much detail with anyone outside of my family, except for a small radio talk show a few months ago (see [Outspoken Radio](#) — editors). It's hard to talk about it, but I think this is the right time to start.

I was at the top of my form in 1993, but the problems with the women's program were getting worse. So I decided to steer clear of the Federation and race against the men in the States and follow my own coaching program. I avoided the USCF training camps, not just because I felt that there was "something" going on, but also because I was in tune with my body, and I didn't want to end up over-trained and sick, like I did in 1984. And it worked; I was in some of the best form of my life by just racing with the men.

Back then, the National Championships were the automatic qualifier for getting a spot on the World Championship team. The race itself was special to me. I had recently trashed my legs at a mountain bike race where it was so muddy, I had to run half of it. I didn't think I'd have good legs after all that running. But I made a break early to try and shake things up, and I ended up solo off the front, really getting a great gap. But then my team director came up and told me that my teammate, Karen Kurreck, was chasing and she had a good gap on the field as well, so

we decided that I'd wait for Karen and our team would go for a 1-2 sweep. I sensed how much stronger I was than her, so I really wasn't worried about the finish. We joined up after a few miles and just powered it to the end. Just a really great day for us!

A week after the championship, I got a phone call from Mark Gorski (*then the National Team Director at the USCF; later CEO of Tailwind Sports, owner of the U.S. Postal team of Lance Armstrong – editors*). It was the first time we'd ever spoken. The first words out of him were that the Federation wouldn't be selecting me for the World's team – even though I had just automatically earned it as winner of Nationals! He said I was going to have to resign from the World's Team because I wasn't a “team player.”

TOL: *Wait, he said this right after you won the National Championship with your teammate?*

IT: Yes. I was stunned, just numb. I asked him, “What do you mean?” He told me again that I wasn't a team player. So I asked him, “How can you say I'm not a team player? I was a perfect teammate at Nationals and it showed – I waited for Karen when the order came through.” So then he replied, “We don't think you're fit enough, we haven't seen enough of you racing this year to trust your fitness.” And I told him, “That was the hilliest, hardest road race of the year and we led for most of it. How could you question my fitness? I'm not an unknown quantity...I've been on every World and Olympic Team for the last 10 years.”

But he gave me an ultimatum: you will win the next race to prove your fitness, or else resign from the World's Team. I said to him, “Well, if I go out with the sole intent to individually win my next race, then that means I'm only looking out for myself, and that I'm not a team player. But you're saying if I don't win that race, you're going to remove me from the team?” And he said yes, and then added that he was changing the rules for 1994 so that the coach's selections would take priority. No more automatic qualifying position next year. And that was the end of the phone call. He basically had just taken my cycling career from me.

Gorski put me in a Catch-22 situation: either end my career myself, or he would do it for me. The USCF had gone through a lot of coaches over the years I was on the National Team. Aside from Rinus, not many of them were very ethical. After all the years of being forced to go my own way— because I wouldn't participate in the doping in 1984 – of being beaten down to the point where maybe other girls would quit the team, I didn't. I had the ability, the results, the will, and self-respect. But now, at that moment, I had nowhere else to go. I remember writing my resignation and mailing it off. That was that. Done. It was over.

Eddie B. and the people who brought him in had set the whole program in motion. The USCF was developing their system and they were going to enforce it. The underlying message was always, “If you want to be in this program, you have to be on our program.” I think professional cycling is a *privilege*, it always has been for me. But I feel like it was run by people who only knew how to compete by cheating, and so all the choices they gave us were unfair ones. I put ten of the best years of my life into cycling. I did everything to ride to the best of my ability, trained harder, raced smarter – and I *never* thought for a moment about not doing it the right way. Leaving was the hardest thing I'd had to do in my whole life up until that moment. I feel like I could have given so much more.

(When contacted for this article, Mark Gorski – now working for a biotech firm in St. Louis – said that he did not recall the specific details of this event, but did not remember anything as being particularly significant or unusual – editors.)

TOL: *That's an unbelievable story – and it obviously must have been very difficult for you. If we can ask, what did you do next?*

IT: I left Reno as soon as I could, I had so much anger to deal with. I moved to Halfway, Oregon; I put away the bikes, and moved on with my life. Cycling really wasn't a sport like football or baseball at the time, so I could distance myself from it all and have some anonymity. I wanted nothing to do with the sport or those people ever again.

It took some time for me to find some semblance of peace. I finally understood that the athletes who ended up the happiest aren't necessarily the ones who won the gold; many of them won the silvers or bronzes. It was great to win some big races, but I had nothing to be ashamed of when I looked back at some of the races that I could have won. I knew that I had gotten the best out of myself. The gold and silver winners usually know each other at that moment on the podium. Often times, the gold knows she cheated, but the silver also knows this, making the silver more worthy. I know I got everything out of cycling that I could earn from my abilities.

Since then, I got married, I got divorced; I raised my son, Tyler. I started a cattle ranch. I know – that was about the last thing that people expected! But it's what I love, and this is the perfect place for it. I have 160 acres and 30 head of cattle, and yes, it's a lot of work. We need about three tons of hay per head in the winter. We used to do all of the work with horses, and I still keep seven on the property. Last year was the first one where we were fully-mechanized to keep up with things.

TOL: *Why did you choose to speak out in 2012?*

IT: I had let it all go for 18 years. You know, there was a lot of anger in essentially being forced to walk away from cycling, but I found new priorities. I have learned from that experience that your reputation is all you really have in life. I take pride in my integrity, and doing the right things the first time, every time. But then came the moment that someone asked me, "You're from that era, you raced when Lance did. So what were *you* taking?" It was hard enough to have my cycling career taken from me, but that one question.... it was as if making the tough, hard, right choices when I was a cyclist was being stolen from me as well.

That was exactly when I knew I had to take a stand. I had to draw a line in the sand and prevent other people from trying to take my reputation away from me and the other cyclists that I knew who were clean. I made the right choices as an athlete. To be called a dooper because "everyone else" did it – someone had to stand up for those of us that didn't dope. My incredible disappointment was that no one at my level, Olympics and Worlds, was saying anything about any of this at the time. I felt that someone needed to start talking. Thankfully, a few other people have also started talking about being clean and the prices they have paid.

Mostly, I hurt for those racers that chose to not dope. Many of them would have had the

opportunities to race internationally, to experience the joys of racing against the best, and in the hardest races, but that was stolen from them.

TOL: *You authored two pretty scathing articles on dopers and the UCI's governance failures. What kind of feedback did you get?*

IT: I've had 100% positive feedback. If some disagree with me, they haven't said it to me personally. But remember, for all those years, most people couldn't really voice their opinions. During my racing years, I didn't know how to speak up for myself. And we had no one to turn to – no one to set an example for us that we could honestly talk to, without losing our spot on the team. Unfortunately, this is exactly the situation that a lot of riders have had to live with right up until today.

When I wrote my opinion for *VeloNews*, ([read it here - editors](#)) I made the statement that I wouldn't let my son Tyler compete in bike racing. The system that's in place today in USA Cycling is basically the one that was put in place by the people who pushed me out when it was still called the USCF. These people helped to *create* the doping culture. They made it *next to impossible* to make choices with integrity. What kind of mother would I be to put him in their hands and into harm's way?

Listen, I understand that Lance got caught, even though he was sort of the golden child, protected by the "system," and so on. I understand that he's flawed, and not a very nice character. But all that aside – let's face it, the system was already there. There was a very widespread and systematic practice of doping before he came along. My friend [name withdrawn], who was on those 7-Eleven men's teams when I was on their women's program – he has tons of doping stories from that time. I'm still surprised that no one has written a book specifically about the doping on that team – way before the whole U.S. Postal mess.

Davis Phinney was also in the 7-Eleven program at the same time I was, although Connie (Carpenter-Phinney) left right after the 1984 Olympics. I was genuinely concerned for their son, Taylor, who was first swept up into some kind of Lance-sponsored team, turned professional, and was the new golden boy for USA Cycling. Right after my opinion was published, Connie wrote a letter to me, begging me to reconsider and let Tyler take up competing. So I wrote her back, and I said, "Connie, I don't have the clout that you and Davis do to ensure his well-being." Connie never wrote back; she apparently didn't want to talk about it.

TOL: *What would it take for you to return to cycling?*

IT: Logistically, I would have to move to the city and I just don't see that, because I love where I am now. I would like to promote women's racing more than working with the athletes directly. Women in cycling *need* a strong advocate, that's what was missing for us in my day. I really wish that someone had been there to look out for us a little bit better. Maybe I'll get my foot in the door by helping to create new races. I know that if you build great races, the riders will come. I loved the Ore-Ida stage races during my time; in 1990, we did 17 stages and something like 700 miles! Women's cycling needs races like this today.

And we can even make some great comparisons to the men's racing. At the 1986 women's Tour de France, we raced shorter versions of the men's stages for two weeks. Sure, we didn't race for 90 miles before the mountains, but we basically started those stages going *straight up* the climbs to the mountaintop finish lines! Maria Canins—who is still one of my most favorite competitors and a person who I deeply respected—finished something like only 6/10ths of an MPH slower than Greg LeMond's average winning speed. We might not have the power, but we certainly have the endurance. We just need the opportunity.

Going back to 1989, when the USCF got in a pissing match over participation in the women's Tour de France, and most of the "A" team riders were forced to stay home for the Wheat Thins criterium series – it actually set women's racing in America back many years. The 7-Eleven sponsors were pushing hard to have the women's team do the Tour de France, but the USCF had "committed" the top women elsewhere. So instead of racing against the best, many of our best had to stay home. Not only did the full team truly miss out on the experience of doing the women's Tour de France, but we weren't all getting valuable experience racing against the same women we'd be competing against at World's and the Olympics! We have to have great races – that's what helps to make great riders.

The international races were awesome. Women's racing needs more coverage. But to get this, we need more people behind it, news people to spread the word and give us the right level of coverage. We work as hard as or harder than the men. Give us good races. Let's show how good we are to the right audience. I still really believe in women's cycling.

***TOL:** Thanks for talking with us, and we really hope that you decide to get more involved in the sport again. Cycling can definitely use more people with your experience, sense of competitive ethics, and fairness. We hope to continue a dialogue with you going forward.*

***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 Joe Harris and Steve Maxwell, June 26, 2014