

In-depth study of cycling

“Throwing light on the problem of doping”

Results of the analysis by Alter Hego – November 2007 – May 2008

Summary of main results and analyses

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I. Introduction: presentation of the consultancy, aims and method of the study

The International Cycling Union decided to carry out an in-depth study of the sport of cycling with a view in particular to clarifying the problem of doping.

Part of this study was assigned to the AlteRHego consultancy.

Presentation of AlteRHego

AlteRHego is a consultancy, founded in 2003, which specialises in **working with structures, projects and people in situations of change.**

Sport is an arena in which it is very active:

- The aim of AlteRHego in this field is to **encourage the adaptation** of sports structures and the **self-fulfilment** of sportsmen and women.
- **Fields of action** are varied and concern:
 - The elaboration and implementation of strategy, the reorganisation of structures and working methods;
 - The provision of psychological profiling;
 - Accompaniment of professional reinsertion.
- **Missions** have already been carried out among different structures and intermediaries: FFC, sportsmen and women and trainers (tennis, judo, swimming, equestrianism, cycling, canoeing, kayaking, etc.).

Objectives

The main aim of the study conducted by AlteRHego in 2007 / 2008 was to **throw light on the problem of doping in cycling** and to draw lessons from this.

For this purpose, a basic study approach was adopted with the idea of “getting down to basics”, with a view to:

- **Obtaining a better understanding of competitors**, in all disciplines,
- **Analysing contexts in which the sport is practised.**

France was chosen as the “pilot” territory to implement this study, with the aim of **preparing an approach that could be duplicated in other countries** based on experience gained in France.

By providing background information and analysis, the **aim** of this study is to help:

- **Build a vision shared by actors,**
- Put forward **recommendations and a strategy** to prevent doping among cyclists.

Method and samples

Three methodological approaches were adopted:

1. **A review of questions and the collection of specific expert reports** focused on the subjects of **motivation** and **factors of vulnerability and protection with respect to doping**.
2. **A qualitative basic investigation** concerning high level cycling in its entirety covering all types of intermediary and all age levels:
 - **Among “experts”**: 34 interviews with experts in different special fields and actors in the system who work alongside competitive cyclists: personalities, managers and administrators.
 - **On the ground (in 5 French regions)**:
 - 19 interviews with managers and trainers or instructors in clubs or other structures.
 - 41 young cyclists (from beginner to Elite), in different disciplines.
3. **A quantitative study of the psychological profile of high-level cyclists**, with 119 signatories to a protocol called the Profile Questionnaire.

II. Key points of the study

A. An overview of the situation based on various qualitative interviews shows an emerging consensus on the following points:

1. Different actors share the concerns which brought about the study:

- Worries **regarding the current situation of cycling** are the main grounds for their concerns;
- **A challenge to the long-term future** of cycling is clearly identified:
“If we don’t change, cycling will soon be finished.”
- **This context is of concern to young cyclists**, who are divided between their passion for the sport and a burden which they feel they must carry.

2. Actors in the system lay emphasis in particular on **four possible explanations**:

- **Factors that encourage / facilitate doping behaviour**;
- **The closed nature of the system** and its inability to adapt to changes in terms of needs, expectations and values;
- **Rifts and conflicts** which run through the entire system;
- **The lack of human and financial resources** to adapt the system and make it work.

3. In addition to these observations, **resources and opportunities are perceived** by different actors:

- **Competitive cycling retains its basic popularity** because its cultural foundations remain strong among the public at large, through:
 - The accessibility of events;
 - Dedication based on “the myth of the select few”;
 - The ability to generate a sense of belonging.
- **Major events form an integral part of a collective imagination** and continue to have a strong impact. Their media coverage remains important.
- **The network of clubs and structures and their organisers and members and the support of partners** (in France) are resources that remain active.
- **New forms of cycling** encourage positive feedback in the collective imagination and the public domain.
- **The emergence and success of new disciplines** (mountain biking, BMX), more in keeping with needs, expectations and current values, are important vectors of development for cycling.
- **Actions are being undertaken and are producing results**, in various fields:
 - Treatment of doping, with in particular an emerging consensus concerning the negative impact doping has on the image and development of cycling;
 - The promotion, development and adaptation of practices;
 - The structuring and professionalization of the amateur system;
 - The structuring of the professional system.

→ *There appears to exist therefore **something of a discrepancy between perceptions of the situation and the reality. Difficulties seem to be focused primarily on traditional disciplines and practices** (road racing and local and traditional events). The perception of these difficulties is amplified by the fact that these disciplines are at the heart of the system:*

“I’ve been cycling on road for 35 years: there have never been more cyclists on the roads. Cycling is developing outside competition.”

B. Results of the Profile Questionnaire and qualitative interviews with young cyclists indicate a changing socio-cultural reality.

The social and biographical profiles of practising competitive cyclists have **become diversified with respect to stock representations:**

- **Current competitive cyclists bear little resemblance to stereotyped representations** still widely evoked... sometimes even by organisers:
 - Levels of study and employment are quite high, school performance is often of a good level;
 - Lifestyles and social circles are mixed, social backgrounds are very heterogeneous regardless of discipline.
- **Participation in the sport as a result of being passed on from generation to generation does exist, however this is by no means exclusively the case** and in more than one out of three cases the sport is practised by means other than parental access.
- In this sense, **the world of cycling offers a model of social interaction which appears to have more in common with integration** (between generations and social categories) than segmentation or the inclusion of some to the exclusion of others.

→ *By focusing on this change in the profiles of cyclists (and therefore of organisers) **cycling can benefit from the present cultural schism to develop.***

→ *In addition, **any policy aimed at preventing doping in cycling must take account of the diversification of its athletes.***

For example, actions could be adapted, particularly in messages of prevention among young people for whom there is “a challenge of economic and social survival” or those seeking to develop and excel (“narcissistic challenge”).

Similarly, women and men will not necessarily be sensitive to the same types of message or preventive methods.

C. Factors of vulnerability to doping behaviour have been identified. These are linked mainly to the interaction between personality profiles and how the cycling system works (Profile Questionnaire and review of questions).

1. Personality profiles are relatively lacking in uniformity, however some elements in particular should be considered in terms of prevention and vulnerability, in particular:

- **Qualities sought after and reinforced by involvement in high-level sport** (for example: the search for the new, dependence on reward, less avoidance of danger, etc) **also represent vulnerability with respect to addiction and doping.**
- **A relative aversion to cooperation could also constitute a factor of vulnerability to anti-sporting behaviour.**
- **Other personality traits** (for example a reduced propensity to analyse feelings and emotions), **identifiable among certain athletes, can also constitute factors of vulnerability** to anti-sporting behaviour, including doping behaviour.

➔ *Like all high-level sports, cycling tends to single out risk profiles, which justifies and makes relevant all actions aimed at preventing the risk of dope taking and addiction.*

The most relevant approaches include:

- *All practices of accompaniment and competition methods designed to encourage a cooperative approach.*
- *The practices of supervision and accompaniment, which include developing the ability to express and analyse what is felt by the young athlete, may help to strengthen factors of protection against anti-sporting behaviour.*
- *The existence of a “dual agenda” - sporting and school based/professional – with the rise in socio-cultural level and development of expressive capacities that this implies, will also tend to strengthen factors of protection.*

2. The cultural backdrop of cycling is very much oriented towards reinforcing the most extrinsic motivations (i.e. motivations that require feedback, outside reinforcement and reward to be maintained. Earning money, having a particular status, enjoying an image highly regarded by others etc, are extrinsic motivations).

This reinforcement occurs in particular through early rewards, over-emphasis of competition at a very young age, training and management practices, etc.

...And yet:

- **These motivations are correlated with a higher risk of anti-sporting behaviour, including doping.**
- **The main motivations of young cyclists completing the Profile Questionnaire, regardless of the cycling discipline practised, relate to stimulation-enjoyment and mastery of the activity** (which are intrinsic motivations).

→ **To encourage a motivational climate more favourable to the emergence of globally pro-sporting behaviour, levers do exist:**

- **The development and distribution of methods of accompaniment** which attach value to and reinforce the most intrinsic motivations;
- **The development of competitions and events that are less focused on solitary “winning”** and its plethora of “addictive” rewards;
- **Greater emphasis on an outlook focused on enjoyment and self-fulfilment** (and not just performance).

In conclusion, regarding the key points of the study, it will be noted that any policy to prevent and combat doping necessarily implies consideration of the complexity of the problem:

- **Doping is multi-faceted and depends on the stakes involved and the context:**
 - **Doping as an “obligation”** (explicit or implicit), when the stakes are ideological or nationalist;
 - **Doping in terms of a challenge of economic survival or social success;**
 - **Doping as a means of responding to performance pressure**, where the stakes are integration in society and where the individual may perceive himself at all times to be in a precarious situation;
 - **Doping as the equivalent of a social rite of integration and continued membership of the group**, linked to collective beliefs which have currency and are passed on within the group in question;
 - **Doping as a psychopathological symptom** indicating the dependence of an individual to an object, **related to a psychological challenge**, a problem of addiction;
- **Some factors of vulnerability and protection with respect to doping behaviour** are becoming more and more clearly identified.

Factors of protection include in particular:

- **The existence of the “dual agenda”** allowing young people to continue studying while at the same time being involved in high-level sport;
- **Reflection and early action with regard to reinsertion** (post cycling career), which give more meaning, assurance and strength to practices;
- **Implementation and supervision of anti-doping actions** (information, awareness-raising, etc), adapted to young people according to their age and the stage of their sporting careers;
- **Improved conditions of supervision and accompaniment** for young cyclists at all levels;
- **The use of questionnaires**, making it possible to identify risk profiles more clearly and therefore adapt the supervision of young sportsmen and women.

→ **The fight against doping means taking action on several fronts: the reinforcement of factors of prevention, and the taking into account, identification and treatment of factors of vulnerability.**

III. Priority fields of action

“Any planned change has its share of utopia”.

In view of the results of the study, three main fields of action in our view should be regarded as priorities, with the following objectives:

1. Reintegration of anti-doping policy in a wider perspective:

- Restore **authority**, since in order to be effective, the policy of testing and sanctions must be consistent, applicable and applied; and because in a system in difficulty, the most pressing need is that rules should be laid down and applied, failing which weaknesses persist or appear which either allow or facilitate transgressions.
- Strengthen **prevention** in relation to testing and sanctions and place anti-doping actions in a wider perspective of **prevention of anti-sporting behaviour** and **promotion of pro-sporting behaviour**: a realignment is in fact necessary to emerge from what could become “a race without end”: this means accepting that a world without doping or cheating will never exist, but acknowledging that it is possible to limit these phenomena, by acting at different levels of the system, to make it less compatible with doping behaviour.
- Devote more energy on the **development of cycling disciplines**, since this is one of the key roles of the UCI. In addition, this will make it possible to:
 - Give back ambitions and positive objectives to the entire organisation and its actors;
 - Reposition the fight against doping no longer as an end in itself, but as a means of encouraging the development of cycling, of bolstering the sport’s image, of protecting those who practice the sport, and of attracting a public sympathetic to the values of the sport and winning their loyalty, etc.
- Questioning values: **what are the values of cycling of the future?** Work on values makes it possible to:
 - Form a collective body which recognises itself in these values and give meaning to actions: this is what we share.
 - Channel development strategy, priorities and working methods.

2. Strengthen the prevention of anti-sporting behaviour by taking action at different levels:

- **Capitalise on and distribute all good practices** concerning:
 - **The implementation and supervision of anti-doping actions** (information, awareness-raising, etc), adapted to different audiences.
Today many actions in this field are being carried out and are producing results in terms of the prevention of anti-sporting behaviour. The first step therefore is to broaden the movement, spread the word and popularise it. The UCI can clearly play a fundamental role in the collection, distribution and promotion of “good practices”.
 - **Emphasis on and promotion of pro-sporting behaviour.** In addition to identifying and punishing deviant behaviour, it is necessary also to emphasise and promote behaviour that benefits cycling and its teams and to turn the spotlight on members of the community who carry on the sport in accordance with the rules and show respect for people and health.
 - **Implementation of psychological monitoring particularly through the use of questionnaires**, making it possible to identify more easily those profiles most “at risk” and adapt the supervision of young cyclists accordingly.
- **Improve the conditions of supervision and accompaniment** of young cyclists at all levels, particularly by reducing the isolation of athletes.
Global accompaniment is appreciated and helps to improve conditions generally, to strengthen the spirit of cooperation and to pool means and resources. There are some successful examples in this area which merit consideration and evaluation with a view to improving and promoting good initiatives.
- **Consolidate the policy of reducing aspects of precariousness**, since the more precariousness there is, the more risks there are (precariousness introduces insecurity which exerts pressure on the individual). Means of reducing this insecurity exist, for example:
 - **Promotion of the “dual agenda”;**
 - Improving the **protection of careers/professional activity** and employment contracts;
 - **Accompaniment of professional reinsertion at a human level (advice, support, guidance, follow-up) and not just at a financial level.**

3. To improve the image:

It is essential to **escape the shackles of information/justification to communicate on what is going well, restore pride in belonging and make actors more responsible for their actions**. To do this, the following should be regarded as priority measures:

- **Give more impetus to sports development:**
 - Give a real place to emerging disciplines;
 - Design different development paths for different practices, while highlighting common identifiers among all practices within the “great cycling family”.
- **Communicate differently:**
 - Consider communication as a pillar of strategy;
 - Communicate “for” rather than “against”;
 - Create new forms of communication and promotion of cycling.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Executive Committee of the UCI for placing its trust in us to complete this study.

Our thanks go also to Mme Marie-Françoise Potereau (FFC), M. Jean Wauthier and M. Olivier Bañuls (UCI), members of the study’s Steering Committee, for their involvement in preparing the study and carrying it out on the ground.

Lastly, we express our gratitude to all those who participated in this study by sharing their experiences, views and time in answering our questions.

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