

2019 Athletes' Council Annual Report

Prepared on Saturday, October 19, 2019
In-Person Meeting, Victoria, British Columbia



Introduction

This document is the first Annual Athlete Report prepared by the Athletes' Council for Cycling Canada. We believe that this marks a starting point to build from to establish a stronger, more unified athlete voice within the organization. We hope that this will set a precedent for the years to come and will acknowledge the collective vision for the Athletes' Council's roles and responsibilities within Cycling Canada.

In this report, we will provide background on the role of the Council, review the past year, outline areas of improvement, and provide recommendations and performance indicators for review in the 2020 Annual Athlete Report.

Thank you for taking the time to read this document and for supporting Canadian cyclists.

The Athletes' Council

2019/2020 Athletes' Council Members:

- Evelyne Gagnon, women's para: evelynegagnon4@gmail.com
- Tristen Chernove, men's para: elevatairports@gmail.com
- Haley Smith, women's MTB: haley.smith@powergate.ca (vice-chair)
- Andrew L'Esperance, men's MTB: andrewlespy@gmail.com
- Drew Mechielsen, women's BMX: drewmechielsen@hotmail.com
- James Palmer, men's BMX: jsp66@shaw.ca
- Sara Poidevin, women's road: sarapoidevin@gmail.com
- Ryan Anderson, men's road: ryan.anderson@shaw.ca
- Annie Foreman-Mackey, women's track: formacannie@gmail.com (chair)
- Remi Pelletier-Roy, men's track: remi.pelletier@hotmail.com

Background

What is an Athletes' Council?

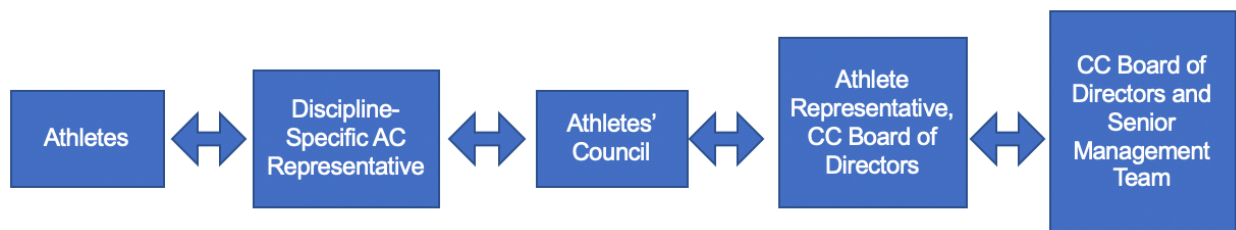
Within Cycling Canada (CC), the Athletes' Council (AC) is a group of elected representatives from each Olympic and Paralympic cycling discipline that: functions as a conduit between National Team athletes and CC; exists to promote and protect athletes' rights and interests; and ensures effective and ongoing communication between CC, athletes, and between disciplines.

Why do we exist?

- To advocate for athletes
- To bring a unified athlete voice to decision-making
- To build athlete leaders
- To inspire positive change within our immediate and extended cycling family

What is our role?

- Establish a recognized, responsible, and valued voice within CC
- Represent diverse interests of all disciplines in the decision-making process
- Act as a conduit for feedback, concerns, and information between athletes and CC (i.e. be a resource for athletes)
- Develop leadership skills to better fulfill these roles



Who are we?

- Two National Team Athlete Representatives – one male and one female – from each Olympic and Paralympic program (MTB, road, track, BMX, para)

What is our current structure?

- Athlete representatives are elected for a two-year term in December of even years (next election will take place in December 2020)
- Elected by current National Team athletes within each discipline and within each gender
- Elected by the AC members, the Chair sits on the CC Board of Directors
- Elected by the AC members, the Vice-Chair sits on the CC High Performance Committee

How do we operate?

- Four teleconference AC meetings held each year
- Additional meetings hosted as issues arise
- One in-person meeting each year

Key deliverables:

- Preparation of the Annual AC Report for the CC Annual Congress
- Voting member on the CC Board of Directors
- Participate at the CC Annual Congress

What have we done so far in 2019?

- Three teleconference meetings
- One in-person meeting at CC's Annual Congress
- First annual AC report (compiled at CC Annual Congress)
- Beginning to set a precedent for subsequent years and AC iterations

What are our strengths?

- The athlete perspective: we have “on the ground” experience and daily interaction with fellow athletes, staff, and the programs’ daily training environments
- “Greenness” – fresh eyes on the administrative and policy structures of CC
- Commitment to collaboration between disciplines
- Passion and motivation for our sport and the athletes we represent!

What are our limitations?

- Lack of complete representation; there are still people missing from the table (in particular non-Olympic/Paralympic programs)
- Ongoing struggle to engage athletes in the process
- Building a trusted voice
- Clarifying what is within the scope of the AC and seeking out the appropriate information
- Continued operation within discipline and program silos

What are our goals for 2020?

- Establish our voice and set a precedent for years to come
- Implement new methods to assist effective athlete engagement (e.g. surveys, anonymous reporting, open meetings, tab on CC website, AC summaries and resources sent to all athletes)
- Improve integration between programs and with CC management and Board of Directors (creating a culture of sharing knowledge/information/resources)
- Gather/clarify/disseminate resources (e.g. mental health, women's specific sport science, concussion protocols, safe sport, etc.)

What do we commit to you? (athletes and CC)

- To acting in the best interest of athletes as our primary objective
- To making our voice heard

What are we asking of CC?

- Seek our perspective, invite us to the table
- Share information from us and with us
- Mentor us (help us build our skills)
- Work to build trust

Year in Review and Areas of Improvement

Program Highlights:

BMX: Athlete representatives highlighted a few major accomplishments, including having all three riders at Pan Ams in the finals. They also noted the resiliency and team-spiritedness of athletes at World Cup Finals, where they maintained a supportive environment and had athletes rebound from poor performances on day one to have success on the second day of competition.

Road: On the women's side, we've seen an increase in the number of women racing on Women's World Tour (WWT) teams, positive changes to the Olympic selection, and having development riders experience a World Championships (a positive that emerged from a negative, injury-riddled situation). Athlete representative Sara Poidevin also noted that the team dynamic at World Championships was extremely positive and unified. On the men's side, athletes noted a return to the Tour de l'Avenir with a U23 team, and solid performances at our Canadian World Tour races.

Para: Athlete representatives highlighted 13 medals won at the Para Pan Am Games, 5 medals at Track World Championships, including a World Title, Road World Cup Overall win, and many Road World Cup podiums across categories and genders. Late in the year, the pursuit world record was set in the men's C1 category. Now entering the final phase of the Tokyo 2020 quadrennial, preparations feel focused and consolidated. The relative stability of the existing coaching and IST staff is fostering a feeling of refinement and predictability, aiding in building confidence and cohesion throughout the Para Team.

Track:

- *Sprint:* A recent addition to the program, Kelsey Mitchell shattered the World Record in the flying 200m in Sept. '19.
- *Women's Team Endurance:* Medal-winning performances at the Pan American Games by NextGen athletes demonstrate the increasing depth of the program.
- *Men's Team Endurance:* Seeing the fruits of many years of hard work, the men's team pursuit team was the second team to ever break 3:50 (Sept. '19).

MTB: Mountain bike saw a lot of growth in depth this year, including progress in almost every category at World Championships (performance metric based on top 3 finishes in each category). We also saw two men step up to meet the top-16 World Cup criteria for Olympic selection, and a strong women's side that will likely qualify two spots. World Championships were also on "home turf" in Monte Sainte Anne, and the national team put in a big effort to field a large team and offer as many development opportunities as possible for both staff and athletes. This was an event that the whole community was very proud of.

Areas of Improvement:

BMX: Increase the intensity and professionalism of the day-to-day environment, and bring a "sense of excellence" back into the program that athlete representatives feel has drifted away.

Road: On the women's side, the aim is to continually improve our nation ranking, by increasing the number of women on both WWT and professional teams. On both the men's and women's sides, the athletes hope to see continued growth in the junior and U23 programs.

Para: Athletes hope to increase development opportunities and communication between the national team, athletes, and Cycling Canada staff. Achieving actual and perceived parity between cycling disciplines and genders remains a priority. Improvements in mechanical and equipment support are sought for 2020.

Track: Athletes hope to see: improved collaboration and commitment to knowledge-sharing between programs; retention of staff in Milton and some normalcy amidst staffing changes; and the establishment of a comprehensive strategy and strong platform to build from post-Tokyo.

MTB: We hope to improve communication from the athletes through our Athlete Reps and create more opportunities to provide feedback to help shape our program.

Impactful Anecdote: A founding member of Canada's team pursuit program, Laura Brown is a two-time Olympian, bronze medallist in the event, and has nearly two decades of racing experience on the road and track. Since stepping away from racing in late 2017, Laura has directed road teams, coached dozens of athletes, and found ways to share her extensive base of knowledge and technical expertise with the next generation of athletes. Laura has been building her coaching skills under the mentorship of Jenny Trew (Cycling Canada's Track Endurance Development Coach). She led Canada's junior team at Junior Track World Championships in Frankfurt, Germany in August and – most recently – the team competing at the Track World Cup in Minsk, Belarus. In her commitment to building the sport, Laura is a true embodiment of the spirit of sport and is paving the way for current and future athletes to support the entire cycling community to reach new levels.

Priorities and Recommendations

Overarching Objectives for 2020:

- Provide clarity about the AC's role to all athletes, staff, and management
- Establish stronger lines of communication
- Seek opportunities to grow leadership skills among athlete representatives
- Build a unified athlete voice
- Be a strong and cohesive team at the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games
- Develop a specific succession plan for post-Tokyo

Recommendations and Action Plan:

Over the next twelve months, the AC would like to see improvement in the following key areas: information sharing and availability; athlete engagement; cross-discipline collaboration; and representation. The following recommendations are meant to be action items to be worked on throughout the next year, culminating in a review and reassessment at the 2020 Annual Congress.

1. *Improve athlete access to resources and information*

One of the major, and easily rectified, issues identified at the Annual Congress is the confusion surrounding, and lack of availability of, athlete resources. For example, the athletes feel that information regarding mental health resources and IST services is difficult to find and cumbersome to access. To improve this, the AC recommends that:

- An “Athlete” tab on the Cycling Canada website be created, with such subheadings as: National Team Policies, IST Services, Mental Health Services, Financial Aid and Bursaries, and other general resources and guidelines (e.g. white papers put together by IST professionals re: nutrition, stretching/self-massage/foam rolling, RED-S, mindfulness, etc.)
- The access that each level of athlete (i.e. development vs senior, carded vs non-carded) has to each of the above resources be clearly communicated and delineated online.

2. *Improve athlete engagement*

Another issue identified at the Annual Congress was the difficulty in eliciting athlete engagement with their Athlete Representatives. This poor engagement is likely due to a lack of understanding of the organization, or a lack of specificity and individuality in our communication, rather than feelings of apathy among the athletes. Thus, the Athletes’ Council recommends the following:

- The AC explores different methods of communication, including but not limited to: surveys, in-person meetings at events, specific emails with personal feel (i.e., sending calls-for-feedback to smaller groups of athletes at a time, to increase feelings of ownership and responsibility).
- The Athlete Reps increase the frequency of their information-sharing with their athletes, helping to improve feelings of involvement.
- The Athlete Reps actively seek feedback from our athletes using the methods suggested in the first bullet point.

3. *Increase cross-discipline collaboration*

A shared desire among Athlete Representatives is to have better cross-discipline collaboration and engagement. As a Council, we believe that operating in program-specific silos results in a (likely unintentional) withholding of knowledge and opportunities that could otherwise be shared to advance *all* of our programs. To help improve this, we recommend that:

- The AC continues to hold quarterly meetings where program updates are given.
- A google calendar (or some other method of collaborative document) be created that communicates location and timing of training camps and competitions, so that we are all aware of the activities of each other's' disciplines.
- Opportunities for cross-discipline training camps be encouraged and offered when possible.
- A database of all national team athlete training locations and basic contact information be created, so that athletes have the capability to collaborate with other athletes in their area.

4. *Push for equity (gender, minority, disability) and explore the expansion of athlete representation within CC*

The AC would like to see actions taken by CC to rectify the discrepancy within positions of leadership, specifically the gender gap. The current Board of Directors is comprised of nine directors of which only two are women (including the current AC chair), and the current Senior Management Team includes no women. In February 2019, Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to ensuring that women are equitably represented and served at all levels of the Canadian sport system, including achieving gender parity in the Board of Directors of federally funded sport organizations by December 2024.¹ Aligned with the Government's vision, we would like concrete actions to achieve this end, including but not limited to an update to the CC bylaws to include a statement and commitment to board gender equity, as seen in other National and Provincial Sporting Organizations bylaws.

Similarly, the AC asks for steps to be taken by CC to ensure that, at the very minimum, one person with a disability is represented at the Board and management level.

Finally, the AC will look to other National Sporting Organizations who have found ways to more adequately represent the diversity of their membership. Athletics Canada, for example, has a model of governance that includes three Athlete Directors on the Board, of which a minimum of one of each gender and a minimum of one athlete with a disability and one able-bodied athlete.

¹ Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat. February 2019. Press Release – Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation Ministers Collaborate to Make Sport Safe and Inclusive. *Red Deer, Alberta, February 15, 2019*. See: <https://scics.ca/en/product-produit/press-release-sport-physical-activity-and-recreation-ministers-collaborate-to-make-sport-safe-and-inclusive/>

The AC believes that we can play an important role in advocating for these changes and interests, and recommends the following:

- Comprehensive reports and position-statements be compiled by the AC for submission to CC on issues of gender equity, inclusion of people with a disability in decision-making processes, and the expansion of athlete representation within the organization.
- The AC serves to hold CC accountable to what we as athletes expect to see as best practices within CC.

Concluding Remarks:

We feel that our time to make a difference is now. Our current council is comprised entirely of new members, and as such, we have fresh eyes and an optimistic outlook on what we can achieve. We are committed to using the voices and influence we have been given to create momentum and lasting, positive change within CC. It is our goal to represent our athletes with care and dedication.

The specific recommendations listed above are our actionable priorities for the next 12 months, and we understand that they are lofty. That being said, we believe that these are important and concrete things that we can accomplish as a Council to serve our athletes in the best way possible.

We hope that this report acts as a fresh starting point for future councils, giving us ground to push off from.