

2020 Athletes' Council Annual Report



Prepared by 2019/2020 Athletes' Council

Introduction

This document is the second annual report prepared by the Athletes' Council (AC) for Cycling Canada (CC) and the athletes of CC. This report represents continued effort from the Athletes' Council to create strong athlete representation within our organization. We hope that this report will continue to 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 2021 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 (incoming chair)
- 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 (outgoing chair)
- Ruby West, women's CX: ruby.west9@gmail.com
- Cameron Jette, men's CX: cameronjette@gmail.com

Note: We have not had an active Men's Track representative in the past year

Background

What is an Athletes' Council?

Within Cycling Canada (CC), the Athletes' Council (AC) is a group of elected Athlete Representatives (AR) from Olympic, Paralympic, and non-Olympic cycling disciplines 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 be available to help 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

Who are we?

- Two National Team Athlete Representatives – one male and one female – from each Olympic and Paralympic program (MTB-XC, Road, Track, BMX, Para-Cycling) with additional membership coming from non-Olympic disciplines (Cyclocross and MTB-DH added officially at the end of 2020*)

*Note: the addition of these non-Olympic disciplines will be reflected in the 2020 update of the Athletes' Council Terms of Reference Policy.

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)
- Athlete representatives elected by current National Team athletes within each cycling program
- Elected by the AC members, the Chair sits on the CC Board of Directors (BOD)
- Elected by the AC members, the Vice-Chair sits on the CC High Performance Committee (HPC)

How do we operate?

- Monthly meetings
- One in-person meeting each year
- AC representatives engaging directly with athletes within their cycling sport
- AC representatives engaging directly with CC coaches/staff on program specific items
- AC Chair engaging directly with entire NT athlete base
- AC Chair facilitating flow of information from Athletes and the Athletes' Council to the Board of Directors and the Senior Management Team

Key Action Items:

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

What are our strengths?

- The athlete perspective: we are experiential experts in our sport system, we bring on-the-ground experience through interaction with 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?

- Ongoing struggle to engage athletes in the process
- Building a trusted voice within the athlete community
- Clarifying what is within the scope of the AC and seeking out the appropriate information
- Continued operation within discipline and program silos
- Knowledge and skill gaps related to certain issues within the organization
- Lack of systems in place to ensure effective succession within the AC

What do we commit to you?

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

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

Our Work

What we have done in 2020: Overview

- First annual AC report (compiled at CC Annual Congress)
- Created a stronger presence among athletes and the CC organization
- Created a monthly newsletter to share information with athletes, make the presence of the AC known to increase engagement and foster connection between athletes across disciplines
- Added Cyclocross representatives to Athletes' Council informally. Making the addition of CX official with December 2020 update of AC Terms of Reference.
- Increased meeting interval during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic to work on strategies to support athletes through this unprecedented time
- Engaged in strategic planning consultations
 - Athlete perspective to the HP program
 - Provided feedback and ideas on additional areas of the plan – i.e. Grassroots
- Created an athlete-led mentorship program called CtC (Cyclist-to-cyclist) to create cross-discipline opportunities to connect and learn
- Created the Athlete Zone on the CC website as a space for athlete-focused information, performance resources and support
- Continued to set a precedent for subsequent years and AC iterations; build the culture of the AC

What we did in 2020: Detail

At the time of writing this report in October 2019 at the Cycling Canada Annual Congress we set out with the following overarching objectives:

- 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

To realize these overarching objectives, we focused on 4 specific areas: *improve athlete engagement, increase cross discipline collaboration, push for gender equity, and explore the expansion of athlete representatives within CC*. This is what we did.

1. *Improve athlete access to resources and information*

With the help of CC staff, we created the Athlete Zone on the CC website. This is a place where athletes have access to resources to support them through their journey in sport. This is an evolving space that will be tailored to the needs of the athletes based on their recommendations and requests. Through the

COVID-19 pandemic we used this space to store mental health resources that were sent out to athletes so they could easily be referenced as needed.

2. *Improve athlete engagement*

We created a monthly newsletter for athletes with key resources, AC updates, management updates, athlete initiatives, race result updates, athlete perspectives and safe sport information. The goal with these is to share information and stay in contact with the athletes such that when we are needed, the athletes feel confident in reaching out for help.

3. *Increase cross-discipline collaboration*

To do something to support athletes' through the COVID-19 pandemic, we created the Cyclist-to-Cyclist (CtC) program. The CtC program is an athlete-led mentorship initiative that connected developing athletes with senior athletes across 6 disciplines within the organization. The program ran for 2 months, 4 sessions and engaged 60 athletes and 25 athlete leaders through the trial session. We learned a lot through this experience and will be evaluating what we learned and how we can improve the program if we create subsequent iterations of a mentorship program.

4. *Push for gender equity and explore the expansion of athlete representation within CC*

We worked on this objective through the presence of our chairperson, Annie Foreman-Mackey, on the board of directors and bringing forward the female perspective to the board level. Additionally, the council is pleased to see more female representation, and racial diversity on the recently formed board of directors and applaud their efforts.

Looking Forward

What are our goals for 2021?

- Continue to build a presence with the athletes through effective communication and engagement such that athletes feel empowered and supported to take opportunities to have their voices be heard
 - Increase engagement and communication
 - Give the athletes the support they need to be involved in CC decisions that directly affect them
- Strengthen our voice within CC and set a precedent for years to come
- Improve integration between programs and with CC management and Board of Directors (creating a culture of sharing knowledge/information/resources)

- Gather information from athletes on what resources they need and share that information through the Athlete Zone on CC website
- Create better systems for the athletes to share feedback, concerns and ideas to Cycling Canada through the AC (i.e. Annual Athlete Survey)

Year in Review: Program Highlights and Areas of Improvement

Program Highlights:

The following section outlines program highlights and areas of improvement through the 2020 season. This is an inside look at the different Cycling Canada programs from the perspective of the athlete representatives and the athletes. The areas of improvement highlight opportunities for Cycling Canada and the Athletes' Council to focus their efforts.

Cyclocross

The 2020 cyclocross season was a very strong one by all measures. Maghalie Rochette stepped up and took the first ever World Cup victory in Iowa City. She continued to produce strong results throughout the year. Ruby West continued to show impressive results in the U23 category, capping her season off with a 9th place at World Championships. On the men's side we had Michael Van den Ham continue to produce strong results with many UCI podiums in the United States as well as some of the best rides ever done by a Canadian male in Europe. Within the program we had strong participation and engagement from the athletes. At the World Championships we held a round table discussion with all the athletes attending, allowing them to voice their views and concerns. This was very fruitful and something we recommend all cycling programs to attempt. Too often only the thoughts of the top athletes are considered, this allows us to engage with developmental athletes and gives us a different perspective on the program.

BMX

- Potential to secure both a Female and Male spot at the Olympic games in Tokyo.
- Solid group of Next Gen riders with coming through with good potential if given the right direction and support
- We were able to run COVID-safe mock races the later part of this year
- Our proposal to OTP for funding was approved earlier this year, so we have been able to keep some staff around and a gym to train at as well.
- We have a very skilled group of youngers riders that have potential in the 10 years or so.

Road

- Positive handling of COVID-related decisions, including Olympic selection, and World Championship team selection and organization.
- Overall, strong Canadian performances for those who were able to compete in the later part of the year!

Para-Cycling

Canadian cyclists in the Para category started the 2020 season with strong performances at the Para Track Worlds in Milton, including a Gold medal and World Record, 3 Silver medals, a 4th, 5th and Canadian record for the men's tandem.

A late winter/early spring training camp in Hawaii was abruptly ended almost as soon as it began due to the start of the COVID-19 global pandemic. All international para cycling road events for 2020 were cancelled. Online racing has been the only option for Canadian Para cyclists, while several nations have continued with significant race schedules, that has not been the case at home. The pandemic certainly puts a higher degree of life strain on persons with a disability, but we are accustomed to a life necessitating a heightened degree of adaptation and are drawing on these strengths.

A series of track camps at the Burnaby Velodrome and a road camp in Victoria were lined up through the winter but had to be cancelled as further travel bans and restrictions developed in British Columbia. While some exceptions exist for high-performance athletes, among our para group, taking a more aggressive COVID prevention approach is supported.

In an effort to keep us connected and pushing one another towards optimal performance, virtual tools like Zwift, Fulgaz, Zoom calls and email communications are being utilized to a high degree. On the bright side, the Paralympic Movement has a clear purpose beyond athletic performance, toward a world celebrating more diversity, inclusion, innovation, and parity. We hope that coming through this pandemic, the world is better positioned to advance these values.

Track

The 2019-2020 track cycling season was fortunate to run a full season, which saw Cycling Canada send a large number of development and elite athletes to a variety of races including a Pan American Games, Junior World Championships, Pan American Championships, five world cups - including a home world cup hosted in Milton - and finally a World Championships held this March in Berlin.

2019 also saw the extension of the Cycling Canada track family with the hiring of Matt Shallcrass as the women's endurance coach, with all other coaching positions remaining stable.

Summer of 2020 was meant to be highlighted by the Tokyo Olympics; however, with the postponement of the Games, the track program has adapted with various new daily screenings, segregated athlete bubbles and heightened measures to ensure the health and safety of the athletes and staff. The elite and NextGen teams' have returned to the daily training environment successfully and safely throughout the summer and fall with the situation continuing to be carefully monitored as the COVID-19 situation continues to change and progress.

Despite the delay, Cycling Canada did announce the team for the postponed Tokyo 2020 Games this July, with Canada sending its largest track team in history with thirteen track athletes named consisting of both men's and women's sprint and endurance squads.

The team will be looking to continue its improvement of becoming a strong and diverse track cycling team. However, given the delayed timeline of the Tokyo 2021 Games and changing track season, a priority should be put on continued development of strong NextGen teams.

MTB

The 2020 season was put on hold before it even really got started due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Most Canadian Mountain bike athletes were in Temecula, California for the start of the US Cup in the second week of March. A few athletes in the mountain bike program took advantage of early season racing opportunities in Europe with athletes gathering valuable experience at stage races in Spain and Greece before the pandemic put a halt to racing. Athletes remained connected throughout the summer via regular Zoom calls together with MTB coaches, the CC off-road manager, and staff. Many athletes took advantage of the summer off racing to take on challenges of their own which were visible through social media. After many races were cancelled throughout the season, the MTB World Cup did go on with a very condensed schedule followed by World Championships. Result highlights:

- Marianne Theberge – 7th – U23 Women – World Cup #1
- 4 athletes in the Top 20 in the U23 Men's race at World Cup #1 – Sean Fincham – 5th, Carter Woods-9th, Quinton Disera – 11th, Gunnar Holmgren-17th
- Leandre Bouchard – 17th – Short Track – World Cup #2 – Aggressive racing at the front throughout the race
- Sean Fincham – 5th – U23 Men – MTB World Championships

An additional highlight of the season was our MTB athlete's engagement in the UCI decision making on the UCI ranking through a survey process administered through The Cyclist Alliance (TCA) with collaboration with the MTB Athlete representative to the UCI, Maja Włoszczowska. Canadian National Team MTB athletes were the most engaged of any country globally through the survey process. We must thank our out-going women's MTB representative Haley Smith for the leadership on this very important initiative. Also, Haley will not be continuing as the women's MTB representative, however she has taken a position with TCA, which is the women's professional riders union, as the mountain bike representative. Additionally, on the Olympic front, we are in a very good position to secure 2 women's and 1 men's spot for the Tokyo Games. There will be 2 selection races next season, the first 2 World Cups, to decide the final team.

Areas of Improvement:

CX

In terms of improvement, we feel more can be done on the recruitment side. We as athlete leaders need to take a role in encouraging some of our top performing domestic athletes to participate in overseas national team projects. Additionally, we need more from Cycling Canada in terms of funding and logistical support. Cyclocross has proven to be a great development tool for all disciplines and is a legitimate avenue for athletes to become professionals. We believe cyclocross is just as valuable as Olympic disciplines regarding visibility and participation for Cycling Canada. This is a robust program that continues to produce results; however, I fear without more involvement from Cycling Canada stagnation will occur.

BMX

Drew and James provided feedback regarding the BMX program including reaching out to athletes within the program for feedback. Please see below:

We think we need a fresh start to the whole program in general. We think it starts the program creating a high-performance training environment for us athletes in our day-to-day sessions. One that provides a calculated (scientific) training program laid out for each rider's development to the top of the sport. We had that in years past with strong collaboration between the coach and strength coach, but since that time, we have gone downhill with regards to the high-performance training environment and approach. We want to be better, but with the resources we have, there is not much change happening unfortunately.

Feedback from riders in the BMX program on a few specific areas summarized:

1. Revamping of the team – Aspirational Program and Group Training

- The program needs to become more of a known entity for the riders. We want our National Team program to be one that riders aspire to be on, instead of right now where people do not even really know one exists. This gap leads to riders quitting racing before they even start to tap into their potential with proper training.
- We need to be setting up training camps and get these riders out to BC or Toronto to train as a group for periods of time to help push the level of the riders and help realize the level other riders need to be at.

2. Funding / Support from Cycling Canada

- We need the funding/resources to provide our riders with a platform and experiences that are going to get them to the top level in the sport
- BMX needs more support from Cycling Canada. We need support from CC to steer the boat in the right direction.

3. A clear development pathway with support from Cycling Canada

- We had a good program in place before with the NextGen program, however, it is no longer getting the attention/support it needs. We need that program to keep the good riders in the sport and progressing to the elite level, we need to build a steady pipeline of athletes progressing through the sport. Currently, the situation is only 2-3 male riders on the elite tour, and that is not sustainable. We need to give these younger riders' opportunities to compete on a bigger stage early so they know what it is like when they get older.

4. More communication between the rider and the staff at Cycling Canada (not just the coach)

- Communication with regards to what kind of funding we have for the year and collaboration with the athletes on the best use of that funding

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-Cycling

- Only one track event and one or two road events domestically per year. Could be another year or two (or more) of reduced international competition.
- Program does not have sufficient depth of field domestically for the desired competitive environment, this inhibits development of race acumen for athletes and staff.
- Equipment and clothing for the Para Program (Track and Road) not on par with able bodied programs.
- Para siloed as a Discipline enables a 'lesser than' perception from the public, cycling community and would be recruitable high-performance athletes with an impairment who choose not to pursue para cycling for this reason.

Possible Solutions to Areas of Improvement:

- Targeted measures toward program integration as a para category within the Track and Road disciplines to open training and racing opportunities, promoting growth through higher levels of performance and competition.
- As a category within the disciplines of road and track, equality of clothing, equipment, recognition of achievement and access to resources could be leveled.
- A calendar of more racing could raise the acumen of both athletes and staff. The Para category to be included at many traditionally 'able bodied' events would grow exposure and interest for recruitment of potential athletes as well as membership growth from cycling participation within the disability community.

Track

Given the situation of the pandemic, the mental and physical health of the athletes should continue to be monitored to a closer degree through the winter as the stress of the situation endures. The conversation and planning of the year is ongoing as the situation progresses and the team will be doing its best to balance and analyze the new information coming in and make the best choices at hand, which will try to be done as best as possible in conversation with the athletes.

MTB

The 2020 season brought unforeseen challenges and all members of the MTB program had to adapt to the dynamic situation throughout the season. The following points outline a few key challenges to be aware of and other areas of improvement.

- The Cycling Canada policy for the World Cups and World Championships presented challenges for athletes that did not have trade/professional team support. We are unsure if there would have been a better solution, however it should be noted that this resulted in some athletes not having the opportunity to compete in international races in the 2020 season.
- There were no junior athletes at MTB World Championships due to the realities of the pandemic and the policy that Cycling Canada established, attention will have to be given to make sure we are supporting juniors through this challenging part of their journey in sport
- Access to higher level UCI racing within Canada – there was a survey shared with the National Team MTB athletes asking about the inclusion of Short Track at Canada Cups and National Championships. In addition to providing great feedback regarding short track, athletes also voiced the need for improvement for access to higher UCI level events within Canada to increase UCI ranking for start position and performance in the World Cup. Cycling Canada have received this feedback and are working towards more UCI points races through Short Track racing and exploring options for more C1 races and HC races in the future.
- Improvements to clothing for the MTB program, specifically skinsuit fit and design, availability of women's specific jerseys and higher quality sponsor pieces.

Priorities and Recommendations

Overarching Objectives for 2021:

These are the three main areas that the AC will focus its efforts for the coming year.

- Athlete engagement and communication
- Involvement in CC decision making
- Systems within the AC for increased efficiency and strong succession year to year

Recommendations and Action Plan:

With the AC call for candidates and elections taking place in December 2020, we will have new members joining the AC going forward for 2021-2023. The first task for the next iteration of the AC will be to review the AC Annual reports. We will then look at the goals and overarching objectives outlined in this report to figure out an action plan for the next 12 months to ensure we are executing our role effectively and doing our best for the athletes within Cycling Canada.

Concluding Remarks:

We feel that our time to make a difference is now. We have had 2 years of solid leadership within the AC and the athlete voice within CC is strong and gaining momentum. We are committed to using the voices and influence we have been given to create lasting, positive change within CC. It is our goal to represent our athletes with care and dedication.

We will work hard together with you and for you going forward to reach our overarching objectives and improve your journey through sport.

We hope that this report acts part of a strong succession plan for future iterations of the AC. We also hope this report inspires you, the athlete, to have your voice heard and to trust us to help you improve our sport for the benefit of everyone involved.