

2021 Athletes' Council Annual Report



Prepared by 2020/2022 Athletes' Council

Introduction

This document is the third 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 highlights and areas of improvement organized by program, and provide priorities and recommendations for 2022.

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

The Athletes' Council

2021/2022 Athletes' Council Members:

- Evelyne Gagnon, women's para-cycling: evelynegagnon4@gmail.com
- Tristen Chernove, men's para-cycling: elevateairports@gmail.com (Vice-Chair)
- Jenn Jackson, women's MTB-XC: jennjacksonxc@gmail.com
- Andrew L'Esperance, men's MTB-XC: andrewlespy@gmail.com (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
- Hugo Houle, men's road: hugohoule@gmail.com
- Allison Beveridge, women's track: allison.beveridge21@gmail.com
- Michael Foley, men's track: sailor6416@gmail.com
- Ruby West, women's CX: ruby.west9@gmail.com
- Cameron Jette, men's CX: cameronjette@gmail.com
- Mark Wallace, men's MTB-DH: markwallacebike@gmail.com
- Amy Ertel, women's MTB-DH: a.ertel01@gmail.com

Cycling Canada Support Staff to AC:

- Kris Westwood: kris.westwood@cyclingcanada.ca

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 woman and one man – from each Olympic, Paralympic and non-Olympic program (MTB-XC, Road, Track, BMX, Para-Cycling, Cyclocross and MTB-DH)

*Note: the non-Olympic disciplines (Cyclocross and MTB-DH) were officially added in 2020 with the latest update of the [Policy](#) governing the Athletes' Council

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 2022)
- Athlete representatives elected by current National Team athletes within each cycling program
- Chosen by the AC members, and appointed by IPC the Chair sits on the CC Board of Directors (BOD)
- Chosen 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 at CC Annual Congress
- 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
- Annual Athlete Survey

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
- 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 2021: Overview

- Created Annual Survey for National Team Athletes – an opportunity for direct feedback from athletes across all programs in the organization
- Worked with board to arrange opportunity for AC members to join board meetings as “Board Observer”
- Helped with nomination process of athletes to newly formed Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee.
- Productive and valuable in-person meetings with HP Management at 2021 CC Annual Congress in Bromont, Quebec
- Officially added 4 members to the Athletes’ Council
 - With the Dec 2020 update on the policy that governs the AC, Cyclocross and DH were officially added to the council
- Third annual AC report (compiled and presented at 2021 CC Annual Congress)
- Created a stronger presence among athletes and the CC organization
- Continued monthly newsletter to share information with athletes, make the presence of the AC known to increase engagement and foster connection between athletes across disciplines – ongoing assessment of AC newsletter
- Continued to learn how best to execute our roles as athlete representatives in the organization with respect to meetings, communication, surveys etc.

What we did in 2021: Detail

At the time of writing last years report in October 2020 following the Cycling Canada Annual Congress (virtual) we set out with the following overarching objectives:

- 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)

To realize these overarching objectives, we focused on 4 specific areas, and written below is what we did to further these objectives in 2021:

1. *Create better systems to for athletes to share feedback with Cycling Canada*
 - First Annual Athlete Survey
 - Summary of results for athletes
 - Summary of results shared with board, management, and coaches/staff
2. *Continue to improve athlete engagement*
 - Monthly newsletter
 - In-person meetings amongst programs when possible
 - Educating athletes on the Athletes' Council whenever possible through communications
 - Inform athletes about AthletesCAN Forum
 - Engaging more athletes on AC with addition of 4 members and 3 members on DE&I committee
3. *Strengthen our voice within CC and set a precedent for years to come*
 - Strong athlete presence at CC Congress in Bromont, Quebec
 - Addition of athlete "Board Observer" invited to monthly board meetings
 - Athlete voice building momentum within CC shown by appreciation by management and board members throughout year and at CC Congress
 - Created AC Member job description and orientation to clarify roles and responsibilities which will also help with a succession plan
 - Created Shared Folder on Google Drive for AC members to ensure organization and easy access to all AC related documents
4. *Improve integration between programs and with CC management and Board of Directors*
 - CC undergoing high-performance restructuring according to CC's 10-year Strategic Plan and the AC has played a role in consulting on how best to implement changes
 - Creating integration between programs though AC reps from different programs working together and sharing highlights and issues

Year in Review: Program Highlights and Areas of Improvement

The following section outlines reflections from last years areas of improvement for each program along with program highlights and areas of improvement for the 2021 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

Short Reflection on 2020 Areas of improvement

2020 was a tricky year for our program because there was no National team programming that happened due to COVID and the challenges of the global pandemic. The only racing that occurred was in Europe and Canadian riders that wanted to race were left to their own devices to figure it out. The only time riders raced for the National team was Worlds and it was a small team. With Cycling Canada staff not able to travel at that time due to COVID, we had to rely on a project manager that was already on the ground. The program manager there was not trained or qualified to be a manager for a team, they stepped in because there was no other option. That individual had a lot on their plate already with their own athlete racing, so it left some other athletes stranded as the priority wasn't looking out for the whole team. This is obviously not common practice, and it was a solution for the challenging situation with the pandemic. In the future, having a manager whose only role is to be the team manager will help things move a lot more smoothly and prevent conflicts of interest.

2021 Program Highlights

Program highlights for 2020/21 would be athletes who were still able to compete and perform under the highly restricted COVID season. Many countries and riders sat out the season, but we still had riders who made the trek to Europe and made it happen, got to the races, and progressed in the sport.

2021 Program Areas of improvement

We will be under new management with Rob Holmgren this year, so our hope is that a new program manager will bring in a fresh perspective. Due to COVID there really was no National team programming run last year, which left riders to scramble to find their own way in Europe. Having some sort of check in process or suggestions/recommendations for support in Europe could be helpful for riders who are doing their own program, especially for younger riders who don't quite have the support system yet.

BMX

Short Reflection on 2020 Areas of improvement

The BMX program did a good job at stepping up and improving where they could this year. With such a small program that doesn't get promoted as much as we would like, we still struggle to have that well known, established and idolized team that people look up to. But with the NextGen teams (East and West coast) having training sessions the later end of this year, it has been great at providing a clearer development pathway to the National team. This will start to help create that more established and idolized national team program. With money saved from last year, the BMX program was able to provide a little more funding which was great.

2021 Program Highlights

- We were able to secure both a Male and Female spot at the Olympics for the first time since 2008 (The second time in history)
- Drew Mechielsen making the final at the Olympics (just the second woman in Canada to do so)
- Tiegen Pascual Silver Medal at the World Championships in Junior Elite
- Strong presence of rookie Elite riders in both the Men and Woman which gives high hopes for the future. (Both 2021 Male and Female National Champions are first year Elites)
- NextGen riders performing extremely well at events and training camps.
- Great World Cup performances in Turkey
- Great availability for on bike training sessions year round
- Well planned team trips to keep things both focused and fun for everyone.

2021 Program Areas of improvement

- More communication with athletes about planning trips and scheduling training for the riders needs
- More accessibility to our gym facility. Home gym at this point should not be needed
- Better promotion for the athletes and the team
- More 'local' team camps to bring athletes together

Road

Short Reflection on 2020 Areas of improvement

In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was no projects happening, except for the World championship for elite men. The project was well organized, by having the support from Israel Start-Up nation, however there were issues with the clothing order from Garneau.

2021 Program Highlights

We had a strong year in the elite men's event in Olympics as well the World Championship. Mike Woods finish 5th at the Olympic Road race and Hugo Houle 13th in ITT. We had a 5-man squad at World Championship, where Guillaume Boivin finished 17th. On the elite women's side at World Championships Leah Kirchmann and Karol-Ann Canuel finished 11th and 13th respectively in the ITT. In the road race, the highlight of the women's elite race for Canada was Alison Jackson's 6th place finish.

For U23 and Junior, we have seen a few development projects led by Richard Wooles and Équipe du Québec in the last part of the season. These projects helped athletes prepare for the World Championship.

2021 Program Areas of improvement

We need to provide more projects to athletes in the early part of the season and to have junior and U23 athletes racing in the Nation Cup. It is essential for our athletes to be gaining these experiences from international racing, there is no other way.

It is essential that we find a full-time coach for the road development program, as Richard Wooles is leaving. This coach should be monitoring the young riders across Canada and providing them with appropriate development opportunities. Additionally, a road development program will need more financial resources to make it happen.

Paracycling

2021 Summary, Highlights and Challenges

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, of all cycling disciplines, Paracycling was the most impacted. As many athletes with a physical impairment have higher susceptibility and higher risk of dangerous outcomes from the virus, additional safety measures and a more cautious approach had to be taken. This safety focus was strongly supported even though it did result in very few in person training or competition projects through 2020 and 2021.

Cycling Canada achieved a fantastic level of adaptive organization, planning and execution to see a Paralympic Games that went quite smoothly from the athlete's perspective, even if it was chaotic below the surface. While the projected medal performance goals for the program fell a little short, this was largely due to an unexpected reclassification of one of the primary targeted athletes into a category which includes athletes with more physical impairment. Due to this reclassification, the athlete chose to withdraw from the games after his first event, where he won a silver medal but wasn't comfortable competing in his next 3 events after the reclassification. Kate O'Brien won a silver medal in the 500m TT, Keely Shaw won a bronze medal in the individual pursuit and Tristen Chernove won a silver medal in the Individual Pursuit. Athletes missing the podium showcased some great performances and gained valuable experience to carry forward to Paris 2024.

2021 has seen significant athlete retirements across many disciplines, including disciplines of athletes with a disability. While several athletes with Games experience will continue on toward Paris 2024, it's also a phase of building and recruitment in the program.

Track

2021 Summary, Highlights and Challenges

Based on the 2020 Track recommendations from the athletes of providing support to athletes – mentally and physically – throughout the pandemic, we believe it was managed well. Track was particularly challenging during the pandemic, due to its indoor nature which resulted in the cancellation and delay of many events. The delay also added many layers to some older athletes that were looking to retire after the 2020 Games and had to be managed on an individual basis where both the athletes and staff managed a hard situation in the best way possible. Development opportunities were also hard to find with training also limited for many,

but there was good retention in the programs and a successful return to racing, for many, highlighted below.

The 2021 track season saw the return of international track racing highlighted by the postponed 2020 Olympic Games. The team taken to the Games was the largest track contingent in history winning two medals, a gold in the women's sprint by Kelsey Mitchell and a bronze in the women's keirin by Lauriane Genest. The team pursuits finished 4th in the women's and 5th in the men's; both teams set new national records and the men recorded their best team pursuit result in 89 years. Hugo Barrette and Nick Wammes also both competed in the keirin and sprint. Aside from the Games, 2021 also saw the return of opportunities for new riders on the world stage with two junior world titles won by Dylan Bibic and Carson Mattern as well as an extremely successful Cali World Cup. There was also a relatively new group sent to the 2021 Track World Championships in Roubaix with strong showings with an entirely new women's team pursuit in 4th and Maggie Coles-Lyster finishing 4th in the women's scratch race. The women's sprint again had strong showings with Kelsey Mitchell and Lauriane Genest finishing 3rd and 4th in the women's sprint respectively. New race opportunities were valuably earned for many Paris 2024 hopefuls.

Although there was good success at both the Olympics and World Championships, there was a large change in staff after the Games, as many of their contracts had already been extended and there was uncertainty around planning and programming leads for many athletes. There are also areas of concern moving forward about a completely fluid program and commitment to a team and training environment. Due to the nature of being a team sport in the team pursuit and team sprint, there must be commitment from the riders and staff to qualify the teams for the upcoming games as qualifying commences and the depth of international talent continues to progress. As a historically traditional program, there will need to be further clarity and transparency as the roll out of the new program continues around priorities, expectations, and selections.

MTB-XC

2021 Summary and Highlights

A full World Cup calendar resumed this season along with National Team supported projects. National level racing also returned with four Canada Cups and the National Championships. Many athletes opted to spend the first half of the season in Europe due to travel restrictions, which were lifted by midsummer. This allowed for more opportunities to race at various national level races with competitive fields outside of the World Cup. The Canada Cups in Quebec were well attended but saw smaller fields in New Brunswick and Canmore.

The season was highlighted by results from Carter Woods, who won the opening two rounds of the U23 World Cup and lead the Overall for a portion of the season, finish just off the podium. Canada sent three athletes to the Olympics, Catharine Pendrel, Haley Smith, and Peter Disera. Catharine also led the elite Canadian ranks through the second half of the World Cup season and will be retiring from professional racing after a decorated career.

Overall, Canada did not stand out as a mountain bike nation this year and we saw our Nation ranking drop significantly from pre-pandemic with less strong Elite results. U23 and Junior categories performed at a similar level internationally to previous years.

UCI Nations Rankings

Canadian Men Oct 2019 – 9th

Canadian Men Oct 2021 – 14th

Canadian Women Oct 2019 – 4th

Canadian Women Oct 2021 – 15th

Projects were held for the first World Cups of the season and the final World Cup after World Championships with a focus on supporting developing athletes and offered some technical assistance for other national team riders without team support at those races.

Areas of Improvement

- National race series
 - Appropriate level of competition for U23s and developing Elites to compete and improve before going to Europe for bigger events
 - Point opportunities to improve ranking for bigger events in Europe, and as a Nation
- Francophone support on projects, especially World Championships
 - At least one fully bilingual or French first language core staff member
- Training groups and camps
 - Less divisive by age/development pool level.
 - Coordinate with road/track/other programs

In-Person Athlete Meeting Summary

Feedback and discussion points from in-person meeting held at Nationals in Baie-Saint-Paul, Quebec on the Wednesday before the weekend of racing.

Domestic Racing

- Avoid calendar conflicts between Canada Cups and World Cups so athletes can attend
- Host HC and C1 races
 - Emphasize to organizers the importance of higher sanctioned races
 - Host a double-header weekend (ie. C1 + C2) to make attendance more worthwhile
- North American series collaboration
 - Series overall prizing, media storyline, incentive for developing athletes to pursue competitive domestic racing rather than jumping to WC prematurely.
- Pan American Championship important point earning opportunity
 - Need a project, or way to allow athletes to attend self-supported or with their own team

World Championships

- Large team was difficult to navigate, there were communication inconsistencies, the quality of support did not feel like a World Championship environment, it was very busy.

- Junior project before Worlds was very well received and extremely valuable opportunity for athletes to do an international race and meet their teammates before moving in with full team
- Francophone coach or staff member to support athletes who's first language is French
 - Key for reducing cognitive fatigue from communicating in second language
 - Precision of communication for details
 - Inclusivity for less confident English speakers and ease of communication

General

- Athletes feel training groups should not be divided by age (U23/Elite)
- Better depth of riders at a similar training level will improve quality of camps
 - Mixing of disciplines would help this

MTB-DH

Reflection on 2020 Areas of improvement

This is our first year being part of the Athletes' Council, but we can see that 2021 was a much better year in general for Canadian DH racers. With COVID restrictions eased it was possible to have races locally again and traveling internationally was possible for athletes without trade teams. Attendance at local races was higher than any recent years and some overseas success in the junior program is exactly what we wanted to see.

2021 Program Highlights

The athletes are aware they have increasing support from CC and we have gotten really positive feedback from the Val di Sole and Lenzerheide Projects. It was great to see the number of racers at domestic DH events increase so much, this should help improve the Canada Cup and Nationals races over time. We had some success at World Champs in the Juniors, Jackson Goldstone winning gold and Gracey Hemstreet earning bronze. As a whole, it would have been the most successful year for Canadians on the World Cup circuit since Steve Smith won in 2013.

2021 Program Areas of improvement

Getting feedback from athletes is crucial but always a challenge, especially through email so for 2022 we are going to set up a meeting at National Champs for anyone who wants to come and give us information and talk about what they would like to see happen in the future. This meeting style once per year has had some success in other disciplines so we are going to give it a try. World Champs selection criteria should be reviewed by AC and released earlier. We think this will help avoid some of the issues we have had in the past, give us more time to solve issues if they happen and it gives the athletes something to aim for during the season. Even though we got very little information back from athletes, it was almost all about team projects and wanting more of them. From something as simple as setting up timing on a DH trail a few

times this winter to off-season training camps to more programs in Europe. It sounds like whatever we can provide will be seen as positive and will be well supported.

Looking Forward

What are the Athlete Council's goals for 2022? (*Presented at 2021 CC Congress*)

1. Amplifying the athlete voice within the organization - ongoing and continued effort
2. Supporting CC with implementation of strategic plan while keeping well-being of athletes as the focus (identifying obstacles and responding quickly)
3. Promoting collaboration and communication across all athletes in the organization - a one-team culture
4. Expand the scope and diversity of athlete contribution to the organization (eg. better storytelling beyond results, athletes speaking at local schools, involvement with HopOn, c.1882) - value add for both athletes and organization

How will we achieve our goals?

- 1) *Amplifying the athlete voice within the organization - ongoing and continued effort*
 - a) Continue to improve communication between athletes and their athlete representatives.
 - b) Increase the number of athletes on CC's Board of Directors
 - c) Increase the number of athletes represented on committees within the organization
 - d) Create a strong succession plan within the Athletes' Council
 - e) Increase the frequency and quality of communications surrounding the December 2022 Athletes' Council elections to increase number of candidates.
 - f) Increasing engagement in AC Annual Athlete Survey
- 2) *Supporting CC with implementation of strategic plan while keeping well-being of athletes as the focus (identifying obstacles and responding quickly)*
 - a) Continue regular communication between AC and HP managers as changes to programming get rolled out
 - b) AC representatives engaged with ongoing changes and bringing highlights, issues, areas of opportunity to monthly AC meetings
- 3) *Promoting collaboration and communication across all athletes in the organization - a one-team culture*
 - a) Continue to use the AC monthly newsletter as a tool to achieve this goal. Refine the content to achieve this while not overlapping with Cycling Canada's monthly newsletter.
- 4) *Expand the scope and diversity of athlete contribution to the organization*

- a) Help Cycling Canada create a more holistic approach to athlete development by increasing athlete involvement in different areas of the organization. In other words, diversifying the value proposition of an athlete. We will achieve this by offering our feedback, expertise, and ideas at the decision-making tables.

Priorities and Recommendations

Following the process of reflection by AC members on the program they represent, the AC Annual Survey and discussions from in-person meetings at the CC Annual Congress, we have summarized the key items in a few overarching priorities and recommendations for Cycling Canada.

Priorities and Recommendations for Cycling Canada for 2022:

- Improve the athlete on-boarding process – equipping the athlete with the information, tools, and resources to succeed as a national team athlete with Cycling Canada.
- Broaden the value proposition of the athlete within the organization - Cycling Canada's purpose is to *Inspire Canadian's to Cycle* - We believe national team athletes can contribute to this goal, in more ways than just performing on the race course.
- Improve the athlete selection process – standardising timelines surrounding selections whenever possible, clearly communicating the selection process to new and existing athletes, increasing education on the selection process including the role of the HPC, increasing transparency surrounding the entire process, improving processes surrounding non-selection.
- Effectively communicate ongoing changes with new HP structure to athletes – offer the opportunity for information and Q&A sessions via Zoom
- Improve cohesion between PSOs and CC

Note: For any stakeholders interested in discussing these priorities and recommendations in further depth, we encourage you to get in touch with the AC. (See contact information above in report)

Concluding Remarks:

We feel that our time to make a difference is now. We have had 3 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.