

Trinity Sports Management
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By Electronic Email only:

UCI

Mr David Lappartient, President, UCI
Ms Amina Lanaya, Director General, UCI
Mr Matthew Knight, Head of Road, UCI
Mr Tom Vandamme, President of Professional Cycling Council

CPA

Mr Gianni Bugno, President, CPA
Ms Laura Mora, Secretary General, CPA

AIGCP

Mr Iwan Spekenbrink, President, AIGCP
Mr Javier Barrio, Managing Director, AIGCP

Velon

Mr Graham Bartlett, CEO, Velon

Re: Open Letter to the Stakeholders of Professional Cycling

Dear Stakeholders of Professional Cycling,

As you are aware, the world is facing unprecedented health and economic challenges, and the world of professional cycling is not immune to these circumstances. We are in a time of crisis and our priorities are rightly focussed on those closest to us; our families, friends, neighbours and colleagues. In today's world it may be tempting for some to view cycling purely in a sporting context. However we must remember that our sport is made up of people, and these people rely on our sport for their livelihood and to provide for their families and loved ones.

I write this open letter on behalf of one particular group of those individuals, the professional cyclists, several of whom Trinity Sports Management represent. This letter is a plea to you, the professional cycling stakeholders, to remember to protect the riders while ensuring the continuing of our sport. Everyone's hope is that teams and riders will eventually return to racing safe, strong and knowing that we navigated this difficult period together.

Of course riders appreciate the gravity of the current situation. They understand the unstable financial position of many teams and that professional cycling, reliant on its sponsors, is very much impacted by the struggles faced within the "real" economy.

However, riders are also central to our sport. They are the gladiators in our arena, a point which is often forgotten during the sport's ongoing political disagreements. When racing returns, we will need our riders to be strong, ready to race and entertain us all again, and to attract new sponsors that will enable our sport to survive.

Let us not forget, it is the same riders who only three weeks ago were being asked by the majority of their teams to line up for Paris-Nice. The virus was already a serious situation at that stage, yet the riders performed their duties and raced passionately for seven full days. I know many of those riders were concerned for their own safety, but even more so, for the safety of their loved ones. They did not know if they might bring back the virus to their children, wives or partners, and elderly parents and grandparents. Despite this they carried out their duty and raced at the direction of their teams.

I write this letter in a spirit of collaboration. I know for a fact that there are conversations happening behind closed doors about salary reductions for riders, with one World Tour team having implemented such measures already. We have witnessed similar pay cuts and deferrals across a number of other professional sports. The concern I share with many is that riders will be taken advantage of during these troubling times by some who seek to simply improve their own situation by implementing financial cutbacks on others that are in fact not strictly necessary. Every team is in a different financial situation, and there is no one solution that fits each team. Indeed some teams are in a strong financial position and may not need to implement any financial measures for the foreseeable future. However for the teams in weaker positions, the challenges they face need to be addressed with the riders in an open and transparent way.

My plea is simple - riders want to help. They know the sport as a whole is in trouble. They know teams and sponsors are facing extremely difficult times. However they want to be involved in an open and transparent conversation about how they can help, and they want transparency around how any potential sacrifice(s) by them will be used to help the team(s). For example, would a salary cut or deferral be passed on to benefit a sponsor meaning they will continue their sponsorship, or used to avoid staff redundancies? Riders want to be sure their help is used in the spirit it is meant for, not just to save on budget now to be used sometime in the future.

I am sure riders want to help if they can, however one must consider are some in a financial position to do so - while there are professional cyclists who are compensated extremely well, many others live pay cheque to pay cheque, not living extravagant lives but using their income to support their family on a monthly basis.

Riders also want to be sure that the spirit of helping one another is mutual. Three main points arise here:

1. Will riders who make sacrifices now be looked after in the future? Consider a 28 year old rider on minimum wage whose contract expires at the end of this year. This rider is pressured into taking a pay cut now to help the survival of the team. Will that rider be protected when it comes to negotiating a new contract for 2021, or will they be discarded and replaced by someone else?
2. If the UCI's proposed amended calendar does indeed run into the winter months, will riders be included in what is and is not acceptable for that period.
3. Thankfully riders can still compete to some level on indoor trainers. I congratulate the teams who have pivoted so successfully into eRacing teams. It is great to see riders take to this new version of the sport so enthusiastically. Platforms like Zwift enable riders and teams to engage with their fans and sponsors like never before. Riders are training, promoting sponsors, engaging fans and thanks to these platforms, they are still racing. This needs to be taken into consideration.

Other sporting organisations more reliant on ticket revenue have of course been forced into implementing financial measures sooner than cycling as their revenues were drastically decreased nearly immediately when the pandemic took hold. For once cycling may be at an advantage that it is not reliant on ticket revenue. We are in a fortunate position where we can learn from them, and use the time we have to develop a plan for the way forward. While some other sporting organisations have designated pay cuts, some have developed pay referrals¹ which could suit this situation, particularly if riders are asked to extend their racing seasons into the winter.

¹<https://www.irishrugby.ie/2020/03/20/irfu-and-rugby-players-ireland-agree-pay-deferrals/>

We can take lessons from many Governments who have devised schemes to help support income through this difficult time. The British Government created the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme² to refund employers with 80% of a salaried employee's wages where the employee would otherwise have been made redundant, and also to self employed workers.

The UCI has an opportunity to demonstrate similar leadership to help the teams and riders - what better time for the UCI World Tour Emergency Fund to be accessed by teams and riders than now? This fund is meant for when teams, or races, are struggling financially - I cannot think of a more suitable time than now.

In this spirit, and to avoid the exploitation of any rider, I humbly propose this simple framework for teams and riders, assisted by the CPA and the UCI, to use over the coming weeks and months;

- Each team should agree a road map under which they will plan to navigate the current situation;
- Riders, and indeed all stakeholders in the team, should be included in these plans at every stage, before any decision is made on a possible financial amendment to salaries;
- Transparency should be required regarding how funds from a pay cut or deferral is used to assist the teams involved; and
- If a rider is to make a sacrifice now for the good of their respective team, their job should be safeguarded to the fullest extent possible moving into the 2021 season.

As a sport, we can take this opportunity to prove that when times got tough, and despite our differing interests, we all joined forces to combat the problems we all face. Proving that in adversity, we can be united.

Yours in sport,



Andrew McQuaid
Director
Trinity Sports Management

²<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/check-if-you-could-be-covered-by-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>