

Professional Certification: A New Approach to Anti-Doping in Professional Cycling



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The Outer Line

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Background

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- **Professional certification – the application of validated standards to an industry and/or its participants and products – has existed in many industries for decades**
- **Consider pro sports the industry, teams as the companies, and athletes as the product – and apply the same principles**
- **All participants must meet established criteria to practice their profession, and must maintain their certification**



- **Similar to industry, accreditation could be applied at the company (team) level or at the product (athlete) level**
- **Today, cheaters can navigate around the rules: micro-dosing, TUEs, and other methods are pervasive**
- **When some athletes can get away with cheating, more and more will make the decision to cheat and the system quickly breaks down**

Potential Benefits

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- **A properly designed and implemented Athlete Certification Program (ACP) offers many benefits:**
 - **A more comprehensive system of team/athlete auditing, tracking and monitoring**
 - **Stronger ethical standards and training**
 - **More severe and permanent penalties for those found guilty of breaking the rules**



Certification of Teams

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- **Teams have the most power in pro cycling to implement cultural change**
- **A new, independent certification agency would set operating and behavioral standards, create appropriate metrics, and hold teams accountable to specific standards**
- **Similar to ISO and LEED procedures, teams would be evaluated and approved to participate in the business of pro cycling: support personnel, financial health, and athlete/coach relationships**
- **Unannounced audits would be conducted**
- **If irregularities were detected, teams would have to respond or adjust in order to continue competing**
- **If a team failed to comply in a timely manner, it would lose its license to participate**
- **Teams or personnel caught cheating would be subject to the same kind of severe penalties that professionals in other fields face – inability to compete, lifetime bans**



Certification of Athletes

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- **There is no athlete “certification” today in pro cycling or agreed upon standard about who is actually qualified to be a pro athlete – other than a very easy-to-obtain UCI license**
- **There is essentially no ethical training or testing**
- **The only requirement is the ability to ride a bike fast**
- **An individual athlete certification program would have several key benefits:**
 - **The professional would have to maintain personal certification to participate – everyone has a strong incentive and financial interest in making the system work**
 - **An oversight agency would uphold the certification; standards would be enforced**
 - **Non-compliance is quickly identified; penalties are severe and non-negotiable**
 - **Testing would be more frequent, and fully support WADA’s Biological Passport**
 - **Reproduces the industry model & establishes Quality Control: an independent agency certifies the company, and the products are validated by a third party**



The Process

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- **Logistical requirements and challenges of setting up such a system:**
 - **Increase the number of accredited labs, establish athlete-centric electronic health records (EHRs) for testing, build stronger inter-agency agreements**
 - **Continued cooperation improvements between WADA, UCI, and NADOs**
 - **Riders would obviously need to buy in and support it – regular, mandatory self-directed testing in addition to random and post-competition testing**
- **With certification, punitive measures could finally be given some real teeth – comparable to other industries, and in alignment with labor laws**
- **Offenders could be barred for life, subject to financial penalties or criminal prosecution**
- **Systematic or repetitive problems could result in the disqualification of a whole team**



Inter-Agency Cooperation

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- **How would an ACP interact/coordinate with existing WADA and NADO standards?**
- **The ACP would be an independent oversight agency which enforces standards for teams and athletes; or WADA could adopt the functions of the ACP itself**
- **The ACP model strengthens, and does not interfere with, the relationships between WADA, NADO, and IF governing bodies to police the sport**
- **WADA owns the testing standards, accredits the labs, and is the investigative body; ACP provides manpower, technology, and related services to manage certification**
- **ACP does not replace command and control testing, but reinforces its effectiveness by requiring pro athletes to be tested more often to maintain certification, which reduces the windows in which cheaters could micro-dose, incrementally infuse, or otherwise cheat the Passport**
- **ACP does not replace UCI governance over teams, but creates an enforceable method to hold teams accountable to UCI standards and practices (in practice, could adopt the ISSUL standards under consideration, or validate and enforce such standards)**

Implementing Certification

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- **Many logistical challenges ahead for an ACP: not enough accredited labs, too few chain of custody personnel, no published UCI team standards as yet, no true ethical charter for teams or athletes**
- **Must work with WADA and NADOs to seamlessly integrate self-directed, required testing with command and control in-competition and unannounced testing**
- **Must work with the UCI to establish and validate measurement criteria for team standards, and an ethical charter**
- **Must work within the legal guidelines of CAS when building the business and technical processes**
- **Must implement new technologies never used before within the context of pro sports: electronic health records (EHRs) and data interchange**
- **Funding: whether a private venture or a public obligation, someone will have to cover the costs**

Conclusions

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- **The ACP works because it requires the athletes to initiate and maintain responsibility for their certification – exactly like other industries**
- **Establishes true Quality Controls and validates the competitive “product”**
- **Reinforces the athletes’ interests for a level playing field**
- **An ACP logo on the sports jersey will become a valuable symbol of “good housekeeping” – demonstrating to organizers, teams – and most critically – fans, that they are an accredited and certified clean racer on a certified team**
- **The reputational and purely economic value of the ACP logo would grow over time**
- **A workable program depends on the integrity and commitment of its participants to uphold the system and apply it equitably**
- **If carefully designed and implemented, the ACP could improve competitive conditions, build a greater sense of legitimacy, expand the fan base, and help to revitalize the economics of professional cycling**



Implementation Details for Consideration

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- **The UCI has proposed “minimum standards” for teams, designed by the ISSUL**
- **A true certification process must be independently validated; the proposed ACP or WADA could validate and adopt the final ISSUL standards, or independently audit and enforce similar standards**
- **Athlete testing model would be based on accrediting collection sites, authorizing sample collection and chain of custody personnel, and adding perhaps two WADA labs**
- **Compulsory certification testing should be twice monthly, with a 36 hour window for the athlete to provide a sample at an accredited collection center**
- **WADA should consider opening accreditation to highly-advanced “reference” labs used by hospitals around the world for high-sensitivity diagnostics**
- **For Biological Passport measurements, reference labs can perform the assays and report into the WADA system via secure EHR and HL7 standards**
- **Teams must meet certification criteria before fielding riders, and riders must provide samples on the mandated schedule or lose certification and not be allowed to compete**

The Authors

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Joe Harris has been a business and IT consultant for over fifteen years, providing strategic services and influential changes to a cross section of Fortune 500 companies. Though his primary career focus is to apply simple, creative solutions to complex business problems, his second life is dedicated to growing the sport of cycling. Since 1992 he has worn almost every hat from operations manager in a national bike store chain (Performance), managed the Indiana University collegiate cycling club (1992-1993) through two of its three consecutive National track cycling championships, soigneur (Saturn Pro Cycling), tour guide in Europe (VeloSport Vacations), journalist and editor (*Mountain Biking*), and market analyst and team patron (Computer Sciences Corporation). He was a liaison between Team CSC and U.S. clients while with the firm, and served as its cycling market subject matter expert in the Consulting division. More recently he volunteers his time to organizations that seek to bring bicycles and bicycle manufacturing capabilities into developing nations. He can be reached at jharris2453@gmail.com and on skype and twitter as [jharris2453](https://twitter.com/jharris2453).