With the introduction of a massive test programme and new test methods, the International Cycling Union (UCI) intends to close the gap on cheats in cycling. The focus is on catching individuals, as UCI President Pat McQuaid believes that doping is no longer organised at team level.

McQuaid is a strong advocate of more tests and new initiatives in the fight against doping in cycling, but the road to a totally clean world of professional cycling is still as rough and bumpy as the cobblestone passages between Paris-Roubaix. It is a step-by-step process, and “we are only as good as the tests,” McQuaid said in his presentation to Play the Game 2007.

Commitment from riders

Biological passports, increased out-of-competition testing, high volume in-competition testing, education and massive co-operation between UCI and its partners are all means to scare away the doping ghost from international professional cycling.

After having chased doped cyclists in the period from 1997 to 2006 and picking up the pace between 2006 and 2007, the aim of UCI from 2008 and onwards is to “close the gap” and make riders commit to a “new cycling” by encouraging them to sign a document declaring that they are not involved in any type of doping.

McQuaid hopes that such a declaration can help sweep away the memory of all the stories from doped cyclists that are popping up to surface at almost every team.

Doping disorganised

UCI is focusing on individual athletes, not teams. Answering a question about the CSC teams anti-doping programme compared to other teams, McQuaid stated, “in today’s cycling there is no longer widespread doping. Doping practices now are done by individuals. It is no longer organised at team level.”

This statement caused former pro-tour rider Jörg Jaksche to roll his eyes as his personal history points in another direction. “Maybe I was just unfortunate. I worked on six different teams and I experienced organised doping in all of them,” Jaksche replied.

During the panel debate Pat McQuaid also stated that many professional cyclists have used EPO without being caught. Laboratories often find traces of EPO, but in very many cases it is not enough to make a positive test.

The future of cycling

Michael Ashenden, an Australian doping scientist, on the other hand, finds that there is a need for new solutions in solving the doping problems in sport, and that further testing is not the way. He lists a number of products with a similar effect as EPO, all of them untraceable in today’s doping tests.

This is why Ashenden suggests, that all doping test are scrapped and replaced by the new biological passport combined with the introduction of a GPS-system that will be able to locate the professional rider at any time (see page 6).

“I don’t think this suggestion will stop the problems with doping,” Pat McQuaid responded and added that the riders also deserve a life in privacy, and that there should be a certain amount of dignity in the fight against doping.