

# All You Need to Know About the State of Professional Cycling Today

Cycling is changing, but why should you care? To most, the sport is a bunch of gangly guys riding across France with extra blood and EPOs throughout their bodies for an unimaginable amount of time. There was previously a lot of truth to this view, but no longer.

Le Tour de France, the epitome of cycling, a three week race throughout the countryside and mountains of France, was raced for the 100th time this past July. The most recent race embodies what the sport of cycling is going through, a revolution and transformation into a worldly sport.

Chris Froome was the winner of the 100th Tour de France this past summer, putting in a dominant performance and leaving no doubt as to his reign over all other cyclists. Born in Kenya and now a resident of Great Britain, Froome was just the second British cyclist to win Le Tour, the first being Bradley Wiggins last year. Both riders won with the support of Team Sky, a cycling juggernaut comparable to the New England Patriots of 2001-2004.

Coincidentally, the start of next year's race will be out of London, speaking to Le Tour de France's willingness to cater more to their ever expanding international crowd. Previously a predominantly European sport, the boundaries now transcend international boundaries and extend into all continents.

Two years ago Cadel Evans won Le Tour, becoming the first to do so out of Australia. This past year, Team Orica Green-edge, a pro circuit team based out of Australia, won the team time trial early in the race, and in doing so put one of their riders in the yellow leader's jersey, marking the first time

an Australian-based team had a rider in yellow.

Later in the race, a South African, Daryl Impey, found himself in the overall leader's yellow jersey. This was the first time a South African racer had ever worn yellow. Additionally, there were riders in this year's Tour from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Japan, and Brazil.

The surprise in this year's Tour de France came in the form of Colombian rider Nairo Quintana. Quintana came in second place overall, won the young riders (under 25) classification, and the King of the Mountain classification, giving him both the white and red polka dot jerseys, respectively.

There had been talk prior to the Tour of a new face out of Colombia who could be a threat to the dominance of Team Sky, but no one truly saw what Quintana had in store. An interesting factoid to the story is Quintana's superb climbing skills can be partly attributed to his childhood, in which he would bike up and over two mountain passes to get himself to and from school.

The ease with which Quintana climbed and attacked at was absolutely incredible. Whereas most riders push and chug and crank and grind their way up a mountainside, the Colombian's riding appeared to be done in a very fluid, even eloquent, manner. No emotion could be found on his face when he was climbing, as opposed to that of sheer pain on the other rider's. Quintana's ride was a beautiful dance between man and bike; the two worked together in a way that permitted an uphill ride that resembled more of a glide, characterized by ease and consistency.

Quintana rode so well he found himself ahead in the overall classification of many riders who, before the race had started, were favorites to win. Quintana could have found himself atop the podium in Paris too, if it weren't for the hellacious, and at times seemingly inhuman, attacks from Chris

Froome.

For so many decades, cycling was dominated by the Europeans, particularly the French, Spaniards, and Italians. In the 1980s, Greg Lemond, an American, won the Tour de France, and the sport slowly gained popularity in America. Now, finally, the sport has clearly moved onto a worldly stage.

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For America, the future of the sport of cycling looks promising, in both the success of its riders and its influence on an international scale.

The future of American cycling lies in the hands of Andrew Talansky and Tejay Van Garderen. Talansky, who rides for American-based team Garmin-Sharp, finished tenth in the overall classification and second in the young rider's classification in last summer's Tour.

Van Garderen, though, may be where more of the promise lies. Two years ago, Van Garderen, riding for that year's Tour winner Cadel Evans, finished fifth overall in the Tour de France and won the young rider's jersey, an impressive feat for a rider not riding as the leader of a team.

Lately, Van Garderen has become that lead rider. In the spring, Tejay won the Amgden Tour of California, a week-long stage race, which was his first overall victory in a stage race. After a poor Tour showing, continuously being dropped by the blistering pace set by Team Sky in the mountains, Van Garderen came back and won the USA Pro Cycling Challenge in August, the highest profile race on American soil featuring many of the same teams and riders that raced in Le Tour.

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In cycling, there are three grand tours. These are three week-long stage races. One is the Giro d'Italia, another is,

obviously, Le Tour de France, and the final is La Vuelta a Espana. Few riders attempt more than one of these in a year, and most choose to focus all of their attention, rightly so, on Le Tour de France. Still, a win in the Giro or La Vuelta is by no means an easy feat.

La Vuelta a Espana just finished this past Sunday. Whereas the final stage in Le Tour de France is a ceremonial ride throughout Paris, the last stage in La Vuelta is a ceremonial ride throughout Spain. The overall leader in La Vuelta wears red, as opposed to yellow in Le Tour. On Sunday, American Chris Horner rode into Madrid in red.

Horner is a 41-year-old rider, and in winning La Vuelta, he became the oldest champion of a grand tour. Horner won with a series of dominating mountaintop performances.

A cyclist's efficiency is measured by his watts, or the power he produces through pedaling. In his win, Horner produced an incredible amount of watts. In one stage, his output was measured at over 2,000 watts. To put that into perspective, Chris Froome, even with how dominating of a performance he put in during Le Tour, produced just 1,700 watts in the key mountaintop stages.

Of course, with his age and dominating performance, as well as the nature and history of the sport, speculation was raised as to whether or not Horner was doping. Suspicions were heightened when Horner missed a random drug test that was to be administered by the Spanish Anti-Doping Agency. The Spanish agency went to Horner's team's hotel, but Horner was not there as he had switched his accommodations to stay in a different hotel with his wife. Apparently, Horner had followed protocol and told the United States Anti-Doping Agency of his change of whereabouts along with his new contact information, and in doing so, he had not violated any rules.

As a cycling fan, I really hope that Horner did not dope, and

that Tejay Van Garderen, as well as Chris Froome, did not dope. Unfortunately though, success in cycling naturally comes with speculation as to whether or not one doped, and there's a chance all three of these men did dope. But I'm going to go on continuing to believe they didn't. There's a general consensus now that the peloton is dedicated to clean racing and far more clean than it was just five or ten years ago.

There's no way to be sure cycling is 100 percent clean; it probably never will be. However, all of the cheating that happened has, at least for the most part, been completely uncovered and is, relatively speaking, a thing of the past. The unveiling of Armstrong's cheating, while the most publicized, was really (read: hopefully, admittedly) the last secret to be made public at the end of a long string of lies unveiled.

No cyclist will admit to doping without any evidence suggesting they did, but the consensus among spectators, coverers of the sport, and media alike is that the sport is cleaner than it ever has been, and its future is bright. Despite the fact that we really don't know whether or not cycling is clean, I'm still going to watch it, follow it, and sometimes become too attached to it. It's an excellent spectacle, a beautiful race to follow that can be inspiring, and something that is undoubtedly becoming more and more of a worldly sport, bringing together different cultures and backgrounds like only the thrill of and shared love of a sport can do.