

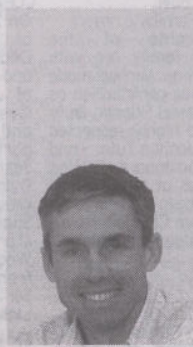
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Cycling's constant moral dilemma

Pressure to win keeps drugs in sport but the past is less likely to catch up with you if you say no

Some years ago, I was at a cycling coaching course in Australia surrounded by a bunch of current and former accomplished cyclists. One course presenter, a coach of note, remarked that "some of you have made it and some of you haven't".

I thought at the time he was referring to me as a "haven't", as although I had represented my country, I had never turned fully professional like my more esteemed and highly regarded colleagues who had made a good living from the sport.



Steve Stannard
comment

I actually thought that I had done okay in my short time as a rider, but this guy obviously judged a person's worth by their cycling resume.

I had done a couple of summer seasons racing in Europe. The first mainly in Belgium and the second in the Netherlands, Germany and numerous other countries. I was a naive young twenty-something with legs of steel and lots of hope.

The first summer I boarded with one of the working members of a Belgian-based professional team. In return for paying rent, he'd look after me and take me to races around the country. I shared his house with one or two other riders, notably a skinny young Englishman in his second European season.

After I'd performed well in my first few races, my Belgian manager obviously thought I had some potential. Just before the start of the next big race, he came to me with a bunch of different pills and vials indicating that I should "take the purple vial" on the start line, the blue one at half way, and the brown one with 20km to go.

"What's the [glowing] purple stuff in the glass vial?" I asked suspiciously. "Vitamins" was the answer. But I'd been warned about purple hearts (amphetamines) before I left for Belgium so I knew what it really was.

I finished in about 12th place or so, enough to make a little money, but with my pockets still containing the unused "vitamins". When my manager found out, our relationship changed; it was clear he thought I wasn't serious about my sport.

The Englishman, I later learned, did on occasion take the "jelly beans" and subsequently won a race or two, earning accolades from the manager and others for doing so. In my whole summer there I did not see any drug testing.

These were the early 1990s and the Spaniard Miguel Indurain was winning the Tour de France from the Swiss climber Tony Rominger. A brash young Lance Armstrong was crowned world professional champion prior to his fight



Steve Stannard, pictured leading on the Te Mata Peak climb in the Hub Open Two-Day Cycling Tour, still cycles competitively.

Picture / APN

with cancer.

Rominger and Indurain had come out of nowhere over the space of a year to be the main challengers for the Tour, and it was known that the former was trained by the mysterious Dr Michele Ferrari, who was issued a lifetime ban in June this year by the United States Anti-Doping Agency for trafficking banned substances.

The Rominger versus Indurain battles up the long climbs of the Alps and Pyrenees are the stuff of legend, in cycling circles at least. These guys were heroes and had "made it".

I went back to Europe the following year to race in a small team, but knowing that the stakes weren't high and never considering turning to the "dark side". It

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was more about seeing the world while getting someone else to pay. I had confidence that I could get a job when it all finished because I already had a university degree. Most others had nothing to fall back on.

When people ask me about my short time as a cyclist and why I didn't keep it up I reply that I didn't want to become a Belgian pin cushion. This is closer to the truth than the humour suggests.

If I'd taken the jelly beans and won some races, I was hardly likely to stop taking them and still try to win. It would be the beginning of a spiral that would stop who knows where.

The impressive ascent of riders like Armstrong, Tyler Hamilton and Floyd Landis has reversed at a rapid rate. Some like Marco Pantani and Frank Vandenbroucke are dead from drug abuse, others dying from causes unknown.

A few remain high-flying legends, but I hope it's just a matter of time before their wings are clipped.

Others have come and gone, while some of my former colleagues in the peloton – after winning accolades and plenty of money – are probably now working in sport or the cycling industry based on their reputation. Some of these riders took drugs to win.

As I look back on those comments from the presenter, I feel I was one who made it. I have a doctoral degree, a good job, a healthy family, the respect of my peers, and I still ride my bike – all without cheating.

The future of cycling is unclear. Science will uncover the drugs used illegally, but until cycling's governing bodies resolutely commit to a drug-free sport, young riders who seek a career will be forced to make that same moral decision I faced 20 years ago.

Professor Steve Stannard is the head of Massey University's School of Sport and a former Australian representative road-racing cyclist. He won last year's Wellington to Auckland Cycle Challenge.

More carrot, less stick to encourage public transport use

Recently I attended the inaugural lecture of a colleague on issues of energy and sustainability. Following the lecture our discussion turned towards the perennial question of how to get people out of their cars and into public transport.

A usual response is to suggest a combination of taxes and subsidies. Subsidising public transport makes it cheaper. But subsidies have to be paid for by taxes on something else.

It is also not clear that people are not taking public transport because it is more expensive. Driving a car to work is a lot more expensive when you factor in the cost of petrol, parking and effort.

I think the issue is this: driving is convenient. Riding the bus has small inconveniences associated with it – walking to the bus-stop, waiting for the bus, getting off and walking to work. The inconvenience increases when it rains. So even if in the long run the benefits of taking the bus far outweigh the benefits of driving, the small inconveniences prevent us from getting out of the car.

We could tax drivers. In Singapore, for instance, you need to pay a very large tax to buy a new car, which makes them unaffordable for many. London has congestion charges. But these taxes affect people disproportionately. People with



Ananish Chaudhuri
comment

small children often have to drive since taking the bus is not always convenient.

It is also not the case that I am better off driving if everyone else is taking the bus. In the parlance of economics, what we have here is a coordination problem. I will ride the bus if everyone else does so. But if everyone is driving then I drive too. Clearly everyone is better off if we all took the bus. But currently we are caught in a situation where we all drive.

So the trick is to get people to break out of that status quo inertia and get them to take the first step towards taking public transport.

My research suggests that we might be able to make a difference by appealing to people's intrinsic motivations.

How about declaring a "Ride the bus/train to work day"?

Obviously we cannot ask everyone to do so on the same day, otherwise the system will be overwhelmed. So we need to ask far-flung neighbourhoods to do this on a given day. Let us say that the residents of Blockhouse Bay and Titirangi in the West and Glen Innes and Glendowie in the east will be asked to ride the bus on the first Monday of each month.

At this point I can hear the guffaws of incredulous laughter. "This will never work" you are thinking. But consider this:

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we routinely stand in line to vote; we rush to donate blood in response to appeals; we contribute to charity; in the midst of a drought we voluntarily reduce our water usage.

We engage in a wide range of activities that serve the common good even when it does not serve our self-interest. And in this case the activity in question is in our own self-interest as well. All that is needed is an initial push to get us going. And we need someone like the City Council to coordinate this.

Here is the other issue. My research suggests that most people are conditional co-operators. We are willing to do things if others are doing so.

One way of getting people into the buses then would be to enlist MPs, councillors and celebrities. Ask them to set an example by taking the bus or the

train. And ask them to collect a group of people to take along with them. Chances are that if Lucy Lawless or Dan Carter is riding the bus then a crowd will form even without asking.

It is entirely possible that enthusiasm might wane after a while. Over time more and more people will revert to driving.

But it is also possible that we might be able to hit a tipping point and the habit will stick.

Why not try it? What is the downside? At most it is the additional cost of some advertisements in the media and an additional insert in the bulletin the City Council sends out to us routinely.

If it does not work then we have not lost much. But if it does then we have solved a deeply entrenched problem at minimal cost.

My daughter's school does a "walk to school" day once in a while and on those days we do leave the car behind and end up walking. At the end of the walk the kids get a sticker or a lolly as a prize, which seems to make them very happy. We could try it with adults too! Lollies are pretty cheap.

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