

Conference Abstract

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Supporting life beyond the finish line A cross-sectional analysis of retirement transition policies for professional riders in European cycling

Michael Liebreinz ^{1,*}, Alexander Smith ¹, Stefanie Hachen ¹, Ana Buadze ² and Jill Colangelo ¹

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¹ Department of Forensic Psychiatry, Section Sportpsychiatry, University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland

² Psychiatric Hospital, Zurich, University of Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland

Correspondence

Michael Liebreinz

Department of Forensic Psychiatry, Section Sportpsychiatry, University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland

michael.liebreinz@unibe.ch

Abstract

Transitioning out of professional sport can present challenges for athletes and their wider environments, frequently necessitating coordinated physical, psychological, and economic support. Although these concerns have been documented in elite cycling, the extent to which structured transition programmes exist within the sport remains insufficiently understood, particularly in Europe, the historical centre of professional cycling. We conducted a cross-sectional qualitative documentary analysis, distributing a standardised inquiry to all European Cycling Federations (ECFs; $N = 51$) between December 2024–March 2025. Federations were asked whether they had formal strategies, policies, or resources related to athlete retirement. Responses were categorised as “ECF-level literature or initiative”, “No ECF-level provision”, or “No response” and relevant materials were descriptively synthesised. Amongst the 21 federations that responded, the majority ($n = 17$; $\approx 81\%$) reported no ECF-level retirement initiatives. Common reasons included limited resources, low perceived demand, or reliance on national or international bodies (*i.e.*, Olympic Committees or sport-specific unions). Four ECFs ($\sim 19\%$) described transition-related structures, though these varied considerably in scope, definition, and delivery. Despite well-documented needs, structured retirement support for professional cyclists remains uncommon across European national federations, and existing programmes appear heterogeneously applied. As cycling expands globally, effective transition planning becomes increasingly important for athlete wellbeing and the long-term sustainability of the sport. Holistic, international collaborations led by cycling’s major governance bodies could strengthen career-long support systems, reinforce the public image of cycling as a health-promoting discipline, and create responsible, athlete-centered ecosystems.

Keywords

mental health; sports psychiatry; retirement; cycling