

## Audio file

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## Transcript

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It's time for the Outspoken Cyclist, your weekly conversation about bicycles, cyclists, trails, travel, advocacy, the bike industry, and much, much more.

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00:00:41

Now here's your host, Diane Jenks.

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Hello and welcome to the Outspoken Cyclist.

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I'm your host, Diane Jenks.

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Thanks for tuning in today.

00:01:00

I wanted to make sure to get this episode up before Ohmloop, the first European one-day classic, coming your way this Saturday, February 28th.

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Indeed, it's Spring Classics time, and as always, I turn to my bike racing expert, Joe Lindsay, the managing director of Escape Collective, for his knowledge and his insights.

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Interestingly enough,

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As many times as we've spoken over the years, it never occurred to me to define certain terms until now.

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And so we begin this early spring conversation with a few definitions, such as, what is a classic?

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Which races are termed monuments, and what does that mean?

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And why are the cobbled races so difficult?

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Why hasn't Toddy Pigacha won all five of the monuments?

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Which women should we watch and how about the exciting 4th place Tour de France finisher last year, Oscar Onley?

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What's he up to for 2026?

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Joe and I talk about team rider changes, bad fan behavior, and whether state-sponsored teams are a good idea.

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We delve into some of the questions that arose for me out of the protests at last year's tour of Spain and how racing might be changing in this time of short attention spans and instant news.

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So let's dive right in.

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Hi, Joe.

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Welcome back to the Outspoken Cyclist.

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It's always good to talk with you.

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How are you?

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I'm doing great.

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Always good to be here.

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Yeah, and how's Colorado?

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Dry.

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Very, very dry.

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We could send you like two or three feet of snow to make it.

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That would be awesome.

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It's like you guys back east have gotten all of the snow this winter and we have gotten none of it and it would be nice if it evened out a little bit.

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Wow, none of it, We're at.

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A basically a 40 year low for snowpack.

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So the avalanche was further west.

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That was in California.

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Yes, that was out of Tahoe.

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Wow.

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Wow, I didn't know Colorado had that little snow.

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Like none.

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Yeah, it's been a bad year.

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And if it doesn't change soon, it's going to be a bad summer for fires.

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For sure, for sure.

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Well, you know, you're the guy I turn to know about racing European

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continental racing, especially, and about the teams and about the riders and the stuff that I just can hardly keep up with all the other stuff that I do.

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So we're going to talk with you about the first of the spring classics.

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And apparently one's coming up right away.

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But you know what?

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It occurred to me that you and I have never really sat down and defined a couple of, given definition to a couple of things.

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One is, what is a classic?

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How are they different from other events during the season?

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And which events are considered cobbles as opposed to monuments as opposed to just plain old classics?

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Oh, boy, there's a lot to unpack there.

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We'll take that step by step.

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I think, first of all, the whole definition of a classic, there isn't one.

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There is no single definition of a classic.

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It's not like an officially recognized term by the UCI, anything like that.

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Classic basically refers to a one-day race that is prestigious and has been around for a fairly long time.

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long time.

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And as you mentioned, there's, the cobbled classics versus other classics, which might be the Ardennes classics, which come later in the spring, or the Il Lombardia, which is in the fall in Italy.

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Those are all considered classics.

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And cobbled classics is basically any race where a portion of the course

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goes over old-style European cobblestone roads.

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Oftentimes, they're also climbed.

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So there's kind of a dual difficulty there in that you've got the roughness of the surface, the slickness if it's wet, and also these very steep gradients.

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And they're

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also quite narrow.

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They're basically often not too much wider than like a golf cart path.

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And what that means is that obviously only a certain number of riders can go up them side by side at the same time, which makes positioning for these very important.

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And that's why you see even mid-race where they will go into one of these important sectors of cobbles, these cobbled climbs and races like this weekend that we'll see it at on the Neusblad or later in the spring at the Tour of Flanders, you'll see this tremendous

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fight for position because riders, all the favorites want to make sure that they're in the front part of the pack because if gaps develop, they don't want to be behind those gaps.

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Is there a specific length to these events?

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No, it's not.

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And that's the other thing.

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This is that these races will vary from Neusblad this weekend is 207 kilometers for the men, as opposed to a race like the Tour of Flanders or Paris-Roubaix, which are more than 250 kilometers.

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So that's about 130 miles or so.

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And then you just have a race like Strad Bianca, which is in a couple of weeks in Italy, is kind of considered a new classic.

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It's A relatively recent race, but it has a very, very old school style and feel to it.

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And the rate that race is bumped around in length to as much as 220 kilometers.

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And now this year it's going to be back to about 185 for the men.

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When you say Strada Bianchi is relatively new, what does that mean relative to timing?

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So that race is only a couple of decades old, and it basically started as an amateur event.

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It grew out of an amateur event called Eroica, which is basically, it's an old school, a ride or race where amateur riders use very old vintage equipment.

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to ride on these, white dirt roads.

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And out of that grew in the early to mid 2000s, this professional race.

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And that has quickly grown into being one of the most anticipated events on the spring calendar because it's very exciting.

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It's very picturesque.

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And it's, you know, it's just this beautiful race in Tuscany and full of Tuscan sort of culture and roads.

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And it's, as I mentioned also, it's usually pretty suspenseful as well.

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So then let's define a monument.

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Well, besides the one that the current administration wants to build.

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Right, No, that's not a monument.

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So there's, again, as with classic, there is no definition of this.

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And I wrote about this a couple of years ago for Escape, you know, kind of looking at the idea of is Strada Bianca a modern monument?

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Monument is

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a term that refers to five of the most prestigious one-day races.

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So it encompasses Milan San Remo, which is in late March, and that's the first one.

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And then the Tour Flanders, Pirie Roubaix, Liege-Baston Liege, which is one of the hilly Ardennes classics.

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And then in the fall, the Il Lombardy race in around Como in northern Italy.

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This definition came from basically a newspaper report in the 1960s or 70s that used the word monument in lowercase and called them, you know, these races are the monuments of cycling, just kind of as a casual phrase.

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And it sort of sat around for a number of decades until it was really about the 1990s when it started to pick up as this almost more formal designation and people started capitalizing the M in monuments and that kind of thing.

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And so now you've got this sort of this idea that these five races are the most prestigious one day races in the sport.

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And there's disagreement about that because Lombardia, for instance, is at the absolute other end of the season.

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It's in early mid-October usually.

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And people kind of, I think,

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And by that point, a lot of people have sort of checked out of cycling at that point in the season.

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a lot of people, for many people, the cycling season ends when the Tour de France ends, and that's kind of understandable.

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It's the peak of the season.

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So you've got this one race, it's way the heck out in October, and people are kind of like, oh yeah, there's that Lombardy race.

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So there's the, it's a beautiful,

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historic race, but I think a lot of people sort of question like, what isn't a monument?

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What really is a monument?

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And I think if we look at the things that define a monument, when I did the story a couple of years ago, I talked to a few people, including Fabian Tanchellara, the former Swiss professional who won, I don't know how many, I'm going to, I will get it wrong, so I won't say how many, but he won a number of Tour Flanders and Paris-Roubaix.

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And I asked him and I asked other people, what makes a monument?

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And is it the age?

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Is it because Liege Baston-Liege was first raised in 1896.

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So it's 130 years old now.

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Is it the length?

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They're all roughly 250 kilometers or more.

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Milan Sanremo, the signal difficulty of that race is its length.

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It's about 300 kilometers.

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So the race takes like 7 hours, even though it's not that, even though there's not that much climbing to it, it's just a very long and arduous race.

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Is it something about the character of the race?

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Like, Paris-Roubaix is known for its cobbles.

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Lombardier is known for always going through the hills in Como past the chapel of the Madonna del Gazala, who's the patron saint of cycling.

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Like, what are these things?

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And the answer that I got from people was, it's kind of all of the above.

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It's what makes a monument is kind of the

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the importance of the race, the difficulty, the prestige of the race, it's sort of stature within the sport of cycling is what makes a monument.

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So do we know any riders who have won off all of them?

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Yes.

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So I haven't researched this right off the top of my head here, so I'm going to get this wrong.

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But there are riders who have won all five in their careers.

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And the most recent, I want to say, was

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Eric DeFlamek, I think.

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Eddie Merck's won all five.

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Only a few riders in history have won all five monuments in their careers.

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It's incredibly difficult because it spans this extreme range of physical ability.

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You have, on the one hand, at the start of the season, you have a race like Milan San Remo, which is mostly flat and comes down to a couple of final climbs that are very suspenseful, but they're not hard enough.

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especially for a modern peloton with the riders and the sort of the sophisticated training and preparation that they have today, they're not hard enough to really force a full selection.

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So you have a rider like Tade Pagaccio, for instance, who's tried for a number of years to win Milan Sanremo.

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You can't quite crack the code because he's the strongest rider in the sport.

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But on that course,

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Once he attacks, everybody knows what he's doing and they do their damndest to get on his wheel.

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And if you can't drop them before the top of that climb, he's looking at a sprint and sprinting after 300 kilometers.

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He's got a pretty good sprint, but so do a lot of other people.

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And sprinting after 300 kilometers is different.

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So you've got that on the one end.

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And on the other end of the calendar, and the other end is sort of the difficulty spectrum, is Lombardia, which is 250 kilometers and has almost, so it's 130 miles, and it has almost 16,000 feet of climbing across it.

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And that's a race where Pogacha has won five straight times.

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He's basically never lost because he can hit the afterburners at any point that he wants and drop everybody.

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And so it's a race that's very straightforward for him.

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In the middle are races like Flanders and Roubaix, where there's positioning, there's luck, there's flats, there's crashes.

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You know, last year Pogacha was off the front with Matthew Vanderpoel in Paris-Roubaix.

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It was looking like it was going to set it up for, you know, either a late move or a two-rudder finish in the velodrome.

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in Roubaix and he overcooked the corner and crashed and Vanderpool went on to win alone.

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So you've got all of these different kind of aspects that factor into the monuments that make them very difficult for one rider to win.

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The last rider who came close was Philippe Gilbert, one of the great classic stars of the 2000s and 2010s.

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He won everything but I think Lombardia was the only race he missed.

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And I gotcha now has Flanders

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She has a number of victories in Flanders and two victories in Flanders and two or three victories in Liege Pastellier.

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She has five wins in Lombardia.

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So the only, you know, the, if we're looking at him collecting all 5 infinity stones, the only ones that are left are Melanza and Remo and Perry Roubaix.

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And he's been on the podium in both.

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So he has a very good chance of becoming the first writer in decades to be able to say they won all five in their career.

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And that's very much a focus for him.

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He has said he

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He really wants to have his career sort of round out with the, this incredible breadth of victories.

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He wants to win everything of note that there is to win in cycling.

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Wouldn't we all?

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Yes.

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Let me take a moment to reintroduce you.

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We're speaking with Joe Lindsay.

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He is the, okay, I always get this wrong.

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Escape Collective, you like run it.

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Yeah, I'm the managing editor.

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Managing editor, okay.

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It's either executive director of an organization, managing editor of a publication.

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How is Escape doing?

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Very well.

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Good.

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We are just about to hit our third anniversary.

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Wow.

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Which is, that's a big milestone.

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And we've hit a point now where we basically are sustainable.

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off of our business model, which is entirely, I should mention for people who aren't familiar with it, is entirely subscription-based.

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We do not do advertising.

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So if you come to our website, you will not be bombarded with a terrible user experience with all these pop-ups and autoplayers and things like that.

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We do not do what's called affiliate commerce.

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So, you know, roundups of stories where there's a link to click where you can go and buy something and we get a cut of that sale.

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We do not do anything like that.

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We're 100% membership-based.

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It is such a refreshing platform and that it works.

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I remember when you first launched it.

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This reminds me of a very short story.

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I will tell you that when I first went into business for myself by myself back in 1997, and I was opening a custom-only bike shop.

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Everybody said, you can't do it without production bikes.

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And I said, hold my beer.

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Watch this.

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Watch this.

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And as the time went on and other shops began to use that same model, and there might have been another one somewhere, but I had so many reps and so many customers say, you're not going to make it.

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And we did because of our focus and knowing exactly what it was we wanted to do.

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And I feel like Escape Collective is the same thing.

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You've made that

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choice and you've stuck with it.

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And I think that's really important.

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The phrase that Kaylee Fretz or my boss, my editor and one of the two co-founders of the company uses is we would rather be everything to someone than something to everyone.

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Very good.

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Yes.

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And that's similar to a custom bike shop.

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Yeah, my dad who they were in, my parents were in business doing something else, but his, he gave me several good pieces of advice.

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And the one was not everybody's your customer.

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Right.

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And

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inventory.

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If it isn't selling, get rid of it.

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Right.

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And they're such simple things.

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They're such simple things, and it takes down a lot of businesses that don't follow them.

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OK, let's move on to some of the events.

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There is one coming up this weekend.

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We're going to get this podcast up in time so people could actually tune in if there's a way to watch it or at least follow it.

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They'll be able to follow it on Escape, for sure.

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Let's talk about the calendar and just some of the lesser-known races, the ones

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ones that people don't necessarily know, but that are important, that we just were talking about either cobbled or monuments or, yeah.

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So the season has actually already been underway for over a month now.

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This is the world tour.

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The men's and women's world tour is the top circuit of the sport.

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And it started in January in Australia at the Tour Down Under.

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Just a week ago, we finished the second race in the Middle East, which was the UAE tour.

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And so now what we're moving on to this weekend is sort of the opening of the traditional European season.

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Obviously, cycling, pro cycling's heartland.

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You know, it's very important.

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It's also the start of the classics season.

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The first race this Saturday is an older and prestigious classic called Onloop Neusblad.

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Way back in the day, it was known as Het Boek.

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which is, it's always been sponsored by a newspaper, which is a very common sort of business arrangement in cycling.

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And one of the reasons that Newsblad is an important race is because it takes place on much the same course as the Tour of Flanders will in about 5 weeks from now, five, six weeks from now.

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So it ends up, like these races, and often started out as sort of a training or a tune-up

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for some of the big events like Flanders or that kind of thing.

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And they have now taken on something of a life of their own as a prestigious race to win.

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But that's one of the big things is that it gives riders a chance to sort of go out

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cast their legs on the course, see how their preparation and training is going, and they're built for that one for that central big target.

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And so the other race on Sunday is a sort of a second division race called Kuna Brussels Kern.

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So they race from Kuna, the town of Kuna, to Brussels in Belgium, and then back to Kuna.

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And this is a flatter race.

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It doesn't have the, it has cobbles, but not the cobbled climbs.

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that Het News Bot does.

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And so it's considered sort of more of a sprinter's race.

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And so you'll see different kind of characters and flavors in each race happen, whether it's the men's race or the women's race.

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The women will not, there is not a corner, Brussels corner for the women, but there is a race on Sunday called, it's similar, called Almut van Het Hageland.

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And so

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Apparently, in cycling, you have to speak at least a little bit of Dutch to get by.

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Apparently, you seem to do pretty well.

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Amlup means tour.

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So is it also that these early races

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sets people up to see how other writers are doing so that they know what their competition is as the year unfolds.

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Yeah, that is part of it.

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And I think that's honestly, these days is more sort of important to fans and, like the bar stool debate than it is to the writers themselves.

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As training has changed and gotten more sophisticated, writers, I think, have a much better judge of where they are in their preparation based off of the training that they're doing, the numbers that they're seeing from, you know, in terms of power output and stuff like that, the work that they're doing.

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with their coaches 30, 40 years ago, your only real base was for understanding how you were doing was either feel or literally just matching up to your competition.

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And that's no longer true.

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So I think a guy, you know, the men and women today go in with a much better sense of where they are.

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And even if they don't perform necessarily that well this weekend, it's not like it never is like, oh, it's time to panic because they know what they need to do to get to where they need to be in a month.

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Do you see some riders whose names we may not be really familiar with breaking through this year?

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Yeah, so that's, and especially this weekend is sort of a, these races are interesting that they produce surprise winners very often.

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It's not necessarily the biggest names in the sport who you will see kind of take the victory this weekend.

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And so again, that doesn't necessarily

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hold that much predictive power for how the rest of the spring classics are going to go.

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You know, obviously the two on the men's side, the two biggest names are going to be Tare Bagacha and Matthew Van Der Poel.

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Neither of them are racing this weekend.

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And on the women's side, you've got Lotta Kopecki and SD Works is kind of the top team for women and that and that sort of thing.

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But it's that these races are always a

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bit of a crap shoot as far as like who ends up in the front.

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Last year's winner was this Norwegian guy, Soren Warrenskild, who wanted a, you know, a sprint finish from a small group.

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And it was, you know, he was definitely not a guy who was like on anybody's top five list of favorites.

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How did he do as the season wore on?

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Well, that's exactly it.

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So the rest of the season wore on.

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I mean, he's a very good racer, but you know, that was basically his kind of standout, one of the standout highlights of the year.

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He did go on to win a Tour de France stage.

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So there was that.

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There is that.

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All right.

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Actually, hold on a second.

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Let me double check that.

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Okay.

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No, it was not him.

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Sorry, it was Jonas Abramson, his teammate on UNOX Mobility.

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So I got that wrong.

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He was a podium finisher in a couple of two stages, but he did not win.

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So anyway, so yes, that was basically ended up kind of being one of his highlights of the year.

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And he's a very good racer, but as the as the stars took center stage later on, you know, it was very clear that guys like Matthew Vanderpoel and Tara Bagachar stars for a reason.

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And I do want to talk about the stars.

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Let's take a short break.

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And when we come back, that's what we're going to do.

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We're going to talk about the stars of the sport right now and a little bit about teams and changes in roster, because we usually talk about teams.

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We are talking with Joe Lindsay.

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He is the managing director of Escape Collective.

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If you are not a member, it is a subscription-only service.

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No ads, no pop-ups, no nothing like that.

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And you get really good up-to-the-minute information and really interesting writers.

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You have some really good journalists who are part of your organization.

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It's a pleasure.

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We will be right back.

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You're listening to the Outspoken Cyclist.

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We are back on The Outspoken Cyclist.

00:23:42

I'm speaking with my friend Joe Lindsay, managing director of Escape Collective.

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We will give you a way to join if you are not already a member, and you should at least take a look and hop on.

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It's a really good organization.

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So we were talking about who the stars of the sport are, and everybody knows Toddy's name now.

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Everybody knows

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Remco Ivanpol and Matthew Vanderpol and Woot and all of these people, they're all still there.

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I noticed, and I want to talk about teams a little bit.

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Tell me what you think.

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This is all pie in the sky, but what you think is happening and how the teams are starting to unfold this year.

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Things have changed.

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People have moved from team to team.

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What teams are we looking at?

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To start on the women's side.

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I think, especially for the spring classics, the big focus obviously is, as in past years, is probably going to be on SD Works Pro Time, which has an absolute roster of hitters.

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We've got Lotta Kopecki, you've got Lorena Wiebes, who's the best by far and away, the best sprinter in the sport.

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You've got Anna Vander Breggen, who had formerly won everything of note before she retired and became a director, and then unretired and came back to racing last year.

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You've got Misha Breitvold, you've got a number of

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very good riders on that team who have the capability to win in these Spring Classics and elsewhere.

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They're kind of the top team in the sport.

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But what we've seen so far this year is that the women's Peloton has been remarkably stable compared to last year, where there were all kinds of big transfers and changes where you had, you know, last year you had Vanderbergen coming back, you had Pauline Ferran-Pervo coming back to the road, you had Demi Volering switching from SD Works to FDJ Suez, you had all these, you know, you had Eliza Longo-Borghini going to, you know, from Lidl Trek to the UAE team.

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There were all these sort of seismic transfers that reached

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shaped the sport on the women's side.

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This year, most of those people are obviously on, the second year of their, of their contracts, which will continue in most cases for another year or two.

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So things are settling in.

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There's more stability there now.

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On the men's side, one of the big things that we saw was this off-season transfer of Renko Avenopol, who you mentioned from his longtime team, Sudol Quickstep to the Red Bull Bora Hansborough team.

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And that was a late transfer.

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He was,

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he's been linked to other teams for years now, that he would break his contract with Sudol.

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It finally happened and Red Bull was able to buy him out.

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So he's transferred and has become part of Red Bull.

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And then you had another couple of late season transfers, Oscar Onley, who was 4th overall, the Tour de France last year.

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He's this very promising 22 year old, I want to say, Scottish kid.

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who was on a smaller team and got basically bought out by INEOS Grenadiers, the big British team, which has since Chris Broome and kind of that era has been really searching for its next big star.

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They've had success with other riders, but they've also had a lot of setbacks and they've kind of fallen in the stature of the sport.

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So that's a couple of the big things happening there.

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You've got on the men's side as well, the biggest team is Tare Pagacha's UAE Team Emirates outfit.

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They have this sovereign wealth sponsor because they're owned and sponsored by the Emirates, the sovereign wealth fund through a variety of their investment properties.

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And they are plowing incredible amounts of money into the sport.

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And you can see the kind of strain right now of other teams trying to match them.

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You've got Red Bull is trying to match them.

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Lidl Trek is trying to match them.

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You know, they got a transfer of Juan Ayuso, who actually came to them from UAE.

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They're trying to level up.

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There's A French team called Decathlon that's trying to level up as well.

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But the strains are there because you see a team like Bisma Lisa Bike, which two, three short years ago was the

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absolute number one team in pro cycling.

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And it turns out that in 2023 and 2024, they ran multi-million euro deficits, trying to basically sustain the spending level to keep up with UAE.

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So there's a changing dynamic right now where there's a few small teams that have the resources to pull away from the rest.

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And there's a lot of discussion in the sport about whether or not something can or should be done to fix that.

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Like salary caps.

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Yeah, salary caps, that kind of thing, revenue sharing, all kinds of different options.

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One of our contributors, Chris Marshall-Bell, just wrote a piece for us yesterday about the whole revenue sharing idea, which is this idea that, you know, that race promoters like the ASO, which promotes the Tour de France, are sitting on these absolute piles of money that they don't share with the teams and that kind of thing.

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And, you know, what Chris is reporting, you know, he dove into some of the financials behind these race promoters.

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And, really, there's right now there is no

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of money.

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All the reform and all this revenue sharing discussion really kind of revolves around the idea that the sport is an underdeveloped and undermarketed opportunity.

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And if you would share revenue, it would grow.

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But the whole point is not that sharing the revenue opens up this giant pot of money right now.

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It's that it would sport reform and revenue sharing would add stability and eventually grow the sport to the point where it was a big pot of money.

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That's pretty speculative.

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Yeah, I can see that, both sides of it.

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But I would also say that looking at professional sports here in the US, most of these teams are privately owned.

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I think only the Green Bay Packers are owned by Green Bay, right?

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So, and I guess the UAE team,

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It isn't owned by the UAE itself then.

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It's owned by.

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Yeah, pretty much.

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Yeah.

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Okay, so there you have a state sponsored team.

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The sponsors are these outfits like Emirates Airlines, which is the national airline.

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It's owned by the government.

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Sponsors like the G42 Group, which is basically a sovereign wealth investment vehicle that's controlled by one of the royal family.

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These are all basically sovereign wealth enterprises where there's not the traditional

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feedback loop of a business that has to justify a marketing spend.

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They don't care.

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They can spend whatever they want on this.

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Whether it's a vanity project, whether it's a sports washing, whether it's an attempt to sort of diversify revenue in the country and that kind of thing, that they can do basically whatever they want with very little feedback loop to say, no, that's not working.

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We need to stop and save money.

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So, you know, I followed the PGA and LIV Golf came along a few years ago and gobbled up a lot of people.

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I mean, a lot of really high profile golfers paid them tons and tons of money, money they would never have seen otherwise, even though golf is not a cheap sport.

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I mean, the pots are big.

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The prizes for a tournament are big, but I'm seeing it begin to sort of unravel.

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People are coming back to the PGA because it's where the honesty seems to be in the sport.

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It's where the integrity is in the sport.

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And I'm wondering if that might happen, I don't know, in cycling, that there needs to be some sort of standard of integrity, that it isn't just about money and paying, you know, gobs of money for a rider and not sharing it somehow with the sport to help

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expand it.

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Yeah, that's a very good question.

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And I think the issue that the sport is dealing with is that it wants more investment.

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And that that's where some of, at least some of the investment is coming from right now.

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And so what do you say no to?

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And what is the cost of saying no to that?

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The counterweight to all of this right now

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is the ASO, which is the big rainmaker for the sport.

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in Chris's analysis, if you look at the amount of revenue across the three main race promoters, which between them organize roughly two-thirds to three-quarters of the races on the world tour, by far and away, the biggest entity is the ASO, which runs the Tour de France and Paris-Roubaix and the Vuelta Espana and stuff like that.

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They are both a

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roadblock to reform because if they don't want to participate, nothing happens.

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But they're also sort of a bulwark against outside takeover because they're privately owned by a very wealthy family.

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And because the Tour de France in particular is considered a sort of

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I don't know if the designation is official, but it is a national treasure, a cultural treasure of France.

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And therefore, if the family did want to sell at some point, the French government sort of has the right to get involved and say, no, this buyer, not that buyer.

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And that's the whole idea is to basically prevent things like, you know,

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the Paris Saint-Germain team sailing to, foreign sovereign wealth kind of thing.

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That's not, the idea is to keep French cultural treasures French.

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And that's very provincial, of course, but it works both ways.

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It's both a block, an impediment to reform, and yet it's also a, you can see it as a sort of a protection of the sports culture.

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Yeah, which I think is, to me, that's important.

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I think it is to a lot of fans.

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There's a big debate right now among, I think, among fans about whether or not the sport does need to reform, does need to modernize.

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You know, I think a lot of people would love to see more stability and more support for the sport, but on the other hand, they don't want to see it change and become something that's unrecognizable to what it is now.

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It's a very old sport.

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You know, I think we've talked about this in the past, where it was born, obviously, in a pre-digital era, but it was born in a pre-television era, even pre-radio era.

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it got its start, newspapers largely started these races and it was a way to sort of package a mythic narrative of athletic feats.

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And today, if you look at a race like Milan Sanremo, it's seven hours long.

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Nobody's watching that start to finish.

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They're just not.

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You have to be an extremely \*\*\*\*\* race fan to watch that race from the rollout in Milan and then seven hours later still be at your TV.

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Like who has that kind of time?

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You know, I don't have 7 hours on a Saturday to watch a race.

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No, that's true.

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And I think that's in today's media environment.

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That is a that kind of thing is a very hard sell, especially for a younger audience.

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Well, the last thing I want to talk about isn't very pretty, but I do want to talk about it anyway.

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What happened at the Vuelta last year, the protests and eventually basically shutting the race down is

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given the state of the world right now, kind of a frightening thing.

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And I don't know if you're hearing any rumblings of issues that might come up this year or if the UCI is looking at making any changes in the way racing is promoted and then executed to prevent those kinds of political issues coming and interrupting these races.

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So the big off-season change that happened with respect to that is that the team that was at the center of all of this, which was Israel Premier Tech, was effectively sold to new owners and renamed.

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So now it's called NSN Cycling.

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And it still has some ties to Israel.

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There are a few Israeli riders.

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There's still sort of a question about whether the former owner, Sylvain Adams, is involved in any context.

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He showed up at the team's training camp

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this last winter, and the team was a little bit cagey about whether he was involved.

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They said, no, he's not the owner anymore, but, okay, then why is he here?

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What is he doing?

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You know, all this kind of thing.

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So there's still some question marks about that, but it certainly is not the sort of obvious flashpoint.

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that it was last season.

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And I think, around the Tour de France this year starts in Barcelona and previously there had been a lot of talk from regional politicians in Barcelona and in Catalonia about that the team would not be welcome.

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And I'm not hearing that now.

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So there may be some boil over from that, but it seems like right now so far it's pretty contained.

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And that's, I think that's a good thing.

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The

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Other things that I look at are, have there been changes in terms of how races run security and things like that?

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I haven't seen a whole lot of that right now.

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Most race promoters run pretty lean.

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It's, you know, the...

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they get basically an in-kind, support from the, whether it's, the Yard Republican in France or the Gardia Civil in Spain or that kind of thing to provide security and that kind of thing at the races.

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I mean, let's face it, amateur marshals are not going to be your first point of, you know,

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from a first point of contact for defense for this kind of thing.

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If you've got, if you've got, a very boisterous protest happening, it's going to have to be law enforcement.

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I don't know that we've seen a whole lot of change on that front.

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And the other thing that I'm watching, and I wrote about this last year, was the UAE team.

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Obviously, with events in Sudan, you have what amounts to a genocide in Darfur happening.

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And there has been very little discussion about the UAE's role in that, supporting the rebels.

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And I'm curious if that will change.

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I don't think it will.

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for a variety of reasons, but those are the kinds of things that I'm looking at as like, those could be flashpoints.

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Obviously, the other aspects are, just anything in geopolitics, whatever else happens in Gaza, whatever else, what happens with the US, possibly going to war with Iran.

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There's all different kinds of things that could, that I couldn't have anticipated at this time last year that happened that I couldn't say with any clarity, like, here's what I'm, you know, here's what I expect to have.

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happen.

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I don't know.

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And we still just passed the four-year mark with Russia and Ukraine.

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Just today, in fact.

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So it's been a very interesting political landscape right now.

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The other, and I didn't think about this until I was listening to what you were saying, and that is the bad behavior of fans who get in the way of riders.

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I don't know if that, I know it's always been kind of a, let me run alongside the riders, let me, do whatever, but it's gotten dangerous with the speeds these guys are going.

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It's a combination, I think some of it's the speed.

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But a lot of it is simply more people on the roadside and people not paying attention as much.

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there's two issues that you see here, one of which was the active protest that we saw last year at like the Tour of Spain.

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And that's a different group of people.

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They are not there for the bike race.

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They are there to use the bike race as a platform for their cause.

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And that is a completely qualitatively different thing than fans.

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But what you see from fans,

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Invariably in races, what you see is in a sprint finish is somebody is sprinting down the barriers and runs into an arm that is outstretched holding a phone.

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And if you look at, when I edit photo galleries and stuff for us, we are fortunate to work with some fantastic photographers, and two of them are Ashley and Jared Gruber, who take fantastic photos.

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And they have a really developed and beautiful eye for a kind of the roadside scene.

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And so sometimes, you know, you'll see a shot from them that's framed sort of to focus on the fans.

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And almost always what you see is the sea of arms holding up phones.

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And everybody's holding up a phone to try to catch something for their Instagram or something like this.

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And it makes me wonder how many people are actually like watching the race unfold right in front of them.

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Right.

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And oh, by the way, that shot is terrible.

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And a million other people got the same thing and nobody's going to click life.

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Nobody cares about your stupid Instagram post.

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Watch the race, enjoy it.

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Right.

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And I think that's the thing is it's this combination of people physically inserting themselves into the course by holding an arm out with a phone and also the distraction of that they're focused on

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on the phone, not what's happening around them.

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So you have like a couple of years ago, you had the woman of the Tour de France who caused the crash because she'd like, made a mug for the television camera with a sign and she's like leaning out into the course and that kind of thing.

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Like had no idea where the riders were coming behind her, had no idea that they were just about to mow her down at 50 kilometers an hour.

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And yeah, that's what happened.

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So people are just not aware of their surroundings and they're focused on either their phone or they're focused on making themselves a part of the story.

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they want their Warhol in 15 minutes of fame and well, they might find it in a way that they're not super happy about.

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And putting riders in danger is not okay.

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No, it's not.

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You like respect the riders, do not touch them, do not get in their way.

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That's the, be on the road, be a fan, cheer them, yell, but do not throw things at them, do not get in their way, do not touch them.

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I mean, this is golden rule, don't touch anybody without their consent, right?

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In whatever context.

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Pretty simple.

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It's pretty simple.

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And why are you there?

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Why are you there?

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Right.

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It's really simple.

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Don't touch people without their consent, including pro athletes doing their job.

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Exactly.

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Exactly.

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So the last thing is, let's ask you for any predictions.

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Got any predictions for this year?

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Predictions for this year.

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Things I am looking at on the women's side, so Demi Volering is settling into her second year with FDJ Suez.

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That's going to be really interesting to watch.

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The women's Tour de France this year goes from Switzerland down to Nice, and the women will visit Mont Vent, too, for the first time.

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So that'll be really interesting, and I'll be interested to see again if Pauline Farron-Perravo, who won last year, is able to repeat.

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It looks like a great course for her, but there is also, for the first time in quite a while, there's actually a decent

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length individual time trial that comes.

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So that'll be interesting to watch.

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You could have somebody like Marlon Royster, for instance, would stand to be a favorite on a stage like that and put herself in a very good position for the overall.

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There's some young writers who I'm very interested to watch, including Kat Ferguson, who's a 19 year old on Movistar.

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She's in her second pro season, has been doing very well.

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May of Esquiban, who won Tuesday just of last year's tour, is again writing very well this season.

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for the men.

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It's going to be really interesting to watch Sudol Quickstep now without a Venipol.

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They're kind of going to have to reinvent themselves as a team.

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And their culture, their DNA has always been that they're a one day classics team.

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They like one day races, they hunt stages rather than the overall victory at a stage race, that kind of thing.

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It's going to be interesting to see how they kind of embrace that identity again and what they do with it.

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I'm interested to see all the stars, you know, Matthew, Vanderpool, Tede,

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Tom Pidcock in his second year with his Spinarello Q36-5 team.

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This spring, one thing I'm also watching is, you know, you've got Matthew and Tade are sort of tops, but just below that, you've got this second tier of competitors who are, you know, include guys like Tom Pidcock.

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And two of them, Walt Van Aert and Mads Patterson, are coming back from injury right now.

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Walt will be in competition on Saturday.

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At Newsblad, he is less than two months off of a fractured ankle suffered in a cyclocross race on January 2.

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Mads is nursing a broken wrist and collarbone.

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He's a little bit farther behind.

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But I really think that with the spring classics that a lot of the sort of the excitement of the race revolves around

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the idea that it's not just Matthew and T watching each other at Flanders and deciding to go with the other one when one or the other goes if the more guys like Walt and Mads and Tom that you add in there the more faces that they have to watch and triangulate against the more interesting and suspenseful the racing is and so that's what I'm hoping for on the men's side.

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Well as always it's such an interesting and um

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enlightening conversation with you.

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We've been speaking with Joe Lindsay.

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He is the managing director of Escape Collective.

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It's [escapecollective.com](http://escapecollective.com).

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And please log on, take a look, join.

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It's an excellent, excellent source for anything you want to know about racing.

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Are you working on any big stories you can talk about right now?

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So actually launching today, I have my annual How to Watch Pro Cycling Guide, which is

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This is the streaming environment is, as is very complicated, especially for us.

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If you're in the US, you need three different services.

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You need to have Peacock for the ASO races like the Tour de France.

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You have to have Max for the Giro d'Italia, and you have to have Flow Bikes for the Spring Classics and that kind of thing.

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So it's expensive.

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And what I've got is a full rundown of which races are airing where, how to save money, what options are available for you, and all of that kind of stuff.

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And that covers our four major markets, which is the US, Canada,

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the UK and Australia.

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Excellent.

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Just a little service journalism.

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Well, you know what?

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It helps.

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It helps.

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I know, Brian.

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So we have a piece of paper underneath the television about all the shows we watch and when they're coming back, for example, like The Pit, which just started a few weeks ago.

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But I know he's been watching.

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He watched most of the tour down under and he loved it this year.

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It was a good race this year.

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So as was as were a couple of the other early season races, I think it's going to stage racing is going to set up to be very interesting.

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You know, like on the men's side, there's a couple of guys, Isaac del Toro, who nearly won the Giro d'Italia last year, and this young French kid named Paul Saxis, who races for decathlon.

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He's just 19, but he's very talented.

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Of course, you know, he's got the weight of being the next great French hope.

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But I think you're going to see hopefully more competitiveness across a number of races this year.

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And that's always a good thing.

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Well, Joe, I'm going to let you get back to work.

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Thank you so much for speaking with me.

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We will catch up again before the big stage races this summer and have a great spring.

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Hope you get some rain or snow or something out there.

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Yeah, me too.

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Please send it our way.

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Believe me, you could have it.

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We're still getting more snow today.

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Thanks.

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Take care.

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You too.

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My thanks, as always, to Joe Lindsay for his expertise and analyses and his generosity with sharing all of it with us.

00:47:06

Log on to [escapecollective.com](http://escapecollective.com) for great stories, interviews, racing updates, and more.

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You can find Joe's brief guide to how to watch racing this year there too.

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Better yet, join Escape Collective.

00:47:22

For links, photos, and a written transcript of the show, log on to our website, [outspokencyclist.com](http://outspokencyclist.com).

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You can leave comments there too.

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Follow us on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube.

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You can also find extended commentary on my Substack.

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My thanks to you for listening.

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Even though there is still a lot of snow on the ground here and cold weather is in the forecast,

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March 1st is literally around the corner, and the time change is following closely behind.

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If your bike is still hanging from the rafters or stuffed into a nook in the garage or basement, you might want to check it out for flat tires, loose headset, worn out handlebar tape, frayed wires, and anything else you said, eh, I'll fix it next spring.

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Guess what?

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It's next spring.

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And give your local bike shop a heads up, because I can tell you from years of experience, that first 60 degree day brings total chaos and long service time waits.

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Lastly, I wanna say thank you to those of you who offered a donation to WJCU's annual Radiothon.

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Years ago, when I first started my show at WJCU, the hopes were to top 50,000 in donations.

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baby, look at us now.

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This year we topped \$108,000.

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Just a phenomenal record.

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So here's a big shout out to all the DJs who work so hard to produce their shows and to Jason S.

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for his outstanding management of the station.

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I'm really honored to be part of it.

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So until next time, please stay safe, stay well, and I get to say it, remember there's always time for a ride.

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Bye-bye.

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Thanks for joining us today on The Outspoken Cyclist with Diane Jenks.

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We welcome your thoughts and contributions on our Facebook page, or visit [outspokencyclist.com](http://outspokencyclist.com) to leave a comment on any episode.

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We will be back next week with new guests, topics, conversations, and news in the world of cycling.

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Thanks again for listening, ride safely, and we'll see you next week.