

## Audio file

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## Transcript

### Speaker 1

It's time for the Outspoken Cyclist, your weekly conversation about bicycles, cyclists, trails, travel, advocacy, the bike industry, and much, much more. You can subscribe to our weekly podcast at [outspokencyclist.com](http://outspokencyclist.com) or through your favorite podcasting app to listen anytime. Now here's your host, Diane Jenks.

### Speaker 2

Hello and welcome to the Outspoken Cyclist. I'm your host, Diane Jenks. Thanks for tuning in today. I have a bit of housekeeping before we get to our two great guests in this week's show. First, it's WJCU's annual fundraiser, Radiothon. This year's theme, Carrying the Torch for College Radio, is particularly pertinent as another well-loved local college station was recently transferred, converted to our local NPR affiliate for a jazz format, much to the disappointment of Cleveland State University and many of its listeners and students. But WJCU, 88.7 on your FM dial here in Northeast Ohio, is alive and well. The station is the on-air voice of John Carroll University and has been the gracious host for the Outspoken Cyclists since our very first show in September of 2010. At that time, we produced the podcast as a companion to our one-hour radio show. Eventually, as the years passed, we phased out the radio show and continued to offer our podcast. Now, 16 years and 683 shows later, we are so honored that WJCU has seen fit to continue to partner with us. Here's just a little bit about why I'm so proud to be part of WJCU. The station is the reigning International Student Broadcasting Championship, People's Choice Radio Station, and College Media Association Pinnacle Awards Small College Audio Outlet of the Year. I know it's a mouthful, but it says so much about the work WJCU does. It has established itself as a worldwide leader in college radio. So all of this is said in the hopes that you will help support the work, which in turn gives me the platform I'm so honored to have. Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to the station. All the money raised during Radiothon goes directly to the station, not to the university. Log on to [wjcu.org](http://wjcu.org) and click the pledge button. Make sure you let them know that you are an Outspoken Cyclist listener too. and thanks. My second item is about my conversation with Maynard Hirschon and his new book, *The Dysfunctional Cycling Club and Other Stories*. I neglected to give you a way to contact Maynard directly. You can find him at [buymeacoffee.com](http://buymeacoffee.com). Search for Maynard Hirschon. Okay, let's get to it. My show this week includes a conversation with Karen Whitaker, the Deputy Executive Director of the League of American Bicyclists. With the upcoming reauthorization of the transportation bill this fall, well, the supposed reauthorization, it

doesn't always happen. There is the opportunity to include a bill that would require automobile manufacturers to incorporate automatic emergency braking, AEB, systems that reliably protect pedestrians, cyclists, and other vulnerable road users in real-world conditions, day and night. Its goal is simple, ensure life-saving technology that actually works for everyone before crashes happen. Karen gives us a CliffsNotes course on that bill and what else is happening in Washington, as well as how we can help. My second guest is Andy McGrath. Andy is an award-winning freelance journalist, and he began our conversation with a really super fun fact. He's a triplet. I've only ever known one other set of triplets. Their mom was a client of ours. It's such a cool fact. Anyway... Andy has written a biography of Toddy Pagacha titled Unstoppable, an apt title if there ever was one. And I think our conversation has to be one of my all-time favorites, because Andy is thoughtful, forthright, and has truly done his due diligence in authoring this book. I think you'll agree. So every five years, although sometimes longer, the surface transportation bill comes up for reauthorization. The federal dollars that are appropriated in this bill are what can make or break a lot of biking and walking projects for the next five years. And at this point in time, there is little love for biking at the executive level. But there are always new bills coming up in Congress, and we can weigh in with our representatives by phone or email on any or all of them. My guest, Karen Whitaker, Deputy Executive Director of the League of American Bicyclists, walks us through one of those bills along with information on the upcoming National Bike Summit. So get your pens and paper ready. There are actions you can take. Hi, Karen. Welcome back to The Outspoken Cyclist. Great to catch up with you. And we have some really important information from the League of American Bicyclists to tell listeners. And I want to make sure that we make it very clear that they are invited to do some of these things, like actually contact representatives, for example, or sign up for the summit, for example. So first up is information to pass on about the upcoming transportation bill. So this transportation bill is reauthorized how often?

Speaker 3

Hey, well, first, Diane, thanks for having me. It's great to be back. Yeah, Congress does a five-year bill. Well, it's supposed to be every five years. Sometimes it's five to seven years. So the last one was in 2021. It was the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. And we saw a lot of great things on the bicycling side. We saw a 70% increase in the Transportation Alternatives Program, which is our biggest funder for biking and walking. We saw new funds specifically for biking and walking safety. And we saw a lot of money for local governments to do safety plans. And all of that has been working great. But now it's five years later, and we're worried about losing a lot of those wins.

Speaker 2

So are you saying that they can claw this money back?

Speaker 3

They can. Or for instance, the Safe Streets for All program, which funded almost 1,700 local governments to do a safety plan. For many of those, they're smaller local governments have never taken on that responsibility on their own. They could just stop that. So all those local governments could have plans, but now there's no funds to build the projects identified in the plans. Okay.

Speaker 2

I mean, we could fast forward to the midterms and talk about that a little later, that maybe we can get some changes. But there's a lot going on in between that. So one of the bills that is being bandied about is the Magnus White and Safer Streets for Everyone Act. Tell us what it is. I know not every legislator is involved, so not every area of the country can actually weigh in and say, please pass this bill. But we can tell people how they can find out if their legislator is involved. So what is the Magnus White and Safer Streets for Everyone Act?

Speaker 3

Sure. Well, Magnus White was a 17-year-old competitive mountain biker and cyclocross rider. In fact, he was an international competitor. He was on his way to compete at the Worlds. And on his last practice, he was riding home in the shoulder of a road and a driver fell asleep and hit and killed him. That's why the bill is named Magnus White. What it would do would be to require new cars to have automatic emergency braking for cyclists and motorcyclists. So you may have seen the ads for automated emergency braking where there's a kid in the crosswalk and a driver looks away and the car stops on its own. That's what we want, but with that technology, it has to be tuned differently for different users. And because bicyclists use the road differently and are going at a different speed, they just need to have different tuning so that it would work with bicyclists and motorcyclists. The European Union has required it since 2022. So the same companies are making cars that have automatic emergency braking in Europe, but they're making cars here that don't.

Speaker 2

So is this AI powered stuff?

Speaker 3

It's not necessarily. It's a little bit different than when we talk about automated vehicles. I mean, this technology, and one of the big differences is automatic emergency braking. It's ripe. It works. It's been tested. You can sometimes buy it in a luxury package when you buy a new car, but it's not required. I would say the AI, it's still developing.

Speaker 2

So my question is, And maybe this goes back to the days when seatbelts were kind of in cars, and then it was mandated. Why would a manufacturer not want to put this in a car? That just is beyond me.

Speaker 3

Well, it could cost them a little bit more to put it in, and so maybe their car is less competitive. Or it could be that they can charge more for it as part of a luxury package now. What I will tell you is Subaru, BMW and Hyundai all have it in at least some of their cars that they're selling here as a standard piece.

Speaker 2

Maybe I need to buy a new Subaru, although I love mine. But mine doesn't, I'm sure mine doesn't have it. It's really, really old, but you know, I love the car. I'm not ready to give it up. But I'm also a driver who is so completely aware of cyclists, you know, that I'm not sure I would need it, although, you know, sometimes I get tired driving, too. So who needs to be contacted and by whom to say, we want to see the Magnus White and Safer Streets Act, you know, put into action?

Speaker 3

So that Energy and Commerce Committee in the House of Representatives is voting next week. So if you look up your member of Congress on their website, it will say what committees they're on. And if it says energy and commerce, you absolutely want to reach out. But even if it doesn't, it's still worth it because we just, we want to create that buzz. We want offices to hear about it. We want to get co-sponsors. If you go to [bikeleague.org](http://bikeleague.org) slash take action, we have an action alert there. So you can send something to your member of Congress there.

Speaker 2

Yeah, the Bike League website has so many resources and we will absolutely repeat it several times during our conversation because everything we're going to talk about is available on the site. So when will the transportation bill actually come up for vote this year or for, you know, beyond marking up and doing all of that? Will it be after the summit?

Speaker 3

It will be. It's supposed to be done by September 30th this year. But if this the energy and commerce markup, whatever happens here, gets included in that whole bill.

Speaker 2

OK.

Speaker 3

So that's this is our our best chance to to push for it.

Speaker 2

OK. I want to talk a little bit about Transportation Secretary Duffy, who is, along with the president, not really in favor of anything that quote unquote interferes with cars. And I mean, they make no bones about it. We don't want to fund biking. We don't want to fund anything that doesn't have to do with roads, bridges, cars. So I think it's a problem. And I'm wondering, how you can surmount that that sort of negative talking about bicycles. Is there a way to do something about that, even though, you know, we're talking the top of the administration and a cabinet member? I don't know how you get over that or around that.

Speaker 3

Yeah, it's a it's been a real problem. We saw A number of grants that had already been awarded get canceled because they were biking and walking grants. Also, the new threat is USDOT is trying to pressure Washington, D.C. to take out bike lanes that already exist in our city. And I'm worried about that as someone who bikes on those bike lanes. but also on what that shows Congress. Because one of the biggest problems with the administration being anti-bike is that Congress, at least the majority party, the Republicans, are following that lead. And so that could also cause problems everywhere in the country. If they say, oh, the administration wants to take out bike lanes, maybe we shouldn't fund them.

Speaker 2

Let me take a moment to reintroduce you, and then I want to talk about the Bike Summit, because it's a place where we can actually make our voices heard loudly. We're speaking with Karen Whitaker. She's the Deputy Executive Director of the League of American Bicyclists. We will give you all kinds of ways to contact the League, and maybe you actually want to go to the Summit. Let's talk about the Bike Summit. It's coming up. When is it? I mean, the mere act of going up to the hill, which is what we would say, is just phenomenal to see all these people with their little bike pins, and they go into their legislators' offices, and they actually have an ask. Explain the Bike Summit, how it works, and what the delegates look like and all of that, and who can attend?

Speaker 3

Sure. So the National Bike Summit is March 24th through 26th. It's the largest gathering of bike advocates in the country, and we do it every year. And so it's both a conference and a lobby day. There's a conference on the Tuesday and the Thursday, and then the Wednesday, we go up to the hill. If you're interested in lobbying, and even if you're a little nervous, it's a great opportunity to do it for the first time, because we'll give you a lot of training ahead of time, we'll set up the meetings for you. There'll be a state coordinator for your state who can also help coach you. We'll make sure that you don't have to go alone to your first meeting if you don't want to, or any of your meetings if you don't want to. And it's an opportunity to say to your member of Congress and their staff, like, I came all the way to Washington because I care about biking. And here's why it matters to me and to our district and our community. And it really makes a difference. I

go up to the Hill all the time and I always hear, Oh, we had these people here in March. And they said the same thing, so it's super helpful.

Speaker 2

So the last time I was at the summit, and I think it was, I guess it was still in March, it was before the pandemic, and the pandemic made us go online, I know that, but then we brought it back in full. I can remember sitting in that auditorium listening, and we all sit there in our seats and we have our little, I was in Ohio, so I was sitting with the Ohio delegation. It is one of the most powerful things. I can remember meeting our senator at the time, Sherrod Brown. So gracious, wanted to hear what we had to say, had two aides with him. One was there to, if you brought him cookies, to take the cookies, which we didn't. But the other was there writing down everything you said. And we got, as I remember, we got a gracious letter back saying, Thank you for coming to my office and telling me about fill in the blank. So I think it makes a huge difference. People are really upset about how government works right now. And this is an opportunity to actually go to representative government. You are the government if you do this kind of stuff. Do you know who the speakers are yet this year?

Speaker 3

Yeah, we have a couple of speakers. We have Amy Walter, who's with the Cook Report. So she really follows politics and elections and what's going on. You might, if you watch the PBS News Hour, she's on that every Monday.

Speaker 2

Every Monday, along with NPR's Tamara Keith.

Speaker 3

Right.

Speaker 2

Yeah.

Speaker 3

Oh yeah, I watch it every week, all the time. So she's going to be there. She's also a huge bicyclist.

Speaker 2

Oh, I didn't know that.

Speaker 3

Ride with her, yes, yeah. And then we have Rodney Ellis, who is a county commissioner from Texas. He used to be in the State House. And he has done some amazing things

for biking in Texas. And I think so he can talk about what it's like to work on these issues in a hostile environment, in what can be a hostile political environment. You know, we're looking forward to having both of them. We'll have the chair of the Congressional Bike Caucus will be there. Mike Thompson, who's from California, who's the one who introduced me to Amy Walter. Yeah, so we have a lot of great folks. We're going to have a lot of really interesting sessions looking at economic benefits of biking and how to collect that data and create that. A lot on bike education. So You can see the agenda if you go to [bikeleague.org](http://bikeleague.org) and under Events, pick National Bike Summit, and you can see what's happening there.

Speaker 2

So I think there are so many things that we can do, and we feel so helpless sometimes, you know, that terrible things are happening. People are being-- I mean, the statistics about both biking and walking are just beyond horrific. And so this is an opportunity for people to actually make a difference. You don't have to be a bike advocate, meaning belonging to either an advocacy organization. You can be anybody to go to the summit, right?

Speaker 3

Absolutely. And we have a lot of people that come who work in on health issues or care deeply about health who are coming because they want to see more physical activity, ways to make it easy for people to get out and move around. We have some people from local governments or a lot of university folks who come.

Speaker 2

Is there anything that's going to be spoken about when it comes to e-bikes or electric vehicles.

Speaker 3

Yes. Yeah, we do have a session on e-bikes and what the next step is to separate out what are e-bikes from vehicles we call e-motos, vehicles that look like bikes but can go a lot faster. We actually have a bill in Congress that would require the consumer product protection. I'm getting it's CPSC. I forget exactly what it means. But to say, hey, you need to update your definition of what an e-bike is and you need to make it illegal to sell to call something an e-bike that's not.

Speaker 2

Oh, that's interesting. That's a really good idea. You have that class one, two, three thing. And I think it's very confusing to a lot of people. You know, we we find really fast e-bikes on trails, for example, that are super dangerous. Or they go flying down the street and people think it's a bicycle and it gives us a bad reputation.

Speaker 3

Yeah, absolutely. And what we've seen is local governments or some states just wanting to ban e-bikes.

Speaker 2

Right.

Speaker 3

When the product that they are really concerned about isn't an e-bike.

Speaker 2

There are a couple of sort of draconian bills that states are trying to pass about. you know, registering bikes and making them pay a lot of money and not letting them even on any streets whatsoever. There's one, I think, going on in Iowa right now that's being talked about that's just insane. And you know, that anything at 25, I think any street over 25 miles an hour, you're not going to be allowed to ride your bike. I don't think it's going to go anywhere. But just the idea that somebody put it out there is really concerning.

Speaker 3

I think we have a confluence of things where we have an administration that has been very negative about it, as well as this, the introduction of these e-motos that we're getting pushed on all sides. The good news is thanks to the Iowa Bicycle Caucus or Iowa Bicycle Coalition and some others that Iowa bill has been dropped. It's good. So that is great. We saw a really bad e-bike bill in New Jersey recently that did pass that requires license, registration, and insurance. And it also messes up the three-class system. The league is working with some of the local advocates, with the People for Bikes, which is the industry, and others to try to fight back, make amendments, figure out what we can do about that New Jersey bill, because we don't want to see more of those bills.

Speaker 2

So that's an interesting point. one I hadn't thought about, and that is the bike league is available to help organizations and areas of the country who need help in these situations. So contacting you for other things is possible.

Speaker 3

Yeah, absolutely. Give us a call. We can. tell you what we've seen around the country, maybe get you in touch with advocates in a different state that we're able to push back so that we can learn from each other.

Speaker 2

Okay. Well, we've been speaking with Karen Whitaker. She is the Deputy Executive Director of the League of American Bicyclists. About a month and a half ago, we spoke with the Executive Director, Bill Nesper, just about the league and about the fact that the

league depends on us to keep it operating. So we were looking at, yeah, we did it in November because I do every November, I do nonprofits in the industry. And the league is a nonprofit, but it works for all of us. So I really, one more time, I'd like you to tell people how to contact people and how they can make sure that they get to this energy and commerce committee.

Speaker 3

If you go to [bikeleague.org/takeaction](https://bikeleague.org/takeaction), that will get you to the action alert. You can also e-mail me directly. I'm [caron@bikeleague.org](mailto:caron@bikeleague.org).

Speaker 2

Awesome. Well, Karen, it's always good to catch up with you. You know, it's not always good news, but I think that my listeners especially are willing to push that button. and I'm hoping that some of them will go to the summit this year. I don't think I'm going to be able to make it. I wish I could, but I will be watching and will reach out. I'm actually going to reach out to Amy Walter. I had no idea she was a cyclist, but I really like the way she thinks, and I do like the Cook Political Report. So thank you. That's a nice little lead. I hope you have a great 2026 and we'll get in touch again. I want to know how it's going as we get closer to the transportation bill in September. Thank you.

Speaker 3

Okay. Can I mention one more thing?

Speaker 2

You can mention anything you want, of course.

Speaker 3

I also just want to let folks know that if they go to [keepamericaactive.org](https://keepamericaactive.org), we worked with a coalition of biking and walking groups to push back on this idea that bicycling isn't in the federal interest and it shouldn't be in the transportation bill. And we got 1,100 signers on that letter. So we got a lot of organizations, some elected officials, a number of businesses. And if you go to that website, you can see the partners, you can download the letter. That's another thing that you can send to your member of Congress and say, hey, I really support this letter and hope that you're doing something. And since you're in Ohio, I want to give a shout out to Bike Cleveland. They did an amazing job getting a bunch of signers on that. And your senator, Senator Hosted, is on the transportation committee in the Senate. So if he can hear from folks and you can share that letter, That would be super helpful.

Speaker 2

Yeah, it's interesting. We also have a good mayor here in Cleveland, which is Cuyahoga County, who's doing some really good things. And by Cleveland, Jacob Van Sickle has just been an amazing executive director since he was elected. I don't even remember

how many years ago. He was such a young man then, and he's so polished today and has done some great work here. So yes, thank you for shouting him out. I think he will be delighted.

Speaker 3

Yeah, he's done some excellent work at the federal level too.

Speaker 2

Yes. I know he'll be at the summit. [KeepAmericaActive.org](https://www.KeepAmericaActive.org). Sign that letter and make sure that it goes to Congress. Thank you so much, Karen. I know you're busy and getting ready for the summit, and we will stay in touch.

Speaker 3

All right. Thank you.

Speaker 2

My thanks to Aaron Whitaker for taking time to speak with me today. Please log on to [bikeleague.org](https://bikeleague.org) forward slash take action and make your voice heard. You can make a difference. Also, if you have any interest in the National Bike Summit, you can learn more and register at [bikeleague.org](https://bikeleague.org). This is a sure way our voices can be heard by those who make the decisions. Let's take a short break, and when we return, we'll speak with award-winning author and freelance journalist, Andy McGrath, about his new book, *Unstoppable*. You're listening to *The Outspoken Cyclist*. We'll be right back. We are back on *The Outspoken Cyclist*. I'm your host, Diane Jenks. Andy McGrath's career as an author pretty much began with an award-winning book, Tom Simpson, *Bird on the Wire*, which won the William Hills Sports Book of the Year Award in 2017. He's also a former editor of *Roll Your Magazine*, worked at *Cycling Weekly* and *Cycle Sport*, and has written on cycling for *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph*, and *Financial Times*. His new book, *Unstoppable*, is the first biography of the cycling sensation Tadi Pagaccia. Deeply and carefully researched, Andy covers the champion and his development over the years from Tadi's beginnings as a small child in Slovenia to his meteoric rise as the four-time winner of the Tour de France. Hi, Andy. Welcome to *The Outspoken Cyclist*. Thanks for joining me on the show today. How's London?

Speaker 4

Hi, Dan. Great to be here. It's not as cold as Cleveland, that's for sure.

Speaker 2

Yeah, I feel like we are in the Arctic, actually. And, you know, it's been a really, really rough winter, but we're getting towards spring. We're actually going to see something above freezing this coming week. So you've written a really interesting book. *Unstoppable*. What a great title. It's so true. It's like nothing's going to stop this guy, not

even a train. So tell us a little bit about yourself and your journalism background. You've won some awards. You are you were an editor of Royure. Tell us some more.

Speaker 4

Sure. So I'm a triplet. So I was born the same day as my two sisters, which, you know, you don't meet many triplets, do you?

Speaker 2

Wait, you actually are a triplet?

Speaker 4

Yeah, yeah. All three within five minutes. My poor mother.

Speaker 2

That is so cool.

Speaker 4

Yeah, it's pretty rare, isn't it? So yeah, I don't normally start there, but it's nice to mention. That's my fun fact, you know, doesn't have any bearing on my journalism, of course. But anyway, you know, I got into cycling in the Lance Armstrong days. Over 20 years ago, as a teenager here in London, got on my bike, realized I wasn't going to be a Tour de France rider or anything close to that. But luckily, writing was my passion. It's what I've always been good at. And I ended up working for numerous publications here, Cycling Weekly. I went straight out of university, joined them, and that was my education as a journalist, really. And yeah, I've covered most Tours de France for the last 17 years. As you say, I went to Ruleur. I was editor there for a long stretch. I just love pro cycling. I love writing and interviewing cyclists, but people in that environment, you know, to be honest, it's a people that make me tick more than say bike tech. That kind of leaves me a bit cold sometimes. I just see bikes as bikes or like nice light wheels as nice light wheels. But whereas people are so much more varied to me, which might annoy some of your listeners. But anyway, and yeah, I was very, very lucky. My first book was a biography of Tom Simpson, the British pioneering road racer who kind of lived fast, died young. He was the first Brit to wear the yellow jersey and Tour de France. And I was fortunate that that won the William Hill Sports Book of the Year prize. No pressure after that.

Speaker 2

All pressure.

Speaker 4

Yeah, all pressure, yeah. And I've had a few books published since then. One about Frank Vandenbroek, who was a Belgian cyclist who lived fast, died young. So I thought

with Pagacci, it was time to change the record and actually write about someone who was alive for a change.

Speaker 2

And hopefully does not die young.

Speaker 4

Yes, touch wood. I think so far, so good for him.

Speaker 2

No kidding. I think really good. And it's good for all of us, too. I think he's just a breath of fresh air in our sport. I think it's interesting that your first foray into books, you won this award. And so now, as you say, no pressure into continuing. What brought you to Pogacha? This is-- by the way, I want to say something about our listeners liking bikes and not people so much I am a people I'm a biography autobiography that is what I like to read and write about and so I think a lot of my listeners do too although of course DI too I mean what else right so uh for me that is not true I I like steel bikes spoke wheels and um and clipless pedals okay let's move on so um What made you write a story about Pogacha right now? It is not a real biography as you sat down and wrote it with him. It wasn't an autobiography.

Speaker 4

Well, it's not an authorized biography, you know, it's not an autobiography that's, you know, first person in his voice. But it is a real biography, you know, like kind of I've gone and talked to around about 50 people who are close to him, which took, you know, a fair really, really a lot of work, you know, and, and the reason is because I kind of suppose he's a bit enigmatic in some ways that he'd won, he's won four Tours de France, and this is the first book written about him. And I knew there were untold stories. I knew there were unplumbed, you know, depths to his personality to him as a kind of bike racer. And I wanted to be the one you know, to tell those stories, to get to the bottom of what makes him such a special champion. And in doing so, you're kind of also telling the story of the last five years, 10 years in pro cycling and even his team, you know, his team wrote really nothing until he joined. They were mid-table in the World Tour, you know, and he's helped to transform their fortunes. So yeah, like a lot of strands coming from Pogaca, but he's the main figure. And I just think at its core, it's a really fascinating story of the most unassuming kid from a little town in Slovenia, which some of your listeners won't know quite where Slovenia is, but it has borders to Italy, Austria, Hungary, I think maybe Croatia too. So it's in that bit of Europe. And it's one of the most beautiful mountainous countries in Europe. I hitchhiked through there when I was 18 on a university trip. And there was just a peak at every horizon. And I told myself, I've got to come back here. And it took almost 20 years till I was writing this book, actually. But it's well worth a visit with your bike as well.

Speaker 2

Let me reintroduce you. We're speaking with Andy McGrath. He's the author of this new book about Tadi Pigacha, *Unstoppable*, a biography of the amazing young rider. And he is a young rider. It's amazing what he's done in a short period of time. What kinds of things do you know about Tadi Pigacha that we might not know?

Speaker 4

Well, let's have a think. He was an underdog for a long time. Some sporting talents whether it's cycling or American football kind of basketball they're good when they're young and they're always good you know they're always superstars not the case for Tade you know quite the opposite you know he was a late developer he was very small I think he finished last in his first race um okay he was like an eight-year-old racing 10 or 10 or 11 year olds but even in in Slovenia which is not the biggest country by long stretch He he wasn't the best, you know, teenager for a long time. He didn't have a great sprint finish. So one of his friends and teammates would often beat him. So I kind of feel like some of his growing pains or, you know, difficulties actually happened outside of the spotlight. We kind of know him as this Tour de France beast, you know, fully formed adult. But it was not a guarantee he'd even make it to the Tour de France, you know, but what happened with him is that he got the right coaching and had the right, you know, physical developments at the perfect time. And, and he was a willing vessel, you know, he kind of, he doesn't make the same mistake twice as what one of his coaches, his first coach told me, actually. He learns very quickly and what people might not know is that he's, he has a kind of competitive beast in him. Like there's, there's a nice story that if he made a mistake in a race, he would get to finish he'd lean his bike carefully up up against the you know team van and then unleash a kind of volley of curse words at himself not at um other teammates you know blaming himself um because you know he does exude this calmness it's very calm relaxed you know nature even in the biggest bike race in the world but People should know that he still has that drive to win. You need that kind of inner toughness and that inner firepower. And that comes out very occasionally, publicly too, with him.

Speaker 2

Yeah, you have to have that kind of drive to do the kind of things he's done over the years. And yet he seems like a really gracious young man. Is he as amiable as he seems?

Speaker 4

He is pretty amiable. He's he's well brought up by his parents. You know, one was a teacher, one worked in a chair factory designing chairs. And they taught him, you know, a lot of, you know, good ex Yugoslavian values, because that's what the country used to be until the early nineties. Yugoslavia that have stuck with him. I sat in a lot of press conferences with Tade. I've done interviews with Tade. He has a good good sense of

humor, but he has an incredible sense of kind of self-control. Like he has a press manager, but I would say most of the time he doesn't need to be there because he can, what's the word? Yeah, he can, yeah, control himself very well. But occasionally he isn't so gracious. You know, sometimes when he loses, very occasionally, like there was a tour of Flanders where he was dropping the F-bomb at rival immediately after the race. But again, like that story I just told, he was really angry at himself for completely messing up the sprint. Not so much angry at this other person. It just came out in that way. But I find that quite reassuring, you know, to see his true colors, you know, that even Pogacha gets furious sometimes on camera.

Speaker 2

I think that's a good thing. You know, it's healthy. It is healthy. And it would be unhealthy not to have that fire in his belly to make him the kind of winner that he is. So I had a question about motivation. Do you know what actually motivates Toddy Pagaccia?

Speaker 4

Well, I don't think it's necessarily records. You know, he's so close to equaling several men as a five-time Tour de France winner. and he's getting closer to Eddie Merckx's monument record, you know, but he kind of always rebuffs comparisons to other people, let alone Merckx, you know, but it's inevitable people are going to make that comparison. One of the other good things about Pogaccia is that he kind of has seen cycling as a game for a long time, you know, since one of his coaches, Andre Hauptman, he used to train them in kind of a gamified style, like it wasn't so structured he'd be like you know sprint hard up this hill recover over the next and go hard over uh over the next one but he's kept that um even in pro cycling when there's so much more riding on it financially pressure wise so I think what motivates him is this kind of lightness that He wants to win every monument. He doesn't want to be restricted by what's happened before, you know, like normally Tour de France winners don't do the cobblestone classics, Paris-Roubaix, Tour of Flanders. Why would you want to wreck your season maybe getting barged by an 80 kilo big Belgian guy? Like it's too risky, right? I think there's a bit of a contrarian in kind of Pogacha that he wants to show that he can do anything. And so far, he's doing a really good job of that, and that's motivating him. But just crossing the line first is a very addictive kind of drug that he's still taking, you know, the last five, six years. That winning addiction is working well for him, motivating him further, I think.

Speaker 2

Yeah, you brought up the D word. And there always is going to be speculation that he is doping in one way or another, but he seems to be a really clean kid.

Speaker 4

Yeah, like I know cycling history. I am not going to promise anything, but on and off the record, teammates and rivals had nothing bad to say about him in that aspect, you

know? Yeah, like I... Hope we don't have anything to worry about, let's put it that way. But we still want to rely on kind of testing and everything else, for sure.

Speaker 2

Right. So I have a question about Tutty's sort of impact on cycling itself. It's been a long time since we've had somebody like him at the front of the peloton. Do you think he's elevating the sport in a way that beyond Europe, beyond the small, and I have to call it niche here in the United States, we don't have a huge European following for bike racing. Like we did during the Armstrong era until, of course, Armstrong imploded. But it did change the way we looked at cycling. You think Tadi Pigachak can have that kind of effect on bike racing worldwide?

Speaker 4

I think it's a good question. And I think we're already seeing the limits, unfortunately. What he's doing is incredible and pretty much unprecedented. You know, Eddie Merck's, the talent pool wasn't so deep or international. The margins weren't quite so fine. But to be honest with you, I, I think, you know, winning so many races is a limiting factor that, you know, people might, might tune in every year and see him winning by two or three minutes and kind of turn off sometimes, you know, casual potential fans. Like, we're already, you know, converts, aren't we, to cycling? We aren't the ones who need to be convinced. Like, it's the ones on the outside that I kind of worry about. Then there's his nationality. Like, I honestly think if he was called Tim Parker and he came from California, it would be a different level of superstardom. And he'd already have a night contract and he'd already have shoes you know like Michael Jordan did and all the rest of it you see what I mean yeah I do through no fault of his own whatsoever just the sports marketing and publicity mechanism coming from Slovenia is is not doing him any favors although ironically I think it helped keep him under the radar in terms of pressure until he won his first Tour de France uh nearly six years ago yeah there's pros and cons basically like We the converts know that it's exceptional and it's a joy to watch. But the ones on the outside, I think it could leave them cold because it's like a full one conclusion, you know, like the Chicago Bulls winning three or four NBA titles in a row. Like that's not great either, is it? Like, so what I'm saying is maybe, maybe we could do with a, with a closer rivalry this year, you know?

Speaker 2

Is there somebody who can compete with him this year that you're seeing? I'm watching Biniam Garmai doing some nice things in the early racing.

Speaker 4

I think Garmai is a contender for the green jersey. Like, he's a great sprinter. He's a great sprinter, but I think he would struggle in the mountains compared to Pogacha. There's a Belgian guy called Remco Avenopole, who's just as prodigious as Pogacha. And I think he's just signed for a new team, Red Bull. who have a lot of money. And I

think they'll get him closer to competing with Pogacha. Plus he's a little bit younger than Pogacha, not by much, but I would find that quite interesting. You know, he could be the man to really push him.

Speaker 2

He's a time trialist too, right?

Speaker 4

Yeah, he's a world time trial champion. You know, he beat Pogacha by two minutes last year in the World Championships. So yeah, he's serious.

Speaker 2

Do you see Toddy? Coming to the US for any racing, there's going to be some new racing here finally. And then of course, we have the Olympics in 28.

Speaker 4

I think, you know, the LA Olympics in two and a half years time that is on his bingo card, as we call it in the UK here on his bucket list. Like he wants a gold medal, barring accident or illness, he'll be there. As for as a US racing. There aren't so many pro ones anymore, which is a real shame. You know, there's no Tour California, Utah, Colorado. When I was growing up, Tour Georgia was there. I would struggle to see him going there like he's, this year, like he's raced the Canadian World Tour races in Quebec and Montreal. But there's such a dearth of, you know, pro-American races and they would need, I think they would probably need an appearance fee to really attract him. Yeah. Because they're not the top level of cycling. They're not world tour.

Speaker 2

Right.

Speaker 4

Those factors would probably combine to ensure-- unfortunately, for US fans, he probably ain't going to be there this season.

Speaker 2

Too bad. We'd love to see him here. The other option, of course, is get yourself to Europe. Let's tell listeners-- I mean, we didn't talk a whole lot about the book because I want them to read it.

Speaker 4

No spoilers, yeah.

Speaker 2

I mean, there's so much in terms of references and sources, and a lot of books you could read in addition to this. And it's got a wonderful list of wins and placings, and not too many photos, which is good. I mean, it's real reading, and I enjoy that. I'm a reader. I would like my listeners to put this on their shelves. I think this is a good book for them. There aren't too many Well, first of all, this is the first one about Tadi Bagotcha, and you might as well have it on your shelf. And I want to know if you have anything else to say, not about the book so much, but about the subject matter, about this young man that would compel people to know more about him.

Speaker 4

Well, hmm. I just think he's a one off. He's the most exciting cyclist the most people have ever seen and it's quite easy to under appreciate that whether you're a casual fan like I just mentioned or for more experienced fans like I know that when he retires there won't be there won't be another rider like this okay so easy to say that but I genuinely think in terms of his ability his psychology his maturity his longevity there's no one like that and it was really interesting for me to explore all the reasons behind those things, you know, the actual, the building blocks of why he is a modern champion like no other. You don't get many chances in life to do deep dives on anyone, you know, your parents let alone a great cycling champion like this. So it was kind of a like privilege. And yeah, I just want people to not take Pagacia for granted because once he's gone, there's going to be a real hole left in the sport. I just hope this book, you know, fills a lot of people's curiosities, you know, when it comes to, yes, for gacha, but also modern cycling.

Speaker 2

I appreciate that. We've been speaking with Andy McGrath. His book, Unstoppable, about Tutty Pagacha, is available. It is a Bloomsbury book. We love Bloomsbury. They're one of my favorite publishing houses. They do great things for cycling. Where can people get the book? Is it available at all the usual places?

Speaker 4

Yes, your local Barnes and Noble, as well as the organization owned by Jeff Bezos. Thank you very much for.

Speaker 2

Couching it up to that.

Speaker 4

Yes, yes, casually like that indeed. Very intentional on my part. And, you know, any other good online or even better online retailer, you know, it should be there.

Speaker 2

And if you have a local bike shop that doesn't carry it, ask them. They'll order it. Everybody has an account with Bloomsbury, I am sure. We love to support local bike

shop, or sorry, bookshops. Did I say bike shop? I meant bookstores. If you have a local bookstore, I mean, they are coming back a little bit here. They are coming back, which is a good thing. Well, Andy, thank you so much for talking with me today. We will look forward to seeing what Toddy does this year. I can't imagine him not doing wonderful things. And thank you for writing this book. I appreciate it.

Speaker 4

Thanks for having me on and your thoughtful questions there. A pleasure.

Speaker 2

Take care. My thanks to Andy McGrath for joining me on the show today. I really enjoyed our conversation and appreciate his thoughtful commentary. The book, Tati Pagacha, Unstoppable, is available at all the usual places. It's a great read. I highly recommend it, and maybe you need it on your cycling bookshelf. My thanks to you for tuning in today. I hope you enjoyed the show. Remember that you can find photos, links, and a written transcript of every episode at [outspokencyclist.com](http://outspokencyclist.com). You can also download the podcast as well as leave a comment there too. Follow us on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube, and check out my Substack for extended commentary on this show and other random Diane thoughts. Subscribe to the podcast on your favorite app so you never miss an episode. And please don't forget about Radiothon. Log on to [wjcu.org](http://wjcu.org) and pledge your support. It's yet another way you can make a difference. If you live in Northeast Ohio, I hope you're staying warm. I guess it's still indoor trainer time, Meanwhile, until next time, here's hoping that damn groundhog was wrong. Bye-bye.

Speaker 1

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