



channel mastery

#170: Rob DeMartini, CEO of USA Cycling offers insight into
the long-term strategy of the organization
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- Kristin: Welcome back everybody to another episode of the Channel Mastery podcast. I'm absolutely delighted today to introduce Rob DeMartini to you today, who is the CEO of USA Cycling and somebody I have been trying to get on this podcast for a while. Welcome Rob. It is great to have you here today.
- Rob: It's great to be here and I appreciate the chance. If I'd known you were chasing me down, we'd have done it sooner.
- Kristin: Oh thanks. Well, I'm so excited to share your insights and kind of your journey with starting with USA cycling back in 2019, correct
- Rob: I started in March of 2019. Yep.
- Kristin: And boy, a lot has evolved during that time. There was already a lot happening prior to that with USA Cycling, but before we get into that today, let's talk a little bit about your background and what made you decide to raise your hand and take that leadership role at USA cycling?
- Rob: Well, I'd had a chance to work in large corporations for most of my career and spent 20 plus years in fast moving consumer goods with Procter and Gamble and Gillette. And then I spent the most recent 12 years in the sneaker and footwear and apparel business. And I really love the outdoor space. My lifestyle is that way. And I figured out that when you're working on and selling the widgets you love it makes the day go even faster. So when I left New Balance, I knew that about it, but I also knew I wanted to try something different. And it's just one of those things about being in the right place at the right time. I got a call from a head hunter who had been hired by the USEC board to find the CEO. And he was calling me to, to say did I know anybody that might want to do that? And it was not yet public that I was going to leave New Balance. And I said, give me a week, I'll call you back. I can think of one name that might, and I put my name in the hat.
- Kristin: That's awesome. So you went from new balance to USA cycling, obviously you must love cycling in addition to running any kind of background there that you can share in terms

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of like, is it just something that you love to do or did you have any kind of competitive background in cycling?

Rob: No competitive background and the little bit I've done competitive since I joined proves that that was the right choice. But I did, you know, it's kind of a roundabout way. I, when I was at New Balance, we had a growth initiative in Europe and I was trying to figure out how to get the brand growing. And I couldn't afford traditional advertising and marketing campaigns across, you know, 35 European countries. But I had seen what Garmin had done by attaching themselves to a world tour team. And I knew the crossover between runners and bikers was very high. So Doug Ellis and Jonathan and Matt Johnson came to me and we put a small sponsorship deal in place for New Balance where we became the off bike apparel of the bike team, which people said they didn't even know what that was. But I said, look wear my stuff around the pits, wear my stuff on the podium and the recognized we're not going to go into the bike shoe or bike clothing market. Cause it was just too many established competitors. And that led to an 11 year sponsorship where we kept growing. It got me closer to the sport. I had started riding just a little bit for fun because running gets harder as you get older.

I liked it, but I had no idea what was involved. And once I got kind of inside the velvet rope at a world tour team and realized how much strategy and teamwork and whatnot, I started to get hooked like a lot of people. And then that's where the interest came from.

Kristin: It is quite an addiction. And I have to say, I definitely have noticed the off bike apparel, sponsorship and footwear sponsorship, you know, that you have with ET education. And I think they have a new name this year too. Forgive me for not...

Rob: They do have a new sponsor, but that it's still the team. Yep. Yeah.

Kristin: And they just, they've done an incredible job with visibility and also with expanding the value equation around a world tour team with some of the adventure races that they've done. And I understand they have even more on the horizon. Maybe even from a mountain bike perspective with some of the new writers that they have. So just out of curiosity, was the partnership that you had for the off bike sponsorship, anything that might've influenced some of the adventure racing that we've seen from the team and just really successful video content?

Rob: I don't think so. I think it'd be unfair to the hard work that Mary has done with that team. I think that's really all of them, but we certainly, you know, she, and I knew each other from her running days when she was with the New York Road Runners. So we've chronicled our, our collective learning in the, in the biking market and realize that there's a lot of undeveloped brand value that can be harnessed from these world tour teams. And, you know, I think at the root of it, the fundamental, you know, world tour team model, it doesn't work very well. And so we got to figure out a way to get brands, more

value in teams, more money if they're going to compete in this very complex, very expensive sport.

Kristin: Yep. I totally agree. And the other thing I was going to ask you about that is, as we're seeing you know, I, I read a ton about, I follow all the UCI and I read everything. That's kinda, my thing is, is following those teams. And, and now that we have events, it's just, couldn't be happier. Right. but one thing I have heard is Jonathan Vaughters talk a lot about the future of competitive cycling in the United States. And he's talked a lot about mass start events and, you know, really trying to humanize the sport more so. And I think it's more like bringing it down to an amateur level or a way for, for people like us to visualize ourselves in it. Can you speak to that at all in terms of like how that might dovetail in with your view around USA cycling's future?

Rob: I can, and I want to underline that these are my opinions and I'm only two years into this. So I got a lot to learn and JV has got a whole career here, so I don't want to challenge what he knows, but I do think that he's onto something, you know, what I saw from the outside, and then in my first two years here, the space between the elite athletes and the, every man and every woman has gotten too wide and there's not enough relate-ability to these immensely talented riders at the top. And, you know, one example that really stuck in my mind, I did Dirty Kanza two years ago, I did the small version, 50 miles to be clear, I didn't do 200, but we were hanging around the end. When Colin Sutherland won it Strickland won it.

And then the EFI team came in right behind him. I think it was Alex House and Laughlin Taylor Finney. And my point was at a, at a world tour event. Those guys are whisked away from the fans immediately. They got a pee in a cup. They can't walk because they're so exhausted. And they're, I don't mean this the wrong way, but they're pampered. And there's no way to relate to them. Here at DK two hours after these guys just finished 12 hours of riding, they're standing around in their dirty kits, drinking beers with fans and the sport needs more of that because, you know Colin was signing little kids helmets that, that doesn't go on at a world tour event. So I think the sport's got to figure out how to make these athletes, how to humanize them, kind of make them relatable. Yes, they are freakishly talented and unbelievably committed. And most of us are never going to get anywhere near that, but we still want to know they just love riding bikes and not enough of that comes through, in my opinion, in some of the world tour racing.

Kristin: And I have to say because Life Time dirt events is a valued Verde client. Obviously it's now called Unbound gravel and it looks like we're actually going to host that event this year, knock on everything around me. That's good. We're recording this and, you know, right around mid ish, March 2021. I just also have to say the video component as this is a show about channels and evolution and nurturing consumers, the video component that EF has, I think a lot of teams are following their lead on that. The Leadville event was

amazing. I mean, I've, I'm a huge fan of that. Anybody who listens to this podcast knows seeing those the EF writers out there training, you know, a couple of days prior to the race on the race course. And then watching the video after it just was an incredible, and they all the, all the athletes said the same thing that you're saying, Rob is they actually enjoyed having that interaction and understanding the meaning of these events to the amateur journey manager, any woman rider, and just like the full-on, you know, family and friend commitment, the way that the entire year is focused on this event basically, cause it takes a village for one of us, you know, full-time workers to actually pull one of these events off, but having them on course was a special treat and seeing them in the gymnasium and Leadville just like everyone else at the meeting was so spectacular.

And if we can see more of that, I guarantee you, you know, that is going to only help things. I think your hunch is right on.

Rob: I think just, you know, again, they're very special athletes and they're so much better than the average bear, but they're still people and they got into this because it was fun. And I think the more the fans see that the more affinity they'll have for the sport and for the athletes.

Kristin: Oh, absolutely. I mean, I immediately, you know, they all are funny, you know, I love their, their personalities, the way that they capture them on video. I just, everything about it. I thought they nailed. So let's talk a little bit about the evolution of USA cycling. So you're in about two years in, obviously you went the spin cycle, like we all did last year, we're still kind of coming out of it. Let's talk a little bit about what you see as kind of the runway, because obviously everybody has a strong opinion about USA cycling, but I personally believe in life and in business what's happened in the past, does not dictate our future. And here we are coming out of some serious disruption. We have a new leader who comes from outside the fishbowl, but is super fluent with our people and the passion behind the membership and wanting to identify with an organization like USA cycling, let's hear from you, like what is the actual like vision that you're hoping to bring for the future of USA cycling?

Rob: Well let me start with this, that, that, I'm glad I didn't know everything I know today when I took the job, I had a sense, but I didn't know the depth, but on a, on a positive note, you know, we get a lot of help from, from members and past members through social media and, and some of it's constructive and some of it's outright hostile, and I'm amazed at the way the, the cycling industry chooses to speak to each other, but I've I'm confident enough in where we're going, that I take that, that messaging as passion and it's much better than people not caring. You know, when we announced the ODA camp a few months ago, just about it, I mean, I've learned one thing about cycling is everything we do is broken, but don't change anything perfect. But you know, on a serious note, we think there's a much bigger role for the NGB to play.

We have a very specific, you know, chartered by Congress, objective and mission to produce world-class that class athletes and to have the country represent well in the sport of cycling like every other NGB. And, and for a long time, we've done that with relative success. I mean, considering the money we have versus British cycling, I'm very proud of the record that, that my predecessors have created and that Jim Miller have created at the Olympic level.

All that said, that's a tiny slice of the cycling world. And I see us being able to play a much bigger role from the center. We have a new brand position that Matt Heitmann is going to be launching here soon called We Champion Cycling. And the idea is those words are picked very carefully because we own champions in this country. But the bigger idea is that everybody can be a champion, whether you're just getting on a bike, whether you're riding with your family, whether you're competing in a local event, or whether you're competing at an elite level.

And our role is to make the pie bigger. And that will help our mission. Because if the, if the pie is bigger, there's more to choose from. You know what this sport has. Unlike some of the more successful NGBs. When I got here, I went and looked at all the NGBs and said, what, what sports do Americans win the best? Is there a reason why the Dutch always beat us? You know, is there, is there some sort of scientific reason? No, it's a cultural one, but the sports that win the most events in the U S are track and field and swimming, and in both cases, you have youth infrastructure that captures these kids very early. Cycling really isn't that way. It's really more of an adult sport. It's a kid activity, but competition and again, NICA, and there's, there's exceptions to this all over the place, but there is no little league. There is no USA swimming at five years old and you're in the system. So we've got to figure out how to build some of those programs and bridges to get kids in sooner, and then keep them here longer. So We Champion is about growing cycling and having the country perform better because there are more kids doing it.

Kristin: I love that. And I think it's such an opportune time for so many reasons, but the two primary would be, nobody can deny the power of Nika. It's incredible. And Steve Matous has been a guest on the podcast a couple of times. And the first time he had just started in his role was already making an impact. And then we had them back again toward the end of the year, last year. And he was just reflecting on kind of again, going through the spin cycle, but really seeing like the incredible growth of demand and also the inclusivity, right? That, that NICA is bringing into the sport. I feel like that alone is a great driver to your vision, but then looking at COVID and the number of new cyclists or people who have fallen back in love with cycling. Let's talk a little bit about that. Cause we have talked at length about catching and collecting that newcomer across all of our focal markets, but let's talk specifically about cycling.

Rob: Well, I think there's no question it's happening and I see it from two fronts. I see the growth that Steve and the team at NICA are getting. I see other good youth programs all around the country, and then we're starting Mari Holden. One of our coaches is pioneering a new program called let's ride and let's ride our free to all commerce programs to try to get kids started riding bikes. And it's not at all race oriented. It's about a little bit of skill, a little bit of etiquette and a little bit of orientation to that. This is a sport. I mean, most kids today think the bike is what you ride to get to your sport. They don't realize there's a sport here. And you know, we need those kids to see, they have a choice here. So let's ride as a great new program or kicking off. And I see it from another angle. I own bike shop here in park city, and the people that are walking in so many of them are brand new to the sport, or many of them haven't pulled a bike out of their garage in 15 years and they're bringing them in and saying, Hey, can you get this thing running? And we're saying, heck yeah, we can glad to see you out there. And the sport needs to do more of that. Oh my gosh.

Kristin: Does it ever, I almost feel like the tail's wagging the dog a little bit in that regard, in terms of consumers almost forcing the hand of the way things have always been done in cycling in terms of, you know, there's so many newcomers coming into shops that they almost have to be evolving their approach. And, you know, I've even seen shops are, are staffing up. They're choosing to staff up with people that don't come from the systemic, like inner world of cycling. They're, they're now hiring people that might represent more of the people who are walking in the door. So I feel like that is changing. But it is like you said, everything's broken, but don't change anything that is so perfect. I mean, that literally, that is so perfect, but at the same time, another one I like is things move really slowly until one day they don't. And I think we saw a lot of those days last year.

Rob: So I think we're definitely at those days right now,

Kristin: The great accelerator keeps dropping the clutch. So let's talk a little bit about how you're planning on you know, we talked about the big vision. Let's talk about how you're trying to drive this. Maybe more in the short term, how, I mean, I, I am, you know, have held a license. I receive your communication. I even at one point became a Volkswagen person because I was like, Hey, I'm a cyclist, I better buy a Volkswagen. Right? So like the identity and the like the emotional attachment, I think is there, but obviously you're really looking now to open that portal and everybody's been online. So there must be a digital component. Plus we have Mr. Heitman coming into the building. Like, can you give us a little bit of a insight in terms of some of the channel strategies or maybe content strategies you're hoping will really drive this forward?

Rob: Yeah, it's a great question. And let me backup and just set up a premise that I think is important to understand. You know, for we're a hundred year old organization actually last year, we're going to celebrate this year since last year was a bit of a do-over, but you know, we've, we've evolved a little through that time, but through most of it, we have

been an authority and a compliance driven organization. And if you think about our product, I think it's, it's, it's so clear to see that most, we think about it today as membership, but most of our customers think about it as a license, which is really code for attacks. Okay. You know, I'm a, I've been a brand guy, my whole career, and I've always been blown away by the brands that can drive much affinity that you will go get it tattooed on your body.

Okay. Iron man, Marine Corps, Harley Davidson. Those, those are communities, not authorities. Marines is probably both in terms to them, but, but you know, these are, we've never been there. We have been a taxing organization. We provide a lot of value, and separately I do want to come back and talk about what's a hundred dollars race, license worth, but we've been selling a product that is compliance-based. And I think, unfortunately, what that means over time is you become a little less customer centric. And what I mean by that is, you know, this analogy, my team hates when I say this, but if your driver's license expires tomorrow and you go into the Durango department of motor vehicles and the line is an hour and a half long, you know what, you're going to stand in it because you need that license tomorrow and you don't have a separate, you can't go to the other guy.

Well, we've come from that area. And, and my, my staff works. They are committed to this sport. They work incredibly hard, but over time you do get a little bit insensitive to what was that experience like? And it gets in the way of creating a community because we're seen as a compliance-based, tax-based product.

We got to make a shift. We're going to continue to sell licenses, but I want a different kind of member. I want somebody who wants to put that logo in their back window as a sense of pride. And in fairness, Kristen, we're not there today. We are not there today. I'm not naive about this. I got a good sense of the reputation we've earned, but I also have a very clear path on how we earn a better one. And so let's ride the ODA programs, all of our free juniors, we just made juniors free this year.

In a year when our revenue fell 50%, we took a big segment of our paying customers and said, we no longer want your money. Now why? Why? Because I don't want the license to be a barrier to a 15 year old to go race. And here very selfishly. I want him as a member, the rest of his life, life, not just the next three years. So we moved to free youth. We're going to do more to invest in. We went into a financial agreement to financially support NICA, where we had been fighting for reasons that neither Steve or I can remember, but they were there. So we're going to invest to try to create an affinity. We're going to create a \$20 membership that is simply a financial supporter that will come with modest benefits, but we're going to be a mission-driven organization that happens to put, you know, to spit racers out of the top to win this country metals.

Kristin: That's awesome. So mission driven from I liked the way that you put that it's an authority and, and compliance in the rear view mirror to mission-driven in the future, which is going to become super important to sponsors. Okay. I feel like there are endemic sponsors and there are broad sponsors, and there are sponsors who maybe have looked at cycling in the past, in different disciplines. And there are sponsors who might be looking at it now and just salivating, because there are so many people raising their hand, wanting to be cyclists either again or in a larger way. The bike equaling therapy for so many last year, et cetera, it's like such a great way to emotionally connect with the right consumer. So how are you planning on carrying that mission-driven positioning to grow your sponsorship to fund these programs?

Rob: There's a few different steps we have to do in there. The first is we've got to come out with this new We Champion brand position and, and we got to live up to it. So our user experience today is not very good. It's tough, or it is, you know, the way our website works is not contemporary by any stretch. You know, it's one of the reasons why Matt's here. You know, I conceptually from my past, I know what to do, but technically I don't have that depth of knowledge that he has. So, you know, we've got to, we've got to figure out if you want to donate \$20 to support bike, racing, to support youth, to win Olympic medals, whatever your hot button is, we need to make that easy. And we need to be transparent with what we do with the money.

So we have completely opened up the books. You're not going to have to read a 990, 18 months later to figure out what are we doing with the money we post every budget year where our money comes from and where it's going to go. And we create dialogue that says, if you think we're putting it in the wrong places, we want to hear from you. We have some very specific responsibilities to do, but we also have a little bit of discretionary investment to make. And, you know, we're what we're saying is we're going to put it into youth programming. So I mean, I think that's the first step. The second is we've got to start communicating that like a contemporary business and brand, not like an authority. I mean, you're, you're a communications expert. You read our output. It is long-winded specific and technical and has no clickbait in it whatsoever. We got to figure out how to be more interesting. We have great athletes stories to tell. We have great personal struggle stories to tell. We have great. We do good stories to tell, but we are not yet where I want us to be in telling those stories. And, you know, the use of social media, the use of our email platforms. Again, it's why Matt's here to help lead us. He's got a proven track record on the subject and in the space. And I think you're going to see that change quickly.

Kristin: I can't wait to see what he does there. I think there's a, as you said, it's definitely, there's a lot of stories to be told. Let's talk about the kind of the, I think it's, so I'm, I see the bicycle industry and the bicycle community as two different things. And I, I really gravitate to using community because I feel like it is more inclusive and it is a wider

portal to bring in cyclists of all different, you know, wherever they are in the spectrum of their you know, love relationship with the bike road racing has definitely not been growing. And then obviously we have other adventure oriented such as gravel growing a ton. We've seen a lot of the vocal minority or majority talking a lot about, you know, please don't put a governing body on gravel, et cetera. Let's talk a little bit about USA cycling's approach to just the categories, because ultimately I feel like that's how things get fragmented and that's how we get weaker. What's your take on, on moving forward there in terms of like giving the people what they want with their events, and then also helping the, the actual like trade or the industry behind cycling with some of the stalwart categories that are real, that are really important to us, especially on the Olympic level, such as road racing?

Rob: Yep. Let, let me break that into two subjects. I think, I think the gravel thing alone deserves an a clear explanation from our point of view. And I have invested in trying to create that. So I'll come back to that second. The first is so funny. You asked me about the disciplines because today when you come and register with us, because we have have this authoritative rule and guideline background, we ask you as a new cyclist, what your discipline is? This drives me nuts. Why do I want you to declare? I mean, as a biker and as a bike shop owner, I got something for every flavor you want. I don't want you to say I'm a roadie or a mountain bike. I want you to say I'm a cyclist. You know, I may primarily ride one format or another partly that's because of where you live, what's available to you and what you like.

So this idea of, of encouraging subdivision, I'm against, I'm trying to pull it out of all of our engagement stuff. If you want to know about mountain biking versus cross great, but we're about all disciplines. So that's the first, and you're going to see us continue to try to communicate that way. Where when you buy a license, it's not going to be designated as a cross license or a road license. It's a license. You can go to any event, but I think that's the first step. You know, the second is kind of cross pollination and I, this is a bad analogy, but there's a reason why rappers and country music stores work together, right? They're trying to cross over and reach each other's markets and interest new people in the, and I think the book, the sports should be doing it. And, you know, in some ways that's what the EF Chronicle videos have been doing when Laughlin's out riding across, you know, roads and no roads across England.

You know, that's, that's really not about racing at all. It's about just, you know, athletic struggle and challenge and all that. So I think we got to keep doing more stuff like that on the subject of gravel and just as background you, I want your audience to know that we've approached this carefully and with respect and before COVID happened, we gathered Tim Johnson and I gathered 15 or so of the top gravel promoters, event organizers and athletes down in Bentonville. And just said, let's talk about where is there common opportunity. We're not rolling in here, requiring you to have licenses and governing over you. But I do think that a world championship under UCI direction is

going to happen. So what I said is, look, I want you 15 where, you know, these are the, the, the stalwarts of gravel, all of the big names were there.

I said, I want you guys to have a seat at the table with me, or supporting us, but I don't want to sit there by myself and decide what's good for you. I'm not naive enough to think I'm ever going to get that right. I want you at the table. And quite frankly, some of them said, we don't want to be at the table. And I said, that's okay. I respect it. But please don't think that that's going to, as the sport matures, it's going to take some shape and UCI has got an interest and we have an interest not to steal what you've built, but to recognize the consumer's moving and we have to go with them. So we have, you know, after that first one in, I think it was actually in March or February of last year, you know, obviously COVID happened and we stopped traveling anywhere, but I gathered about 10 of those people, again, four more times and said, if there's going to be a world championship, should the first one be in the United States where gravel by far is the most mature? And they said, yeah, it should. And I said, things like, should your events be qualifiers? You know, I'm open to, yes, I'm open to no. And quite frankly, most of them said, no, we don't want to do that. And I said, okay, I respect that. But also recognize that if UCI comes to me and says, we want you to host the world championship, we're going to probably do it. I mean, how do you not do that? So we're trying to find a way forward is very respectful of what, you know, they've all changed names, so I'm going to get them wrong, but what DK and mid south and SBT and, and, and Vermont Overland and all these, the Grasshopper series, these guys, all had something to say, and we did our best to listen, to respect it.

And whatever happens will be shaped by either the input they gave us are going to continue to give us. Or in essence, some of them said, no, thank you, go on without us. So I don't know what's going to happen there, but I don't think you can deny that when you have proteins showing up to unsanctioned, gravel events, it's a sign of maturity. You know, I'll go one step further. The year we were talking about when he said it was in Kansas you know, UCI told us to say, don't let the pros ride it. And we said, we're not going to do that. I mean, slap my hand if you want, but we're not going to do that. That's not our place. It's not even our race. So I mean, but, but it's, it continues to mature and it's good for the sport.

Kristin: It is. And I think that we are not in the same era in terms of how people enroll with brands or categories as with mountain biking. Like that was a really long time ago. Things are really different. The institutions that govern have changed a lot, the consumer or cyclist has changed a lot. So I think we all need to remain open-minded and kudos for you for sitting down with your audience and not dictating where it should go. It sounds like you, you held court and you'll continue to do that. And I guess on that note, it might be a perfect opportunity to talk about what is a hundred dollars race license worth in your vision going forward?

Rob: I'm glad you brought it up. And I think, I think I asked to come back to this because, you know, internally my organization's very defensive about the value of it. And because the outside world says, you're an insurance middleman, and, you know, you send the triple pleated khaki fund suckers to take all the fun out of the event that is so shorthand to what we do. What a hundred dollars today gets you is a rule book that is been thought through and make sense, 1200 officials who volunteer their time to get out there and do the right thing. Do some of them take it too far, sometimes? I'm sure that happens, but there's no way the sports better without them out there, you get results and rankings, you get safety protocol. There's no doubt that USA cycling, sponsored events are safer. Are the safest races available?

We absolutely believe that when COVID went crazy in the middle of March and April last year, we were immediately publishing how to get back to racing. What do we need to do to make this sport as safe, the sports safer, and I'm not taken away from any individual organizers out there. They do a great job, but they can't bring the strength that we can bring of a staff of 50 people thinking about this, who have done this for years, you know, and the last thing on insurance, I cannot stress this enough. We are the biggest buyer in the market. We buy the best product available, and then we provide it to the organizer at a subsidized rate. So I get into this debate a lot with organizers. If you want to go buy something cheaper, there's no question. You can do that. Okay. We've had major events, unsanctioned events come to us and we've talked them into letting us look at their policy.

And Kristin, we have found cases where the one exception is bike racing. So, so, you know, insurance is one of those things that if you don't know what you're buying, it's easy to buy cheap. What we have is an excellent product that will make sure that, that that event director is his or her house is never going to be in jeopardy, right? We're going to stand behind them and fight for what we think is right. The fans will be covered. The writers will be covered. We know what we're doing in the insurance market. I don't that my team does. And we're providing an excellent product. And then this year alone, we are subsidizing the cost with a million dollars, a membership money to deliver that to organizers for less than, than they could buy it on the open market. That's not a middleman, right? That's what a hundred bucks gets you.

Kristin: Right. And I think it's really important to say that, because again, we cannot look in the rear view mirror around what is needed or what you are providing today and going forward. And I think that that's why it's really important to have you on the podcast here today and why it will be so important to see the test and learn environment that you and Matt Heitmann are going to be bringing forward in terms of like being able to position this message in ways to like enroll with it in a different way than we ever have seen in the past. I personally have, you know, I started racing really late in life and, and it was really intimidating for me to like, know what, what box I should be checking and what I

should be doing. I just wanted to be known as a cyclist. And like that alone feels like relief.

And then also knowing that you're investing in youth cycling and the infrastructure and mindset that that will bring from parents and from people who are going to be attending those events and supporting those events will equal better, you know, better bicycle safety, better bicycle infrastructure. And ideally like people are out and enjoying a natural environment. They're more likely to fall in love with it and protect it. Like all of that feels great to me. And I think brands are going to want to get behind that, whether they're, you know, from the quote industry or, or whether they're broader market brands. So I realized there might be a little bit of a, you know, you're in a gap job being, you haven't actually stuck the landing yet, but you've left the other side. So you're in the middle and falling. Right. and I have no, no doubt, like with the experience that you're surrounding yourself with and the passion internally, I know several people who work with you or who are volunteering on, on boards that you've set up.

It there's, I mean, inclusivity is, is, is front and center. As I said, youth is front and center and just really a different approach going forward. I think if there was a way we could see this happening with other facets of the government, people would be so amazed and you're actually like creating a lot of change around what people have seen in impossible stagnated organization. Like how could this ever change? You've already started that. And I think that a you're hiring the right folks and you're focusing on the right things and ultimately listening to the cyclist. That's really what it comes down to. And this podcast is all about that, whether it's you know, whatever kind of consumer it is that you're focusing on, they're always the north star.

Rob: There's no question that, you know, we've got to continue to get a lot better at listening. And I've tried to you know, I've tried to take those strongest voices and instead of dismiss their input, bring them to the table. You know, I just, I had coffee this morning with Marty Jemison, who's not somebody I knew, but lives here in Park City. And I got to know him because he had made a pretty derogatory kind of post when the ODA information came out. And I reached out and said, can I talk to you and hear what it is you're unhappy or uncomfortable with? And, you know, it led to a great discussion this morning about why don't we have an alumni association, you know, everybody that puts on the national team Jersey, if you get to that level, you know, you've got a point of view and you've got an experience that we can learn from.

And one of the challenges about the Olympic effort, if you will, is that, you know, athletics is difficult. It almost never ends on your timing. You know, it's, I reminded Marty it's a little bit like being a CEO. It never really ends the way you want it to not in total control at the end. And, you know, we, that creates some negative noise in the system. I accept that. And I don't think I know how to change it. What I do know is we can put programs in place that when that day comes, when you either take off or worse

are asked to take off that Jersey, you're still part of the family. You know, let's create an alumni. You know, people have so much affinity for the college they went to, but they don't have that same affinity for governing bodies or the Olympic movement.

And why, I just think the movement has not done a good enough job to keep people part of the family and that when, you know, there's a sense, and I don't think this is meant to be that way, but when we take that Jersey off, we're done with you. Good luck. You're on your own. And this sport in particular of the demands we put on teens and 20 year olds, that's unfair because you've made huge sacrifices to compete at that level. You've probably delayed college. You've probably delayed any kind of commercially valuable work experience to be great at what you're doing. We need to be there to help a little bit more even after the racing is done.

Kristin: Agreed. And I also think it gives us a chance as the journey men and journey women cyclists to actually look up to these heroes in a way, instead of wondering, well, where are they? You know I think that's actually really powerful and, and they have stories to share that, that I think younger, highly committed athletes can relate with and there could be some, you know, mentorship opportunities there who knows. I mean, that's actually a really cool thing. I can't believe that isn't in place already either.

Rob: There's definitely a huge mentorship. And especially this sport that's gone through its own challenges. There are people that can speak to experiences that young kids need to hear today.

Kristin: Oh, absolutely. Right. For sure. Well, this has been it's so funny. I had a, a line of questions and I don't know that we hit, we hit a couple of them, but I love the direction that we took here. I feel incredibly honored that we were able to, you know, have you on at this point in your journey at USA cycling, because I feel like you're really poised on, you know, just looking at the future and you're ready to kind of, you know, take action instead of just like absorbing and, and researching. You're now to the point where you're executing these ideas. And obviously the testing and learning will be there, but I just wanted to say thank you for, for raising your hand and wanting to be the leader and also for just, you know, having the guts to create change and to listen to the cyclists out there, whether they're in the industry, whether they're ex athletes, whether they're running pro teams, it seems like you've had a lot of conversations. You're an excellent listener. And I really am honored that we were able to have you on the show here today. Rob, is there anything else that I neglected to ask that you wanted to touch on before we wrap up?

Rob: No, I think you know, first of all, I appreciate you giving me the platform to speak to your audience and any time you want access to me or any of our leaders, you have it. So all you gotta do is call and, and we'll be glad to produce, you know, in good times and bad, we're by no means perfect. We have a lot of work to do, and we've got to

get better at it. And every day we make a mistake, but we're trying to learn quickly and accommodate our members. And most importantly, the new members, people that are just coming into the sport, that's where our future is. And I love, I love working with the industry to try to get them.

Kristin: And we definitely are all about trying to catch and collect that newcomer. So maybe we can come up with a show in the future about that. As we are at the, you know, what is traditionally the kickoff to the cycling season, April is right around the corner. So I think it will be a very different kickoff, a very different year this year. I very much look forward to cheering from the sidelines and seeing how you lead the organization. And I look forward to having you back.

Rob: All right, Kristin. Thank you very much.

Kristin: Thank you.