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Did You Know?

The First American to Win the Tour de France

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Everybody knows that Greg LeMond was the first American to win a Tour de France. 1986. It was epic. Before LeMond, an American could not win a Tour. But he did. He showed them all. LeMond. The first American. Right? Sorry, but this is wrong!

The first American to win a Tour de France was Marianne Martin. A woman from the mid-west. She won the Tour de France Feminin' in 1984 – two years before LeMond. Marianne Martin was the first American to ride down the Champs-Élysées in yellow. Marianne Martin was the first American to stand on the podium on the final day of a Tour as a champion – not Greg LeMond.

Few Americans are likely to be aware of Marianne Martin's incredible achievement. She came from nowhere as part of a ragtag American team and won. I was following cycling in 1986 and vividly remember LeMond's victory. Yet, I had no idea that Marianne Martin even existed until yesterday when I was catching up on my subscription to a very excellent magazine.

The fact that a passionate cycling fan and self-proclaimed aficionado of the sport, like me, was unaware of Marianne Martin's victory compelled this week's post.

At this point you might wonder why a bicycling lawyer is writing about this topic at all. It has nothing to do with bicycling or the law, right? Fair question. Representing bicyclists, runners and athletes of any kind is a passion for me, but a great deal of my professional time is also spent practicing in other areas of the law, such as Labor and Employment. As a Labor and Employment attorney, I am adamant that all people must be treated fairly and equally. Marianne Martin's story compels me because it reflects an issue that has existed in sport – parity – or rather the lack thereof.

Despite its many troubles, the men's Tour is big business today. Yes, there are tales of teams folding each year leaving riders unpaid or left without contracts. Yet, most pro tour level men's teams have large sponsors and massive budgets. There is media coverage from nearly every country. Television crews in helicopters and on motorcycles follow the riders through every stage. Each team has at least two team cars that follow the riders for every mile of this greatest of the three week Grand Tours. The teams have doctors, nutritionists, mechanics, trainers and Soigneurs on staff at all times. Big business. Big money.

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Martin's Tour was starkly different in 1984 from what men's cycling is today. She purchased her own bicycle and paid for her own travel. I am not sure that the women's professional races are a lot better today. Perhaps they are even a bit worse. Although it was shorter, the Tour de France Feminin' raced along the same course and was held at the same time as the men's race between 1984 and 1989. As such, it enjoyed popularity in Europe. But, its popularity slowly declined when this format changed. It has been shortened several times and was even canceled for a year in 2004. Its UCI rating was lowered and it has been run with a reduced field on several occasions. So far as I can tell, the race's final iteration was canceled in or about 2009 and, today, France does not even have a major women's stage race. The steady decline of women's cycling is sad to see and, surely, there is a long way to go to achieve parity.

Yet, how do we fix it? In the United States there are laws, such as Title IX, prohibiting gender-based discrimination in the educational setting. Title IX is intended, in part, to ensure equal treatment and opportunity for women's sports by educational institutions that receive federal funding. Other countries have anti-discrimination laws as well but these laws do not always help for a truly international sport, like cycling.

How to fix it? There may not be a quick and easy solution. For my part, I continue to watch women and men race. I have particularly enjoyed watching women's cyclocross this year. I also encourage young people, especially my own daughter, to ride, or run, or follow her interest in sport. Hopefully it will take. If enough of us do the same, perhaps one day another woman will join Marianne Martin and Greg LeMond as the only Americans to win the Tour de France.

Until next time (*when I will tell the story of how bicycling saved my life*).

Do you need legal counsel?



Bicyclists have unique rights and duties under the New York Vehicle and Traffic law. As such, bicycling accidents are not exactly the same as the average automobile accident or negligence claim and they should be evaluated thoughtfully and handled in light of these differences. Resolving a bicycling accident claim can be an arduous and challenging undertaking that requires dauntless advocacy. After all, at the end of the day no one hires the litigation attorney to be a nice guy. Success requires setting realistic goals, intelligent tactics, meticulous preparation and seasoned, confident counsel. My experience representing both plaintiffs and defendants in and out of the courtroom along with my ferocious advocacy have made me a sought-after attorney for corporations and individuals alike. I assist my clients with determining their needs and goals. Together we generate strategies designed to achieve the best outcomes possible – all the while keeping the economics of litigation in mind.

How can I be of service to you?



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