

Track Racing Anyone?

In 1967 an eighteen year old bicycle racer from Toronto came to Winnipeg to race on the only cement Velodrome in Canada. The rider was Jocelyn Lovell, and the event was the Pan-Am Games. In the ten mile race he struggled and finished at the back of the pack, but the next day he was entered for the kilometer time trial, racing against the most experienced kilo riders from both North and South America. Jocelyn finished in fourth position, missing the bronze medal by 78/100 of a second, and setting a new Canadian record for the distance in 1 minute and 12.81 seconds. Jocelyn went on to become Canadian track champion on numerous occasions as well as competing at the highest level in the World Championships, The Olympic Games and the Commonwealth Games. The speed and bike handling, which he had learned on the track, helped him in road races, and in a criterium he almost always came out as the winner. His career was cut short by a terrible accident in 1983, when he was hit by a truck. Finally the Winnipeg Velodrome was demolished as interest in track racing decreased, and the city wanted to make more room for the Polo Park shopping area.

Today track racing is enjoying a revival and we see riders from Western Canada making their marks on the world track racing scene, but Manitoba has no facility for this and aspiring track riders are forced to move out of the Province, or more often to the USA and Europe to take up their chosen sport. We would just love to have a new cement velodrome, or a wooden indoor track, somewhere in Manitoba, but at present that is almost impossible, both from the financial aspect and the fact that we have very few riders who have ever had the interest in track racing.

Here in Portage we are looking at the possibility of setting up a grass track for bicycle racing. This has been done in Ontario in the past, and a few years ago grass track racing was very popular with both riders and the public in England and Australia and other parts of the Commonwealth, where racing would be part of a local sports day or on a weekday evening at the local park. An oval track is marked out on a playing field and can be anywhere from 4 to 7 laps to the mile. The bikes are simple fixed wheel track bikes with racing handlebars, no brakes apart from the fixed cog, racing wheels with 700 x 28c tires, or studded cyclo-cross tires. A steel frame is recommended as the bike takes a lot of punishment on a grass track; such a bike is not expensive. It would be very little advantage to use carbon fiber frames and wheels, and the cost of a crash could be prohibitive. Races can vary from 1K to 10k in length with many variations of sprints, time trials, pursuits or even team races.

We would like to know how many of our current racers would be interested in this sort of a venture. We believe that both current road riders and cyclo-cross enthusiasts could enjoy this exciting and spectator friendly branch of the sport. Grass tracks have produced many riders who went on to excel on the velodrome and road; competition is fierce as a field of riders tries to be first around the last bend before the finishing line!

If you are interested or have any questions please contact John Palmer at jbpalmer@mymts.net and we can arrange to have a meeting with interested individuals to discuss this further. Believe me it is great fun!

Jp. 17/6/2011