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Grief, recriminations, then gold: How the wheel has turned for Cycling NZ

Theme:
Leadership



Co-authored by Dana Johannsen, Radio New Zealand

The stunning success of New Zealand's track cycling campaign followed grief at the death of one its athletes, public recriminations and efforts to put things right. Paris delivered a golden glow, but the sport isn't ready to declare itself "fixed".

New Zealand's Olympic cyclists had just arrived at Narita Airport the day after the closing ceremony of the Tokyo Games - that strange spectator-less spectacle of three years ago - when the awful news began to filter through.

Their friend and teammate, Olivia Podmore, had been found dead at her Cambridge flat in a suspected suicide. She was just 24.

The tragedy left Podmore's teammates, coaches and support staff at Cycling NZ shocked and bereft.

While members of the Tokyo Olympic team wrestled quietly with their grief in managed isolation on their return to New Zealand, outside Cycling NZ bosses were weathering a storm.

Podmore's death, which followed a concerning social media post in which she spoke of the pressure of high performance sport, prompted wave after wave of allegations from current and former athletes, coaches and parents about Cycling NZ's treatment of its athletes.

The treatment of Podmore, and in particular her role as a whistleblower in a 2018 inquiry into widespread leadership and cultural issues within Cycling NZ, also came under the microscope.

On day one of the Paris Olympic cycle, Cycling NZ was thrust into the middle of one of the biggest crises a sports organisation in this country has faced.

It would lead to a mass clear-out of staff, the loss of a major sponsor, and yet another damning inquiry into its high performance environment and the decision-making of its leaders.

A 'safer, healthier and more inclusive' environment for women

That all five medals were won by women at Paris is significant.

It represented a marked shift from the environment that Mike Heron KC and prominent academic Sarah Leberman investigated only three years earlier as part of an [independent inquiry](#) into Cycling NZ's high performance programme following Podmore's death.

The inquiry findings highlighted a programme where gender biases were prevalent.

"More needs to be done to meet the need and ensure equitable treatment and therefore opportunities for female cyclists," the 104-page report read.

The issue was exacerbated by the "overall male dominance" in the high performance programme, which the inquiry considered impacts on female performance and potential. The inquiry also found there was a lack of appropriate support and "inadequate provisions" for women's health.

Former NZOC boss Kereyn Smith was tasked with taking the 29 recommendations from the report and putting them into action. She finished up in her position as Cycling NZ's transformation director earlier this year, after completing all the action points the organisation had set down.

For Smith, it was a daunting task to be handed a 104-page document and convert those weighty words into tangible change.

She says she is most proud of the work that was done to make the environment "safer, healthier and more inclusive" for women.

[Read the full article here.](#)


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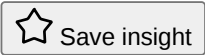
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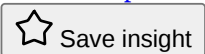
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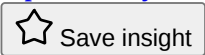
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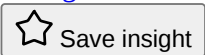
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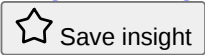
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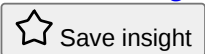
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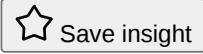
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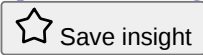
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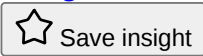
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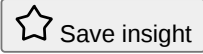
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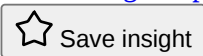


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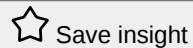
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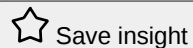


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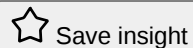


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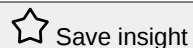
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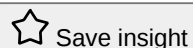
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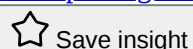
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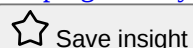
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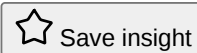
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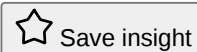
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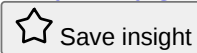
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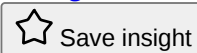
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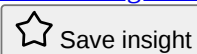
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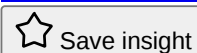
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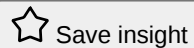
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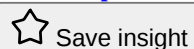
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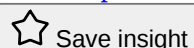
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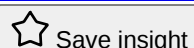
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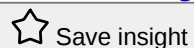


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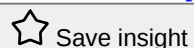


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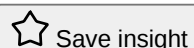
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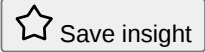
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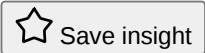
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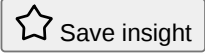
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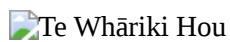
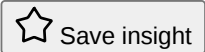
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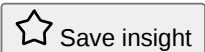
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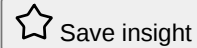
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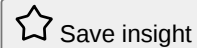
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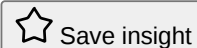


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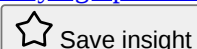
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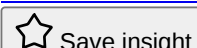
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