
From the 1860's to the 1980's: how it took over a century for women cyclists to enter the Olympic Games, and what happened next

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Résumé

Women have been competing in cycling for practically for as long as men, since 1868. In the late 1890s, a group of female professional cyclists in the United States were earning even more money from sponsorship deals than their male counterparts – until women were banned from cycling in the country for 50 years. Similar bans were also seen in Europe, and the development of the sport came to a standstill in the early 20th century. It was not until the 1950s that the Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) began to organize, among other things, its own world championships for women.

The idea of the inclusion of women's cycling in the Olympic program was first raised by the Finnish member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) Erik von Frenckell in 1953. The matter was discussed repeatedly by the IOC and the UCI during the 1960's and 1970's, but it was not until 1984 in Los Angeles that female cyclists were able to line up at the starting line of the Olympic Games on the Mission Viejo route, in front of hundreds of thousands of spectators.

In this presentation, I review the stages that preceded the granting of Olympic status to women's cycling, based on the IOC archives. I will also discuss what the Olympic status and the political power structures of sports meant for the women cyclists who participated in the Olympics, based on my oral history interviews with the women who represented the five top countries in Los Angeles: the United States, West Germany, Norway, Italy and France – all of which had distinctive cultures both in cycling and women's sports.

Mots-Clés: Women's cycling, Los Angeles 1984 Olympic Games, Oral history

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