



Transgender cyclist Austin Killips wins women's Tour of the Gila – next stop Olympics?

Description

Killips' name first came to wider attention in March, after being cited by former cyclo-cross champion Hannah Arensman in a Supreme Court filing explaining why she was retiring from the sport at 24. Arensman had lost out on a podium place to Killips in the national finals in December, later accusing her transgender opponent of repeatedly shoving her during the race – a claim Killips denied.

"I have decided to end my cycling career," Arensman said. "My sister and family sobbed as they watched a man finish in front of me, having witnessed several physical interactions with him during the race. I feel for young girls learning to compete, who no longer have a fair chance at being the new record-holders and champions in cycling because men want to compete in our division."

Amid the Killips controversy, Thompson, who came third at the women's Tour de France in 1986 and 1989, argued that the pattern was becoming more common. "These women are young, and there's a lot of bullying," she said. "They get cancelled, they get silenced, their jobs are threatened. They get put on the TERF [trans-exclusionary radical feminist] list. If they say anything, they are eviscerated. And so, instead of fighting this, they just walk away."

Killips is a candidate to make the US Olympic women's cycling team in Paris next summer, should the UCI, the global governing body, maintain its policy of allowing transgender riders to compete so long as they suppress their testosterone levels below 2.5 nanomoles per litre over a two-year period. The average testosterone level for women is between 0.5 and 2.4 nmol/l, while the British Journal of Sports Medicine has suggested that trans women are stronger and maintain better heart and lung capacity than women, even 14 years after taking hormone therapy.

"I expect Austin to win the Joe Martin Stage Race [in Arkansas] this month, then potentially to go on to the Tour de France Femmes and the Paris Olympics," Thompson said. "That's just common sense. After all the UCI races, the national championships, why not? The Olympics just aren't spoken about yet, because there would be a really big backlash."

With results rapidly improving, Killips is allowed to compete as a consequence of the UCI's liberal transgender policy, which stands starkly at odds with World Athletics' approach of banning all post-puberty males from the female category. It also comes in spite of sustained lobbying by female riders for an outright ban: last year, Marion Clignet, France's triple world champion, presented the UCI with a survey showing that 92 per cent did not agree with trans athletes racing in the women's peloton.

By Oliver Brown

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Date Created

05/04/2023