

# Bicycling in Colombia: The Development of a National Passion

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## Abstract

The introduction of the bicycle to Colombia in the 1890s provided a new method of transportation and quickly became the foundation of a new sport, road racing. Over the last fifty years, Colombian bikers have successfully competed in national and European bicycle races such as the Vuelta de Colombia, Giro de Italia, and the Tour de France. After reviewing current historiography on Colombian cycling, this essay traces the history of the bicycle's introduction into the country and explores the reasons why it has become, after fútbol, Colombia's most popular sport.

**Key Words:** sport historiography , cycling, Tour de France, ciclovía

## Resumen

La introducción de la bicicleta a Colombia en la década de 1890 proporcionó un nuevo método de Transporte y rápidamente se convirtió, en la fundación de un nuevo deporte, las carreras por carretera. Durante los últimos cincuenta años, los ciclistas colombianos han competido en carreras de ciclismo nacionales y europeas como la Vuelta de Colombia, el Giro de Italia y el Tour de Francia. Después de revisar la historiografía sobre ciclismo colombiano, este ensayo recorre la introducción de la bicicleta en el país y explora las razones por las que se ha convertido, después del fútbol, el deporte más popular de Colombia.

**Palabras claves:** historiografía de deporte, ciclismo, Tour de France, ciclovía

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It is a historical cliché to point out that Colombia does not fit the stereotypes and models conventionally used in discussions of Latin America. After all, as David Bushnell famously observed, “What is a Latin Americanist to do with a country where military dictators are almost unknown, the political left has been congenitally weak, and such phenomena as urbanization and industrialization never spawned a ‘populist’ movement of lasting consequence?” (Bushnell 1993, viii). Likewise in sports, Colombia is unique among Latin American countries in adopting competitive cycling as its passion second only to soccer.

At first glance, cycling would seem an odd choice for a country set squarely in the high Andean Cordillera. Only in the late twentieth century has the government built paved highways through these mountains, yet on almost any day one can see groups of intrepid Colombian cyclists tackling the roughest, steepest roads on their two-wheeled machines. Over the last fifty years, Colombian amateur and professional bikers have successfully competed in such renowned European bicycle races as the Giro de Italia and the Tour de France. After a review of the current state of historiography on Colombian cycling, the object of this essay is to trace the history of the introduction of the bicycle into Colombia and to explore the reasons why the population embraced this demanding activity in the mid-twentieth century with such phenomenal passion.

### 1. Historiography of Cycling in Colombia

Despite its importance in Colombian culture, the history of cycling has attracted scant scholarly attention. Until recently Colombian academics have regarded “sport” as a marginal field, subordinate to the weightier themes of politics and economics. In 1989 the editors of the six-volume *Nueva Historia de Colombia* (1983) included a chapter on “El deporte en Colombia,” in which Mike Forero offered a survey of various sports practiced by Colombians. Twenty years elapsed before Jorge Humberto Ruiz Patiño explored the development of sport, nation, and the state in Colombia during the first three decades of the 20th century in *La política del sport: Élite y deporte en la construcción de la nación colombiana, 1903-1925* (2010). In the absence of academic interest, sports journalists have supplied much of the information concerning Colombian cycling. For example, Matt Rendell, a British writer, has produced two important books, *Kings of the Mountain* (2002) and *Olympic Gangster: The Legend of José Beyaert: Cycling Champion, Fortune Hunter and Outlaw* (2009) and Mark Jenkins published, “How a Colombian Cycling Tradition changed the World,” (2015). The most recent addition in this category is Mauricio Silva Guzmán, *La leyenda de los escarabajos: 100 grandes momentos del ciclismo colombiano* (2017).

Since 2015, however, two important scholarly studies focusing specifically on cycling have appeared: In “Fervor y marginalidad de las ciclovilidades en Colombia (1950-1970),” (2016, 2: 49-67) O. I. Salazar discusses the introduction of bicycles to Colombia, the cycling fever motivated by Colombian road races, and the conflicts generated by cycle riding on the streets of the cities, while in “Race, Sports and Regionalism in the Construction of Colombian Nationalism” (Fernández L’Oeste, et. al (2015) Héctor Fernández L’Hoeste explains that in the twentieth century, Colombian regionalism tended to limit the popularity of a given sport. For example, cycling was a passion primarily in the mountainous departments of the country, while residents on the Atlantic coast were followers of boxing. He suggests that the entire nation did not embrace a single sport until the emergence of professional soccer teams in the last quarter of the century.

In 2017 Jorge Humberto Ruiz Patiño reviewed 16 texts dealing with Colombian sports (4 articles, 3 masters theses, 3 undergraduate theses, 3 books, two book chapters and one paper) and concluded that as a group, sports studies in Colombia either lack a solid conceptual base, or else they attempt to apply theories based on an insufficient factual basis. The situation, he argued, calls for new ways of representing the information in Colombia's cultural history. (Ruiz Patiño 2017, 43). In short, it would seem that Andrés Felipe Hernández's assessment written in 2011 remains valid: Colombian historians have undervalued the importance of sport (including cycling) "in spite of the fact that competitive practices of the body can be traced to times as early as those of political developments." (Hernández Acosta 2011, 24-44).

## 2. Arrival of Bicycles to Colombia

Vehicles for human transport that have two wheels and require balancing by the rider date back to the early 19th century. English, German, French, and U.S. companies contributed to successive technological developments of their design. By the 1860s Michaux et Cie, Compagnie Parisienne, Benon and other French firms used artisanal methods to produce bicycles in small numbers that had diagonal, single-piece frames made of wrought iron. These vehicles were known as velocipedes or "bone shakers" since the iron-banded wood wheels resulted in a bone-shaking experience for riders. Soon adaptations, including solid rubber tires and ball bearings, improved the ride. In the 1870s, technicians increased the size of the front wheel to create the so-called "high-bicycle" known in England. By 1884 tricycles were also in use, and both styles were popular among a small group of upper middle-class people in England, France and the United States. (Norcliffe 2001, 44).

In the 1880s the development of the "safety bicycle" transformed the machine from being a dangerous toy for sporting young men to an everyday transport tool for men and women of all ages. The "safety bicycle" known as the Rover featured a steerable front wheel that had significant castor, equally-sized wheels, and a chain drive to the rear wheel. The chain drive improved comfort and speed, as the drive was transferred to the non-steering rear wheel and allowed for smooth, relaxed, injury-free pedaling. The addition of the pneumatic bicycle tire developed in 1888 made for an even smoother ride on paved streets. Other technical changes reduced the bicycle's typical weight from about fifty to thirty-five pounds, and the vehicles also became more affordable. The Pope Manufacturing Company which mounted a bicycle exhibition at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1892 reduced the basic price for its model from \$150 to \$125 while others sold for even less. (Herlihy 2004, 251)

In the early 1890s the diamond frame pneumatic safety bicycle overtook all other cycles on the road, and the decade saw a "bicycle boom" that became known as the "golden age" of cycling. In 1891 North Americans alone purchased 150,000 bicycles effectively doubling the country's cycling population. The safety bicycle's impact on the female population cannot be over estimated as it provided women with unprecedented mobility and contributed to their larger participation in the lives of Western nations. As bicycles became safer and cheaper, more women had access to the personal freedom they embodied. Bicycling clubs for men and women spread across the United States and European countries, and the bicycle came to symbolize the New Woman of the late nineteenth century, especially in Britain and the U.S.

The new-found practicality of the bicycle suggested that average citizens would soon use bicycles for everyday errands, and their usefulness for delivering mail, police work, and even the military was ever

more promising. By the mid-1890s the center of manufacturing in the United States shifted to the Midwest: Chicago alone had twenty-five bicycle makers including the newcomer Arnold, Schwinn, and Company. Only when the depression of the late 1890s created a pale over the prospects of this new, vibrant industry, did the boom begin to fade. (Herlihy 2004, 263).

In Colombia the bicycle era began with the arrival of Henri Louis Duperly Desnoües, an Englishman of French descent, who was born in Kingston, Jamaica. Desnoües moved to Colombia in 1892 and opened a photography studio in Barranquilla that brought him fame and money. Soon after, he relocated in Bogotá where his firm, “Fotografía Inglesa de H. L. Duperly & Son,” produced magnificent pictures that fostered a growing clientele. At about the same time, his son Ernesto began importing bicycles, still known as “velocipedes,” first to Cartagena and then Bogotá. By 1894 Colombian newspapers were reporting that the bicycle’s popularity in Europe was catching on in Bogotá, and on July 22 of that year the first race of velocipedes took place with prizes for the winner. (Londoño Vega and Londoño Vélez 1989, 361).

Colombian men quickly embraced the bicycle. Its contribution to female emancipation was likewise significant, for as in Europe and the United States, the safety bicycle gave women unprecedented mobility. Although at first some Colombian journalists regarded bicycle riding as unsuitable feminine behavior, within a short time they were promoting the new sport as a healthy physical activity for women as well as an alternative for keeping young men from passing the summer frequenting bars. (“Escarabajos de dos ruedas” 2005). Since women could not cycle wearing the then-current fashion of voluminous, restrictive dress, the bicycle craze fed into a movement for so-called rational dress, or “bloomers” which helped liberate women from corsets, ankle-length skirts and other encumbering garments.

By 1896 sales of Columbia and Hartford brand bicycles were flourishing in the more populous Colombian cities. In July 1898 one hundred aficionados in Bucaramanga resolved to constitute the first organized bicycle club, the Sociedad Ciclista. Meanwhile in Bogotá, cyclists, encouraged by Guillermo Pignalosa, who later would become the director of the Federación Colombiana de Ciclismo, were competing in short races between the intersection of Calle 26 with Carrera 7, to the northern limit of Calle 63, in order to return by Carrera 13. Two *velódromos* (race tracks)—one in the Plaza de los Mártires and the other in the Quinta de la Magdalena— were built specifically for the use of cyclists. (Forero 1989, VI: 371). By February 1899, more than 600 bicycles were crossing Bogotá in all directions, and races were held on Saturdays and Sundays. During that year cyclists competed to celebrate Independence Day on July 20, and their regularly scheduled races at the Velódromo Central were successful notwithstanding the uncertainty that reigned in the city over persistent rumors that a civil war might erupt at any time. The racing season ended on August 20 with “the participation of elegant female cyclists who demonstrated an astonishing capacity for the sport.” On Sunday, September 3 the women cyclists were to be the guests of their male rivals for a “splendid trip” that was to end with a bicycle race from Bogotá to the Puente del Común, but the outbreak of the War of the Thousands Days forced cancelation of the event (“Escarabozos de dos ruedas” 2005). Not even this bloody civil war, that lasted from October 17, 1899 to June 1, 1903, diminished Colombian passion for the bicycle. Bicycle racing continued to be a blue-ribbon event in highland department capitals, towns, villages, and along the roads.

In 1896 the International Olympic Committee introduced cycling at the first Olympic Games in Athens, but in Europe and especially in France, the road race (as opposed to track racing) soon became the most popular manifestation of competitive sport.<sup>1</sup> These events were accessible to all, for the public could

gather along the roadside of the route and cheer along the cyclists as they streaked by. Reports of these races only increased Colombian enthusiasm.

### 3. Colombian “Sports” in the first half of the Twentieth Century

During the era known as the Conservative Republic (1903-1930) the Colombian government gradually developed policies regarding the relationship between sport and the state that reflected a strong class distinction. By the end of the War of the Thousand Days a new national bourgeoisie had emerged that participated in elite social clubs that encouraged the practice of various sports such as polo, tennis, golf, and shooting. In 1903 Congress reinforced the gulf between the bourgeois and the “*pueblo*” (popular class) by adopting Ley 39 de October 30, known as “La reforma Uribe Uribe,” which organized public instruction and called for the inclusion of physical education in elementary and secondary schools in order to improve student moral and physical wellbeing. The implication of this law was that “sport” would remain the exclusive practice of the elites while “physical education”—i.e. activities involving gymnastic exercises—would become part of the public school curriculum. In this way Ley 39 served to reinforce the distinction in Colombian society between the elite and the so-called “*pueblo*.” (Ruiz Patiño 2010, 128)

Further strengthening bourgeois prejudices about the poor in the first two decades of the twentieth century were popular beliefs concerning the supposed inferiority of non Caucasian peoples. A prominent supporter of these concepts was a Boyacense physician and Conservative leader, Miguel Jiménez López, who was deeply influenced by the ideas of Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, Herbert Spencer, and Social Darwinism. In 1917 Jiménez published a scholarly article in Paris in which he concluded that racial decay rendered Colombia’s chances of progress nil and that only if “his countrymen eventually lightened their skin through European immigration could Colombia avoid falling farther behind the most civilized nations.” (Henderson 2002, 85). Of course, there were those who disputed the racial decay theory, and in the 1920s the debate reached its height during a cycle of conferences on the “Problems of Race in Colombia” held in Bogotá’s Teatro Municipal. Evidently Congress found Jiménez López’s ideas the most convincing for in 1922 it adopted a law encouraging European immigration but prohibiting the immigration of Chinese, Hindus and Turks. (Henderson 2002, 86).

While the debate over eugenics was raging, Congress attempted to formulate a more coherent policy regarding sport by adopting of Law 80 of November 18, 1925—an effort that would include the entire population in a national project of physical culture, or in other words, to co-op for the state all private initiatives that were already promoting physical exercise. Law 80 incorporated gymnastics and calisthenics under the rubric of “physical education,” –activities deemed appropriate for teaching in colegios and the universities. Soccer, tennis, golf, and polo—activities already classed as “*deportes*”—would continue to be practiced primarily by the elites in sports clubs, colegios, and universities. Law 80 established national and departmental commissions of physical education that were instructed to organize athletic contests, develop sport fields, and encourage amateur athletes to take part in physical activities. Ruiz Patiño concludes that during the thirty years covered by his study, the meaning of “sport” changed from the “physical practice of high moralizing, hygienic and civilizing potential practiced by elites” to activities that were extended, at least by the law in 1925, to embrace all Colombians. (Ruiz Patiño 2010, 129).

In the years that followed, however, the government did not enforce Law 80, and unlike the 1950s populist government in Argentina under Juan Perón, the Liberal Revolution of the 1930s failed to modernize and democratize Colombia through sport. For example, in the *Juegos Nacionales* of 1928 only sportsmen belonging to social clubs, colegios, or sport clubs were allowed to participate. For most of the pre-WW II era, the majority of the population received no more than two years of primary education. The introduction of physical education in the public schools remained aspiration rather than reality, and the practice of organized sports on a national and international level continued to be the province of the elite. (Restrepo, “Prólogo” in Ruiz Patiño 2010, 17).

Essentially barred from participating in such team sports as soccer or basketball, the Colombian poplar classes (urban and rural) played traditional games such as *tejo*, an activity of pre-Columbian origins that is a little like North American “horseshoes.” To play, players throw a metal disc, the “tejo,” across a 20 meter alley to the target box. At the center of the box, a metal pipe is equipped with small targets or *mechas* that contain gunpowder. On impact with the tejo, the mechas explode loudly which signal a successful toss. (Ruiz Patiño 2017, 36). Playing tejo was a purely recreational amusement, but for young men born in the Atlantic coast departments boxing offered opportunities to win fame and fortune, while for poor youths born in the interior highland departments—Cundinamarca, Boyacá, Antioquia, and Valle del Cauca—reports of European cycling contests and access to a bicycle, awakened similar dreams that might be achieved by racing competitively. (Fernández L’Hoeste 2015, 87). To prove that long-distance cycling was possible in Colombia despite the almost non-existent roads, on November 30, 1929 fifteen riders participated in a two-day, two-stage race from Bogotá to Tunja and back (a distance of about 141 kilometers one way) sponsored by the newspaper, *El Espectador*. Rafael Borda won the contest with a time of 18 hours 19 minutes and 10 seconds, a feat that encouraged other would-be racers to attempt long distances. (Galvis 1997, 19-30).

**Departments and Principal Cities of Colombia**



#### 4. The Impact of European Road Racing

The Tour de France was the world's first national road race. Sponsored by the Paris newspaper *L'Auto*, it took place from July 1-19 in 1903. The competitors rode some 2,428 kilometers in six stages through difficult French terrain that passed through the mountain chains of the Pyrenees and the Alps. At the end of this grueling ordeal, Maurice Garin emerged as the winner. In 1909 the Italian newspaper *La Gazzetta dello Sport* organized a similar race, the Giro de Italia that proved to be equally successful. This competition covered 2,448 kilometers of Italian territory in eight stages and was won by Luis Ganna. Not to be outdone, in 1935 Spain inaugurated the Vuelta a España, but despite these rival competitions, the Tour de France, held annually (with the exception of the years during the two world wars) retained its status as the "Holy Grail" for aspiring bicycle racers. As historian David Herlihy writes: "Tales of heroic cyclists in the mountaintops fighting off their rivals and the elements quickly became part of popular lore." (Herlihy 2004, 385.) Such reports further motivated Colombians cyclists who were participating in shorter races between Bogotá and Tunja; Tunja and Bucaramanga; and Medellín and Sonsón, but not until the 1940's did they begin to call for a "Vuelta a Colombia" similar to the Tour de France.

In 1938 the Liberal government of President Alfonso López Pumarejo inaugurated the first *Juegos Deportivos Bolivarianos* to mark the 400th anniversary of the founding of Bogotá. This event, inspired by the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin, featured athletes in 14 different sports including road and track cycling. The outstanding Colombian cyclist in this contest was Marcos Gutiérrez, "certainly one of the precursors of competitive cycling on an international level." (Herlihy 2004, 385.)

In 1938, President López also issued Decreto 2216 creating the Asociación Colombiana de Ciclismo (Aciclismo) and charging it with organizing bicycle sports in the country. Aciclismo was first located in Cali but moved in 1950 to Bogotá amid plans to sponsor the first Vuelta de Colombia. (Forero 1989, IV: 372). In that year Colombians participated in the Juegos Centroamericanos y del Caribe de Guatemala, and in the 4,000 kilometer bicycle contest, the Colombian team led by Efraín Forero Treviño defeated teams from Cuba, Mexico and other countries. Born in Zipaquirá, Cundinamarca in 1931, Forero's early cycling successes won him the sobriquet of "the Indomitable Zipa," and he was to become the first of Colombia's cycling heroes.<sup>ii</sup> On mounting the victors' podium in Guatemala City and hearing the national anthem, Forero was deeply moved by the international prestige cycling had brought to Colombia. (Rendell 2002, 7.)

Forero's victory in the Juegos Centroamericanos y del Caribe encouraged other individuals interested in competitive cycling to think seriously about establishing a Vuelta a Colombia, but their dreams were stymied by the abysmal condition of the country's roads (many of which were barely passable on foot), and the unprecedented political violence that had broken out in 1948 after the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán.<sup>iii</sup> Notwithstanding these obstacles, Donald Raskin, an English athlete born in 1922 who had immigrated to Colombia with his family at the age of 12, proposed the idea to the leaders of Aciclismo who agreed to back the plan. To convince naysayers, Efraín Forero suggested a "trial run" between Bogotá and Manizales, a distance of some 241 kilometers. The success of this endeavor won the support of Pablo Camacho Montoya "Mirón", a sports reporter for the influential daily newspaper, *El Tiempo*, who proceeded

to persuade his editor-in-chief, Enrique Santos Castillo, that the newspaper should provide funds for the first Vuelta.

With *El Tiempo*'s sponsorship, 35 participants, equipped with heavy, clunky bicycles, assembled on Avenida Jiménez in Bogotá on January 5, 1951. The young men were generally from poor families, and their main objective in life was to escape poverty—to overcome their own limits by winning prizes to support their families. For them the race was a means of surviving. By winning the Vuelta or one of its stages, they hoped to gain access to patronage and find employment. (“Escarabajos de dos ruedas” 2005, 3).

The proposed race, divided into ten stages, covered 1,254 formidable kilometers along paths of sand, mud, and stone through Cundinamarca, Tolima, Viejo Caldas and Valle del Cauca. For fifteen days the “country was paralyzed listening to the details recounted with great emotion by Carlos Arturo Rueda C. over the Nueva Granada radio network.” The Vuelta cost 7,000 pesos and was an enormous success. On his arrival in Bogotá, Forero, the winner, who completed the race with a time of 45 hours 23 minutes and 8 seconds, was greeted by a huge, excited crowd shouting, “To France . . . Efraín Forero to France!” (Forero 1989, VI; 372).<sup>iv</sup>

By 1952 enthusiasm for the second Vuelta was enormous. Many patrons stepped forward, and the organizers invited European cyclists to participate alongside the Colombians in order to bring more prestige to the event. Among the guests was José Beyaert, a Frenchman who demonstrated experience and ability gained from competing in the European tours. Beyaert won the second Vuelta by a comfortable margin, but a Colombian, Ramón Hoyos Vallejo, the victor in the ninth stage that covered 169 kilometers between Cali and Sevilla, soon emerged as the foremost Colombian cyclist in the 1950s.

Ramón Hoyos Vallejo was born in Marinilla, Antioquia in 1932. He lived in the heroic epoch of Colombian cycling when the competitions covered difficult roads, and the cyclists surmounted manifold difficulties to reach their destination. He won his first Vuelta in 1953 earning the nickname “Escarabajo de la montaña” from sportscaster Carlos Arturo Rueda because of his climbing abilities, and later by extension all Colombian cyclists came to be identified as “los escarabajos.”<sup>v</sup>

Hoyos repeated his victories in the Vueltas of 1953, 1954, 1955, and 1956. During the 1955 race, another Bogotá daily newspaper, *El Espectador*, in an extraordinary coup, obtained exclusive permission to publish a biography of Hoyos written by Gabriel García Márquez who at that time was the newspaper's main investigative reporter.<sup>vi</sup> *El Espectador* printed the biography in 12 installments between June 27 and July 12. García Márquez's account turned Hoyos's victories into a “swashbuckling tale mixing tragedy and triumph” for by this time Hoyos's stature in the country was immense. As García Márquez observed:

Cycling has no specific patron saint. Each rider prays to the saint of his own devotion. In Antioquia's humble homes, many go further, exposing and illuminating, beside a holy image, a photograph of Ramon Hoyos, cut from the newspapers. (Rendell 2002, 47.)

A Spaniard, José Gómez del Moral, won the Vuelta in 1957, but Hoyos returned to win in 1958. He also participated in the Melbourne Olympic Games in 1956 and in the Vuelta a Mexico. In 1959, weary of receiving trophies but very little money for his efforts, he retired from competitive cycling to open with one of his sons a bicycle store, but Hoyos continued to be one of the living legends of Colombian cycling, a pedaler who competed for the pure desire to win the leader's shirt. (Araujo Vélez 1993b.)

Salazar Arenas points out that the Vueltas a Colombia that took place in the 1950s were responsible for the growth of ciclismo fervor throughout the country. The first participants were not professionals but amateurs determined to challenge Colombia's awesome geography, and as a result, they were seen as heroes. Numerous publications extolled the difficulties and courageous feats of riders. In fact, Salazar Arenas argues, the Vueltas redefined the meaning of "national heroes" since the cyclists were more alive and more vivid than the *próceres* (independence heroes) of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They were also more human. Media accounts noted that many were campesinos, students, or messengers and associated their humble origin with speed, personal success, and social advance. Such stories implied that anyone with ability could become a cyclist. (Salazar Arenas 2016, 53).

It is also important to remember that between 1948 and 1964 a vicious civil war generally referred to as "La Violencia" convulsed Colombia. Government efforts to suppress this conflict stymied its ambitious plans to improve roads and other aspects of the country's infrastructure. The annual running of the Vueltas during this time created a sense of national pride that helped to counteract the horrors of deadly atrocities. Thanks to the development of radio, Carlos Arturo Rueda vividly described the details of each race by following the cyclists in his own car and broadcasting by using a transmitter and telephone lines. His radio commentary of the progress of the competitors made the action accessible to people all over the country.<sup>vii</sup> As Patricia Londoño writes:

The people, animated year after year by press and radio publicity, gave the account of the progress of the Vuelta a tremendous reception. Rueda's ability to describe different aspects of the route and the efforts of various cyclists captivated national attention and for a brief period overrode deep-seated political feuds and animosities (Londoño and Londoño 1989, 370.)

The races also made Colombians more aware of the geography of their country, and the continued deplorable condition of the roads contributed to the fame that the Colombian Vuelta was the most difficult competition in the world. (Salazar Arenas 2016, 61). Spectators who lined the route of the Vueltas created a new public ritual. Turning the race into a veritable carnival, they cleaned the roads. They applauded the cyclists as they passed by, giving them water and singing the national hymn. Moreover, as soon as the race was over, young men started to train for the next one "riding second-hand bicycles with a picture of their favorite "idol" on their cap, and a pound of meat or a tube of toothpaste in the basket." (Salazar Arenas 2016, 62). As historian Ricardo Montezuma observes:

The Vuelta achieved what had seemed impossible for politicians, engineers and large public projects: to connect several major cities by successive one day journeys...Against all odds, broad regions of the country that had been in near-total isolation from the capital, of the Pacific and Atlantic oceans were suddenly brought together. This feat caused such fascination for cycling stars that many youths in low-income sectors were motivated to emulate the exploits of their idols. (Montezuma 2011, 39).

By the late 1950s Colombian cycling began to evolve. The Vuelta was becoming more structured and hierarchical. The time gaps between riders were no longer measured in hours, but in minutes and seconds, and teams brought coaches and auxiliaries in registered vehicles. (Rendell, 2002, 49.) Although there were participants from other Colombian departments as well as foreigners, the majority of the riders

still came from two regions: Cundinamarca and Boyacá, known as the *cundiboyacense altiplano* in the center of the country, and Antioquia in the west where mountain ascents easily reached 3,000 meters. (“¿Porqué los Colombianos?” 2014.) In 1961 Radio Cadena Nacional based in Antioquia sponsored a new race known as the Clásico RCN. This course ran from Medellín to Jericó and back, and the winner of the inaugural competition was Rubén Darío Gómez, “el tigrillo de Pereira.” Begun as a local event, the Clásico RCN quickly became a significant regional competition attracting the most important Colombian cyclists. (“Escarabajos de dos ruedas” 2005, 3.)

Another development was the increasing participation of Colombians in European races. Instrumental in encouraging cyclists to compete outside their own country was José Beyaert, the winner of the second Vuelta a Colombia. Beyaert, who was born in Lenz, a French town on the border with Belgium, had won a cycling gold medal in the London Olympic games of 1948. His experience in the second Colombian Vuelta was a revelation for Beyaert who was impressed by the raw courage of the Colombian cyclists who competed on old fashioned bicycles but had won no Olympic titles. After his victory, he was preparing to return to France when the acting president of the republic, Roberto Urdaneta Arbeláez, invited him to be the official trainer of the Colombian national team. Beyaert accepted the offer and began his work by writing a popular cycling course entitled, “Make Yourself a Champion.” The daily newspaper *El Siglo* published the series, divided into twenty-three installments, with an additional seven installments responding to readers’ letters, during February and March of 1952. Beyaert also founded cycling schools in Cali, Pasto, Cúcuta, and Barranquilla.

Soon after the second Vuelta a Colombia, a group of industrialists persuaded Beyaert to select a Colombian team to compete in the 1953 Tour de France. Against his better judgment, he agreed and chose Efraín Forero, Ramón Hoyos, Héctor Mesa, Oscar Oyola, Mario Montaña and Fabio León Calle to travel with him to Europe. Unfortunately, this experience proved disastrous. In their first practice race called the “Route de France” (an amateur cousin of the Tour de France), the Colombians were clearly out of their depth. “Surprised by the high speed of the stage start and utterly incapable of riding into the gusting winds on treacherous cobblestones, they were in trouble from the beginning.” They crossed the finish line an hour and two minutes after the stage winner. They did little better in other stage and race attempts, although on June 21 Fabio León Calle became the first Colombian to win a race in Europe—a 110 kilometer event ending at Châtillon-sous-Bagneux in west Paris. (Rendell 2011, 163)

Despite the team’s disappointing performance, the government asked Beyaert to continue as trainer for the Rome Olympics in 1960 and the Vuelta a Mexico, but in 1961 he left active cycling participation to become an owner of a textile factory, a salesman for Laboratorios “Recamier,” and the owner of a restaurant.<sup>viii</sup>

## **5. A New Era: Martín Emilio “Cochise” Rodríguez, Rafael Antonio Niño, and Luis “Lucho” Hernández**

By the 1960’s Colombian participation in European races was well-established, and each decade produced a new hero. The outstanding cyclist from 1961 to 1978 was Martín Emilio Rodríguez, better known as “Cochise,” who would win a world title and become the model for a new generation of aspiring pedalists. Rodríguez was born on April 14, 1942 to a poor family in barrio Guayabal, Medellín.<sup>ix</sup> The death

of his father increased the family's financial difficulties forcing Rodríguez to leave primary school to go to work. He found a job as a bill collector for a group of doctors and acquired a bicycle in order to facilitate his rounds. Soon he became dedicated to ciclismo. He began to train seriously, and in 1961 placed well in the 11<sup>th</sup> Vuelta a Colombia. Cochise won the Vuelta in 1963 and 1964 but was bested in 1965 by another Antioqueño, Javier Suárez. He regained the title in 1966 and a year later achieved his first international victory in the Vuelta al Táchira. Cochise was hoping to compete in the 1972 Munich Olympics, but the Organizing Committee declared him a professional and thus ineligible to participate. (Méndez Bernal 1997, 432-437).

In order to continue his career Cochise joined the Bianchi-Campagnolo professional cycling team. Between 1973 and 1975 he won seven stages in different European races and finished 27<sup>th</sup> overall in the 1975 Tour de France. After Cochise retired from competing in 1983, President Belisario Betancur appointed him cultural and sport attaché in Italy. From then on he dedicated himself to promoting sport among young people and occupied an indelible place in the cultural conscience of Colombians. In short, Cochise was a pioneer at a point when not many Colombians, or indeed, South American riders, had turned professional. His ability to perform well against the toughest competitors in Europe proved to the world how capable Colombian cyclists were.

Once Cochise began competing abroad, the domination of races by cyclists from Antioquia declined. Men from Boyacá, Colombia's mining heartland, emerged to displace them. The *boyacenses* had an advantage. The high altitude of their department tended to develop in young men an ideal cycling phenotype—light-frames with potent hearts and expansive lungs. Such was the situation of Rafael Antonio Niño Munevar, who was born to a poor family in the village of Cucáita on December 2, 1949. Poverty made him abrasive. He hated school, argued with his parents, and left them for the department capital, Tunja. There he brought his first bicycle and began his career as a bicycle messenger. Soon he was devoting all of his efforts to becoming an outstanding cyclist.

At the age of 20 Niño defeated Cochise to win the Vuelta a Colombia in 1970. During the next ten years he won five more Vueltas, turned professional, and participated in major European races including the Giro de Italia. In the words of Matt Rendell:

Niño would achieve a despotism that Cochise had never sought and even Hoyos had never equaled. His headstrong personality drove him to discard the existing culture of Colombian cycling and impose a pitiless new order. He was the poorest traveler abroad. Yet despite his consistent failing abroad, the conditions he created allowed those who came after him to compete in the finest international company. Born into peasant poverty, Niño also made bike-racing integral to Boyacá's identity. (Rendell, 2002, 113)<sup>x</sup>

Niño's contact with European cycling transformed every aspect of the sport in Colombia— from diet and preparation to contracts and finance. Over the years the bicycle itself had undergone modernization. The "iron horse" became more aesthetically pleasing, light and aerodynamic. Steel frames and aluminum components gave way to titanium and carbon with lenticular wheels and digital systems for gauging speed. Woolen uniforms, perforated black leather shoes, and helmets with black and white stripes transitioned into bright adjustable lycra garments, multicolored shoes integrated into new pedal systems, and compact helmets with attractive designs. (Montezuma 2011, 51).

Active Colombian participation in European racings soon revealed that the nation's Asociación Colombiana de Ciclismo (Aciclismo) under the leadership of General Arámbula Durán was failing to adjust to these new developments. At its general assembly meeting in 1979, regional representatives of the core cycling departments—Antioquia, Santander, Boyacá and Cundinamarca—broke away from the official body and constituted a rival organization, the Federación Colombiana de Ciclismo. Their leader and instigator of the split was an energetic industrialist, Miguel Ángel Bermúdez. In 1980 the two groups reunited as the Federación Colombiana de Ciclismo with Bermúdez as its president. (Rendell 2002, 131).

Young and dynamic, Bermúdez worked passionately to make the Vuelta a Colombia one of the great events of the international cycling calendar. He began an ambitious campaign to get commercial firms to sponsor Colombian cyclists in Europe and to bring the Ciclismo World Championships to Colombia. As a result, a new group of young cyclists began to make their mark in European competitions by participating in the Vuelta a España, the Giro de Italia, the classic Daupiné Liberé, and the Tour de France. It was a challenging program, but by wining some mountain stages in the European races, Luis “Lucho” Herrera became the dominant Colombian cyclist of the 1980s.

Luis “Lucho” Herrera was born in Fusagasugá, Cundinamarca in 1961 to a middle class family. He worked as a gardener on his parents' *finca* (farm) when, on his fifteenth birthday, his mother gave him a bicycle which he used to commute from his house to Fusagasugá. He began cycling competitively as an amateur in 1981 and in 1984 won both the Vuelta a Colombia and the Clásico RCN. As a professional riding with the Colombian team Café de Colombia, he won the Vuelta a España in 1987, the first South American to win a grand tour event. He also won the prestigious polka-dot jersey which is given to the best climbing rider in the Tour de France. Now known as “King of the Mountains” he went on to win five “King of the Mountains” jerseys collected from competitions in three different Gran Tours. Herrera retired in 1992, but during the decade of the 1980s he was the most important symbol of Colombian ciclismo. (Araujo Vélez 1993.)

## 6. Daily Use of Bicycles

Enthusiasm promoted by the Vueltas encouraged Colombians to adopt bicycles for everyday activities. By the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was obvious that two-wheeled vehicles could become an important alternative to relieve streets crowded by automobile traffic. Used by messengers and by the police, they also afforded cheap transportation for the lower classes. Even in rural areas, “the peasant pedaling through the village plaza on a battered English Raleigh was a common tableau.”(Jenkins, 2015, 4.)

Several models were available, but in 1955 the hero of the Vuelta a Colombia, Ramón Hoyos, was endorsing the Monark. Originating in Varberg, Sweden in 1908, by mid-century the Monark brand was clearly the popular choice.<sup>xi</sup> The Federal Ingeniería Factory in Bogotá assembled the vehicles using imported or nationally-made parts to produce 20 to 30 Monarks every month. (*El Tiempo*, April 26, 2013). Their manufacture promoted the Colombian economy in two ways: by lowering the cost of public transportation and by supporting a national industry. The company made four models: one for students, one for pleasure (aimed at women), one for factory workers, and one for use in rural areas. By the end of the decade, newspaper advertisements touted bicycles as appropriate for children and young people, and frequently bicycles were offered as prizes in local raffles or contests. Businesses used images of bicycles and/or cyclists

to promote their products: for example, Pony Malta (a non-alcoholic malt beverage something like root beer) compared the time to prepare a good beer with the time that professional cyclists needed to train, and on its bottles a picture of a cyclist in action illustrated the slogan, “Drink of Champions.” (Salazar Arenas 2016, 63.)

Yet problems emerged once bicycles began competing for space on the roads with buses, automobiles, and pedestrians. After the 1950s more Colombians were buying cars, and in the 1970s motorcycles built locally joined the sea of small Renaults, Toyotas, and Hyundais that clogged the streets of Bogotá and other principal cities.<sup>xii</sup> As early as 1941 the national government adopted Decreto 14 to regulate their use in Bogotá. This decree required bicycle owners to have a driver’s license, to register their vehicles for license plates, and to pay respective taxes, yet by 1955 officials estimated that only some 15% of cyclists were complying with the law. (Salazar Arenas 2016, 64). When agencies that rented bicycles began to appear, many cyclists who took to the roads did not know how to ride them properly and failed to respect traffic rules. As a result, automobile commuters in Bogotá and Barranquilla regarded the cyclists as just one more headache. In 1969 *El Tiempo* reported that urban cyclists were the most dangerous obstacle in Bogotá’s traffic. (Salazar Arenas 2016, 64.)

Thus, Salazar concludes, that by the mid-twentieth century, the bicycle had created a strange conundrum. While professional Colombian cyclists were boosting their standings in national and European road races, the situation of the urban *ciclista* was increasingly precarious. On the one hand, thanks to the public adoption of the Vuelta a Colombia as an annual patriotic ritual, race participants represented heroism and positive images of the nation and modernity. On the other, motorists regarded individuals who used bicycles for recreation and commuting as dangerous hazards that collided with pedestrians and snarled traffic on narrow city streets. (Salazar Arenas 2016, 65).

Frustrated by obstacles posed to ordinary cyclists, a group of aficionados made up mostly of university students decided to take matters in their own hands. Organized by Jaime Ortiz Mariño, an architecture and design major who had studied on scholarship at Ohio’s Case Western Reserve University, small groups of young men began nocturnal rides en masse along Bogotá streets, pedaling their machines with flashing lights wrapped around their legs. These cyclists also started a repair shop. They gave passionate speeches that denounced the lack of recreational spaces in the capital and promoted the use of the bicycle as an environmentally friendly alternative to automobile contamination. (Jenkins 2015)

By Sunday, December 15, 1974 the group had succeeded in convincing Bogotá bureaucrats to close two major arteries—Carrera Séptima and Carrera 13—from the center of the city to Calle 72 to automobile traffic between 7 AM and 2 PM in order to allow individuals the freedom to run, skate, walk, or cycle unimpeded. Ricardo Montezuma, one of the architects of what came to be called the “*ciclovía*,” notes that the purpose behind closing the streets to motor traffic was to encourage the average citizen to travel along them safely in other types of vehicles; something unimaginable for many at that time. Bicycles of the period were used mainly for work, competitive training and recreation for children. “Proponents of the event wanted to show Bogotá’s elite that the bicycle was more than a vehicle for messengers; that it could be used by adult men and women, and that stepping out of one’s car did not stop being an upright citizen by taking to the streets of Bogotá on a Sunday morning.” (Montezuma 2011, 45).

The enthusiastic response of the people to this innovation was amazing. Bogotanos turned out in huge numbers with their bicycles, skates, or simply on foot in order to be part of an historic event in the

capital. As a result, the city government decided to hold the “*ciclo paseos*” more frequently. Thanks to Decretos 567 and 566 issued by mayor Luis Prieto Ocampo the “*ciclovía*” began officially on July 20, 1976 and was to be held every Sunday. Mayor Prieto Ocampo attended the inauguration of the event which now had expanded to include four routes: one from El Salitre to the Ciudad Universitaria; another from Olaya to El Tunal; another from the Parque Nacional to the Funicular, and finally, the Circuito del Norte. (López M. 2010)

In the 1980s modernization and technical changes to the bicycle and its accessories attracted an ever larger number of aficionados who practiced pedaling for recreation. Leisure vehicles were available in more comfortable models, with smaller and wider wheels, simpler frames, longer seats, and taller handlebars. Such modifications were attractive to women, the elderly and people with physical disabilities.

The growth of the *ciclovía* was supported by a burst of patriotic fervor unleashed by Colombian cycling triumphs in Europe during the 1980s. With the possible exception of boxing which was still widely followed by the Atlantic coast population, bicycle racing was the first sport to glue Colombians throughout the country to their radios and television screens. In 1980 Alfonso Flores Ortiz became the first non-European cyclist to win the French Tour de l’Avenir, a victory that open the way for Colombian teams to participate in European races thereafter. (Silva Guzmán 2017, 40-43).

During this decade the number of European and North American cyclists in Colombian competitions multiplied as well. Rivalry between the two largest radio networks enhanced the promotion and spread of these races. The sport ceased to be exclusively amateur and regional. It became instead a professional activity with many Colombian cyclists wearing the colors and insignias of professional teams from a variety of countries. In 1983 Colombia was the first country to be invited to send an amateur team to compete in the Tour de France. A year later, Martín Ramírez in the Dauphilé Libérée defeated by twenty-seven seconds Bernard Hinault, the greatest French cyclist of the late twentieth century, and in 1987, Luis “Lucho” Herrera won the 1987 Tour of Spain. (Montezuma 2011, 46).

Cycling euphoria waned in the 1990s—replaced by a passion for soccer as a result of Colombia’s qualifying for the 1990 World Cup, but despite this development, popular interest in the *ciclovía* continued. In 1995 Instituto de Recreación y Deporte (IDRD) assumed direction of the program which between 1976 and 1995 had been under the purview of the Departamento Administrativo de Tránsito y Transporte (DAT). Firmly supported by Bogota’s two mayors: Antanas Mockus (1995-97; 2001-2003) and Enrique Penalosa Londoño (1998-2001), by 2010 the *ciclovía* had grown from 21 kilometers to encompass 121 kilometers. Uniformed guardians provided security for the riders, and there were public restrooms installed along the routes. Ambulatory vendors sold water to the participants. Located a kilometer apart there were also “*cicloparqueaderos*”—spaces where people might repair their bicycles or skateboards. There were even professionals available to give advice and instruction of how to ride a bicycle. (*El Espectador* November 16, 2017).

The *ciclovías* provided a welcome unity and distraction in Bogotá during the years that Colombia’s military was battling drug cartels, paramilitary groups and well-armed subversive guerrilla groups such as the FARC, M-19 and ELN. Moreover, while participating in their first *ciclovía* in August 2015, Mark Jenkins and his wife Sue Ibarra discovered that the event provided a meeting place for the poor people living in the south of the city, the middle class in the middle and the rich in the north. As Ricardo Montezuma, the director of the non-profit Fundación Ciudad Humana, explained to them:

These different classes rarely mix, except on Sundays during the *Ciclovía*, when the wealthy from the north ride south, and the poor from the south ride north. They cross paths, and perhaps they recognize their shared humanity. (Jenkins, 2015).

On a more negative note, Jenkins also learned that the *ciclovía* had barely altered the car culture of Bogotá. On days other than Sundays, automobiles still ruled the Bogotá streets, and every week in the city a cyclist was killed by a motorist. (Jenkins, 2015). Despite this awareness, supporters of the *ciclovía* take pride that the event enjoys international recognition. According to IDRD there are more than 50 *ciclovías* in Latin America, many inspired by the Bogotá model. (López M. 2010).

## 7. Conclusion

This brief review of the development of *ciclismo* in Colombia during the twentieth century suggests that four factors may have contributed to national embrace of the sport. First of all, Colombia's mountainous geography, rather than being a deterrent to cycling may have actually encouraged it. All major European cycling road races are located in countries with extensive mountainous terrain, and there is some suggestion that the presence of mountains offers an intrinsic challenge to cyclists. Once bicycles were available as an inexpensive mode of transportation, Colombians living in the Cordillera departments of Boyacá, Cundinamarca, Santander and Antioquia, by necessity had to tackle mountain terrain to get to almost any place they wanted to go. As they honed their skills in ascending the Andean slopes, it was probably a natural progression to think about racing. Marcos Gutiérrez's success in the 1938 *Juegos Deportivos Bolivarianos* surely strengthened their resolve to continue competitive cycling. However, when one notes that in Colombia's equally mountainous Andean neighbors—Ecuador, Venezuela and Bolivia—a passion for cycling failed to develop, this explanation seems less than convincing.

Second, and more credible, is the observation that reports of the *Tour de France* and other European road races stimulated Colombians to embark on their own competitions. Colombian newspaper accounts of these races were widely circulated. They encouraged local cyclists to stage their own "tour," and the actual holding of the *Vuelta a Colombia* in 1951 was clearly a pivotal event. Occurring at a time when violence convulsed the country, a road race through several departments provided a way to hold the various regions together and build a nationalism to counter the horrors occurring in the countryside. Via *Radio Nueva Granada*, Carlos Arturo Rueda's charismatic descriptions of the efforts of the cyclists had the effect of creating alternative popular heroes who were not politicians, soldiers, bandits or guerrillas, but "escarabajos" – lowly campesinos, messengers and gardeners— that entranced listeners in every part of the nation. In the view of David Quitián, Rueda's colorful, on-the-spot commentary of the perils and achievements of the riders as the stages of the *Vuelta* crossed through departments provided Colombians with knowledge of a country greater than they previously imagined, one dominated by modernity as represented by the *escarabajos* and their "iron horses." Moreover, once the *Vueltas* became an annual event, they constituted a sign of peace and goodwill that embraced isolated rural communities and reconnected the disparate sections of the country. (Quitián, 2015). Agreeing with Quitián, Montezuma, who, after confessing that "little is known about the reasons why the bicycle became so deeply rooted in many regions of Colombia starting in the late nineteen fifties," nevertheless concludes that the strong fan base for bicycle

racing and the fervor awakened by the first Vuelta “were quite likely the key elements contributing to the bicycle’s spread in Colombia.” (Montezuma 2011, 39.)

Third, Colombian triumphs in European races also contributed to a new sense of national pride. Success did not come easily, but after the arrival of José Beyaert in 1952, Colombian cyclists had the benefit of a seasoned French pedalist who could help them adopt European innovations to perfect their technique. The celebrated victories of Martín Emilio Rodríguez “Cochise” in European tours between 1973 and 1983 was proof that Colombians could successfully compete in the most demanding road races of the late twentieth century.

Writing in 1984 Rafael Duque Naranjo in his study of the *escarabajos* of the Vuelta a Colombia offered a fourth intriguing explanation when he observed that team sports such as basketball, volleyball and even soccer had never achieved success in Colombia to the degree that they had in countries such as Argentina, Uruguay and Mexico. Colombians, he maintained, tend to excel in “solitary sports” such as boxing, shooting, and weightlifting. National glory had been won by single men and women— individuals, not groups or teams, and “ciclismo is the sport of solitary men.”<sup>xiii</sup> Duque Naranjo continued:

This clear statistic—the triumph as a solitary rather than collective sport ought to motivate a national psychoanalysis. . . or perhaps a reflection on our socio-economic structure if one takes into account that the Colombian sport heroes are usually poor. All of them seem produced (*elaborar*) by silence and anger.

They perfect their discipline as a vengeance, be it on the Atlantic beaches where the boxers train, or tennis in the parque El Salitre, or going up the mountains toward La Calera where the anonymous messengers strengthen their muscles to compete with a Bernard Hinault. (Duque Naranjo 1984, 10)

Since the 1980s the situation described by Duque Naranjo has undoubtedly changed for cycling is increasingly a team endeavor, and Colombian soccer teams have proven their merit in successive World Cups. Yet, during the mid-twentieth century individual athletes managed to find success in sports such as cycling and boxing when without strong government support national team sports had failed to materialize. Even today Colombian cyclists rank among the world’s best riders. Nairo Quintana placed second in the 2013 Tour de France. He won the Giro de Italia in 2014 and the Vuelta de España in 2016, and in 2017, Rigoberto Urán and his Cannondale-Drapac team finished second in the Tour de France. (Silva Guzmán 2017, 248-251).

Finally, Colombian cycling heroes have inspired citizens who were not especially athletic to use bicycles for recreation and transport. In the 1970s the pressure placed on Bogotá’s municipal government by fervent cyclists produced the inauguration of the “ciclovía” on December 14, 1974—the first time a major South American city closed its principal streets to automobile traffic in order to allow individuals to travel by bicycles, scooters, skates or walking unimpeded. Over the decades the expansion of the *ciclovías* in Bogotá and their adoption by other cities throughout Colombia and other South American countries attest to the contribution made by Colombia’s extraordinary national passion to enhancing urban life throughout the Latin American world.

## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> England was the exception to this generalization, since the Cheltenham Cycle Touring Club opposed mass road racing leading to an interest in track and rather secretive time-trials on roads.

<sup>ii</sup> Before the arrival of the Spanish, Zipaquirá had been a Chibcha Indian settlement headed by a chieftain known as the “Zipa.” It was Carlos Arturo Rueda, the sports announcer narrating the first Vuelta a Colombia for radio audiences, who baptized Forero, “El Zipa Indomable.”

<sup>iii</sup> A lawyer and Liberal reformer, Gaitán was a charismatic orator and the leader of the Liberal Party, 1946-1948. His assassination on a street corner in Bogotá on April 9, 1948 ignited popular fury and set off a vicious riot known as the *Bogotazo* that engulfed the capital city.

<sup>iv</sup> Commenting on the Vuelta’s popularity, Silva Guzmán ecstatically proclaims: “Here it all began. It was the most beautiful and romantic leap (*salto*) in national sport. The creation: land, water, life’s breath (and blood, of course). The mythological hero: el Zipa. Colombia, then, began to practice a new religion whose number of fans still grows with immense fervor. This country was, is, and will be pure *ciclismo*.” Silva Guzmán 2017, 19.

<sup>v</sup> An “escarabajo” is a black, volatile insect with a sharp, penetrating stinger that does much damage to trees.

<sup>vi</sup> Gabriel García Márquez had already published two short novels and was on his way to becoming Colombia’s most celebrated author of the twentieth century.

<sup>vii</sup> In *Grandes hazañas deportivas de Colombia*, Alberto Galvis asserts that Rueda C. “was a creative master of the microphone” who became the most important and famous of sports commentators and played a significant role in attracting to sports fans throughout the country. (Galvis 1997, 16).

<sup>viii</sup> Beyaert retained his interest in cycling, but in 1972 he was implicated in a doping scandal involving Álvaro Pachón in the RCN Classic. Beyaert proclaimed his innocence stating that he had only given Pachón for one of his climbs a “*perla de éter*” (a completely round, soft gelatin capsule containing a small portion of ethyl ether), a substance medically prescribed for respiratory ailments. He had not been Pachón’s trainer and had only wanted to help him. Beyaert argued that ordinary drug use in a sport as demanding as cycling was normal, especially in Colombia. The use of stimulants, however, was a different “kettle of fish.” In an issue of the *Revista Mundo Ciclistico* (May, 1982), Beyaert confessed that he had used stimulants, a practice which he later deeply regretted. He explained, “The use of stimulants

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notably prejudices athletes and gives rise to scandals. Now I counsel athletes to resist drugs. If he is not in optimal physical condition, he can suffer great complications.” (Duque Naranjo 1984, 53).

<sup>ix</sup> Rodríguez was given the nickname “Cochise” by children who had seen a film titled “*Flecha Roja*” (Red Arrow) that portrayed the adventures of a group of Indians whose leader, Cochise, was heroic and invincible.

<sup>x</sup> Niño’s hometown, Cucaita erected a statue of him on a bicycle in the principal park, and in 2006 it inaugurated a museum in his honor. (Colombia, Ministerio de Cultura, 2009)

<sup>xi</sup> Monark bicycles should not be confused with the Monarch brand bicycles that were manufactured in the 1890s in the United States.

<sup>xii</sup> In 1945 a company called Auteco began importing American Indian motorcycles, and by 1954 it had acquired the right to assemble and sell Lambretta motor scooters. In 1972 Auteco formed a business partnership with Kawasaki to build motorcycles under license.

<sup>11</sup> Other “solitary champions” include Antonio Cervantes “Kid Pambelé” who won the world light welter weight title on October 28, 1972; Helmut Bellingrodt, shooting world champion, 1972, 1984 Olympic Games, and María Isabel Urrutia, female weighlifter, multiple times world champion, and gold medalist, 2000 Olympic Games.

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