Towards Sporting Modernity: Sport as the Driver of Cycling, 1891–1902

France in the 1890s was politically relatively stable, even though the new Third Republic – in the form of the ‘conservative Republic’ defined by Thiers as the form of regime least likely to divide the French people – was still challenged by threats from the extreme right, and was shaken to the core by the national drama of the Dreyfus Affair (1894–99). But the threat of a coup d’état from General Boulanger had been avoided in the late 1880s; parliamentary democracy seemed established, if occasionally questioned. Economically and socially, although France was still concerned at its weakness and slowness of development compared with Britain and particularly Germany, the country was beginning, in the mid-1890s at least, to recover from the economic depression suffered in the 1880s (Démier, 2000: 409). Structures, thinking and technologies in industry were modernizing and facilitating France’s economic and social transformation, even though the real explosion in the growth of the economy would not occur until the early years of the twentieth century or even the post-1945 period. Rather than being found in the motors of development of previous years, such as the building of the railways, or the urban building sector, or state investment in general, the drivers of growth during the 1890s were to be found in the renewal of industrial infrastructures and in household consumption. A particular success of French industry during the 1890s was its ability to adapt and adopt the products of the ‘industrial avant garde’ (Démier, 2000: 411–13) at this time, of which one of the most important was the automobile. Building on the vibrancy of the bicycle industry in the 1880s, as French production regained the early dynamism of the late 1860s that had been swept away by the disruptions of the Franco-Prussian war and the Commune, the industrial manufacturing base responded to ongoing demand for bicycles as well as moving into the production of motorcycles and motor cars during the 1890s. With increasing prosperity, increasing literacy, the developing strength of the bourgeoisie and the arriving significance of the industrial working classes in terms of the consumption of products and services of all kinds, sports in general – and cycling in particular –
found an environment propitious for their growth.

French sport in the 1890s was – as the historian of the early cycling clubs Alex Poyer has suggested – at a point where, structurally and institutionally, it could build upon the solid bases constructed by cycling, which in the 1870s and 1880s had pioneered the model of clubs and associations. The famous amateur multi-sports federation *Union des sociétés françaises de sports athlétiques* (USFSA) was set up in 1889, leading the way for other national federations. Cycling clubs, whose socially more inclusive membership was stimulated by the increasing availability of affordable machines (a result of the second-hand market, greater production and rising living standards) and by the greater facility of riding of the ‘safety bicycle’, flourished strongly: from a mere 300 in 1891, the number of clubs had reached 1,400 in 1895 and 1,700 in 1899 (Poyer, 2007: 37). As cycling became increasingly democratized, the audience for cycle racing became much more significant, and the media, in the form of both specialized and non-specialized press, began to stage increasingly high-profile and spectacular competitions.

In order to give a discussion of the representative themes of cycling overall during this period of developing maturity for sport and its institutions and economy, this chapter will firstly consider the activities of the French national cycling federation – the *Union Vélocipédique de France* – which was challenged in the 1890s by other bodies with ambitions to lead cycling in France. Secondly, we will discuss a number of the immensely spectacular – and now considered iconic – races of this period, organized by the press and setting the principles of much subsequent cycle sport. Thirdly, we will examine the principal newspapers of the time that made cycling and sport their business, developing the nexus of relations between sport, media and industry that would characterize not only the birth of the Tour de France in 1903, but much of the subsequent history of cycling in France during the twentieth century. The term we shall use to describe this nexus is the ‘sports–media–industrial complex’ (1). Finally, analysis will focus on the way in which it was French, rather than British or American, cycling that led the way towards the creation of one of the earliest of international governing bodies for sport, the *Union cycliste internationale*, set up in Paris in 1900.

**Federations and organizations: towards unity**

During the 1890s the need arose for purposeful governance of cycling organizations and activities. As early as 1881 the first and most impor-
tant of national cycling federations, the Union Vélocipédique de France (UVF), had been set up in an attempt to coordinate the actions and interpretations of cycling as a developing leisure and sporting pursuit (Poyer, 2003a: 58–62), but it struggled initially to impose its authority on the disparate and growing ecology of clubs, races and practices. The increasing internationalism of cycle sport in particular meant that France was also in need of an organization capable of speaking with a clear voice on French positions regarding vexed issues such as amateurism and professionalism, the timing and distances of national and international records, and a host of other matters. During the 1880s the UVF eventually managed to master the competing claims – for instance from regional federations of cycling clubs, or lobbies in favour of amateurism or professionalism – to control French cycling on the national level. The principal institution that challenged the UVF in the mid-1880s was the short-lived Alliance Vélocipédique de France during 1884–86, which essentially had little to propose in terms of an alternative vision. But the flourishing of competition of all kinds, the development of the commercial importance of professional racing, the increasing stake held by industry in cycling in the form of the growing market for bicycles of all kinds, and the often frenzied interest of the sporting press in cycling as sport and leisure meant that challenges to the authority of the still young national federation were many and varied.

The Union Vélocipédique de France

As early as 1869–70 there had been some feeling that a national federation of clubs providing a unified governance of the development of cycling would be useful, but France’s first sports federation was that for gymnastics, the Union des sociétés de gymnastique de France, created in 1873, followed eight years later by that of cycling. As Ritchie (2011: 89–97, 102–04, 141–50) has conveniently and expertly described, in the United Kingdom and in America, France’s reference points for all things cycling-related, the Bicycle Union (later to become the National Cyclists’ Union or NCU) had been set up in February 1878, closely followed by the Bicycle (later the Cyclists’) Touring Club (August 1878), while the League of American Wheelmen saw the light of day in May 1880.

During the early and mid-1880s the Union Vélocipédique de France struggled somewhat to assert its independence from influential individuals, newspapers, clubs and regional federations, and because of the multiplicity of views on the vexed questions of the decade, particularly that of amateurism and professionalism, it found it difficult to impose a clear and undeviating line. Nevertheless, the UVF in the early 1880s was
sufficiently firm – at least initially – on amateurism to be seen as another example of France adopting *le modèle anglais* of sport, both in terms of its structure and its support of Corinthian values (Poyer, 2003a: 58). The founding congress in 1881 had been dominated by northern clubs imbued with British values (because of the presence of expatriate English members working in northern *départements*), and the definition of ‘French amateurism’ adopted had made only small concessions to the significant numbers of French professional riders, against whom (because they were classified as professional by the UVF) British amateurs (as defined by the NCU) would never be allowed to compete. Successive congresses of the UVF made the status of amateur and professional riders more flexible, and more reflective of what southern clubs described as France’s more egalitarian and republican sporting values, rather than what were perceived as rigidly British (foreign) imported principles of Corinthianism and an insistence on rules of amateurism that stifled competition (and thus progress). As Ritchie has briefly described (2011: 177–78), what we might term the French compromise brokered by the UVF eventually led cycle racing towards open competition.

Although internal divisions in the UVF caused the failure of the Union’s contribution to the *Exposition Universelle* of 1889, by the late 1880s the UVF had weathered the storms of the early years and was ready, during what is often described as the ‘Golden Age’ (e.g. Poyer, 2003a: 103) of French cycling, to guide the development of the sport as it became ever more important commercially, and as pressure gradually built for the creation of an international governing body. The UVF was instrumental in the birth of the *Union Cycliste Internationale*, created in 1900, thus guaranteeing a French influence on the development of cycling worldwide, but before this could happen, the French national federation still had to deal with a number of challenges to its role during the 1890s.

**Rival federations: the Touring Club de France, the Fédération Vélocipédique du Nord, the Association Vélocipédique d’Amateurs**

Three federations whose existence could threaten the centralizing and unifying role of the UVF came into being between January 1890 and January 1891. The *raisons d’être* of these three competing bodies reflected the three main causes of tension within the UVF during the previous decade, namely dissension over what kind of cycling should be primarily promoted (touring vs. racing), regional federations and conflict with the Paris-based Union, and the ever-present issue of amateurism vs. professionalism. The new organizations were the *Touring Club de France*
(TCF, January 1890), the Fédération Vélocipédique du Nord (FVDN, March 1890) and the Association Vélocipédique d’Amateurs (AVA, July 1890). The AVA was accepted into the Union des sociétés françaises de sports athlétiques in January 1891. The most interesting of these three breaks in the merely apparent unity of French cycling are that of touring and the TCF, and amateurism and the AVA.

The Touring Club de France was created essentially as an echo of the British Cyclists’ Touring Club, in order to fill the void left by the UVF in the area of touring as the national body concentrated on competition. Cycling clubs since the beginning of the sport had been obliged to balance the passions of members principally interested in racing and members more attached to the gentler pleasures of touring, and debate on this had raged (e.g. Martin, 1888). Racing, doubtless because it was easier to manage, organize, codify and structure, generally became the more visible focus of clubs, and the UVF’s responsibilities to steward French cycling emphasized competition much more than leisure riding. Touring members of cycling clubs that affiliated to the UVF felt their interests were ignored, as did individual cyclists who took out personal membership of the national organization. The TCF thus answered a long-felt need and took over a number of the touring-related functions that the UVF had nevertheless developed, such as signposting of dangerous inclines and the publication of route guides and handbooks listing accommodation and facilities for the repair of cycles. Relatively rapidly – in fact by 1895 – the TCF expanded its brief from simply cycle touring to include touring by other means, such as cars (Poyer, 2003a: 196). The UVF, in reaction, continued to devote some time to cycle touring, in defence of its theoretical role as a federation for all kinds of cycling.

The challenge to the UVF from the Fédération Vélocipédique du Nord reflected the enduring spatial split in French cycling between clubs and groupings of clubs in the southern and western regions of the country and similar networks of relations and collaboration in the northern regions. Whereas by the early 1890s the Fédération du Sud-Ouest had lost its influence, cyclists and clubs in northern France could affiliate to the FVDN rather than the UVF and those in the Haut-Rhône could similarly choose allegiance to the Fédération du Haut-Rhône regional structure. Whereas the TCF’s challenge to the UVF concerned principally the promotion and regulation of touring, and the AVA/USFSA disagreed with the UVF in terms of the ethics of sport (amateur values or commerce and professionalism), the rivalry of the FVDN was less ideological: the FVDN competed with the UVF in its governance of cycling by proposing its own competitions, its own rules, producing maps and organizing
campaigns against government initiatives such as the tax on bicycles.

The Association Vélocipédique d’Amateurs represented a return to
the purest of amateur principles for cycling, in a reaction against what
was seen as the tawdry commercialism and professionalism into which
the UVF had allowed French racing to fall. Only those who could meet
the most searching criteria could compete as amateurs in the calendar of
competitions arranged by the AVA, and races were mostly track-based,
all the better to control the quality of the viewing public they attracted.4
Cycling’s entry into the amateur bastion of the USFSA created what was
known as a bataillon sacré of cyclists carrying the amateur faith in the
heathen land of French professionalism. The AVA/USFSA was mocked
mercilessly by the (commercial) cycling press for what were seen as its
outdated ‘English’ aristocratic ideals and social snobbery, but in 1892 it
had the success of being the only federation whose riders were allowed
to compete as amateurs in the UK. And in 1893, when the International
Cyclists’ Association (ICA) was founded in London, British influence
ensured that the anglophile AVA/USFSA was accepted as a founding
federation. Concretely, the AVA/USFSA had about half as many adher-
ents as the UVF, who were concentrated mainly in the capital and the
Paris region.

The Union cycliste de France
In November 1895 the partisans of professionalism and professional
sport launched a new national federation uniquely concerned with
professional competition. The Union cycliste de France (UCF) was
designed to represent the interests of clubs and velodromes involved in
professional racing, and was therefore uninterested in the perpetual
discussions over the status of amateurs and professionals, and how
French amateurism met or failed to meet the requirements of the UK and
US governing bodies (Poyer, 2003a: 200). The UCF was thus the result
of a schism in the UVF between those who wished to continue to manage
French cycling as a whole – clubs, federations, amateurs, professionals,
touring, racing – and those who saw the guaranteed future of cycling
reflected in the professional, commercial, industrial and mediatized
racing of the velodromes. The Manifeste de l’UCF was published on the
front page of Le Vélo (1895), which was as usual fostering a continuing
debate on the pro/am issue, proposals for trades unions for professional
riders, the legal status of velodromes, and so on, and was backing the
new federation against the UVF.

Since its foundation in 1881 the UVF had continually reviewed its
definitions of amateurism and professionalism in response to pressures
from abroad and from within the UVF itself, where different factions defended different interpretations of what cycling was about (Poyer, 2003a: 198–200). In the early 1890s the organizational structure of the UVF was modified to make its work more effective, and in so doing more power was given to those within the Union whose principal interests lay in professional racing. The role of the national annual conference was reduced, giving more executive authority to the Comité directeur, and the powers of the Commission sportive were augmented to allow it – rather than the annual conference – to nominate the velodromes that would host UVF championships. Increasingly, during the early 1890s, the UVF was realizing and reflecting the growing links between itself as cycling’s governing body and the rapidly developing industrial-journalistic complex of manufacturers, velodromes and the sporting press. From 1892 members of the Comité directeur were allowed overt ties with press and industry, and the remit of the Commission sportive to choose velodromes to stage lucrative championships created an obvious link, beneficial financially to the federation, between the Union and the cycle-racing industry.

It was the faction embodied in the UVF’s Commission sportive that was at the root of the birth of the UCF. The reformers of the Commission sportive – led by the influential sports journalist Paul Rousseau – wished for a closer relationship between the UVF and the press, manufacturers and velodromes, whereas the Comité directeur under president Louis d’Iriart d’Etchepare – despite its loss-making stewardship of the Union – defended a more traditional approach. The schism finally occurred in late 1895 when, although disavowed by the annual conference, the Comité directeur refused to step down, thus forcing the supporters of the Commission sportive to secede. To the irritation of the UVF, the UCF was approved by the Interior Ministry in February 1896, and briefly provided a parallel governing body for French cycling, before its members rejoined the UVF in 1898, already planning another take-over of the organization from which they had seceded only three years before. Although a significant and interesting example of how ‘professional’ French cycling was even in the early years, and how significant and important professional racing and its stars were and would remain throughout the development of cycling in France, the UCF was short-lived because its national overall appeal was too limited: its membership was mainly Parisian and composed principally of velodrome managers and owners, sporting publicists and cycle manufacturers; it found difficulties in attracting the support of ordinary clubs; and its championships met with little success. Moreover, the UCF came perhaps too near the
end of the 1890s boom in professional track racing to base a secure future on a trend in cycle sport that was in relative decline.

UVF renewal and moves towards internationalism
Although the UVF had been weakened by competition from the UCF, it had managed to survive, despite losing members to the TCF and making an unhappy alliance – as an essentially petite-bourgeoise organization – with the aristocratic Omnium club in Paris, as well as dealing with anti-centralizing challenges from the Fédération cycliste lyonnaise (1896). Also in 1896 an ephemeral Fédération cycliste des amateurs français (FCAF) turned another page in the ongoing debate over amateurism and sporting ethics, but by threatening the USFSA and making it readier to compromise with the UVF, it enabled these two major federations to reach an agreement. The USFSA had profited slightly from the troubles of the UVF, gaining members and influence, but in October 1896 it saw fit to accept that professional races should be the exclusive domain of the UVF, while the UVF allowed amateur competition to be the preserve of the USFSA. But once the threats from the UCF to the UVF and from the FCAF to the USFSA had declined, the USFSA gradually weakened, eventually passing all responsibility for amateur racing back to the UVF in 1900 (Hubscher and Durry, 1992).

As we shall discuss in a following section, during the final years of the nineteenth century, secure in its now unrivalled position as the national federation, the UVF engaged with the process of creating a French-inspired international regulatory body for cycling. Here, however, we consider some of the principal races and forms of competitive cycling that characterized cycling as competition during this period, before the invention of the Tour de France in 1903 revolutionized racing in France, and arguably worldwide.

Sport: the maturity of competition

Competition during the 1870s and 1880s had been moving slowly towards the organization of a mature system of racing, with established regulations, a fixed calendar of events, an understanding of the amateur or professional statuses of riders, media coverage and a faithful public. It was very definitely in the 1890s that professional cycle sport properly took off in France, as the sporting principles established mainly in the 1880s melded with the rapidly growing sporting press and cycle industry to create a context in which racing would be promoted and reported by
an influential journalistic–industrial complex. Under pressure to produce more and more exciting racing and ever greater feats of physical prowess, riders began to specialize in the disciplines in which they were most gifted, rather than competing in all kinds of races as had sometimes been the case in the early years, and so cycle competition became a true sport-spectacle.

Competition for readership between the sports paper *Le Véloce-Sport* and the generalist *Le Petit Journal* and differences of opinion over the state and future of French cycling in general meant that the newspapers were actively seeking ways of attracting public attention. The race between Bordeaux and Paris in May 1891 was the gimmick hit upon by Paul Rousseau and Maurice Martin for *Le Véloce-Sport*, and Paris–Brest–Paris, run by *Le Petit Journal* and its editor Pierre Giffard in September 1891, followed closely, helping to launch a new mode of cycle competition. The year 1891 – twenty-two years after the famous Paris–Rouen race of 1869, which itself blended sport and media – is widely recognized as marking the start of a new era of professional racing that was to reach its culmination in 1903 with the creation of the Tour de France itself. Jean Durry (1973) coined the term *le Grand départ* to describe the way in which 1891 launched contemporary cycle competition. Racing on the road was to grow in popularity and strength during the 1890s – the celebrated Paris–Roubaix was first run in 1896 – but competition on the track was also to undergo a great boom, as the ownership of velodromes passed from cycle clubs to private entrepreneurs and, with the help of the cycling press, races and racers were transformed into objects of huge public enthusiasm.

**The Bordeaux–Paris race**

The inaugural Bordeaux–Paris race was staged on 23 May 1891 and was devised jointly by *Le Véloce-Sport* newspaper and the Véloce-Club bordelais, two institutions that had a number of influential individuals in common. Twenty-eight riders signed up for the 577 km race. Relying heavily on *Le Véloce-Sport* for publicity and on the VCB for the practical organization of the route, over the following decades the race was to become the doyenne of long-distance road racing in France. Much of the impetus behind its creation came from the rivalry between *Le Véloce-Sport* and other newspapers that were beginning to take sports journalism seriously, in particular the Paris-based *Le Petit Journal* whose cycling columns hosted articles by Pierre Giffard, writing under the pseudonym of ‘Jean-sans-Terre’.

Whatever the subsequent transformations of Bordeaux–Paris – and
the history of the race in the 1890s at least is a palimpsest of evolving thinking on cycle racing in France – the race as it was devised in 1891 was born of competition within France for leadership of *la vélocipédie*, and comparison with Britain. Piqued by the idea that cycling clubs in Lyon and Grenoble had been talking in 1890 with the London Stanley Cycling Club about the running of 12- and 24-hour time trials in the Haut-Rhône region, road racers in Bordeaux apparently brought forward their ambition of doing the same, but rejected as too logistically complicated the British model of time trials based on time limits (Lombard, 1891). This meant that the race would be a place-to-place ride, not conceived, however, as an individual record attempt (along the lines of, say, the End-to-End or Liverpool–London in the UK) but as a mass-start road race.

In 1891 the VCB and *Le Véloce-Sport* were keen to attract crack British riders to compete in Bordeaux–Paris, but the NCU refused to authorize British amateurs to compete in France in an open race where they might in fact be riding against professionals. Despite French indignation at the alleged bad faith of the British governing body – which in the view of the French was turning a blind eye to the ‘sham-amateurism’ of riders who were retained by manufacturers – in order to attract the best international field, the organizers of Bordeaux–Paris allowed only French *amateurs* to take part, thereby opening the door for UK participation. This effectively meant that British professionals such as G.P. Mills (riding for Humber as well as for his Anfield Bicycle Club) were racing against ‘true’ French amateurs, the best of whom was (Pierre-Joseph) Jiel-Laval (always known as ‘Jiel-Laval’) of the VCB. A further irony was that, since the organizers allowed pacing from companion riders, the victorious Mills was helped to Paris by many kilometres of shelter behind France’s premier professional rider, Charles Terront, who was not, of course, allowed to compete himself.

The race itself was an epic of courage and endurance, as it had been intended to be. Holbein was generally expected to win, but Mills’s dominance was such that it soon became obvious that he would be victorious, and he was welcomed to Paris by a crowd of some 10,000 spectators. The winning time was 26 hrs 34 mins 57 secs, giving an overall average speed of 21.82 kph. The Britons Holbein, Edge and Bates arrived next, with Jiel-Laval only losing fourth place by two minutes to Bates. The second French rider home was Coulliboeuf, placed sixth, three minutes behind Jiel-Laval (Spectator, 1891).

The race made a small profit: 510 francs of income from entry fees and donations against 423 francs of expenditure on programmes,
posters, checkpoints, prizes and so on produced a net gain of 87 francs (Jiel-Laval, 1891). But the main impact of Bordeaux–Paris was the publicity it had always been intended to give to cycling and, accessorially, the stimulation the result gave to debates in France over amateurism, professionalism and the presumed superiority of the ‘English model’ of training and racing. Mills’ performance was acclaimed as one of the greatest ever long-distance rides, ‘morally superior’, said *Le Véloce-Sport*, to all other distance records because of the atrocious conditions of rain and wind he had faced (Spectator, 1891). In the weeks that intervened between Bordeaux–Paris and Paris–Brest–Paris in September 1891, discussion raged over whether French races should be organized specially to allow the participation of fake British amateurs, whether British training and racing was technically more advanced and whether British riders should be banned from Paris–Brest–Paris. Bordeaux–Paris had raised the profile of cycle racing with a single spectacular event, as the general public and the general press alike had taken notice of the race, but the specialist press, keen to retain its own niche, was unhappy with the reporting of other newspapers (Hamelle, 1891).

During the rest of the 1890s – as close reading of a near-contemporary view of developments in cycle racing allows us to suggest (Coquelle and Breyer, 1899) – Bordeaux–Paris served as a kind of test-bed for the development of professional road racing: in 1892 it was organized wholly by *Le Véloce-Sport*, and English riders did not participate because of disagreements over amateurism and professionalism; in 1893 the race was run by *Le Véloce-Sport* and the growing *Le Vélo*, which in the later 1890s was to take over the event completely; during the rest of the decade arguments raged over amateurism and professionalism and British participation, the use of pacing riders, the use of motorcycle or car pacing and other issues and, in 1902, the press war between sports newspapers led to Bordeaux–Paris races being staged by both *Le Vélo* and *L’Auto-Vélo*.

*The Paris–Brest–Paris race*

The 572 km of Bordeaux–Paris had been planned as a spectacular demonstration of what men and bicycles could do, but just three months later another race was organized whose scale and drama eclipsed that of its earlier rival and, in many ways, caused cycle sport to claim its proper place in the popular imagination. As Durry (1973: 30, 33) explains the relationship between the two races: ‘cet événement [Bordeaux–Paris] marqua les esprits, mais une aventure encore plus fabuleuse se préparait, qui allait avoir un retentissement non seulement national mais mondial’.

He goes on to suggest that, after Terront’s incredible September 1891
ride, ‘la cause du cyclisme était définitivement gagnée’. The non-stop ride from Paris to the far-flung Breton port of Brest and back, a distance of 1,196 km, was run over the days following 6 September 1891. The victor was the French professional Charles Terront, who completed the distance in 72 hours and beat the national hero of Bordeaux-Paris, the French amateur Jiel-Laval, into second place.5

The race was the brainchild of Pierre Giffard and Le Petit Journal newspaper. It came to be known as ‘la grande course du Petit Journal’, as the friendly rivalry between Le Véloce-Sport and the Parisian generalist paper that was one of the first properly to report sports developed. Paris–Brest–Paris was conceived as a response to the VCB and Le Véloce-Sport’s organization of Bordeaux–Paris as a race to attract British riders, which had effectively prohibited the participation of French professionals. Paris–Brest–Paris was thus devised as a course nationale, reserved for French riders of any category. Whereas Bordeaux–Paris was ‘amateur’, and G.P. Mills had won a cup and a gold medal from the organizers, prizes in Paris–Brest–Paris were either cash (for the professionals) or ‘un objet d’art’ (for the amateurs). Terront’s winning efforts were to earn him 2,000 francs.

Giffard’s aim was to devise a race that would best ‘mettre en relief l’intelligence de l’homme en même temps que sa force physique et les qualités de sa machine’. Such a definition may seem surprising: why stress the ‘intelligence’ of a rider in a long-distance road race? Why be concerned with the characteristics of the bicycle used by the rider? In contrast with the simplistic approach of considering cycle racing as simply a question of physical ability, Giffard’s understanding of the relationship between cycle sport and cycling in general was arguably more subtle. Although Giffard’s summary of the qualities that riders would need (Jean-sans-Terre, 1891a) anticipates the view later popularized by Henri Desgrange that racing was as much about ‘la tête’ as it was about ‘les jambes’, it is in his famous declaration that ‘la vélocipédie n’est pas seulement un sport, mais un bienfait social’ that the origins of the ethos of Paris–Brest–Paris are to be found. A good-tempered exchange of views between Le Véloce-Sport and Le Petit Journal discussed whether Paris–Bordeaux was a real test of riders (‘une course d’hommes’), whereas Paris–Brest–Paris would be a test of bicycles (‘une course de machines’); this arose from the ruling that in Paris–Brest–Paris riders would only be able to use a single machine, rather than changing bikes after accidents or on different terrains, as had been allowed in Bordeaux–Paris. For Giffard (Jean-sans-Terre, 1891b), using a single machine would oblige riders to pay more attention in escaping accidents
(‘l’intelligence’ needed to avoid potholes or crashes), and manufacturers would be forced to provide reliable technologies (the ‘qualités de la machine’ that contributed to everyday cycling being a ‘bienfait social’).

So the inaugural Paris–Brest–Paris was designed as a national, open (professional/amateur) course de machines. It was a phenomenal success: 400 riders enrolled (several registrations from women were refused), 205 actually departed from Paris and 100 made it back to the capital. Thousands of spectators watched the start, the turn at Brest, or the arrival of the leading riders in Paris. Newspapers not usually interested in sport took up the race and commented, mainly favourably, on the extraordinary exploits of the competitors. In the absence of British riders, amateur or professional, French national pride could have full rein, and the performances of Terront, Jiel-Laval and the third-placed Couliboeuf were lauded in eulogistic terms. *Le Petit Journal* took pleasure in quoting an article from the *London Evening News and Post* warning British riders of the new supremacy of the French (*Le Petit Journal*, 27 September 1891). The race did encourage manufacturers to develop and improve technology: the huge advertising campaign undertaken by Humber on the strength of Mills’ victory in Bordeaux–Paris had shown how sales could be influenced by racing success, and Michelin claimed to have developed a new clincher tyre specifically for the race. More generally, manufacturers were brought closer to the organization of cycle sport by a donation of 1,500 francs from the *Chambre syndicale des fabricants français de vélocipèdes*; but they were doubtless chastened by the calculations of *Le Petit Journal* that over 50 cycles broke during the race, thereby preventing their riders from completing the course.

Whereas Bordeaux–Paris became an annual event, the greater scale perhaps of Paris–Brest–Paris caused it to be neglected during the rest of the 1890s, the race only being resurrected in 1901 by *L’Auto-Vélo* of Desgrange, engaged in its bitter circulation war with *Le Vélo* of Giffard. But as a ‘one-off’ event, ‘Paris–Brest et retour’ had immeasurably advanced both racing and public perceptions of cycle sport.

*Velodrome racing*

The phenomenon of velodrome racing, which developed in the 1880s and rapidly reached its zenith in the 1890s (Holt, 1981: 82), is a complex case-study of the influences and trends at work in the evolution of cycling as sport and leisure. The brief period during which the velodromes flourished was marked by the rise of professionalism, the decline in the role of clubs in the organization of races, the rise in the importance of the sporting press, the strengthening of links between racers and manufac-
turers, and overall, a democratization of cycling.

Cycle racing in the early decades of the sport had been organized - mainly by clubs but also increasingly, as we have seen, by the press - on public roads or in public spaces such as parks or urban boulevards, but the need had soon developed for permanent facilities for racing that were not subject to the vagaries of town councils or conflict with other uses of public space. It was thus that early influential clubs built their own race tracks, to be used both for races and training. The south-west region was an enthusiastic early promoter of velodromes, with permanent facilities being built in the mid-1880s, such as that at Dax (1885), the Saint-Augustin track in Bordeaux (1886) and the Parc Beaumont track in Pau (1886). The Saint-Augustin track of the Véloce-Club bordelais allowed the club to transfer racing from the Place des Quinconces, but eventually represented a heavy financial drain on the club, whose demise in 1892 opened the way for fully commercial private-sector exploitation of velodrome racing in Bordeaux in the later 1890s.

The 1880s were the decade of gentlemanly competition on the track between riders of social distinction, participating in races organized by the still socially elitist cycling clubs, as cycling had not yet become a mass entertainment. Track racers in the 1880s were generally predominantly middle and upper class, whereas on the road, racers had already become predominantly lower class. However, by the 1890s and the full flush of early professionalism, track and road racing came to be dominated by riders from humble social origins who aspired to sporting glory and its attendant rewards. Eugen Weber suggests that although track racing was initially merely an ‘upper-class fad’ (both in terms of competitors and spectators), in the 1890s at least it was very rapidly taken up by the masses: ‘Cycle races were the first popular sporting entertainment of modern times, and the first to offer numerous professionals an avenue of economic, hence social promotion’ (1986a: 195). Weber makes the point that the famous Vélodrome d’hiver track founded in 1893 in the select Champ de Mars quarter in Paris was soon swamped with lower-class spectators, as track racing developed rapidly into commercial spectacle (1986a: 198). The Vél’ d’hiv’ track was not the first to be set up in Paris: it succeeded the Palais des Arts libéraux (1890, in the Salle des arts libéraux built for the 1889 exhibition), which had soon been followed by the famous Vélodrome de Buffalo and the Vélodrome de la Seine in 1892 and in 1895 by a track at the Bois de Vincennes, and yet another at the Parc des Princes.

Under the combined influence of burgeoning professionalism, entrepreneurial innovation and a vigorous sporting press, velodrome racing
in the 1890s became something of a mania, but the popularity of the sport was always dependent on the fickleness of the public. Attracting a paying crowd to watch cycling in a stadium was more manageable than trying to make any money from the spectators of a road race such as Bordeaux–Paris, but once the first flush of enthusiasm for mere novelty (of the machines and the event) or for speed (and danger) had been exhausted, those who organized the track competitions had to find ways of maintaining interest. The life of a velodrome was often short, as backers became disillusioned with the uncertainties of the gate receipts. In the provinces, three or four velodromes in Bordeaux competed for the favours of the cycling public in the 1890s, but all eventually failed. *Le Vélo* was sufficiently concerned in 1897 to lead a survey of France’s tracks, concluding that most were in a bad state. Publicity for the events was guaranteed by the sporting press – avid relayers of anything that could increase their circulation – and as Holt has described, ‘Ballyhoo and hyperbole became the stock-in-trade of the sports journalist, who carved out a distinctive and specialized niche in the journalistic world’ (1981: 90). ‘Heroes’ were fashioned by the sporting press whose careers and lives became sporting soap operas, reported on daily by the newspapers. Although some managers and owners of velodromes were former riders, such as Henri Desgrange (who admittedly was also a gifted journalist and publicist), Weber (1986a) and Holt (1981: 81–103) both rightly emphasize the links between cycling as ‘spectacle’ created in track racing and other more traditional domains of popular entertainment that were forged by the ‘sporting impresarios’ who often ran the tracks. The clearest examples of the crossover between sport and popular entertainment in the arts were Clovis Clerc of the Folies Bergères, manager of a track at Charenton in Paris, and literary man-about-town Tristan Bernard, owner of the Buffalo velodrome. It was perhaps their influence that helped develop races involving animals, revealingly dressed actresses, cycling acrobats and other gimmicks. In anticipation of the ‘hook’ to be found by Desgrange in 1903 for the Tour de France, however, velodromes seized on the notion of what could be called ‘extreme racing’, with non-stop duels between riders over distances of 1,000 km or more, or 24 hours. Such ordeals attracted crowds, but the public tired even of these spectacles of endurance and suffering, and the ‘star system’ of riders created by the press produced tensions between the velodromes and the most popular and successful racers. Difficulties such as these led to the creation of a riders’ union and further complications for an unstable entertainment industry.
The sporting press: reporting spectacle

The relationships between sport and the press in France were first examined in a pioneering volume by Edouard Seidler, published in 1964, which presented the history of this symbiotic existence from the earliest days of the journal *Le Sport* (first published 1854, in Paris, for the ‘gens du monde’) through the creation of *Le Vélocipède illustré* (1869) by Richard Lesclide, and beyond to the launching of *Le Vélo* in 1892 and then *L’Auto-Vélo* in 1900 (Seidler, 1964). Although, as their names indicate, *Le Vélo* and *L’Auto-Vélo* were very closely reliant upon the burgeoning sport of cycle racing in the 1890s, they were essentially examples of the ‘multi-sports’ newspaper, whose daily publication in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in France was made possible by the huge range of sporting competitions and by the, carefully managed, public interest in the events and the personalities involved. Since cycling competition was to launch the mutually profitable relationship between sport and the press, by virtue of its early appearance in the 1860s and 1870s, there were naturally a number of cycling-specific newspapers that set the tone for much of what followed. One of the more significant of these was the influential *Le Véloce-Sport*, which as we have seen was central to the establishment of one of the most famous and significant of late nineteenth-century cycle races, Bordeaux–Paris. Newspapers, often involved in circulation wars with their competitors, were during this period keen on inventing, staging and sponsoring races of all kinds, and especially cycle races, which were particularly popular with the reading public, and *Le Vélo* and *L’Auto-Vélo* followed this model enthusiastically. We shall initially consider the example of *Le Véloce-Sport*, and then discuss *Le Vélo* of Pierre Giffard and its avowed enemy, *L’Auto-Vélo* of Henri Desgrange.

*Le Véloce-Sport* and *Le Véloceman*

As Pierre Chany, among others, has chronicled (1995: 40–41) *Le Véloceman* and *Le Véloce-Sport* were founded independently in Montpellier and Bordeaux in 1885. They were early examples of successful weekly sporting newspapers devoted exclusively to cycling, and they demonstrate how provincial journalism managed to provide comprehensive media coverage of the developing sport. *Le Véloce-Sport* was closely linked with the famous Véloce-Club bordelais, though the club collapsed in 1892. It was founded in March 1885 by Pierre Rousset (president of the VCB), Fernand Ladevèze and Maurice Lanneluc-Sanson (a leading member of the VCB), and in 1886 absorbed its Montpellier-
based competitor *Le Véloceman*, a Franco-British publication run by the famous French-based British rider and trainer H.O. Duncan. In 1889 it was bought by three members of the VCB – Paul Rousseau, Maurice Martin and Emile Jegher – taking over another (French) cycling journal entitled *The French Cyclist* in 1893, after which date it was published in Paris. It soon merged with *La Bicyclette*, becoming *Le Véloce-Sport–La Bicyclette*, and came under the control of A. Lucenski and Louis Minart. Many of the personnel of *Le Véloce-Sport* were important members of the VCB, to the point where the newspaper was often at pains to reject accusations from other, mainly Parisian, journals that it was merely the club newsletter. Like the *Véloce-Club bordelais* itself, *Le Véloce-Sport* had ambitions to represent the Bordeaux ‘model’ of cycling at the national level, and to engage in debate over issues crucial to the development of *le sport vélocipédique* on an equal footing with the Parisian sporting press.

Rivalry with the developing sporting press in Paris arguably first impinged on *Le Véloce-Sport* when it started to publicize the inaugural Bordeaux–Paris race. Pierre Giffard’s intention to stage a spectacular race for the (daily) *Le Petit Journal* from Paris to Brest and back had thus been anticipated, and the columns of the papers aired a courteous debate over the merits and ethics of the respective races (*Le Véloce-Sport*, 2 July 1891, 30 July 1891, 6 August 1891; Jean-sans-Terre, 1891a; 1891b). However, from 1888 *Le Véloce-Sport* had been adopted as the official journal of the UVF, meaning that it was in its columns that the UVF published its decisions, rulings and other information, thereby according the newspaper something of a protected status. From its origins as – almost – the newsletter of an admittedly prestigious and influential club in Bordeaux and the voice of the views of the south-western clubs and regional federations, *Le Véloce-Sport* thus became an important national arbiter of cycling debate and fashions. It provided a forum for two major journalists of the sporting press, as well as launching a number of others into the profession. The famous sports journalist, newspaper owner and influential figure in the politics of French sport in the 1880s and 1890s, Paul Rousseau, was employed as the sub-editor in 1888, before leading the buy-out of 1889 that relaunched the paper, and the long-time columnist Maurice Martin was an active member of the VCB and an enthusiastic tourist, using his articles in *Le Véloce-Sport* and later newspapers to help ‘invent’ the concept of cycle touring.

*Le Vélo*

Between its launch in December 1892 and its disappearance in November
1904, the history of Le Vélo encapsulates much of the heady events of sport and the media in fin-de-siècle France. The last four years of its life were marred – terminally so – by vicious competition with the new sports newspaper of Henri Desgrange and the Tour de France, L’Auto-Vélo, but in its hey-day Le Vélo was a highly successful example of what the new industry of sports journalism could be. In effect, it was Le Vélo, printed on green paper and known affectionately as ‘le petit Vert’, that introduced the idea of a daily rather than weekly or fortnightly sports newspaper.

Just as the later L’Auto-Vélo was to be irrevocably marked by the personality and sporting ideology of its editor, Henri Desgrange, Le Vélo was very much the creation of its inventor and editor, Pierre Giffard. As editor for general news, Giffard had been responsible for introducing sports reporting to the pages of the mass-circulation daily Le Petit Journal, and had managed to boost sales of the paper through promotions such as the Paris–Brest–Paris race of September 1891 (Marchand, 1999: 58–59). By 1892 Giffard had realized that there was a growing market for sports reporting, and Hippolyte Marinoni, the owner of Le Petit Journal, was beginning to tire of the demands to include more and more sport in his mainstream newspaper. Le Vélo was born with the help of Le Petit Journal, as it was initially printed on Le Petit Journal’s presses, and it only became fully independent from Giffard’s former employer in the mid-1890s, when sales had risen so much that Giffard parted company with Marinoni. Le Vélo in its early days also benefited from the input of young and progressive staff such as Paul Rousseau, poached from Le Véloce-Sport, Victor Breyer, Robert Coquelle, the brothers Hamelle, and the almost father-figure of the popularization of cycling and cycling history, Baudry de Saunier. Maurice Martin of Le Véloce-Sport also contributed occasionally in the early years, before joining the staff for good later in the decade. Although Le Vélo was much less closely linked with industry than its later rival L’Auto-Vélo, important financial support came initially from the tyre and cycle manufacturer Adolphe Clément.

Le Vélo needed a sound journalistic footing in the form of experienced and talented reporters, and the support of Le Petit Journal and of industry, because the market for sports newspapers, although expanding, was not without competitive pressures. The birth of ‘le petit Vert’ had to be brought forward by some days to 1 December 1892 in order to steal the thunder from the weekly La Revue des sports, which was relaunched on 3 December as a daily (Marchand, 1999: 75). As well as La Revue des sports (originally established as far back as 1876), Le Vélo was
fighting for readers with *Le Véloce-Sport* (1885), *La Bicyclette* (1892), *La Revue du sport vélocipédique* (1886), *Le Vélocipède illustré* (1890) and increasing columns devoted to sport in the generalist dailies such as *Le Petit Journal* and *Le Figaro*. Even before the particularly targeted threat from *L’Auto-Vélo* in 1900, the burgeoning success of Giffard’s new paper had to weather turbulence created by the merger of *Le Véloce-Sport* and *La Bicyclette* in the mid-1890s and by the creation in 1898 of what was to become arguably the greatest of all sporting newspapers, *La Vie au grand air*.

The prosperity of *Le Vélo* – sales increased from 20,000 in 1892 to over 80,000 by 1894 – can be explained by the journalistic talents of the reporting team and by Giffard’s charismatic – if on occasions irascible – leadership. Beyond the mere organization and running of the newspaper, however, *Le Vélo* managed to capture the loyalty of its readership because of its role as a promoter of cycling, and also, arguably, because of Giffard’s interpretation of what ‘sport’ should mean in 1890s France. These two things were interlinked, and it is possible that, although *Le Vélo*’s position on cycling and sport was attractive during the 1890s, by the turn of the century it was the different sporting ideology of Henri Desgrange that was more in tune with the wants of the readers of sports dailies.

One key to an understanding of Giffard’s philosophy of sport is his famous slogan: ‘le vélo est plus qu’un sport; c’est un bienfait social’, which was to be found on the masthead of *Le Vélo*. While obviously believing that cycle sport was an important aspect of cycling, Giffard agreed that the new means of personal transport was something that needed encouragement, and the columns of *Le Vélo* hosted debates on the need to fight against government taxation of cycles, as well as demands for responsible cycling, for appropriate signing of roads and hills, for garages for cycles and a host of other ‘practical’ measures that would allow cycling to play its full role in improving society. Another key was Giffard’s belief that sport was a means for saving the lower classes from ‘le péché de paresse, d’indolence, et de séjours interminables au café’ (*Le Vélo*, 1901). Although Giffard was first and foremost a ‘modern’ newspaperman highly aware of the interlinkings of sport, media and industry in the new genre of sports journalism (after all, it was he who had launched the first truly modern major race in 1891 with Paris–Brest–Paris), he was also attached to an arguably less commercial–industrial vision of sport closer to the French ideal of *sports anglais* practised for their physical and moral benefits. It is this moral and social dimension to Giffard’s thinking on sport that leads some commentators
such as the sports journalist and historian Jacques Marchand to stress the links between his philosophy of sport and that of Pierre de Coubertin, implicitly distinguishing the Giffardian view from that of Desgrange, the ‘fixer’ of the journalistic–industrial complex of turn-of-the-century French cycling (Marchand, 1999). Marchand goes so far as to suggest an ‘objective affinity’ between the views of Giffard and Coubertin (1999: 95–96). A more detailed examination of Giffard’s career and philosophy of sport and the press can be found in Dauncey (2008), which similarly suggests that, compared with Desgrange and his rich backers from the Omnium club or the industry supporters of the – avowedly non-political – *L’Auto-Vélo*, Giffard appeared as a progressive and politicized commentator on society whose personal interest in politics contributed to his professional downfall and that of *Le Vélo*.

*Le Vélo* eventually folded in November 1904, killed off by the success of the Tour de France organized by Desgrange and *L’Auto-Vélo*, but weakened already from 1899 by a political feud between the progressive Giffard and the powerful right-winger, the Comte de Dion. The main lines of the rivalry between *Le Vélo* and de Dion’s *L’Auto-Vélo* are usually summarized in terms of opposing positions on the judicial–political scandal that structured French society in the 1890s, the Dreyfus Affair, but the tensions between Giffard and de Dion were arguably as much to do with sport and industry as with Dreyfus. The divisions in French society caused by the Dreyfus Affair were often of a kind that encompassed entire world- and life-views, as the guilt or innocence of Dreyfus and the government’s manipulation of his trials forced people into opposing positions on the nature of civil and political society, on the state, the army, the Church, patriotism and nationalism. It was therefore relatively easy for a progressive such as Giffard to become totally opposed to a right-wing, aristocratic, industrial magnate, establishment figure such as de Dion.

*L’Auto-Vélo and L’Auto*

In January 1903 Giffard won a pyrrhic victory over de Dion, Desgrange and *L’Auto-Vélo* with the legal decision that *L’Auto-Vélo* had to drop the ‘Vélo’ from its title, but less than two years later *Le Vélo* itself had closed, beaten into submission by the dynamism and implacability of its young competitor. *L’Auto* would prosper until the Occupation, eventually to be reborn – in troubled circumstances – after the Second World War as the no less famous *L’Equipe*. *L’Auto-Vélo* was founded by the Comte de Dion in October 1900 as a result of his quarrels with Giffard. The precise details of the feud between the two men remain somewhat
unclear but, in general terms, it seems that, although they were both united by a love of sport, and particularly the new vogue for automobiles, de Dion felt personally and politically slighted by *Le Vélo*, and believed that the car industry and his company in particular were ill-served by Giffard’s approach to running France’s dominant sports newspaper.

Although *Le Vélo* carried much advertising for de Dion’s cars and the products of many of his manufacturing friends, Giffard’s readiness to support Dreyfus in the newspaper infuriated many of his indirect backers. After a fracas at the Auteuil racecourse during a protest against the election of Loubet as president of France in 1899, after which de Dion spent time in prison for affray, their agreement to remain friends in support of the cause of the automobile while being political enemies put the count and the editor in a fraught situation. Relations deteriorated in a tit-for-tat downwards spiral: Giffard’s attempt to be elected as a deputy in Normandy was partially sabotaged by de Dion; de Dion’s adverts were no longer published in *Le Vélo*; Giffard criticized the *Automobile Club de France* for being nothing more than a society club for the elite such as de Dion and launched a rival *Moto-Club de France*. Finally, de Dion realized that the best way to deal with Giffard was by crushing *Le Vélo* and set out to do so with *L’Auto-Vélo*, backed by the industrialists Clément and Michelin and fronted by Henri Desgrange, former lawyers’ clerk, cycle-racer, velodrome owner and manager and advertising director of Clément. Desgrange was seconded by Victor Goddet, another velodrome manager, in a team that reflected strongly the belief that the reporting of sport was to be free of politics à la Giffard, but closely linked with industry and commerce.

Although *L’Auto-Vélo* was initially dwarfed by the sales of its well-established rival, an active and vicious campaign of commercial undercutting and sporting piracy weakened Giffard’s position: *Le Vélo* had lost some advertising through offence given to de Dion, Michelin and Clément, but even manufacturers who remained faithful, such as Darracq, were persuaded to change allegiance. In 1901 Desgrange wrestled sponsorship of the Paris–Roubaix race from *Le Vélo*; also in 1901 Desgrange ‘stole’ the first re-run of Paris–Brest–Paris from Giffard by persuading the owner of *Le Petit Journal*, Marinoni, to cede ownership to *L’Auto-Vélo* rather than to *Le Vélo*; Bordeaux–Paris 1901 was undermined by Desgrange’s influence over riders as manager of the Parc des Princes velodrome, and Bordeaux–Paris in 1902 was run twice, first by *Le Vélo*, and then soon after by *L’Auto-Vélo*, but with better riders and faster times.
While awaiting the coup de grâce of the Tour de France in 1903, the sales war between ‘le petit Vert’ and ‘le petit Jaune’ (L’Auto-Vélo was printed on yellow paper) catalysed competitive sport and accelerated the development of sports reporting. As well as reviving races such as Paris–Brest–Paris and rejuvenating classics such as Bordeaux–Paris and Paris–Roubaix, L’Auto-Vélo used the latest telegraphic technology to get instant reports on races, and introduced a real system of special correspondents sent specially to cover events worldwide. In 1903 Giffard left the sinking Le Vélo, as did Paul Rousseau and Frantz Reichel, who founded the short-lived Le Monde sportif, one of a small number of new papers such as Les Sports (1904–10) that attempted to occupy the space between the conquering L’Auto and the faltering Le Vélo. It was to check these inchoate rivals that L’Auto started looking for the ‘killer’ event that would definitively convert Giffard’s cycling readers to the cause of L’Auto.

The claimed intention of L’Auto was to report sport without politics: ‘il ne sera jamais, à L’Auto-Vélo, question de politique, soyez donc, ô lecteurs, ou pour ou contre […] soyez ce que vous serez, mais ne comptez jamais sur L’Auto pour vous en parler’ (Desgrange, 1900). So Desgrange’s paper was not political in the narrow sense of party-politics, but it was ‘le journal des industriels’, creating events and news as much as it reported them and pushing cycling and sport forwards as free-market products. L’Auto’s awareness of the ‘loop’ of sport–media–industry is neatly demonstrated by its generous hiring of Giffard in 1904, and by the quiet purchase of Le Vélo, whose editor Gaston de Pawlowski was then paid to produce copy critical of L’Auto in a measure planned to maintain interest in both newspapers simultaneously!

The creation of the UCI: the internationalization of cycle sport

In a period of imperial expansion and nationalistic rivalries, sport was also becoming increasingly internationalized, as interest in confrontations between nations or their representative champions, such as Augustus Zimmerman in cycling (see Ritchie, 2011: 303–14), fascinated the sporting public and whetted the appetite of the sporting media, and as ever-improving travel and communications facilitated the staging of contests and reporting on them. As sport internationalized, the need for common rules and regulations became increasingly pressing, to allow national records and competitions to be sensibly comparable and so that international competitions could be staged fairly. Not counting the IRB,
which was set up in 1886 essentially as a ‘home-nations’ organization to
govern rugby in the UK, the creation of the current international cycling
body in 1900 preceded that of most other major sports: FIFA was formed
in 1904, and many others followed in the years before the First World
War: ISAF (sailing, 1907), FINA (swimming, 1908), IAAF (athletics,
1912), FIE (fencing, 1913) and ITF (tennis, 1913). French influence was
strong in the inception of many of these governing bodies.

The Union cycliste internationale (UCI) was formed on 14 April
1900, in Paris. The UCI – known almost without exception through its
French acronym, rather like FIFA – has had a chequered history, with its
role being constantly challenged and debated. Most recently, in the 1990s
and the 2000s, the UCI has been accused of incompetence and ineffi-
ciency in investigating and eradicating doping in professional cycling and
has generally been challenged (e.g. Fotheringham, 2005; 2007), and these
failings can be seen as a natural consequence of many of the circum-
stances that accompanied the birth of the organization in 1900.

For a long time, the UCI struggled to assert any kind of authority
over the world of professional and amateur cycling, faced with the
entrenched commercial, industrial and media interests of the traditional
stakeholders in the sport. In addition to the difficulties of imposing any
kind of order on the disparate activities of cycle manufacturers, sports
newspapers, race organizers and cycling clubs, the UCI also found itself
in an unenviable position of weakness vis-à-vis the long-established
national cycling federations. Countries such as Belgium, Spain, Italy and
France, which had considerable experience of professional racing
extending back to the 1870s and beyond, had evolved (often at the cost
of much conflict and argument) strong national organizing bodies that
were loath to make compromises at the international level (some of the
vicissitudes of the French experience of settling on a national governing
body in this early period have already been touched on in this chapter).
Additionally, the UCI had to cater for the interests of national cycling
federations from countries where the sport was dominated not by profes-
sionalism but by amateurism, and the conflicts between these two
interpretations of the sport has made the running of the UCI all the more
problematic.

Early attempts to regulate international cycling: the ICA
As Ritchie (2011: 295–302) has described, the International Cycling
Association (ICA) was born in November 1892 as the result of British-
led moves to create a structure to govern the burgeoning activity of cycle
racing on an international level. Despite the dynamism of cycle racing in
France and in continental Europe in general (and also, of course, in the United States), and the strength of the French national association the Union Vélocipédique de France, British cycling was the de facto leader of cycle racing worldwide, and it was the British annual cycling championships organized by the National Cyclists’ Union that came to serve as the generally acknowledged ‘world’ championships, in the absence of any competitions actually staged by an international body independent of national associations.

While French cycling stakeholders – regional and national federations, industrialists, newspapers and indeed racers themselves – were keen to see the structure of the sport defined at an international level, the ICA was intrinsically problematic for the French sports–media–industry complex both in terms of its fundamentally Anglo-American genesis and organization, and also because, as a body born out of British cycling (and British ‘Corinthian’ attitudes towards sport in general), its principal preoccupation was to develop international competition in cycling along amateur lines. For the French and for many other countries (including the USA) where professionalism in sport was more culturally, socially and athletically acceptable, British control of the inchoate international body for cycling was troubling. Although the NCU had carefully and cleverly obtained support for the ICA from the French amateur sports federation, the Union des sociétés françaises de sports athlétiques, it had broken off relations with the UVF precisely over the issue of the French national body’s toleration of professionalism. Pierre Giffard’s Le Vélo, which regularly commented negatively on the activities and ethos of the ICA, was representative of the simmering dissatisfaction within French cycle sport (outside the USFSA) with the new world regulatory authority, also exemplified by – among many others – Le Véloce-Sport in January 1893, commenting negatively on the birth of the ICA and its focus on professionalism: ‘Cette ridicule et absurde manie de conserver [...] cette barrière entre professionnels et amateurs semble être un retour à l’ancienne loi des castes [...] Le professionnel est-il donc si bas, si ignoble que l’on se trouve offensé par son contact?’ (F.-M.B., 1893). And in September 1893 Le Véloce-Sport made an editorial appeal, signed by Paul Hamelle, for a ‘Union Latine’ where (‘continental’) professionalism would have its rightful place alongside (‘Anglo-Saxon’) amateurism in competition of all kinds (Hamelle, 1893).

The ICA organized world championships in 1893 in Chicago (perhaps in an attempt to distance the event as much as possible, physically and conceptually, from France) where US riders dominated, and every following year until 1900 in Antwerp (1894), Cologne (1895),
Copenhagen (1896), Glasgow (1897), Vienna (1898) and Montreal (1899). The 1893 event coincided with the Chicago World Trade Fair and the star rider was the American Augustus Zimmerman, who embodied the contradictions and tensions intrinsic to the ICA as a rider deemed ‘professional’ by the ICA itself, but considered ‘amateur’ by the US national body, the League of American Wheelmen. But in 1900 the annual meeting of the ICA and the venue for the championships were finally scheduled to be organized by France, providing a golden opportunity for the UVF and other supporters of a less restrictively amateur code for competition to stage a coup and transform the ICA into a world governing body that would also fully embrace professionalism.

The UCI replaces the ICA: Anglo-French rivalry

On 25 February 1900 the annual congress of the International Cycling Association was held in Paris and ended in some confusion, according to the possibly not totally objective report and comment on the proceedings published in *Le Vélo* (Breyer, 1900a), as its British chairman Henry Sturmey struggled to impose his wishes in the various issues that were threatening to cause the ICA’s demise. Against the backdrop of the long campaign of *Le Vélo* against the ICA, member countries were lobbying for a reform of the voting rules and for the encouragement of membership from other cycling nations. The February 1900 meeting of the ICA was unable to resolve or advance either of these issues, as Dutch and German representations for membership were deferred or rejected, the American National Cyclists Association accepted in a confusing replacement of the League of American Wheelmen, and discussion of voting reform postponed until an extraordinary meeting scheduled for April.

One item that was agreed was the Italian request that – as arranged for in the ICA statutes – official documentation was to be provided in both English and French. Such a concession was, however, symbolic of the nature of many of the arguments that were rendering the work of the ICA so problematic: French cycling (and beyond France, cycling in other ‘Latin’ countries) had become increasingly resentful of what it saw as British domination of the international regulation of cycle sport. Writing in *Le Vélo* a week or so after the unsatisfactory congress of February 1900, the senior sports journalist Paul Hamelle explained this conflict of positions in florid terms that are nevertheless not untypical of the ‘literary’ style of much sports journalism of the period:

> En résumé, il est apparu clairement, au cours de ces tumultueux débats, que deux esprits étaient aux prises, figurés par l’Angleterre et la France: l’un, esprit ancien, voué aux fictions fanées, hypnotisé par les souvenirs d’un passé
And the second spirit was, naturally, that of France: ‘l’autre, l’esprit nouveau, qui accepte l’évolution et ses changements; oh! bien souvent sans enthousiasme, mais sans dépit puéril non plus, et se résigne à légiférer pour les hommes tels qu’ils sont, et non tels qu’ils devraient être!’ (Hamelle, 1900a).

For all his sympathy with the French position, Hamelle was by no means the most fervent of the detractors of the ICA: that honour should be awarded to the young Victor Breyer, who as an accomplished competitive cyclist, journalist and agent in the organization of cycle sport was rapidly creating a significant place for himself in the development of French cycling. Sturmey, who was seriously aggrieved by what he saw as French attempts to sabotage his control of what he considered to be ‘his’ organization of international cycling, singled out Breyer as one of the main protagonists in what he described as the French campaign, led by the UVF and Le Vélo, to assume leadership of the ICA, which led to Breyer’s sardonic response in Le Vélo (Breyer, 1900b). Certainly, by 1900, the UVF was becoming more comfortably established than it had previously been during most of the 1880s and 1890s as the lead organization of French cycling; even if there were still remaining disagreements over amateur and professional cycling in France, at least its national role was no longer challenged, as was indeed confirmed in April 1900 with the disappearance of the one subsisting regional cycling association, the Fédération vélocipédique du Nord (founded in 1890), whose demise was welcomed by the influential journalist Maurice Martin (Martin, 1900a). French sensitivity over perceived Anglo-Saxon domination of international sport was partly a reflection of Gallic resentment of the way in which ‘modern’ sports appeared to have been mostly imported from Britain – football, rugby, athletics – and of real or imagined French sporting inferiority vis-à-vis British or American athletes. But a concern with the balance of (sporting) power between the ‘Latin’ and the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ worlds also mirrored greater national insecurity over France’s place in the world (after defeat by the Prussians, Alsace-Lorraine, the Grab for Africa, late industrialization and other perceived failings) and the widely prevailing ‘racialist’ interpretation of national characters. One
example (among many) of this Weltanschauung occurred precisely in June 1900, between the final failed congress of the ICA and the first meeting of the UCI: the races of cycling’s Grand Prix de Paris had been dominated by French and Italian riders – the great French champion Jacquelin had won the premier race – and according to Maurice Martin, writing in Le Vélo, this was proof enough of differing athletic abilities between nations of the North and the South: ‘In summary, except for rare exceptions, the races of the North seem better suited to sports of power and slow energy, and those of the South more fitted for cerebro-physical sports less demanding in their athletic aspects, such as cycling’ (Martin, 1900b).

The UCI is founded: French dominance
The business of the ICA deferred from its meeting of February 1900 was discussed at an extraordinary meeting, again held in Paris at the luxurious Hôtel de Russie, on 15 April 1900. It was at this meeting that the first nail was hammered into the coffin of the ICA, as the faction opposed to Sturmey and his Anglo-Saxon domination of rulings on international cycling managed to force a change in the representation of member nations, thereby transforming the balance of power within the association. Le Vélo’s Paul Hamelle gave a useful summary of Latin complaints about the ICA and what the French saw as Sturmey’s autocratic and idiosyncratic running of the organization, likening the situation’s chaos to the Tower of Babel (Hamelle, 1900b). Despite some apparent sharp practice from Sturmey himself, who was involved in the discussions as a representative of the Cape Cyclists’ Union and was supported by a specially appointed friend acting for the New Zealand Cycling Union, the meeting eventually obliged Great Britain to accept a dilution of its influence: two categories of membership in the ICA were decided, major countries having three votes, and lesser cycling nations having no actual vote but keeping the right to express their views. This new arithmetic of voting placed Britain on an equal footing with France and Italy, which now had a voting weight equal to that previously enjoyed by Britain – and resented by France – with its triple representation of the English National Cyclists’ Union, the Irish Cyclists’ Union, and the Scottish Cyclists’ Union. What must have been a rather bad-tempered meeting ended with a failed attempt by the UVF to remove Sturmey as head of the ICA, and the delegates went their separate ways. However, later in the evening of 14 April, the French, Belgian, Italian, Swiss and American delegates issued a communiqué announcing their withdrawal from the ICA and the simultaneous founding of a new international cycling organ-
ization in the form of the UCI, under whose rules the world championships planned for Paris in mid-late August 1900 were to run, and whose first official congress was to be held, also in Paris, in summer 1900. As the historian of early French cycling Alex Poyer points out (2003a: 247), four of the six original signatories of the UCI’s founding were French: Alfred Riguelle (UVF), Count de Villers (USFSA), Victor Breyer (representing the American National Cycling Association) and Paul Rousseau, (deputizing for the representative of the Swiss national federation). And, as Victor Breyer polemically and triumphantly reported (Breyer, 1900c), the new body’s first president was the Belgian Emile de Beukelaer, further cementing the ‘Latin’ control of business and concepts.

When the UCI met on 11 August 1900 in Paris, the locale was no longer the sumptuous refinement of the Hôtel de Russie, but the rather more utilitarian setting of the headquarters of the UVF, at 21 rue des Bons-Enfants. This was certainly practical, but it also underlined the strong French influence on the new body governing international cycling. Present at the meeting were the Unione velocipedistica italiana, the UVF and the USFSA representing France, the Union cycliste suisse, the National Cyclists’ Association (USA), the Ligue vélocipédique belge, the Verband der Deutscher Rad Rennbahnen, the Canadian Cyclists’ Association and the League of New Zealand Wheelmen. France’s place at the top table of world cycling was ensured by the six votes agreed for her by the congress (along with Germany, Italy and the USA); the prizes for all future world championships were fixed in French francs, and France’s new sway over international cycling was underlined when the world championships held in Paris at the end of August resulted in a clean sweep of victories for French riders.11

The UCI develops: quarrels between the UVF and the USFSA
After a second congress held in December 1900, the UCI met again, in Alexandria, on 6 April 1901. Henri Desgrange, writing in his newly launched daily sports paper L’Auto-Vélo, was characteristically sardonic about what the international organization of cycling could achieve: given that riders were everywhere behaving properly (the term he used was soumis, or ‘obedient’) and that everyone knew that the next world championships were to be held in Berlin in June and organized by the major German velodrome consortium, all that would be achieved in Alexandria would be ‘se raconter des inutilités dans toutes les langues’ (Desgrange, 1901b). Despite Desgrange’s cynicism, the third UCI congress further strengthened the UVF’s influence over the new body, as voting rights were rearranged to give it four votes to the two of the USFSA (previously the
two national associations had shared France’s six votes equally), and the absence of the USA (the League of American Wheelmen and the National Cycling Association were in some disarray) allowed European views to be heard more strongly. Although relatively little of real substance was decided in Alexandria, one decision of the nascent UCI – the apparently anodyne recognition of the UVF’s category of ‘amateur’ riders – did have a significant impact on cycling within France.

Even by 1901 the long debate in France over amateurism and professionalism had still not reached a satisfactory conclusion. In cycling, the UVF and the USFSA both held to essentially similar but competing definitions of what, precisely, the nature of amateurism should be, and constantly quarrelled over whether ‘their’ riders (amateur cyclists could take out either a UVF or a USFSA licence) should be allowed to race together, where, and how.12 Because of the focus of world sporting and cultural attention on France during 1900, the warring associations had reached a temporary truce to cover the various championships of 1900 and the cycling competitions of the *Exposition Universelle*, but traditional disagreements nevertheless remained. The truce expired at the end of the year, opening the way for old disputes to re-emerge against the background of struggles for influence within the UCI. The ICA had always recognized the USFSA as the French representative for amateur cycling, with the UVF naturally taking responsibility for professional matters; when the UCI replaced the ICA, the UVF requested recognition for its own amateurs in international competition, and when the UCI agreed, this placed the USFSA in the disagreeable position of being forced to allow French amateurs with either licence to compete together, both abroad and in France itself. The sympathizers of the UVF at *Le Vélo* – such as Frantz Reichel and Paul Rousseau – took a certain wry pleasure in pointing out this discomfiture of the USFSA and in inviting the rival, minor association to ‘put up or shut up’, particularly since, in their view, the USFSA had recently been guilty of sharp practice in persuading the Paris council to accept it as organizer of the amateur part of the prestigious *Grand Prix de Paris du Conseil municipal* planned for late June 1901, on the grounds that they alone were officially recognized as France’s amateur ruling body (Reichel, 1901a; Rousseau, 1901). The USFSA decided that it would rather withdraw from the UCI than have to accept any part of UVF amateurism, and aimed to continue its responsibility for the *Grand Prix de Paris* (Reichel, 1901b). The immediate quarrel over the *Grand Prix de Paris* opened the way for renewed arguments over amateurism, as relations between the two associations worsened (Reichel, 1901c, d, e, f). Ongoing arguments between the
USFSA and the UVF eventually led to the Grand Prix de Paris being replaced by a UVF-organized Grand Prix de la République in late June, followed by a modified Grand Prix de Paris later in the autumn. Hence the UVF’s dominant role in the UCI was strengthened almost immediately by the withdrawal of its national rival, and the UVF was confirmed in its view that it could influence the international regulation of cycling in ways that would further its interests in France.

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During the 1890s French cycling moved towards the maturity of institutions, structures and principles that would govern competitive and leisure use of the bicycle until essentially after the Second World War. Although the four years of traumatic conflict of the First World War would interrupt the development of cycling early in the following century – not least by the death of many champions of professional cycling in the trenches – during the 1920s and the 1930s it would be the Tour de France that would drive professional riding, as well as velodrome racing in the form of ‘Six-Days’ competitions such as that of the Vélodrome d’hiver in Paris. The national federations created during this period would continue until after the Second World War, when the UVF, for example, was replaced by the Fédération française de cyclisme. What is perhaps most significant about this period is the way in which it was cycling qua sport, rather than as either utility or leisure, that seemed to be the driving impetus within the complex nexus of activities that made up the developing ‘culture’ of cycling. Cycle sport thus reflected and accompanied developing themes in French culture, politics and society. These themes and their workings out were marked by an international climate within which nationalism found natural expression in competition through sport, and by a context of domestic society and politics within which the institutions of sport on a national level were gaining in influence over individual clubs, and playing out issues such as amateurism/professionalism and popular media reporting that encapsulated the socioeconomic and sociopolitical tensions of a country in full economic transformation.

Notes

1 The term ‘military–industrial complex’ was famously introduced to general use by President Eisenhower, in his Farewell Address of January 1961, warning of the dangers of the imbrication of defence companies and the armed forces (and politics).
The columns of the sporting/cycling newspapers of the period were filled with debates on amateurism/professionalism, for example the series of articles by ‘Glofranc’ and others in *Le Véloce-Sport* during November 1888, e.g. ‘Glofranc’ (1888) and Nandy (1888).

A particularly detailed treatment of the UVF is given by Poyer (1999), for the minutiae of institutional changes.

An amateur was defined in the *Statuts et règlements de l’USFSA* as ‘Toute personne qui n’a jamais pris part à une course publique, à un concours ou à une réunion ouverte à tous venants, ni concouru pour un prix en espèces – ou pour de l’argent provenant des admission sur le terrain – ou avec des professionnels – ou qui n’a jamais été, à aucune période de sa vie, professeur ou moniteur salarié d’exercices physiques’. Quoted in Poyer (2000: 52).

A first-hand account of the race is provided by Jiel-Laval (1892).

Just as the structure and form of cycle racing was influenced in the early days by horse racing, the cross-fertilization with the world of the arts and popular entertainment in dance, music and theatre also influenced the developing status of professional sportsmen ‘managed’ by artistic or sporting impresarios such as Clerc, Bernard, or the director of Buffalo and the Vélodrome de la Seine, William Baduel.

With Pierre Giffard, Paul Rousseau later went on to found *Le Vélo*.

The columns of *Le Vélo* hosted many views, of course, and some of its journalists, such as Paul Rousseau, were strong supporters of ‘modern’ links between press and industry, as evidenced by *Le Vélo*’s support for the UFC rival to the UVF in the mid-late 1890s. More generally, the criticism reserved by *Le Vélo* for the UVF, variably described as ‘la vieille Bique’ (the old Hag), or more acronymically, ‘un vrai Four’ (‘a real flop’) or ‘une vaste Fumisterie’ (‘a huge joke’), reflected the Union’s perceived ineffectiveness in advancing the cause of cycling, as well as what were seen by some as its old-fashioned views on sport and industry.

The discussion that follows is based on the admirably clear exposition of the facts made by Marchand (1999: 113–23).

Giffard had assumed that he and *Le Vélo* would be the natural organizers of a revived Paris–Brest–Paris, but Desgrange realized that real ownership of the race resided with *Le Petit Journal*, and it was thus that the second running on 23 November 1901 became ‘La course Paris–Brest et retour du Petit Journal, organisée par L’Auto-Vélo’.

Didier-Nauts (amateur sprint), Jacquelin (professional sprint), Bastien (demi-fond amateur), Huret (100 km pro).

In 1900 the UVF could claim that the majority of riders taking out amateur licences were doing so with them (1,200) rather than with the USFSA (700).