



Interview of the Month
Elizabeth (Lizzie) Armitstead,
Professional track and road cyclist
2014 World Road Champion
April 2015

- 1. GenderHopes: You are a woman in a male-dominated environment. Can you name a few of the specific challenges that you face or have faced during your career as a professional cyclist?**

Lizzie Armitstead: Inequality in sport, particularly my sport, cycling, is still very much an issue and something I think I unfortunately will have to contend with my whole career. The main obstacles I have faced as a female athlete are not only financial but much broader and complex. There has been some improvement and things are changing slowly. Specific examples would be as a junior not being selected for major championships because they were only taking a boys team and if they took a girl they would have to take a female member of staff and therefore cut the budget for the boys team. I had a much better chance of returning home with a medal than any of the junior boys. Strada Bianchi is an iconic race in cycling: in 2015 we had the inaugural women's race. This was a huge step for our sport, however the men's winner took home 7500 Euro the women's 750 Euro. There is still a long way to go.

- 2. 6 April marks the International Day of Sports for Development and Peace. How do you see sports having an impact on the development of peace? Can you think of any examples of this?**

Cycling is an international sport: every team has representatives from lots of nationalities and different walks of life. For me, peace comes from education and understanding of difference. The Afghanistan women's cycling team is a fantastic example of sports having an impact on peace. Although facing serious danger by training on the streets of Kabul, these women follow their passion and love of cycling and have encouraged more people to stand up for freedom in their city and join them.

- 3. The salary gap remains high between male and female professional cyclists. Are you aware of any initiative to bridge this, or which actions can be taken (by sponsors, media, etc.) to change this situation?**

The world governing body for cycling, the UCI, has financial rules in place for

men's professional teams. There is a minimum wage for men but not for women. The new president suggested a minimum wage for women in his manifesto. Unfortunately enforcing a minimum wage could potentially lead to some teams collapsing as they just don't have the financial backing from their sponsors so it is a difficult situation. In order to have more interest from sponsors, we need more exposure in the media, which is improving slowly.

4. We often see female athletes being sexualised in the media and valued for their physical attributes rather than their achievements. Is this a problem you've encountered and have you had any support to counter this?

This is a problem I have experienced in my career. I have always had a very firm standpoint on this, but unfortunately not every female athlete thinks about the bigger picture and some exploit their sexuality for financial return. I have been offered contracts by lads' magazines, but I believe that in order to be taken seriously as an athlete I shouldn't do them. I haven't had specific support to counter this although I have very strong female role models in my family who have always encouraged me to strive for better through my performances alone.

5. As a World Cup Champion, you are also an important role model for young women who want to enter this field. What advice would you give to young female athletes?

I would advise young female athletes to be bold, believe in yourself and stand up for yourself. I have never taken no for an answer and will always question somebody or something if I feel it is sexist or unfair. The most important thing for an athlete to remember is that your performances are your strongest tool against sexism. When you are winning, people have to listen: that's what I am striving for and as long as I am successful, I will be taken more seriously in my fight for equality.

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Elizabeth "Lizzie" Armitstead is an English professional track and road racing cyclist. She won a total of five medals in the UCI Track World Championships in 2009 and 2010 before choosing to focus on road racing. On the road, she won the silver medal in the road race at the 2012 Summer Olympics. She won the gold medal in the road race at the 2014 Commonwealth Games before winning the 2014 UCI Women's Road World Cup with a race to spare.