



'Attempted manslaughter': Why do idiots keep throwing things at pro cyclists?

There are fears the fan experience will change after Mathieu van der Poel had a water bottle thrown at him during his Paris-Roubaix victory



Mathieu van der Poel has liquid thrown at him during Paris-Roubaix (Photo: Getty)



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Cycling fans have been warned over their conduct at races after Mathieu van der Poel was hit by a water bottle, with one leading official likening the incident to “attempted manslaughter”.

Travelling at 31mph along the 500m Templeuve cobbled sector during Sunday’s Paris-Roubaix race, Van der Poel had a spectator throw a closed bottle at him.

While the overall outcome of the one-day classic was unaffected, as the Dutchman rode the remaining 33km to take a solo victory, the Alpecin-Deceuninck rider is pursuing legal action.

After the man handed himself into Belgian police on Monday, CPA Cycling president Adam Hansen tells *The i Paper* about his fears for the future of the fan experience.

“A lot of people do not realise how dangerous cycling is, and a bottle thrown in the face could be deadly,” former professional rider Hansen says.

“A full water bottle is like a brick. You just have to hit your head in the right place at the wrong moment, and that’s fatal.”

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Incidents with fans, either intended or accidental, are common in the sport, with numerous examples of spectators impacting the race on Sunday alone, including XDS Astana’s Davide Ballerini narrowly missing a collision with a bystander who stepped out into the road.

“Fans need to appreciate their closeness with riders, and they should not abuse it because they might lose it,” adds Hansen.

Similar incidents have occurred in previous years, with Eddy Merckx infamously punched in the stomach by a fan during a climb at the 1975 [Tour de France](#), while [Chris Froome](#) claimed he had [urine thrown at him](#) during the Tour in 2015.

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It is not even a first-time experience in Van der Poel's career or even this season, as he was spat at during the E3 Saxo Classic last month and had beer and urine thrown at him last season.

“He's used to it, but a bottle is more lethal. This is going to be in his head, and he will be concerned about this being the next level of abuse,” Hansen says.

The Dutch rider was seen to recoil on the broadcast as the bottle hit his face while cycling along the difficult-to-handle cobbled road, and after the race, he told *Sporza*: “We can't let this slide.

“Hopefully, the police can identify the man, because there has to be a trial for this. This is attempted manslaughter. If the [Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI)] does not take action, then we will do it with the team.”

The man in question sent a letter of apology to Van der Poel, and spoke publicly through his lawyer this week.

“Of course, I wanted to [apologise] first and foremost to Mathieu van der Poel himself. I am so happy that he crossed the finish line first on Sunday – despite my stupid action,” he told [Het Laatste Nieuws](#).

“But at the same time, I realize that I have to apologize to every rider or cycling enthusiast.

“Mathieu van der Poel was approaching and when he passed I made that stupid decision and threw that water bottle. Why did I do that? I've been asking myself that question ever since, but I don't have an explanation for it myself. [It was an] extremely foolish impulse – I can't explain it any other way.”

Since the incident, the UCI have said they “unanimously condemn, in the strongest terms, the unacceptable behaviour of a spectator during the 122nd edition of Paris-Roubaix”.

UCI added: “The UCI and representatives of cycling's families express their support for the rider and will explore, in conjunction with the competent authorities, all the legal channels at their disposal so that such behaviour is duly and severely punished.”



Mathieu van der Poel close to cheering fans at Paris-Roubaix (Photo: Getty)

Hansen, who advocates for professional cyclists, agreed: “I want this person to get maximum punishment because this can be used as an example.

“We can clearly see that previous punishments were not severe enough to deter future events.”

Hansen referred to the infamous incident at the [2021 Tour de France](#) when a woman held out a sign reading “Allez Opi-Omi”, which caused peloton leader Tony Martin to crash and wipe out a third of the pack. It led to the woman receiving a fine of €1,200 (£1,027) and €500 (£428) in damages.

While the incident in 2021 could be argued as an accident, the one on Sunday “can only be viewed as malicious”, Hansen stresses. “It happens more to Van der Poel, because it’s jealousy, this fan clearly wanted someone else to win.”

Cycling fans are passionate, but after years of the sport being surrounded by doping controversy, they have grown to distrust success, with Van der Poel the latest victim of an ongoing epidemic.

The spectator at the heart of the latest drama travelled to the event on the weekend with a Belgian fan group of Matej Mohoric, who have since issued a statement, dissociating themselves from him.

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“The fans know something like this risks them being close to riders, and that’s not what they want,” says Hansen.



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The access fans have is unique compared to many other sports, as it travels across the world, to cities and rural areas, giving fans unrivalled and personal access to the riders.

It would be virtually impossible to barrier a whole race or conduct searches on all spectators like at other sporting events due to the sheer length of road races.

But as police involvement in the Tour de France at the busier stages continues to intensify, Hansen finds it difficult to see what else can be done to protect riders while still maintaining the essence of the sport.

“If we have to separate riders from fans, we would start to lose the fans. I would hate for them to lose this privilege,” says Hansen.

“As a rider, when you see one of your fans at the side of the race and you see their excitement, it also has a positive impact on your race; taking it away would impact the sport for everyone.”