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CHRISTOPHER MALCOLM

Black Lives Matter Opened My Eyes

I NEVER FELT DISCRIMINATION AS A BIKE RACER, BUT WE NEED TO RAISE THE BAR ON EQUALITY.

BY NELSON VAILS Jul 27, 2020

I had the blessing of being involved in a sport where the national team took care of everyone equally. I don't recall any discrimination. If there was racism directed to me, it was over my head. I was winning races, I spent a summer in Moscow, I lived and raced in Japan. Never been treated any differently at any border. I was treated equal amongst everyone in the peloton, staff, directors, race directors,

fans alike. When I was the face of Raleigh Bicycles, there was no color to that. I believe in the power of unity through sports. That's something Nelson Mandela preached.

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I think I got respect because of my involvement with the national team and my Olympic success. A lot of doors remained open because of my success. People may have treated me differently if I didn't win, but we don't know that.

With Black Lives Matter and the protests, my eyes have been opened. When you get perceived as white, you have an advantage over someone who's not. That's being recognized now, people will not feel overlooked because of the color of their skin. We need to raise the bar on equality again.

Nelson Vails, 59, is a 1984 Olympic silver medalist and the first African American to medal in cycling.




CHRISTOPHER MALCOLM

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1980s. I was holding my track bike in the back of my friend's jeep as we headed down the 405 from the velodrome. A BMW 635 passes us in the fast lane, slows back down, then the driver leans over to give me a thumbs up. Once I saw that big smile I knew it was Nelson. Personalized license plate (84 SLVR) cinched it as he sped away.

I can agree with Mandela regarding unity through sport (or music, or...) Finding some common ground, working together, or just plain pushing another to their best.

That encounter on the freeway was only about the shared joy of the bike. It made both of us smile that day. Thank you for the memory Mr Vails.

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Todd

2 days ago

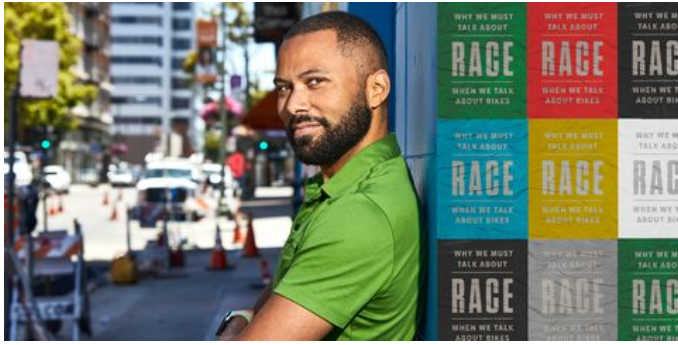


Nelson, you are a hero to me. I lived in CS back then and I think I saw you race at CSOC. An inspiration! Wish we would see a more diverse cycling community.

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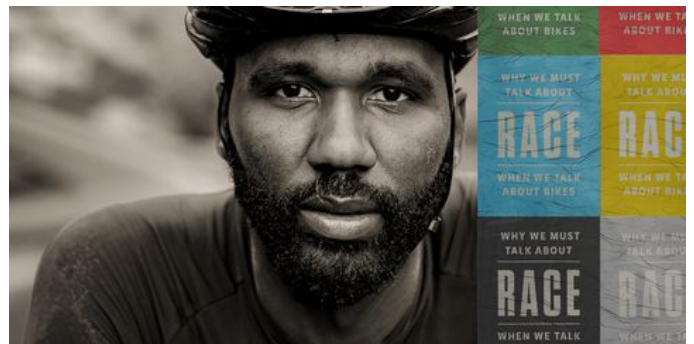
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