

# The Starting Line

**Gender:** Female

**Race:** Biracial

**Hobbies:** Athlete

**Stereotype:** "Oh, you play sports? You must be really good at basketball?" Me: "Actually, I'm a runner and learning to be a cyclist" Stereotype: \*puzzled look\* "You run? And ride a bike?"

This... is a typical conversation I have with people. In fact, I wish I could share the face people make when I tell them that I love to run, ride a bike, and even swim. The look gets even better when I show up at the starting line. The starting line is the hardest place for most people to get to. It is sacred. People will mentally set goals and will often not follow them through fruition. To get to the starting lines means you must invest, you must sacrifice, and you must be disciplined. I am convinced these are all traits everyone has when they are standing at any given starting line. So why does it surprise so many people to see athletes of color standing beside them at a race? It is almost like it is unfathomable for BIPOC athletes to be good at anything other than basketball or football. At least, it feels that way to me when I have these repeated conversations and get the same blank stares.

I have been running for over twelve years and have competed in 30+ 5ks and 10ks, 2 half marathons, 1 full marathon, 2 Ragnars, and 2 triathlons. Training for a multi-discipline sport is what made me fall in love with cycling. The starting line for any cycling event looked no different than a run race. I was often one of a few who looked like me and I was always giving other athletes of color secret high fives in my head for being there with me. I knew they received the same looks I did. I knew they equally felt out of place in a space that means so much to us all.

It is one thing to make sports more diverse and to amplify the voices of people who are not often seen. I am honored to sit on the Board of a non-profit (Ride for Racial Justice) and an initiative (Bike Ride for Black Lives) that are uniting communities and increasing BIPOC presence on the starting line of cycling races. How do people then make these athletes feel more welcome and that they belong? Marshall 'Major' Taylor is one of the most prolific Black cyclists of all time, but his story is riddled with racism throughout his entire career. He was so gifted but not even talent made him welcome in such a white dominated sport.

How do we normalize the starting line?

How do we normalize seeing athletes of color on the starting line of white dominated sports?

How do we make people feel welcome in different spaces?