

MAGGIE COLES LYSTER



COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS

THANK YOU, MAGGIE, FOR SHARING YOUR STORY WITH MAPLE RIDGE. LEARN MORE AT [MAPLERIDGE.CA/2016](https://mapleridge.ca/2016).

STORIES TO EXPLORE

MAGGIE COLES LYSTER'S WEBSITE
maggiecoleslyster.com

ARTICLES MAGGIE WANTS TO SHARE

cyclingmagazine.ca/sections/feature/maggie-coles-lysters-story-brings-attention-to-sexual-abuse-in-womens-cycling

cbc.ca/sports/olympics/canadian-cyclist-maggie-coles-lyster-uci-investigation-sexual-assault-allegations-1.5486904

"WE MUST SUPPORT AND BELIEVE ONE ANOTHER. USE YOUR VOICE TO SPEAK OUT WHEN YOU ARE READY, AND DON'T BE AFRAID TO REACH OUT FOR HELP OR SUPPORT ALONG THE WAY."



TELL US ABOUT THE EARLY YEARS.

I was born in Maple Ridge, BC, on February 12th, 1999 and grew up on the North Alouette River, enjoying hot summers rafting down the rapids and autumns watching the salmon spawn. My family lives in Maple Ridge, which is my "home base" when I'm not travelling and racing.

I have two younger sisters, Kaelen (17) and Campbell (11), who are both so talented! Before I was born and when I was a baby, my parents (Barry and Nona) ran an adventure tour business. When I was four, my dad bought a bike store. Not long afterwards he managed a bike team as well, so I grew up in a bike-loving family. We no longer own the bike shop, but cycling still plays a huge role in all of our lives. My dad is my coach and travels with me to many of the international events. We make a great team!

I ran cross country and rode horses competitively in my early years, but cycling was always my passion and, as I got older, it became obvious to me that this was my calling.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE THING ABOUT MAPLE RIDGE?

Being at the foot of the mountains! Out of all of the places I have travelled—and I have seen over 15 countries as well as a lot of North America in the past five years—nothing brings me as much joy and comfort as looking up and seeing the Golden Ears. When people ask me what I miss most from home when I'm on the road, the Golden Ears are always what come first to mind.

I have come across a few people internationally who know of Maple Ridge, but most people I meet internationally haven't heard of our beautiful city and instead ask how my pet moose is doing and whether living in the snow year round gets cold, haha!

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN 10 OR 20 YEARS?

My goal post-cycling is to study veterinary medicine and specialize as an aquatic veterinarian. I plan to attend a North American school and, after graduating, to work on the west coast if possible.

Before that happens, my plan is to become a multi-time Olympian with more than one gold medal hanging around my neck. You know, just your average bucket list items. I know that with the skills I have and my determination, I can achieve my goals...though I know it won't be easy in the slightest!

Life throws so many curveballs from crashes, injuries, major success and failures. The biggest lesson I have taken away from it all is that you can be dedicated to your goals, but you have to be ready to be flexible with how you get there.

WHAT'S THE STORY BEHIND YOUR NICKNAME, ELLE PIRANHA?

"Elle Piranha" is a nickname that was given to me back in 2016. I was 17 years old and racing in Switzerland at the Junior Track World Championships at the omnium event (a multi-race event where whoever has the most cumulative points at the end wins). Halfway through the final

race I was in 3rd place! But a rider bumped wheels with me and I went flying, sliding down the 45 degree wooden banking on my side.

My mechanic and coach ran over, put me on my bike and pushed me back into the race. I had fallen back to 4th place. There was no pain at this point, I was riding on pure adrenaline and raced my heart out to regain my medal spot...and I did it! I received bronze at my first Junior Track World Championships!

After the ceremony, I was lying in the medical tent having slivers removed and wounds cleaned and an elderly French man, who had just watched my race, pointed to me and said to my dad "elle, piranha." Since then, it has stuck.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR BIG CRASH ON THE BOARDS AT THE SIX DAYS OF COPENHAGEN TRACK EVENT.

The biggest takeaway from that experience had to do with my recovery afterwards and addressing the trauma from the accident.

I was racing a multi-day track race in Denmark, called Six Days of Copenhagen, and I crashed on the last lap of the last race. I ended up severely concussed with four fractured bones in my

face, some broken ribs, a punctured lung and lots of road rash. I couldn't fly due to my injuries, so I was stuck in Copenhagen until being cleared to fly home on my 19th birthday...not exactly how I had pictured celebrating!

I pushed to be back on the bike as soon as I was medically cleared from my injuries and focused only on my physical recovery. I soon realized my bike racing wasn't the same as it was before my crash. It was time to face the music: I was scared. I was having daily flashbacks to the moment I regained consciousness and it became clear that I needed to focus on my mental and emotional recovery, not just the physical.

It took lots of patience and work with psychologists, sports psychologists and a dedicated practice with mindfulness and meditation to get myself back to the place I'm at today. I have regained control of my power and am now able to be the best version me.

The bottom line is that trauma can take many forms and affects our physical and mental beings. It has changed my perspective on what recovery really entails.

IF YOU COULD SAY ONE THING TO YOUR FELLOW WOMEN IN SPORT, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Though it can be intimidating to speak up against inequality, abuse, harassment or lack of opportunities for women in sport, using our voices to support one another is crucial to our success.

From personal experience, I know how it feels to weigh speaking up with feeling you might jeopardize your reputation, or even your career, by calling attention to inequality. Know that there are others on your side and who may be experiencing the same inequalities - all of our safety and happiness matters. We must support and believe one another. Use your voice to speak out when you are ready, and don't be afraid to reach out for help or support along the way.

WHAT IS YOUR PROUDEST MOMENT OR ACHIEVEMENT THUS FAR?

I won the Junior World Championships! Those "rainbow stripes" are what most racers dream of and what gets them on the bike to train everyday. To win something I had dreamt about for years and to be named the best junior cyclist in the world was almost unbelievable.

Also, kind of a funny moment to be proud of, and definitely not the same as winning a World Championship, but, last year, when I finally finished my online English university course, I completely melted down and cried tears of joy. 2018 had been such a long year, with 3 crashes and concussions, and I ended up having to drop my online university courses because my post-concussion symptoms were making focusing and studying nearly impossible. I am very hard on myself when it comes to failure, so to drop those courses was awful and took me a long time to accept that it was necessary, and that there was nothing wrong with me. I just had to take time to heal. Finally, being able to work through and finish a course felt huge for my recovery and self-growth and was a feeling of accomplishment that will be with me for a long time.

HOW HAS COVID-19 AND BEING QUARANTINED IMPACTED YOU? HOW ARE YOU COPING?

When this all escalated in early March, I had just flown to Manchester, UK for a track race. They ended up cancelling the race five hours before we were supposed to start! It was the weekend when flight bans and lockdowns were implemented and I couldn't get through to the airlines to change our flights. I ultimately ended up on the last flight from the UK to the USA before the travel ban was implemented. I'm thankful to be staying with family.

The Olympics have been pushed until 2021, all races have been postponed or cancelled until at least the fall and key training facilities, such as the gym, have closed. My routine and direction have definitely been thrown. At first I would get on the bike and wonder what I'm training for?

COVID-19 has forced me to slow down in some aspects of my life, but has also inspired me to take time on other things that would normally come second to training. I have been taking the time for meditation and yoga, have worked on my online courses, and am becoming certified as a personal trainer. Now more than ever, it has been important to connect with friends and family. Take care of yourselves, everyone!

