

## Interview with Team Novo Nordisk CEO Mr. Phil Southerland on the cycling team's contract renewal with Novo Nordisk – December 1, 2025

Our team had the opportunity to learn more from Team Novo Nordisk CEO Mr. Phil Southerland after Novo Nordisk extended its sponsorship of the professional cycling team for a landmark additional five years. This represents the longest period of committed funding from the Danish company to date. Announced [last month](#) on World Diabetes Day, this ensures the team's backing through 2031.

Team Novo Nordisk was co-founded by Mr. Phil Southerland and Mr. Joe Eldridge as a grassroots initiative to raise awareness for diabetes by cycling across America. After turning professional in 2008, the team became the first-ever pro cycling squad comprised exclusively of athletes with T1D in 2013. Since then, Team Novo Nordisk has worked to showcase the athletic potential of people living with diabetes and inspiring others to defy the limits of their diagnosis and public perception.

See more below, including top takeaways and the full conversation.

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### Key Takeaways

- **On the factors contributing to Novo Nordisk's five-year extension of the sponsorship:** Mr. Southerland explained that Team Novo Nordisk fits neatly into Novo Nordisk's broader patient-first approach, with the team serving as living proof that the company's work changes lives. He also explained that the extended runway offers Team Novo Nordisk the opportunity to further its initiative to make movement a daily routine in the global community with diabetes and obesity.
- **On Team Novo Nordisk and the diabetes community:** Mr. Southerland compared the cycling community today to the diabetes community, both driven by data. Namely, professional cyclists actively track carbohydrates, proteins, fats, and optimize timing and balance for metabolic stability. Similar to someone with diabetes, when glycemic stability improves, performance improves. He also said that platforms like Strava, on which cyclists, runners, and endurance athletes are increasingly sharing their data, expose athletes to public judgment, something the diabetes community has long experienced with their A1c levels. Speaking on the team's broader impact on promoting movement, Mr. Southerland shared anecdotes of children picking up a bike for the first time after seeing someone "just like them" race professionally and adults now energized by the idea of exercise.
- **On the team's mission to reach the Tour de France:** Mr. Southerland said the entire diabetes ecosystem must be activated in order to accelerate Team Novo Nordisk's mission to reach the Tour de France. Specifically, he claimed all negative diabetes stigma must be eliminated and global access to best-in-class treatment and technology must be ensured. Moreover, exercise must become a universal pillar for diabetes, obesity, and broader metabolic health. While Team Novo Nordisk "couldn't ask for a better partner than Novo Nordisk," he said it will take all of us to bring the team to the start line of the Tour.

# Interview with Mr. Phil Southerland

## On Novo Nordisk's extended sponsorship

**Kelly Close:** Congratulations on this impressive milestone! We've greatly enjoyed following the progress Team Novo Nordisk has made over the years and the victories its members have achieved. Could you tell us more on what contributed to Novo Nordisk's landmark five-year extension of the sponsorship?

**Mr. Southerland:** I feel the long-term extension reflects several powerful factors. For 13 years, Novo Nordisk has stood with us not just as a sponsor, but as a true partner in changing the world for people with diabetes. Our shared mission puts people with diabetes first, and Mike Doustdar has been very clear about maintaining a patient-first approach. Second, we bring immense pride to Novo Nordisk employees. We serve as living proof that their work changes lives, and our fight to win inspires them in their own roles. Third, we help drive credibility and trust across the healthcare and market access landscapes - among HCPs, payors, and most importantly, patients. Our existence highlights Novo Nordisk's deep commitment to doing what's right for people living with diabetes and obesity.

Finally, this long-term partnership reflects a belief in our potential to reach the world. Mike has challenged us to do exactly that: unite and activate the more than one billion people living with diabetes and obesity to make movement a daily routine. The extended runway allows us to test new ideas, scale what works, and find partners who share our vision.

They've seen the impact: millions inspired, thousands of engagements each year, and a global platform that grows stronger every season. This five-year extension is a result of that impact and a sign of confidence that together, we can drive change on a scale we've never achieved before.

## On Team Novo Nordisk and diabetes in the cycling community

**Jeremy Alkire:** That's incredible to hear, and we certainly see that mission coming to life. Can you share what team members have noticed in their own diabetes management over time? Are they looking forward to new therapies or technologies?

**Mr. Southerland:** Our athletes live at the intersection of elite performance and cutting-edge diabetes management. Over the years, they've experienced remarkable advances: CGM accuracy, insulin stability, pump automation, and integrated data systems. These tools help them train smarter, recover better, and race with greater confidence.

Personally, I'm constantly testing new forms of treatment, and I've had some major breakthroughs recently. With a strong R&D ecosystem, we can leverage the full spectrum of technology and therapy to optimize performance and help our athletes reach their true potential. The "old way" of managing diabetes worked well enough to let us compete, but today's evolution in treatments makes it clear we've only scratched the surface of what's possible.

And yes, our riders are always looking ahead. Every new innovation offers another opportunity to raise the bar for what living with diabetes can look like.

**Monica Oxenreiter:** Specifically, how have pressures and stresses changed for the team?

**Mr. Southerland:** Professional cycling is always evolving, and the competitive bar rises every year. Expectations are higher, racing is more intense, and yes, the pressure can be brutal. Cycling guarantees failure: in races, you lose far more often than you win. Our athletes train harder and smarter than ever, yet stigma still exists. It's easier to excel when people believe in you; constant doubt can weigh heavily on mental health.

After my own mental health crisis in 2023–2024, I'm far more aware of the challenges our athletes and even our fans may face. I'm proud of the work our team has done to support those in need. We operate like a family, and we've worked hard to normalize talking openly about mental struggles. At the end of the day, our athletes are superheroes for the global diabetes community. They have the power to win and the power to change the world. Their purpose makes the suffering on the bike a little easier, knowing it relieves suffering for our diabetes family around the globe.

**Jeremy:** Thank you for sharing, that is such a heartwarming message for all of those out there living with diabetes. Beyond the team's own challenges, how have you all seen the broader cycling community change over

time?

**Mr. Southerland:** The cycling community has evolved significantly over the two decades we've been racing. Today, it's driven by data, and in many ways, it's becoming more like the diabetes community. Everything is measured. Riders track carbs, proteins, fats, and optimize timing and balance for metabolic stability. Just like someone with diabetes, when stability improves and lows are prevented, performance improves. Cyclists, runners, and endurance athletes share their data through platforms like Strava, exposing themselves to public judgment, something the diabetes community has long experienced through A1c numbers or post-meal glucose readings.

While the data landscape has shifted, one constant remains: people who ride, run, or stay active know life is better when you move. Physical health improves, but the mental health benefits are extraordinary. The cycling community is more united than ever in wanting to share that "exercise addiction" with the world.

## On Team Novo Nordisk's impact

**Monica: Team Novo Nordisk has made significant contributions to research on T1D and elite athletic performance over the years. Does the organization intend to submit additional research going forward?**

**Mr. Southerland:** Absolutely. At Team Novo Nordisk, we believe scientific evidence is one of the strongest tools we have to change the world's perception of diabetes. Every time our athletes train and race, they generate data that can help redefine what's possible with Type 1 diabetes. We're working in improving our systems for managing data related to diabetes, sleep, exercise, nutrition, and more. Sport and diabetes share a common truth: both are about the 1% improvements. Marginal gains in diabetes therapies can have exponential impacts on performance. Over the past 20 years, we pioneered awareness and adoption of CGM, and today the toolbox for our athletes has grown dramatically. The quicker we can publish our insights, the sooner people with diabetes everywhere can push toward their own full potential, no matter their dream. We will continue publishing and sharing research because it strengthens the global knowledge base and empowers people with diabetes and healthcare professionals worldwide to confidently encourage exercise as part of diabetes care.

**Jeremy: How have Team Novo Nordisk members observed the impact of their advocacy on how people with diabetes approach exercise?**

**Mr. Southerland:** Nelson Mandela said, "Sport has the power to change the world." Our athletes embody that every day. They're living their dream of being professional cyclists, and that alone is inspiring, but their dream also inspires others. They know that pushing harder on the bike can help someone just like them live a better life, and that ripple effect is incredibly motivating.

We see the impact everywhere: on the roads, online, and in conversations around the world. Parents tell us their children picked up a bike for the first time after seeing someone "just like them" race professionally. Adults tell us they're no longer afraid of exercise; instead, they're energized by it. The message our athletes carry has shifted behavior. People are moving more, believing more, and replacing old fears with confidence and empowerment.

**Kelly: That's incredible to hear, and we hope that your message continues to reach even more people with this extended sponsorship. To close, can you tell us: What else are we missing? What should we be asking about your path to the Tour de France?**

**Mr. Southerland:** The Tour de France remains a dream, one we're steadily working toward. Each year, we build through development, innovation, and unwavering commitment from our athletes and staff. I strongly believe that we'll get there. Maybe it's five years, maybe it's fifteen. For me, the journey itself matters just as much as the destination.

Our athletes validate the progress of the diabetes industry; reaching the Tour will validate the mission and work of Team Novo Nordisk. It may even be a 10-year-old kid watching us today - someone we inspired - who eventually brings us our first yellow jersey and inspires the world. That thought alone gives me goosebumps.

The real question is: how do we accelerate this journey? To get there, we must eliminate every negative stigma surrounding diabetes, ensure global access to best-in-class treatment and technology, make exercise a universal pillar for diabetes, obesity, and metabolic health. Achieving this dream will require the entire diabetes ecosystem. We couldn't ask for a better partner than Novo Nordisk but it will take all of us to bring Team Novo Nordisk to the start line of the Tour.

When that day comes, it won't just be a victory for us; it will be a victory for everyone affected by diabetes. And we intend to make it happen

*--by Jeremy Alkire, Monica Oxenreiter, and Kelly Close*