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INVESTIGATION

Yorkshire’s Tour de France knight, Gary Verity, is on his bike after expenses scandal

Sir Gary Verity brought the bike race to the Dales, but has quit as a tourism chief amid claims of lavish spending and bullying

David Collins, Northern Correspondent

March 24 2019, 12:01am, The Sunday Times



Sir Gary Verity was made a Chevalier of the National Order of Merit by the French president for his work bringing the Tour de France to Yorkshire



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When Sir Gary Verity, a flamboyant sheep farmer from the Yorkshire Dales, persuaded the Tour de France to hold its Grand Départ in Yorkshire, it was regarded as one of the most audacious and lucrative bids for a UK sporting event.

An estimated 3.3m people lined the routes of stage one and two as some of the world’s greatest cyclists started off in Leeds and powered through the Yorkshire Dales national park to Harrogate in 2014.

Verity was knighted the following year and made a Chevalier of the National Order of Merit by the president of France, which was seen as due recognition for bringing the opening stage of the world's most famous cycling race to Yorkshire.

Last week, however, Verity resigned as chief executive of Welcome to Yorkshire after The Sunday Times presented the tourism body with evidence of bullying and erroneous expenses claims. In a statement on Friday, the board said Verity had resigned “on health grounds with immediate effect”.

In fact, the resignation followed years of concerns about Verity's bullying behaviour towards staff and his expenses claims, described by several staff members as “lavish”.

It is understood that among the expenses Verity, 54, attempted to claim were some relating to the funeral of his sister, who died in January.

The board of Welcome to Yorkshire said it had ordered an investigation into expenses allegations relating to Verity, who received a pay package of £243,000, according to the latest accounts.



An estimated 3.3m people lined the route of the Yorkshire legs

“The board has investigated these and concluded that Sir Gary made errors of judgment regarding his expenses at a very difficult time for him and his family. Sir Gary has agreed to voluntarily reimburse Welcome to Yorkshire for monies owed.” That amount is understood to be a five-figure sum.

The organisation stressed Verity's resignation was "not directly linked" to the expenses inquiry, which the board has hired the accountancy giant KPMG to conduct, and refused to disclose further details of Verity's expenses claims.

The truth about how Verity treated some members of his team has until now been kept quiet by a board made up of councillors and business leaders, which former staff members say acted "like the Yorkshire mafia" in trying to protect one of their own.

Verity had been in a precarious position since 2017, when he received a "final written warning" from board members at the completion of an investigation into bullying.

At least three former staff members are known to have given evidence to the inquiry, although the number may be higher.

One senior female employee who gave evidence said she was bullied so badly by Verity that she went on medication for two years and now believes she suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder.

"He made my life a total misery," she said. "I was depressed for years afterwards, and it is only now that I am coming to terms with his behaviour.

"I was told the board was going to remove him, as so many people came forward with similar complaints. When they kept him in his position as chief executive, I felt totally betrayed. A lot of people did."

Board member Sir Thomas Ingilby, owner of Ripley Castle Estate in Harrogate, who last week denied to this newspaper the existence of an investigation into Verity's expenses, handled part of the bullying inquiry.

On the inquiry's conclusion in 2017, Ingilby told the staff member: "Gary received a final written warning. Furthermore he has got to see counselling, which I think he needed badly because until he accepts he isn't a very nice man . . . Many apologies on behalf of the board for what you have been through, it shouldn't have happened, and we're going to make sure it doesn't happen again."

A number of former Welcome to Yorkshire staff are understood to have signed non-disclosure agreements (NDAs), which prevent them from discussing bullying by Verity.

Verity, who owns a sheep farm in Coverdale, took over the running of the Yorkshire Tourist Board in 2009 and renamed the organisation Welcome to Yorkshire. As well as being knighted, he serves as a deputy lieutenant for West Yorkshire. The historic role is designed to maintain links between Yorkshire and the monarch.

Dee Marshall, former director of communications at Welcome to Yorkshire, said she believed senior people knew of the allegations but did nothing. “I was proud to work for Welcome to Yorkshire. I think the team achieved amazing things, one of the highlights being delivering the Yorkshire Grand Départ of the Tour de France in 2014,” she said.

“However, I had grave concerns about the management of the company and left in 2016. I did not take any payment and did not sign an NDA. It worries me that some people with influence were aware of issues but chose to turn a blind eye.”

Susan Briggs, director of The Tourism Network, which has worked with hundreds of Yorkshire tourism businesses, said: “There needs to be far more transparency about how taxpayers’ money is being spent by this body so we can be clear that campaigns and activities are good value for money and are those the industry would choose.”

Verity said: “Over the last 10½ years I have always tried to set the highest standards of personal performance and leadership.

“Where this has been achieved, I am grateful, and when, on occasions, I have fallen short, I apologise. My health is now my main priority. I ask for time and space to heal.

“It has been an honour and a privilege to lead such an inspirational organisation and work with such a creative and talented team.”

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Gonzague 4 HOURS AGO

What an pain these cycling races have become for some residents and businesses in Yorkshire. Economic impact of them were always known as "verity-nomics" in various quarters.

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Roy Lloyd 5 HOURS AGO

A £243,000 pay package as head of the Yorkshire Tourist Board ?

As an honorary Yorkshireman I deem that excessive. And I don't like bullies and cheats.

On yer bike, luv.

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blueboy13 5 HOURS AGO

the knee jerk action of a knighthood does seem wrong- the honours committee should find out more in depth aspects of a person-and unearth things like gross bullying of many people and helping themselves to monies (if you like theft)

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Siempre28 5 HOURS AGO

So, this guy got a knighthood, but Gordon Banks didn't....?

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StuC 6 HOURS AGO

Bullying behaviour, delusions of grandeur, greed, lack of moral compass - all signs that are entirely consistent with something called Narcissistic Personality Disorder.

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Siempre28 6 HOURS AGO

So this guy got a knighthood, but Gordon Banks didn't....?

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Erudio 6 HOURS AGO

Why on earth do you need to spend vast sums on hiring KPMG to investigate? Surely anyone with an ounce of common sense can look into this.

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Mrs J Delaney 6 HOURS AGO

AT LAST.

pompous
arrogant
over-paid
self-centred

...it was the Gary Verity show from day two.

... [See more](#)

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Margaret Wilkinson 7 HOURS AGO

Why is it sporting successes are synonymous with scandal. I so wish this wasn't the case and that sport could just be sport and be pursued for the good of all .

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Gonzague 7 HOURS AGO

Clearly something in the water in Leeds. Didn't the former

Chief Executive of the Inward Investment agency there also hit the headlines for bullying and an expenses scandal?

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June McDermott 8 HOURS AGO

Cycling is rancid in the uk.

Skys push to have a top team has brought this kind of attitude to the uk.

Brailsford, wiggins the doctors, et al. Taking knighthoods for bullying, lying and cheating.

The attitude of cyclists now is beyond disgust.

get off our pavements. Use the gd lanes built for you at vast expense to tax payers and look where you are going.

do not try to squeeze through spaces that any normal person would see as dangerous and then complain if something happens to you because you make yourself invisible. And so much more.

Other countries manage cycling because their population dont take such an arrogant "me first I don't care about you" attitude.

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