



## ***My Cycling Past***

I'm not sure at what point my cycling 'career' began. I have been involved in so many areas of the cycling business that it doesn't matter, anymore. It doesn't matter because I think I've come full-circle on what cycling means to me. Is a career only a career if a certain amount of money is being made? I used to think that. Now I don't. As a five-year-old outside of Chicago, my Big Wheel™ was the most important piece of machinery on the property. I rode it until the plastic wheels wore through. Then I kept riding it until the sidewalls caved in. My first evening learning to ride a two wheeler ended with my little body splayed across a blood splattered white picket fence. Maybe that spilled blood created the bond that has lasted ever since.

I had always been one of the fastest runners in the school. Football, soccer, basketball, and baseball came easily. Cycling, though, was always present. Somehow going nuts on a bike, any bike, felt better than anything those other sports could offer. When I was 11, I started doing long rides in the coastal range of Northern California. When I think about it now, I can't believe the rides I'd go on by myself. Rides I'd never let my own child do. I wouldn't tell anyone where I was going, because I didn't even know myself. By 13, I was racing every chance I could get. I couldn't concentrate at school. As soon as I'd get home, I'd eat something, put on the clothes, and get out on the bike. There were no organized rides in my area. No kid in my school rode a bike for anything other than transportation. While their lives were centered around things in our town, my thoughts were about towns all over the state and what I needed to do to beat the kids that lived in them. By 15, cycling had extended the tentacles of my thought and action to a shocking degree. I knew all of the regions of California. The terrain, the climate, the road conditions, the supplies I would need and the people I would face. The racing was never easy. I very rarely won. Being a late bloomer didn't help matters. I had already spent years on the rivet in races while other kids enjoyed the strength advantage of early puberty. Some of them were excellent riders, able to win at the junior and senior level. Each week offered up epic battles. At home I probably had the 1,000 yard stare. My mind was elsewhere.

By the time I could drive, I felt like I'd been through hundreds of struggles that had taken me to the point of absolute collapse, somehow managing to survive or triumph. I'd seen things happen around me that were better than I could read in any book or see in any movie. The amazing thing was, it was only beginning. That had only been California. I'd now fought my way onto the best junior program in California. Rivals from the time I was 13 were now my teammates. In the same way I had thought about the kids in other towns in my own state, I now associated kids with towns in other states. I began learning about the rest of the United States through racing. I understood the terrain of the country and the people's spirit. All from that special way that only cycling can deliver it. Making you feel it in the walls of your heart. All the way, it was excruciatingly difficult. Every notch I improved, there were instantly stronger, tougher riders by my side. This was all part of the journey. It was my basis for longevity. I had seen kids who had won too easily at first. They didn't last. Usually, they gave the sport up from an inability to cope as soon as it got harder to win.

By 18, my teammates were the best kids from around the country. I had been to Europe many times. Now it was kids from other countries that I had to figure out. I knew young riders from at least 10 nations. When we would get together in Europe, 150 or 200 of us on the start, it would explode into racing that again drove me to wonder how would I ever eclipse their ability. I started to think less about the riders in the US. The rest of the World was opening up. The rest of the World? There was an endless conveyor belt of talent out there. It was humbling. I needed continual growth of my character to deal with it.

After nine years of riding and racing, half my life, I turned senior. For the next three years I would

apply myself at an even higher mark to make the transition through amateur to professional. Becoming a professional road racer had been my personal Mt. Everest. As a youth, it was the biggest life challenge that I could conjure up. When I turned professional, I had only one teammate who was from the United States: Greg LeMond. Professional cycling, though, was going into a period of tremendous change. My professional road career would only last three years before I would have to re-invent myself as a cyclist. I turned to the mountain bike and World Cup racing, traveling to new parts of the globe for another five years.

Today, I am still involved with cycling. I work in the industry. I consult with riders, teams, and other companies. My own riding has changed from the 'performance' emphasis to a simple quest for well being and getting from point A to point B. The most enjoyable times I had racing were without doubt the years spent before I started making real money. I think there are very few professionals that wouldn't say the same thing. Those are magic years. They happen whenever you 'join the ride', no matter what age you are. Now, even when I ride to the store to get a gallon of milk, cycling feels great. I can feel like I did when I was barely past 10, moving through the fog far from home on coastal roads. Just my breathing to keep me company. It took me 25 years, an odyssey of adventure around the World, to realize that in its purest form cycling has simply been the method I use to connect with myself.