



The Coach

"Once the person commits to being coached, s/he begins to experience a different, more hopeful world as his or her perceptions evolve." - John Agno

Coaching is an area that has exploded in the sport of cycling. Even with the Internet and the wealth of information available for free at a person's fingertips, hands-on coaching has grown. It seems like everyone has a coach, now. Internet coaching has burgeoned. I include 'trainers' under the coaching umbrella. Hairdresser's and truck drivers who only ride bikes to look good in a dress or keep plaque of the walls of their heart have coaches. I am amazed by this movement. I do not find fault in it, although I'm certain that the majority of those being coached will not find their faults. There is something about being coached. The comfort and security of being watched over, looked after, that makes an athlete feel like it's all going to be OK. Someone new to racing goes on a group ride these days and starts hearing this speak:

"Dude, I'm sooo tired. My coach has me doing 60/40/20's, followed by Double-Down Flappers. And that's all before Thursday."

"Really? Let's slow down then, because yesterday mine made me do a Dirty Dozen with the Special Sauces."

"What's the 'Special Sauces'?"

"I'd rather not say. What are Flappers?"

"I'm really not at liberty to discuss that. What about you, rookie? Who's coaching you?"

"Um. Coach? I, uh, I don't really have one."

So the pressure mounts, and the coaching ranks grow larger. Being on the receiving end of good coaching has it's benefits. You can learn how to train more effectively, for one thing. That can of course backfire, too. There are so many riders seeking coaches now that quality has been sacrificed in many cases. Riders are getting stamped out programs full of numbers. Hours, minutes and seconds with target heart rates next to them. Intensity levels ranked on scale of 1 to 5. This, from coaches that may never even be seen in person. Riders pay for this because they want the comfort. The peace of mind. The knowledge that they are doing everything they can. Don't fall prey to that. Learn to follow yourself, first. If you pay for a training program like that, you better be really good at listening to your own body and mind. You'll need become so good at hearing yourself that you'll have surpassed your coach's knowledge before their coaching works for you.

I've had a lot of coaching. Voluntary and involuntary. It wasn't until I started a junior development team and began pointing kids in certain directions that I really began to look inwardly at what I had truly learned. I discovered that handing out a training program was a small fraction of the job. Teaching a kid how to listen and learn from themselves, view and respond to what was happening around them, build confidence and grow via their own

means was where I found the foundation to be. Results really didn't matter to me. Personal growth was the goal. I always tried to make that clear. One of the kids went on to win a National Championship that Summer. I know we'd both attribute that more to enlightenment than the training programs I made for him.

I can say without question that the best I've ever ridden and the best I've ever seen anyone ride had more to do with happiness and great mindset than the training program being followed. The best coaches are people of strong character that exemplify more than their teachings. They transcend the sport for the sum of their own experiences in life eclipses anything you might have to overcome that year. Oh, and yes they can offer some training advice if you need it. That's not to say that you can't learn from Poindexter behind a computer in a place you've never been to telling you with what vitamins to take and how many minutes to ride at your AT on a given day. What you won't get is the stories. The insight. The words and emotion coming out of a person that plant seeds of power within your own character. The most valuable thing that a coach can do.

When Eddy Borysewicz came to the United States in the mid 70's, he wasn't planning on staying here. He was a cycling coach for Poland, and he had his programs there keeping him busy. During a visit to the United States, someone invited him out to their group training ride. The US was not exactly a world power in cycling at that time. We were more of a laughing stock. Total non-player on the International scene. Being the strong character that he is, Eddy couldn't help but give some direction to the people at that ride that day. He got invited back the next week. In practically no time he was asked to take command of the US National Cycling program. He uprooted, moved to the United States and started from scratch.

I began reading about 'Eddy B.' in Velo News in the early '80's. His influence had permeated cycling in the US. It seemed like he was everywhere at the same time. The US was responding, too. There was junior racing where there had been none before, and our riders were starting to win International races. Eddy was all over the television during the '84 Olympics. In less than 10 years, he had taken the US from zero to hero. In 1986, I went to the December camp at the US Olympic Training Center and met Eddy for the first time. His mere presence was enough to make 100 kids shut their mouths and stand at attention immediately. When he opened his mouth, his stern voice, thick accent and terse words rattled some kids right out of the program. They knew within five minutes that what this guy expected from them was more than they could ever give. One night at that camp my roommates and I got busted for lighting farts after the 10pm lights out curfew. We were yanked from our room and sentenced to 500 push-ups each over the course of the camp. At the meeting the next morning, Eddy tore into us. He openly addressed our foibles in front of all the campers. "Dis Willerton tink funny light it fart." It was the first time he ever mentioned my name.

Through my National Team years, Eddy was ever-present. His applause or discontent was felt even when he was half a world away. When the Iron Curtain fell in 1989, US cycling was changing again and Eddy had started his own trade team. He called me himself to ask me to join them in Donald Trump's first Tour de Trump, that year. Eddy had changed, too. He was somehow gentler, more understanding, and paid a lot of attention to the groups supporting his team. He was becoming a professional. He was a capitalist now.

The team he had started was called Subaru-Montgomery. I joined them full-time in 1992. By then, Eddy was a full-blown pro team director sportif. His fire burned hotter than ever before. It was contagious. We were infected with it, and we rode our hearts out. The team went on to become the US Postal Service Team. Eddy moved into a quieter period of his life, but no less challenging. He organized cycling camps in Southern California. When a fire swept through his property, he lost nearly everything he owned. Many former athletes sent him whatever they could, and Eddy slowly pieced himself back together.

I sat with Eddy on some steps at Interbike in 2003 and listened to the story of his tragedies. He'd grown more humble. The kindness in his eyes that used to only show up when a rider was in serious need of some understanding now showed more often. I had not

seen him for years. After that it would be years again before I would see him. Just a few weeks ago, he came to my town to give a talk at a fund raiser for an athlete he once coached. Before his talk, he came to my house for dinner. He was conscious of his full head of grey hair. He was also recovering from a painful divorce. His second. "Now I have everyting how woman want it, but don't have woman. Silver on head, gold in pocket, steel in pants." He stood before the audience that night and I was in awe. For the first time, I realized his true genius. He is still powerful looking. Healthy. No person who witnesses him can deny his strength. His genius is a combination of that strength coupled with expression. How does a man come from nothing in Poland and influence as many people as he has in the United States? Simple. Raw ability to exude power and somehow, miraculously, learn to make certain key words in the English language trigger extremely moving segments of speeches stored deep in his brain. I was always effected by it, it just took 22 years to know exactly what he was doing.

It has become evident to me that of all the vast knowledge that he possesses, of all the training programs that he ever proposed to thousands of athletes, the most valuable parts of Eddy B. have always been his person. His presence. The power of the spirit that resides in him. He wears it openly and for everyone to see. The hardships that he has endured. The triumphs that he's seen. Of course Eddy wanted to know what everyone's Vo2 Max was. But what everyone wanted to know from Eddy wasn't numbers. They wanted a piece of what made him so damn strong inside. That is what ultimately makes a coach great. That was the seed that turned USA cycling around and gave it the push it needed.