



## ***The Slippery Slope***

It's inescapable. The noise of all that's wrong in the world of sport is blaring in our ears. It's like a three-ring circus. "Everybody, gather in the tents. We've got a gambling referee, we've got the spies of Formula 1, over my shoulder there's an NFL player taming his fighting dogs, and we've got a whole ring dedicated to Tour de France racers and their positive tests... go ahead and get more cotton candy and popcorn, because you're going to need it." What does it all mean, people ask. That the world is no longer a fair place and there is no way to get ahead in sports without cheating? I am most concerned about what it might mean to all of the Junior, Category 2-5 and Masters racers out there.

I imagine amateur racers wondering "Does this mean that I need to do something, too? How will I get ahead?". I want to examine the pitfalls of that question. Bicycle racing is spending so much time and effort trying to deal with it's problem at the Professional level that *you* have become the athletes most susceptible to risk. Everyone knows that positive tests and drugs in cycling are not new. When I was a junior, I remember positive tests in the sport like people remember where they were when a president was shot, a Space Shuttle blew up, or a terrorist attack occurred. Back then, racers didn't hire lawyers to dispute tests. That started as an American phenomenon. In the old days, if they were positive, racers knew they had been caught and served their sentences without wild claims to the contrary. The premise was: get caught, and you were busted. These days, I am very worried what message is being sent to amateur racers. Is it, get caught and there's a good chance that lawyers can poke a hole in a testing procedure? If so, what should stop me from using something? There can be no doubt that all of this activity at the Pro level raises curiosity at the amateur level. Obviously, I don't like what I'm seeing and hearing on so many levels.

I'll tell you a little story. In the late 80's, I went from the junior to the senior level in racing. I was a Cat. 1 racer in my first year as a senior, and it was evident that I had a chance to make a living at bike racing. I had lived a spectacularly healthy existence, up to that point. My mom was more into health foods than anyone I've ever seen, since. She could put raw, dry seeds in a Thermos at night and in the morning it would be cereal. I had never drank alcohol or even coffee. With the hopes of adding more power to my pedaling stroke, I began lifting weights in the off season. The magazines dedicated to weightlifting had ads for products that seemed to claim they could make me look like Arnold Schwarzenegger. I thought, "Geez. If I could add even one centimeter to my leg circumference, I might be dropping guys and winning more sprints." I decided that I would begin ingesting a product called 'Amino Fuel' by the Joe Weider company. It was available all over the place.

Every day, I'd finish my workout and take my Amino Fuel. Spring came, I stopped lifting weights, but I thought "Why stop taking my Amino Fuel?". So I didn't. Summer arrived. I was riding very, very good. I headed off to South America to race the Tour of Colombia. It was two weeks of stupendously hard racing. Good thing I brought enough Amino Fuel! I started to wonder, "Would I be riding this good without Amino Fuel?" That question hurt me. Deeply. It was painful that that seed of doubt had crept into my mind. Until you've experienced that question, you might not know it's out there. That self doubt is Point #1 of why taking supplements or drugs will suck. Even when they are legal it can get to you. Be very careful what you ask for if you are turning to supplements. You might not like where you end up.

On the last day of the Tour of Colombia, I noticed strange spots on the palms of my hands. I thought nothing of it. "Must be the effort and the heat." I thought. Upon returning to the United States, I went to a high-altitude stage race in Mammoth, CA. There, I cemented myself as one of the top amateurs in the Nation. Every day, Amino Fuel down my hatch after the stage. Every morning, spots on my hands and up my forearms. By the end of the stage race, spots were showing up on my thighs. They would go away in a few hours, so they couldn't be serious, right? "Hey, hey, did anyone see my Amino Fuel? No,

I'm just making sure it's here." Point #2 of why taking supplements or drugs will suck: Starting to rely on your stuff, and increasing paranoia about having your stuff nearby. Even when your stuff is legal, it's a really bad feeling. You don't want it. Illegal, I can only imagine the horror. The key to a happy cycling career is knowing that all you need to perform is your own naked body. "I think I can do good in this race, but, I'll just take my little buddy, here, anyway." I'd rather show up at race in my boxer shorts and have to borrow shoes, a bike, and fill up my bottles with a garden hose than have that feeling.

When Mammoth ended, the word was out that I was a favorite to win the 1989 National Championship Road Race in Park City, UT. My team piled into the vehicles and drove to Park City. I stared at my red spots all the way there. I didn't feel very good, having this strangeness going on in my body. The first event was the criterium, and it happened just a day or two before the road race. I thought that I would need my full, daily dose of Amino Fuel for recovery. When the criterium ended, I went back to the condo and drank it down. My body finally said enough was enough. My tongue filled up in my mouth like a balloon, my throat constricted, my eyes were swelling shut, and the red spots sprang up over my entire body. I went straight to the hospital in Salt Lake City for an emergency dose of Cortisone. Point #3 of why taking supplements or drugs will suck: No matter what you think or anyone else tells you, you never know what your body is gonna do. I didn't go fast. I didn't even go slow. I had to get on a plane and go home. No National Championship ride, that year. For the next month, I had to take Benedryl at different intervals of the day and night while my spot crops receded. It turns out, I had been experiencing a severe allergic reaction to the Amino Fuel.

I never took Amino Fuel again. More importantly, I made a deal with myself that I would never take another product again that I could end up relying on. I realized very quickly how much I hated those feelings of at first, doubt, then reliance, and finally, negative effects. If it were not for perseverance, my season would have been over. I came back that Fall, without Amino Fuel or any other products, and still managed better rides than I had ever done before. I learned over time that the Amino Fuel probably did about as much good for my riding as shampooing with Graham Crackers and taping a four leaf clover under my saddle would have done.

Do not let what is going on in professional cycling make you feel like there is a wonder product out there for you, too. Whether it kills you or turns you into a Tour de France winner is not the question. It will remove your personal happiness and enjoyment of the sport no matter what it does to your riding. It will slowly strip you of possibly the most important thing that you have: a good feeling about yourself in your own mind. To say that it's a 'slippery slope' is an understatement. There is much more downside than meets the eye, and it can get you from any angle. Everyone acknowledges the dangers to the younger generations. Sometimes I hear older generations outlook on sports and health and wonder if they think that age and experience wins them a free ticket to a performance enhancing product free-for-all. Just because you survived the 60's free love period, crazy times in the 70's or the heavy metal 80's, doesn't mean that you're immune. I'm talking about a different kind of letdown, here.

I am not saying to stop chewing your Flintstones. I see a lot of 'taking' in the world of sports. Sports has become so much about 'taking' that pro sports hold very little interest to me, anymore. Whatever happened to 'giving'? Think about what you will be giving to yourself and your competition by staying away from those products that will, ultimately, only serve you unhappiness. There are racers that have to go to bed thinking that if they don't take their special stuff, there will be no food on their family table. With continued, huge efforts, our sport can let future racers provide without having to take any special stuff. To get to there, we need more giving and less taking. Let it start with you.