

Maddog Unleashed

It's Business As Usual In the Pro Racing Game, With Plenty of Dope(s)

The gods visit the sins of the fathers upon the children.
—Euripedes, Phrixus, fragment 970

BY PATRICK O'GRADY



Just in time for Valentine's Day, cycling fans were showing VeloNews.com some love for reporting that Amaury Sport Organization had barred Astana from its events, including that little race around France come July.

The letters flooded in, hundreds of them. Some were insightful, others silly, and far too many were indicative of the severe brain trauma common among Euro-pro wannabes who cycle bareheaded.

Jingoists smelled yet another French conspiracy to win their own national tour (I predict a renewed drive to rebrand pommes frites as freedom fries). Fantasists called for the immediate debut of an American national tour to replace the French version, because creating a three-week, 3,500-kilometer race is so, like, easy. A flock of ostriches reported deleting their bookmarks to VeloNews.com and canceling their subscriptions to the print mag, as if shooting the messenger somehow erases the message.

Puh-leeze. The ASO-Astana pissing contest is just the latest skirmish in the escalating gang war over territory between the grand-tour organizers and the UCI. It's venal, stupid and pointless, not unlike the rest of the real world, a place the hardcore sports fan seldom visits.

Where There's Dope, There's Dopes. ASO's decision to stiffarm Astana may indeed be unfair to Tour champ Alberto Contador and his teammates. But what were they smoking when they decided to join this two-wheeled crack house?

"He that lies with the dogs, riseth with fleas," George Herbert wrote a few centuries back, and I expect some frantic scratching erupted in Astana's doghouse after the bad news broke.

And frankly, anyone calling for "solidarity" among the riders in response to Astana's exclusion hasn't been paying attention this past decade. There has been far too much of that already—collusion might be a better word—and the old-timers' code of silence is what has driven their descendants to this precipice.

The dopeheads dug this bottomless cesspit cycling is drowning in, the one that clean riders, sponsors and fans have to take a big whiff of day after day. And some of the dumber, greedier ones will keep doing whatever it takes to score that big payday, the kind that whisks you away from long hours in the saddle letting Belgians stripe you up the chops with cowflops from the cobbles.

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly. Sure, there are clean pros trying to earn an honest euro, feed the family, meet the mortgage. But how do you know who's who? The smiling young man who autographs a team cap for your kid could spend his nights hanging from the rafters in a belfry with leathery wings folded.

Hey, there's a thought. Maybe I've been barking up the wrong holiday here. Forget about Valentine's Day—let's harken back to Halloween.

First thing we do, we kill all the pros. Then we hire a reputable voodoo priest to bring them back to life as zombies and voila: The ProTour of the Living Dead.

Zombies don't crave money or fame, and they sure don't need dope. Serve 'em up a cracked skull full of fresh brains and they're good to go. Black-rubber DEAD-STRONG bracelets for the slobbering fanboys. Podium gets to eat the losers. I tell you, zombie racing will make keirin look like ballroom dancing.

We'll still have to be testing these guys, of course. But not for dope—to be sure they're really zombies. Given the perilous state of the economy, some live down-and-outers may try to sneak in for the free brains and a shot at some post-race long pig.