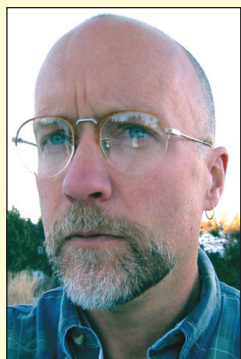


Maddog Unleashed

It May Be a New Year, But a New World, Now, That's Asking Too Much

Each year new consuls and proconsuls are made; but not every year is a king or a poet born.—Lucius Annaeus Florus, *De Qualitate Vitae*



BY PATRICK O'GRADY

Happy New Year! And I mean it, even though it's Pearl Harbor Day 2006 as I write this. Some years you just can't get shut off fast enough, and I'm not above taking a three-week head start.

Why not? Everyone else in cycling was cutting corners in '06, if you believe what you read. Trying to keep track of who has tested positive for what can be a full-time job, most seasons, but throw in a bunch of penalty-box time for guys who were merely implicated and a guy starts to feel like he's watching a sissified version of hockey.

There were days where I definitely felt sympathy for anyone driven mad enough to start flailing about him with a stick. One of them was July 27, when Phonak confirmed that Floyd Landis had tested positive for a skewed testosterone-epitestosterone ratio during the Tour de France.

More than four months later, we still have no definitive ruling as to his guilt or innocence. Landis' hearing before the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency is unlikely to occur before early February, just before the start of another race he won in 2006—the Amgen Tour of California—and if that goes against him, he can appeal to the International Court for Arbitration of Sport.

So who knows? We might not learn who “won” the 2006 Tour until the first guy rolls down the starting ramp during the '07 prologue in London.

Hello, Sailor—Meet Me in Portland? Elsewhere, Eurobike showed us a little ankle last fall, whispering vague promises about a September assignation in Portland, then scampered away, giggling, to Monterey.

Sure, it was probably a bad idea. So what? I have them all the time, and some of them even make money. Now we must all go slouching back to Vegas, where there's more carbon in the air than on the show floor and the only green you'll see all week will be fluttering out of your wallet like so many migratory presidential butterflies.

After serving a nine-year sentence in Sin City, I was looking forward to Stumptown the way an old con does his parole hearing. And now here I am, back in my cell at the Sands, while Eurobike gets all cuddly with Sea Otter on the beach.

I'm tellin' you, Bugsy, I can't do another year in this place. Somebody send me a cake with a file in it.

Cleaning House (and Senate). And last, but not least, the United States has a brand-new House and Senate for 2007. We're stuck with the same old White House, though, all bunkered up with the phone off the hook and its fingers in its ears, counting down the days until January 2009, when mopping up the bloody mess in Iraq will be someone else's problem.

To be sure, we threw a few of the rascals out last November, but we also put a few new ones in. And while there is good news—like Minnesota Democrat Jim Oberstar chairing the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee in the 110th Congress—with the 2008 presidential election already well under way, we should expect the talk-versus-walk ratio to be heavily skewed toward the sonic side of the equation.

Anyone who doubts this need only look to the closing days of the 109th Congress, where the Republican leadership hung up its teensy jock with nine of 11 appropriations bills for the fiscal year unfinished, hoping to derail the Democratic train as it leaves the station this month. And here you thought the adults had been in charge for the past five years.

If you really, truly, want to solve a problem, you have to do more than talk; you have to try. But if you try, you risk failure. And nobody with a hand in this game wants to risk a draw to an inside straight, not when standing pat may win that fat pot, the one in which all the chips bear the presidential seal.

Hey, I said it was a new year, not a new world. Still, try to have a happy one, anyway.