

Maddog Unleashed

Bicycle, Bicycle, Bicycle: Take Queen's Advice And Do It, Don't Watch It



"We were all riding at the limit . . . and we couldn't get any closer to Riis." —Laurent Dufaux after Bjarne Riis destroyed the other contenders on the stage-16 climb to Hautacam in the 1996 Tour de France

BY PATRICK O'GRADY

In late May I found myself mesmerized by the serial mea culpas that were overshadowing the actual bicycle racing at the professional level. It felt like accompanying an old friend to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting and sitting through confession after confession ("Hi, I'm Rolf and I'm a dooper." "Hi, Rolf!" Hi, I'm Erik and I'm a dooper." "Hi, Erik!" "Hi, I'm Bjarne and I'm a dooper. . .").

As I write this there's a week left in the Giro d'Italia, but I couldn't tell you the top 10 at gunpoint. I haven't followed the race with any enthusiasm, which is not smart for someone paid to keep abreast of developments among the shaven-legged set. But I just can't take this crap seriously anymore.

Oh, when it was my turn in the barrel, I climbed in, but my heart wasn't in it. The stories I edited were merely words in a row, with punctuation and paragraphs. Sometimes there were pictures.

Fortunately, a guy doesn't have to have a deep, abiding love for crime to edit a burglary story. The only motivation required is a paycheck, which can be exchanged for a variety of medications. Unless you'd rather hit a meeting with Rolf, Erik and Bjarne.

Better Late Than Never? I know, we all should be delighted that racers we have publicly admired but secretly doubted have finally confessed their sins, even if it took the expiration of various statutes of limitations and a tell-all book by a former soigneur to lay the groundwork for these come-to-Jesus moments.

But please, save the weepy admissions of decade-old misdeeds for \$2 pint night at the local pub, where bartenders may display heartfelt expressions of concern based upon tips received. I'll take notice when these fallen angels start giving us chapter and verse on the modus operandi—how they got the stuff, and from whom; how they used it; and how they beat the tests.

And I won't be holding my breath while we wait. We don't even need the hymnal for the song these canaries are singing, because we know it by heart after years of hearing it daily from Washington and Wall Street. Mistakes were made. Why dwell on the past? Let's move on.

Smile! You're On Candid Camera. You know what's frightening? I watched stage 15 of the Giro via Internet video and it was still entrancing, even knowing that last year's winner, Ivan Basso, kept a few bags of blood on ice at a Spanish gynecologist's office in case he felt a little peaked going into the Tour de France after winning the Giro by an extraterrestrial nine minutes and change.

This must be what keeps boxing fans coming back. They know their "sweet science" is rigged, fixed, queered in a half-dozen different directions, but they keep buying ringside tickets or springing for the pay-per-view because the act is so damn' good.

I got so caught up in stage 15, I almost forgot what I was watching. Professional bicycle racing is not a sport—it's a crime in progress. Like a liquor-store stickup, only with the occasional commercial interrupting the security-camera video.

I Want to Ride My Bicycle. The next day was a rest day, Memorial Day, so I didn't even have to pretend to pay attention. Instead, I took a two-hour spin along the local bike paths, feeling as though I was starting to get some snap back in my legs after an overlong winter and marveling at the hordes of cyclists I was seeing on the first day of summer.

Mountain bikes, road bikes, cruisers and tandems, plus an astounding number of trailers stuffed with children. Helmets, gloves, jerseys and shorts. Somebody around here is moving a hell of a lot of product, I thought. And they're doing it without a racing hook, because most of these people wouldn't know Basso from Bozo.

That's bad news for Bozo—I mean, Basso. But good news for the rest of us.