

Bachelor's Thesis for completing the course of studies Kulturwirt B.A. at the
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On the topic of

Communication in International ProCycling Teams

Evaluating internal and external communication inside
professional cycling

Department of Managerial Economics, Mercator School of Management
University of Duisburg-Essen, Duisburg, Germany
Supervised by Prof. Dr. Joachim Prinz

Written by Claudia Zerries

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I. Introduction

The main objective of this thesis is to outline where and why communication in cycling teams tends to fail and succeed in order to show how effective communication can benefit a team's sustainability.

When it comes to internal and external communication, cycling teams often lack a business approach to managing team public relations. With regards to the diverse internationality in teams, language barriers and volatile roles of sports directors and members of management, effective internal communication takes on an important role in the management of a team. With regards to external communication, this thesis will further try to highlight how target-oriented and creative approaches to sponsor, fan and media relations can help the long-term viability of a team.

In the process of interviewing nine riders during the Tour of California 2015 as well as conducting Email and Skype interviews with three additional staff members and former professional riders, I have established several theses I will further underline, taking assistance from multiple sources.

II. Definition Of Terms

UCI

The Union Cycliste International (UCI) is the world governing body for professional cycling. The UCI decides over licence distribution, sets race and team regularities and enforces disciplinary rules. While it sets regularities for WorldTour races, the UCI is not involved with the organisation of races.

UCI WorldTour Races

The annual cycling calendar currently consists of 27 races in the highest category, 1. UWT, one day races such as Paris-Roubaix and 2. UWT, stage races such as the Tour de France. The former race structure was, among other, called "ProTour", often leading to confusion regarding WorldTeams and "ProTour teams" or "ProTeams" as seen in my email interview with Grischa Niermann and Michael Creed in the appendix.

UCI WorldTeams

The currently 17 teams in highest league of cycling are called WorldTeams. They are obliged to take part in WorldTour races, where points for securing a stay in the league are collected based on rider placement.

UCI ProContinental Teams

There are currently 19 teams in the second highest division in professional cycling. ProContinental teams are not eligible to start at WorldTour races, but may take part as wildcard teams, chosen by race organisers.

UCI Continental/Third Division

The UCI Continental race circuits are divided into Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe and Oceania. National federations, and not the UCI, manage this league. Until 2005, the American teams were formerly known as division three/third division teams. The US Continental league currently has 30 teams.

Tour of California

The Tour of California is a stage race in the American Continental circuit held in May. While the Tour of California is not a WorldTour race, many **WorldTeams** participate due to its demanding route and as a preparation race for the season.

Neo Pro/Stagiaire

Neo Pros are young riders on their first professional contract, emerging from amateur teams. There are specific UCI rules governing how many Neo Pros a team can sign and on which conditions regarding working hours and payment.

Motorpacing

Motorpacing refers to a training method with one person driving a motor scooter with the cyclist behind in the slipstream, keeping pace during different speeds over a length of time. The purpose is to simulate racing in a group or during a lead-out attempt in an oncoming sprint.

Soigneur

A Soigneur is the traditional French term for “caretaker”, often in forms of a physio- or massage therapist. The role is fluid, as most Soigneurs also do the cooking, laundry, logistical tasks, as well as being a confidant and motivator and supporting a rider mentally.

WADA

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) is responsible for conducting and enforcing the WADA-Code, composed of a list of prohibited substances and methods as well as sanctions if an athlete does not adhere to it. Besides professional cycling, it counts over 600 sports organizations under its rule.

KPI

Key Performance Indicators (KPI) measure a company's success in achieving their targets. KPI's are values used to evaluate how well an organization is reaching its pre-set goals.

Free agency

A free agent in the sports world is an athlete free to sign with any team of his choosing, meaning that he is not under contract with any other team. There are no transfer fees in cycling and, apart from rare exceptions, riders do not change teams while still under contract at another team.

Collective bargaining

In sports, collective bargaining agreements are reached between a league's players (often represented through a union) and the league's owners on division of league's revenues, sanctions etc. A collective bargaining process would be hard to implement in cycling, as there are neither unions, nor split revenues such as for the selling of TV rights.

Power meter

Together with a set of equipment like a heart rate monitor or GPS device, a power meter delivers data about a rider's performance on the bike such as power (measured in watts), speed, heart rate, altitude and energy.

1. Communication Inside Teams

1.1 Arbitrary internationality and language

Diverse internationality in teams depends on different factors, most importantly on either inherent team structures, a well-connected agent or due to a sponsor's preference. There are teams, whose sponsors have a focus on their distinct home market, often seen in countries like the Netherlands or Belgium, where cycling is traditionally popular and where the sponsor's product is not available or known outside this country's market¹. These teams have a significant number of riders of the team's home nationality, while also signing successful international riders, if the opportunity presents itself.

On the other hand, teams, whose sponsor wants to expand internationally, look into signing riders of that specific nationality, as local media tends to focus on local riders and their results. The signing of a rider has in the past proven to be relatively arbitrary. An example of an American cyclist, who became member of an Italian team due to the team's involvement with the American bike manufacturer Cannondale, can be seen in the early career of Michael Creed², who in 1999 received an offer from the then-popular Italian team Saeco. The then 19-year old described how an associate of the team saw him racing at the Junior World Championships that year and then approached him and asked whether he would like to race in Italy. Months later that associate called him with an offer and the question if he knew another American rider who would join him in going to Italy because "we don't want you to get homesick". The team "needed two Americans" to please the sponsor. Michael Creed, who is now a sports director at the American team SmartStop, highlights that signing a rider under these circumstances would not be possible today. With young professionals having their results displayed on the Internet, it is easy for the team to search for a particular type of rider with promising results. It has become more competitive and transparent and with the UCI imposing a limit on team size in 2005, teams do not take such risks in signing a relatively unknown rider anymore. The example of Ted King, who also joined the Italian team Liquigas in 2011 due to Cannondale's involvement, underlines Creed's point, because, other than Creed, Ted King has already gained experience on a UCI

¹ Etixx for example, a company for sports nutritional products, sponsors the Belgian Team Etixx-Quick Step. Etixx's main company and former name sponsor of the Team, Omega Pharma, only caters to Benelux countries. It's website is only available in Dutch and French

² Interview Michael Creed, appendix lines 966 - 996

ProContinental level in the 2010 season at Cervélo TestTeam. In a conversation with Michael Creed on his podcast series³, King explains his problems integrating into the Italian culture in the team, especially after his teammate, fellow American and “best friend” Ted Duggan left the team. He also states that he feels like he is fitting in “as much as he can” and that he is happy at the team.

There also seems to be the factor of pure coincidence to be taken into account when we talk of how internationality comes about in a team. While talking to Team MTN Qhubeka’s sprinter Gerald Ciolek⁴ during the Tour of California, he mentioned how contacts are established in pro cycling:

“Pro Cycling is a small world after all, who knows who, who knows someone who needs a certain type of rider. Teams are looking for you and contact your management.”

Ciolek’s team MTN Qhubeka is one of the most diverse groups in today’s pro cycling structure. The South African team’s goals differ slightly from others, as one of the main sponsors, Qhubeka, is a charity organization, working towards giving away bicycles on the African continent, and thus supporting mobility in countries with poor infrastructure and difficult access to schools. While 13 of the 23 riders are from the African continent, internationality is part of the team’s philosophy and thus the group consists of riders from a vast cultural background.

How a team chooses a rider to be part of the team is often also thanks to a well-connected agent. Some riders I have talked to during the Tour of California stated that they have established contact with the team through an agent, and that further talks with the team’s management happens through him or her. Language barriers do not seem to pose restrictions on the choosing of a rider, but rather whether his skills fit to what the team is searching for at that moment⁵.

The question whether language fluency is necessary in order to become part of a team and lead it to success, can be evaluated in the example of Italian rider Ivan Basso’s early years as

³ Creed, Michael (16 August 2013): Open Mic with Mike Creed, Ep 10 – Ted King. <https://itunes.apple.com/de/podcast/open-mic-mike-creed-ep10-ted/id668459898?i=286718646&mt=2>
26:45 – 27:24 minutes

⁴ Interview with Gerald Ciolek originally conducted in German, see page 67 lines 386 – 388

⁵ Christian Knees confirmed that notion, see appendix lines 151f

a professional rider. In the 2005 documentary “Overcoming”, we see Sports Director Bjane Riis of the Danish team CSC in talks with Basso, his newest addition to his international team, who has trouble making himself understood in English⁶. But as Riis has spent five years in different Italian teams during his active career, he himself speaks fluent Italian, which, until Basso advances on his English courses, seems to be sufficient in communicating race tactics. In the documentary, we see Ivan Basso winning one stage at the Tour de France and finishing third in the overall classification. This could lead to the idea that only a basic form of communication is necessary to achieve results, and when it comes to signing well-known and successful riders, language barriers are secondary. This notion was underlined with a study conducted by the University of Zurich⁷, where the results suggested that the effects of national diversity do not significantly influence a team’s performance. Brandes, Franck and Theiler evaluated 90 observations in the German Bundesliga and came to the conclusion that:

“(...) we do not find a significant influence of the number of nationalities within the “core team” on seasonal team success. (...) Instead, it seems that a team’s financial power determines its sporting success.”

While football in its sportive side cannot be compared to cycling, the (very little) amount of communication on the “field” and with the coach/sports director as communicator before the event is comparable. Also, the fact that cycling as well as German football does have an open agency approach when it comes to signing athletes, the financial power of a team can be attributed to its success as well, or at least confirming the assumption, that a higher “buying” power of athletes can lead to success.⁸

Brandes et al. further describe how certain “field” positions require more communication than others and that especially here a language barrier could act as an obstacle for team success. In cycling on the other hand, tactical coordination in the race itself is not as fast paced as it is in football and riders usually get instructions before the race and directly from the team car during a race⁹. The impairment of one important position in the team not understanding the language as well as others might not be as significant as it is in football.

⁶ Gislason (2005): 13:33 – 15:02 minutes

⁷ Brandes, Franck, Theiler (2009): 61f

⁸ Prinz, Wicker (2012): 428f confirm this idea with regards to professional cycling.

⁹ Radio communication with the riders is only allowed at WorldTour races

During the interviews I have conducted at the Tour of California 2015, riders often stated that they were quick to learn the language when coming to a new team with a language not their own. They have also said that when it comes to race tactics, minimal communication and basic vocabulary was sufficient.

I have talked to Jure Kocjan¹⁰ of the American team SmartStop, who has spent three years racing in Italian teams before he continued his career in the US. He was keen to highlight that it did not take too long for him to learn the language. On the question of whether there were any communication problems during his time in Italy based on the language difference, he stated:

“Yes, of course. It was really hard when I just came there, the first time in January all I knew was “Ciao” and “Uno, due, tres”, that’s all I knew. Just a few words and then I learned. But it went so fast because you have to, you’re there you just listen. If you stay at home and just learn every day one hour it takes forever, but if you’re there in two or three weeks I learned a lot.”

Kocjan also mentioned that one of the two sports directors spoke a bit of English, which helped him integrate. According to Kocjan, it took him six months to learn the language fluently.

A large amount of international riders have started their career in French, Belgian and Italian teams, as those countries have a vast tradition of taking on young riders and “schooling” them on in their career. Also because of the fact that European races are considerably more demanding than elsewhere, due to the sheer amount and frequency of races, as well as the mixed terrain and quality of riders, riders themselves seek to be taken on by European teams in order to become successful and to “learn the trade”. With the strengthening of the American league, the cycling boom in England and both countries establishing rider development structures, this has become less apparent. But as Jure Kocjan states, there are a lot of riders speaking Italian in the peloton. Cyclists, especially in a development structure or on their first professional contract, tend to be eager to learn the language in order to understand and be understood. For example Ruben Zepuntke, who during his time in the Rabobank Development Team in the Netherlands, also stated that he spoke Dutch as well as learning English due to the array of nationalities on the team.¹¹

¹⁰ Interview Jure Kocjan, appendix lines 442 - 487

¹¹ Interview with Ruben Zepuntke originally conducted in German, appendix lines 276f

Another rider I have interviewed, the Swiss Martin Köhler¹² of the Australian team Drapac Racing, explained that language barriers were minimal in teams he was riding in, as everyone knows their role in the team and is quick on learning the language. He explained how the tasks were clear and easy to understand. He said: “I could not speak Italian but I always knew what to do. It’s always about the same things, and always the same words. You learn it fast.” He further explained that he himself as a Swiss rider, who moved from a Swiss to an Australian team, understood tactics as a matter of getting used to the usual vocabulary and not being afraid to ask questions:

(...) “Even before at BMC everything was in English. I am used to it. Sometimes you don’t exactly understand everything but it’s always about the same things. And you can ask questions.”

The notion of “you just know what to do” was a reoccurring theme, even if the riders did not speak the language well. As Mike Creed¹³ explains regarding his years riding in Italy on the Saeco team in the 1999 season, communication was very scarce. According to Creed, once every two or three weeks team manager Claudio Corti would visit the apartment he shared with other riders, carrying money, a bag of cookies and leaving the riders to their own after that. In order for him to know when to race, Corti would call two or three days before and, on the day of the race, pick him up outside the apartment. Learning Italian was not necessary, as his role in the team was very minor. No one showed him the ropes, but as Creed admits, he did not ask any questions either. Nowadays, with limited budgets and UCI restrictions on team size, teams cannot afford to keep a rider on the outside.

Besides being able to discuss race tactics, speaking the team language, which is often dictated by the majority of riders from the same languages, it is detrimental for the rider feeling welcome inside the team. German cyclist Gerald Ciolek described, how while he was a part of his former team OmegaPharma – Quick Step, most riders spoke Dutch and because he was not familiar with the language, he often felt left out:

“It was kind of tough. They talk to you in English, you speak English, that is why you are not forced to learn another language. But sure, the conversations between the

¹² Interview with Martin Köhler originally conducted in German, appendix lines 167 - 173

¹³ Interview Michael Creed, appendix lines 1005 - 1018

riders are mainly in Dutch. (...) To catch up with other riders is not as easy as being in a German team.”¹⁴

Being alone in a foreign country and practising a sport where training is often spent in solitude and where races happen among riders not speaking one’s language, some riders take the chance to return to their domestic home circuit lightly. Even though it often means a step down in terms of pay, race quality and team status, former WorldTour riders benefit from the training methods they came to observe in their former team, as well as coming home with a more established knowledge, experience and physique. In his autobiography, Phil Gaimon describes, how one of his teammates, John Murphy, returned to the US from racing in Europe on the Swiss WorldTour team BMC, and although it was a step down for him in terms of pay and status, Murphy was enthusiastic about riding in his home country again:

“I was worried that he’d be unmotivated after such a step down, but that wasn’t the case at all. In fact, John was burned out on all the crappy races he’d been doing in Europe. He was excited to live in the United States again and ride for a team that would have some fun, despite the steep pay cut.”¹⁵

This shows that, while the language barrier does not seem to pose much of a problem for riders and has a limited influence on team performance, it can be hard to adapt to the cultural change, especially if the rider is not able to integrate well in the already established team structure.

1.2 The role of the sports director as a communicator

One important finding of my research was the importance of the sports director as a communicator inside the team, especially on a lower league level such as at the American team SmartStop. Apart from the obvious task of being the one behind the wheel of the team car during races, Sports Director Michael Creed plays a pivotal role in the organization of the team. He has joined the team at the beginning of 2014 with the responsibility to

¹⁴ Interview with Gerald Ciolek originally conducted in German, appendix lines 360 - 369

¹⁵ Gaimon (2013): 214

rebuild the team from its focus on criterium- to stage and one-day races. Some of his tasks¹⁶ include:

- Organizing training camps, booking hotels before the race starts
- Booking plane tickets of riders and staff
- Organizing vehicle transfers to and from a race, including driving the team car across the country
- Scheduling motorpacing sessions or finding drivers to do it
- Booking hotels for parts of the staff not included in the race organizer's provided accommodation
- Three weeks before a race: writing a "master sheet" with everyone's arrival time, vehicle distribution and a basic sheet with stage start times, length and tactical outline
- Writing a daily sheet emailed to team members with a detailed stage plan, weather forecast, departure and transfer time, as well as personalized emails for the riders explaining tactics and expectations
- Personal talks with every rider every evening during a race to talk tactics as well as evaluate how they are feeling form-wise as well as mentally
- Entertaining sponsors and team owners during a race
- Researching potential signings and contract negotiations with current riders
- Talking to and finding potential new sponsors

I will further elaborate on the ineffectiveness of such multitude of tasks in chapter 1.3, but it has become obvious, that a sports director plays a central role in the communication inside a team, especially on a continental level where teams often work on a low budget.

In larger teams, sports directors still act as a central communicator, but the frequency of contact to their riders varies. During my questioning on how often riders get in contact with the sports director, the interviewees' answers ranged from "once a week" to "only at races". Ruben Zepuntke was not an exemption, but had a different experience at his former employer, Bissell Development Team, lead by Axel Merckx. He explained that personal talks could last at least 30 minutes each day¹⁷, with critique and explanations to help those young

¹⁶ Interview Michael Creed, appendix lines 839 - 855

¹⁷ Interview with Ruben Zepuntke originally conducted in German, appendix lines 312 - 318

riders. Bissell, now called Axeon Cycling, is one of the most prestigious development teams in cycling, producing several talented riders who regularly go on to sign contracts with WorldTour teams.¹⁸ I was able to conduct an email interview with Grischka Niermann¹⁹, former professional cyclists and now coach at the Rabobank Development Team (RaboDev), where Ruben Zepuntke has spent one year as a rider in 2012. Niermann explains his role at RaboDev as that of a coach first and foremost, but admits that he acts as a sports director as well, involved with tactics and present at races. The team employs five coaches in total, while he and Richard Groenendaal are sports directors as well, beside team manager Artur Van Dongen in his role as sports director without any coaching responsibility. Niermann describes the importance of individual talks with his riders and “clearly structured talks before and after a race”, modelled on a fixed scheme. His goals are to understand and motivate his riders through his coaching, and that the team philosophy consists of giving the riders a chance to get individual results, while acknowledging the contradiction in teaching them how this can only be achieved as a team. Extensive communication with the coach thus seems significant in the growth and improvement of riders, especially on a development level.

The mixing of the role of a coach and a sports director can be logical during an early phase of rider development, where having a “mentor” is important, while clear structures and fixed points of communication are more important on a professional, more fast-paced level. On a much bigger scale, UCI WorldTeams like Sky Pro Cycling distribute responsibilities much stricter, as far as putting the position of a sports director further in the background. Due to holding one of the largest budgets in the league, Sky is able to add another communication layer between the rider and the sports director, introducing the coach as the first and foremost connection to the team. Closely knit to British Cycling, the national cycling federation, Team Sky has access to a vast amount of staff from both corporations.

As the German rider Christian Knees explained²⁰, he only talks to his sports director shortly before and during a race, while he on the other hand receives his information from his race coach, who delivers information about training and form further inside the team. Thus, the

¹⁸ Examples of former riders in this team’s development structure who are now WorldTeam riders are Taylor Phinney (BMC), Joe Dombrowski (first Sky, then Cannondale-Garmin) and Lawson Craddock (Giant Alpecin). 2012 Tour winner Bradley Wiggins has set up a development team in the UK, admitting that he wants to model it on Axel Merckx’ approach to schooling young riders.

¹⁹ Email Interview with Grischka Niermann originally conducted in German, appendix lines 623 - 742

²⁰ Interview with Christian Knees originally conducted in German, appendix lines 136 - 139

sports director fulfils his essential role only at races, while choosing race rosters based on the coach's evaluation. According to the Team Sky website²¹, there are five Sports Directors, one Head of Performance Support and Innovation, two Performance Coaches and one Performance Analyst. Head of Performance Operations Rod Ellingworth, as well as Head of Athlete Performance Tim Kerrison oversee this part of the organization. In an interview with The Guardian²², Kerrison, who has previously coached the Australian swimming team, talks about the inconsistency of the role of the sports director in other cycling teams, where most riders employ their own personal coach independent of the team:

"The concept of coaching seems to be hit and miss: some teams have a coach; some teams leave their riders to their own devices; in some the directeurs sportifs²³ oversee what they do between races but we know it's hard for them."

Kerrison's argument includes the idea that there should be a full-time support for the riders, not only during races and training camps. Considering that the sport of cycling demands the athlete's full involvement throughout the year due to training, nutrition and over 100 days racing away from home, it seems logical for the team to get involved full-time through the implementation of a coach. It is already common for riders to send in their training data, including power output and GPS tracks, in order for the team to oversee the rider's basic training. An extra level of a coach communicating with the rest of the team could lead to a more transparent and tailor-made race schedule, as well as the rider feeling taken care of and not left to his own devices. Also, with regards to the Tour de France, studies suggest that coaches, who have previously taken part in this race as cyclists, have a positive influence on team performance overall.²⁴ In order for a coach-athlete communication to be successful, the four anchors of communication, introduced by Vlad Roșca²⁵, should be implemented: Individual, group, institutional and cultural communication. With a rider coming to a new team environment, this would help him overcome the first step of getting adjusted in order to reach his performance potential earlier.

²¹ Sky Pro Cycling (2015): Sports Directors/Coaches. <http://www.teamsky.com/teamsky/staff#Xa6dAlb3zhKl2xjW.97>

²² Fotheringham, William (27 April 2013): Tim Kerrison says Bradley Wiggins and Sky exploited 'knowledge gap'. <http://www.theguardian.com/sport/2013/apr/27/tim-kerrison-bradley-wiggins-team-sky>

²³ Directeur sportif, in short DS, is the French traditional term for sports director.

²⁴ Prinz, Wicker (2012): 428

²⁵ Roșca (2010): 280f

Another communication speciality with Team Sky is that, from the inception of the team until today, they count a psychiatrist, Dr Steve Peters, as part of their senior management staff. Thus, the team covers the mental aspect of an athlete's performance as well. With this kind of setup, it is not surprising that Knees find his current team very well organized. While such full-time involvement with the rider is also a question of funding, a distribution of responsibilities sets clear boundaries to the often-vague role of sports director, who can focus on his main tasks. UCI WorldTeams like Sky, Astana and BMC also assign their sports directors to specific riders in groups of about five²⁶, thus giving their riders a fixed contact person. This especially bears significance in teams as big as Sky, counting up to 70²⁷ members of team and staff, thus shortening ways of communication, avoiding confusion and also promoting group cohesion.²⁸

1.3 Clear management roles can help effective communication

Just as the role of a sports director is not fixed, team managers can also sometimes be represented in forms of team owners, sports directors, sponsors or patrons. Most of a team's management consists of former professional cyclists, retiring from their active career into roles such as sports directors or founding a team of their own, also managing the business side of it. There are several examples of fluid management roles in cycling, some examples including:

- Brian Smith started working with Team MTN-Qhubeka as interim manager, progressed into the role of general manager, while also being a sports director at the Tour de France 2015.
- David Brailsford took on his role as team principal of Team Sky, while also, until 2014, acting as the performance director of the British Olympic track cycling team. He oversees performance and team tactics, but focuses his work on performance analytics. He is an M.B.A. business graduate, but is not involved with the team's finances.

²⁶ Michael Schär of BMC confirmed that in his team every sports director oversees a group of five to six riders, see interview in appendix lines 115f

²⁷ Based on listings of riders and staff on their website, TeamSky.com

²⁸ Russell (1993): 77f

- Jonathan Vaughters of Cannondale-Garmin founded a youth development team in 2003, before it progressed into a UCI WorldTeam, which he now leads a team manager after stepping back from his role as sports director.

Riders explained that communication with whom they deem to be “the manager” is limited and sometimes seen unnecessary. Initial contact on the WorldTeam level is often established via the rider’s agent and, if the manager is not present at races or team gatherings such as training camps, some managers do not seem to get involved with communicating to the riders at all.

This could have a multitude of reasons:

- Team management is solely responsible for contract negotiations and the business side of running a team
- Team management does not have sufficient know-how on team tactics or the sportive side of running a team
- Team management likes to leave communication to others, such as the sports director, to establish fixed contacts and avoid miscommunication
- The sports director does not want management, in the form of the commercial side of the team to get involved and has enough influence to keep it from happening

It would be difficult to say whether there is an optimal role of a team manager, but it can be argued that a manager’s role should be fixed and clear in order for a team to run efficiently. In a cover story for the Harvard Business Review on decision-making, Paul Rogers and Marcia Blenko identify ambiguity as “the enemy”, as it hinders accountability, while stating, “without clarity, gridlock and delay are the most likely outcomes.”²⁹

An example of a clear division of roles can be seen at Cannondale-Garmin, where their business-approach to running a cycling team is also underlined by the titles of the positions in management: CEO Jonathan Vaughters has, as explained previously, transgressed into the role of team manager after pursuing an M.B.A. and actively stepping back from his role as sports director. He is also rarely visible around the team itself anymore. During my interview with Ruben Zepuntke³⁰, the 22-year old German rider confirmed that his

²⁹ Rogers, Blenko (2006): 59

³⁰ Interview with Ruben Zepuntke originally conducted in German, appendix lines 281 - 286

communication with Jonathan Vaughters as manager is indeed limited. Zepuntke has also not experienced Vaughters in his former role as sports director. He further explained, how Slipstream-COO Louise Donalds manages team logistics:

“The highest one up is Jonathan Vaughters as team manager. (...) But we do have our manager, which is Louise Donald, who organizes everything - flights, transfers (...) If you do not understand her, you have a problem. (...) It works very very well.”

Advancing Slipstream Sports from the American third division on to becoming a WorldTeam, Jonathan Vaughters has established Cannondale-Garmin as a business entity, which, in his eyes, should be lead by a strong management. His critique on the current state of cycling³¹ included, that “old bike riders” are leading most boards deciding over the sport, with not enough knowledge about marketing the business side of the sport. Vaughters supports the idea to differentiate between management and sports director, by taking a step back and not appearing behind the wheel of the team car anymore.

“At the end of the day, it’s hard to be critical and say, “These guys sitting on the board of directors are just a bunch of old bike racers, what do they know about moving the business prospects of professional cycling forward” Well, what was I? I was an ex-professional bike racer with no business education whatsoever. I was basically criticizing myself. So I figured I should go and fix that.”

In this interview, Vaughters is also naming the example of former professional rider Charlie Wegelius advancing into the role of sports director, Vaughters highlights Wegelius’ “great managerial skills”, which, to his mind, is needed to fulfil the role sufficiently.

The examples of Team Sky and their coaching system in chapter 1.2 and Jonathan Vaughters stepping back from his role as sports director, show that riders can perceive communication inside the team as efficient because of fixed contacts in management. But experiences in other WorldTeams vary. According to former BMC rider Martin Köhler, a bigger team leads to more difficult communication, because there are several channels a rider has to go through. Köhler mentioned at the Tour of California that not the different languages spoken among riders posed a problem, but organisation and logistics due to the

³¹ Schmalz, Dan (18 March 2009): Jonathan Vaughters Interview. <http://nyvelocity.com/articles/interviews/jonathan-vaughters-interview/>

amount of people involved. He faced problems with clothing arriving late and different nationalities and cultures in the management department making communication difficult.³² On a smaller scale, as seen in the American league, managers have to take on several tasks, instead of being able to rely on a COO to book flights and manage the schedule. Explained in chapter 1.2 regarding Michael Creed and Team SmartStop, sports directors can also act as logistics managers. But Creed highlighted the importance that he, as the one most affected by faults in the schedule, has to do the coordination himself. He also mentioned that through booking tickets and distributing vehicles, he has a better overview of the schedule he has to work with. Through the merging of tasks, small teams run the risk of important team members losing motivation due to being overworked³³, especially in a sport, where bigger team successes can be absent over a long period of time. But core problems are also the reluctance to delegate and team management not seeing the problem out of convenience of not having to employ another team member. An effective sharing of staff workload is not always a question of budget, but of properly introduced human resource planning. Mechanics and soigneurs are often hired only when needed during bigger races but, and according to Michael Creed³⁴, short-term employees are motivated and good to work with. On the other hand it is difficult to assemble a fully motivated fixed staff willing to travel throughout the year on a relatively low pay. Due to the teams being that small, risk-management through diversification is not a given³⁵ – if there is one lesser-motivated part of the team disrupting the tight schedule and budget, everyone is affected. Teams have to highlight choosing their personnel not only based on willingness to travel and to work on a small budget, but carefully in terms of motivation and skillset. Adding to that, the tendency of merging tasks is not sufficient without a proper scanning of core competencies in a team³⁶ but instead the seemingly easy way to rather chose the nearest person available, willing to take on more work on the same amount of pay. A team's management then has to work with is the high fluctuation rate due to low pay and the tiredness of many days spent travelling, especially if it does not succeed in creating a work environment with incentives

³² Interview with Martin Köhler originally conducted in German, see appendix lines 203 - 214

³³ Ridder (2013): 283 - 287

³⁴ Interview with Michael Creed, appendix lines 791 - 802

³⁵ Hamel (2013): 246

³⁶ Krüger, Homp (1997)

and constant communication of praise and constructive criticism³⁷. Here management has to get involved in communication and take on its role as team leaders, because otherwise, the task of motivating and managing the staff AND riders would put too much strain on the role of a sports director as the highest instance in the team on the road.

1.4 Underperformance of riders due to miscommunication

During the 2013 season, Olivier Aubeil and Fabien Ohi of the University of Lausanne conducted a total of 72 anonymous interviews with riders and members of management and staff of several cycling teams, in order to evaluate the effect of employment conditions on doping practises. Aubeil and Ohi's research also relies on access to the UCI databases, who partly funded their research, to underline the demographics of the sport and its employment structure. While concentrating on the issue of doping and its structural drivers, the authors made interesting observations on miscommunication in teams. In the paper, a distinction is made between "less successful and more constrained teams", where "communication with the rider depends on the latter's initiative" and "leading teams" on the other hand, taking the initiative to contact the rider themselves.³⁸ This coincides with statements made by three former riders employed by the Kazakh team Astana, who all have had the experience of the team leaving them to their own devices, which, among other problems experienced with the team, has led one rider to retire from the sport.

While talking to the Slovenian rider Janez Brajkovič³⁹ during the Tour of California, he was not hesitant to note that communication at his former team Astana, where he spent the season of 2008 as well as two years between 2012 and 2014, was meagre. When asked about his mode of communication at his current team UnitedHealthcare, he stated, "there is a lot of communication, compared to previous teams and years." And while describing the most significant difference between his current and former team, the Slovene said United Healthcare is "a happier team", where problems are resolved and talked about.

Similar lack of communication from Brajkovič's former team can be observed in interviews with former Astana professional Evan Huffman, who returned to racing in the USA at Team

³⁷ Hamel (2013): 255 on intrinsic motivation

³⁸ Aubeil, Ohi (2015): 1110

³⁹ Interview Janez Brajkovič, appendix lines 56f and 150.

SmartStop. He spent two years at the Kazakh team, racing in Europe and Asia, a chance only a few American teams could offer him. After receiving the invitation to join a UCI WorldTeam in 2012, he did not hesitate to join and stated in an interview with the Sacramento Bee “I was told if I had results, I would be taken care of.”⁴⁰ The Author of the interview, James Raia, further described, “[Huffman] had a cellphone, but his team rarely called.” Huffmann and Brajkovič thus both stated, that most communication with the team happened when the respective results were to the team’s liking. Brajkovič highlighted, that his own manager helped him with the communication, also regarding contractual negotiations.

“(...) when you have good results it's very easy to talk with everyone, they come to you and talk to you. But when things are not so well, it's better to have somebody to take care of you.”⁴¹

The just recently retired rider Frederik Kessiakoff had similar experience with his former team Astana. After sustaining several injuries at Strade Bianche, an Italian race early in the 2014 season, he found himself being put under pressure by team management for underperforming. In an Interview with VeloNews.com⁴² Kessiakoff states that he was sent to compete, even though Astana’s team doctors did not see him fit to race. The rider blames this partly on missing communication between the different members of staff in the team’s management. He received an email after his first accident in March 2014, directed at the whole team, stating the management’s disappointment with the riders’ performances at that particular race. Then, after Kessiakoff did not finish the Tour of Austria due to his on-going illness, personal letters on behalf of team manager Alexandre Vinokurov followed, even threatening to cut his wages:

“[The letter] says that they are very disappointed in my performances and the fact that I quit the race, and if this continues they will have to take action in accordance with my contract.”

⁴⁰ Raia, James (3 May 2015): Cyclist Evan Huffman tries to climb back, <http://www.sacbee.com/sports/other-sports/article20152023.html>

⁴¹ Interview Janesz Brajkovič, appendix lines 67 - 70

⁴² Johansson, Malena (27 February 2015): Kessiakoff says Astana mistreatment cut career short. http://velonews.competitor.com/2015/02/news/kessiakoff-says-astana-mistreatment-cut-career-short_361792#SvJI8x7ct1EA0lci.99

Kessiakoff was obliged to send in his training data, which for him would have proved that it was not a lack of motivation to train that made him miss out on results, but his health in general. The 34-year old Swede decided to retire after the 2014 season, blaming the miscommunication on part of Astana. "They didn't succeed in getting the best out of me, instead it only got worse" he stated in the VeloNews interview. Kessiakoff suffered during his last year as a professional cyclist, paired with a fear of losing his income, which resulted in further bad results. Vincenzo Nibali on the other hand, one of Astana's most successful riders, is in a better position to not take the pressure being put on him by team management too hard. As occurred with statements from Vinokurov during the Tour de France 2015 regarding the former Tour champion's bad placing in the overall classification, Nibali was quoted saying "Vino[kurov] said that to motivate me, to bring out a bit of nastiness in me."⁴³ Other than Kessiakoff and Brajkovič, Vincenzo Nibali as the Tour de France winner of 2014 would not have reason to fear for a new team, even if Astana, as they have threatened to, ultimately decided not to honour the remaining year of his contract.

In the field of sports psychology, the inverted-U hypothesis⁴⁴ has taken on popular appeal due to the simplicity and the range of application of the model. It describes, how with increased arousal, performance first rises, reaches a peak and then falls in the shape of an inverted-U. Applied to Kessiakoff's case, his stress levels, due to injury and pressure, did not allow him to reach an optimum performance, but instead the heightened arousal has made his performance worse. In a sport like cycling, where almost constant attention is asked of the rider, a lot of stimulus in form of pressure or stress can cause a drop in focus and thus result in more crashes and injury⁴⁵.

In a more detailed model based on the inverted-U, Fazey and Hardy's Catastrophe Model⁴⁶ adds the layer of competition, opposed to training, as another reason for anxiety and the impediment of arousal on performance. According to this, sending Kessiakoff to races thus further induced his inability to perform. The reaction of a rider to pressure is a highly individual process; a trustful relationship with team management and a coach helping

⁴³ Ryan, Berry (17 July 2015): Nibali says Vinokourov's comments were designed to motivate. <http://www.cyclingnews.com/news/nibali-says-vinokourov-s-comments-were-designed-to-motivate/>

⁴⁴ Kremer, Scully (1994): 63f. The inverted-U hypothesis is based on the Yerkes-Dodson law.

⁴⁵ In a 1970 study, J.B. Oxendine argues that a high state of arousal can be beneficial for sports involving gross motor skills like weight lifting, while with sports involving complex motor skills, arousal can impede performance.

⁴⁶ Kremer, Scully (1994): 65f (cited after Fazey and Hardy (1988))

athletes prone to anxiety would help performance in a sport where a balanced psychological state is very important.

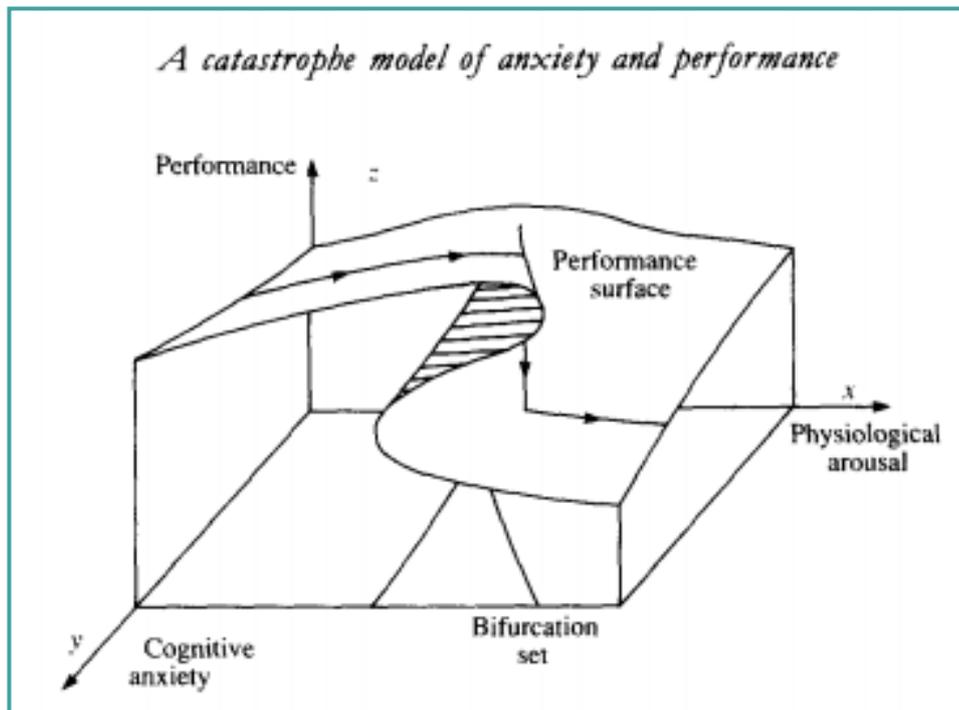


Fig. 1: A catastrophe model of anxiety and performance (Fazey, Hardy (1988): 167)

Not only can some riders end up in a loop of bad results and illness, others may take more desperate measures, as seen in the example of two Astana riders having tested positive for the performance enhancing drug EPO. With regards to the two doping cases in the team, Frederik Kessiakoff confirmed⁴⁷ that the atmosphere in the team, the pressure and neglect for the riders, could lead to “weaker” riders taking measures such as doping, to get results and therefore securing their contract and income. The positive test had serious results for the team, as the UCI considered withdrawing Astana’s UCI WorldTeam license for the 2015 season. In its reasoned decision to request for a license withdrawal⁴⁸, the UCI notes the findings of the Institute of Sports Science of the University of Lausanne (ISSUL)⁴⁹, which was sent to observe the team’s structure and its organization in terms of alleged team doping.

⁴⁷ Stokes, Shane (2015): Kessiakoff on Astana’s pressurising of riders, team’s licence woes, Nibali’s panache and an improving sport. <http://cyclingtips.com.au/2015/06/kessiakoff-on-astanas-pressurising-of-riders-teams-licence-woes-nibalis-giro-panache-frustration-and-an-improving-sport/>

⁴⁸ Zapelli, Pierre (2015): Request for the withdrawal of the licence of the UCI World Team Astana WorldTeam. http://www.uci.ch/mm/Document/News/NewsGeneral/16/97/47/ReasoneddecisionfromtheLicenceCommissionintheAstanaWorldTeamcase_Neutral.pdf

⁴⁹ Here the UCI’s connection to the University of Lausanne is highlighted again, as they have also funded Olivier Aubel and Fabien Ohl’s research paper mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

The ISSUL did not find any hints on doping provided or suggested by the team's staff itself, but saw significant mismanagement, which could lead to the taking of prohibited substances. The ISSUL audit's findings are not public in its entirety, but according to the UCI document of the reasoned decision, the commission observed, "a globally inadequate organisation of the management [and] a problem with the management culture." In terms of communication, it found out, that

"The Team's organisation is defective in that it neglects the most vulnerable riders and does not offer them proper follow-up. Finally, some riders are very much left to their own devices, in particular when they spend time far away from the Team, without any serious checks on training, performance, fatigue, etc., a situation that entails increased risk regarding these riders."

This conclusion of the danger of riders being left to their own devices coincides with Aibel and Ohl's observations, who in their research paper, quote an anonymous rider "employed by a team based 1000 kilometres from his home". The rider confirms that he is rather working with his own sports doctor close to his home, as well as with other volunteers, due to the lack of assistance from his team.⁵⁰ The instance of circumventing the team doctor due to him being too far away from the rider's home, naturally causes the threat of a rider doping outside the team's supervision or even working with a doctor who is not as familiar with the WADA restrictions a cyclist has to subject himself to, running the risk of an unintentional positive doping test.

The ISSUL report found what several accounts from former riders have confirmed: This mode of scarce communication and a rider left on his own is a clear sign of mismanagement. Although threats and pressure are by some managers and directors seen as a tool to motivate riders, they can lead to a multitude of negative outcomes – among other riders taking performance enhancing drugs in order to improve their results.

2. Communication Towards The Sponsor

2.1 The importance of extensive sponsor relation programmes

Professional cycling is a sport solely dependent on income through sponsoring money. Unlike sports such as football, cycling teams do not generate money through ticket

⁵⁰ Aibel, Ohl (2014): 1100

sales, broadcasting rights or transfer fees. According to UCI rules, a team is allowed to have two principal partners appearing in the team's name⁵¹. Those generate most of the team's income, which is generally a minimum of €8 to €10 million⁵² per season. Due to the limited stream of revenue and a scarcity of big-scale sponsors because of the sport's history of doping, good ways of "selling" the team to a potential sponsor and good relations to current sponsors are detrimental for a team's survival.

In an interview via email⁵³, Michael Roecklein explained his tasks as Sponsoring Director of Team SmartStop. Roecklein has started his own development team in 2011, before joining SmartStop in mid 2014. His work ranges from securing relationships with industry partners, to individually negotiating content creation during the biggest races of the season based on the sponsoring contracts. During the Tour of California for example, he described being the face of the team for the sponsors, and that "my main job is to make sure they have a good time and get the most out of their investment in the team at the race". He further explains that halfway through the season, negotiations with current and potential sponsors begin anew. Concerning the interests of a sponsor and why a sponsor invests in a team, Roecklein describes:

"Companies want impressions most of all. They see buying impressions from us as less expensive and more fun than other options. Companies often have specific requests like lead generation (introducing them to potential new customers) or having a connection to a charity."

Other than what can often be seen in arguments for sponsoring a team branding, as in seeing a company name on the jersey, is not the most important objective for the sponsors Michael Roecklein works with, as only the main sponsor benefits from name recognition. According to Roecklein, networking is an important reason for sponsors to get involved with the team. Incentive events during bigger races give them the chance for, as Roecklein describes, a "natural connection to other companies that they want to take advantage of."

⁵¹ UCI cycling regulations, part two, section 2.15.050 „The name of the UCI WorldTeam must be either that of the company or brand name of the principal partner or that of one or both of the two principal partners, or the name of its paying agent.“ http://www.uci.ch/mm/Document/News/Rulesandregulation/16/82/39/2-ROA-20150619-E_English.pdf

⁵² The UCI does only set a minimum pay for riders and a minimum number of riders, sports directors and staff. A percentage of the team's wages has to be paid into a bank guarantee in order to receive a WorldTeam license. As teams rarely talk about their finances and as there is no minimum or maximum income limit, €8 - €10 million is a generally quoted estimate minimum for running a cycling team on a WorldTeam level.

⁵³ For the full Interview with Michael Roecklein see appendix lines 488 - 622

What is often not seen by the general public and by some teams neglected as a selling point, is the opportunity for companies to build business-to-business (B2B) contacts by sponsoring a cycling team. VIP areas at races are a huge opportunity for sponsors to entertain potential and on-going business relations, as well as employees, in an exclusive and special environment.⁵⁴ And this for a comparably low investment, as teams like Team SmartStop operate on an annual budget of \$1 million⁵⁵. Races like the Amgen Tour of California follow this concept of highlighting B2B communication, providing large VIP areas for team sponsors and the race sponsors own interest group – the pharmaceutical company Amgen produces, among others, cancer medication and thus invites a large number of oncologists to the race. This aspect of sponsor relations is often not communicated well, as most fans perceive sponsoring as a tool for companies to sell products. Sponsoring impact in terms of B2B communication is difficult to measure in the sport of cycling - here it is important for the team to communicate and highlight aspects of sponsoring apart from pure impressions due to of a name on a jersey.

In terms of results, Roecklein says “winning is the thing I am least concerned about.” Some sponsors are actively following races, others, especially sponsors investing a bigger amount of money, will be informed through weekly mailings, which in return will then sometimes be used on their social media accounts, thus extending the life of the team’s achievement. What, according to Roecklein, appeals to the sponsor in terms of winning, is the idea that not only did the team, but the whole company win a race. Considering that Eric Marcotte of Team SmartStop has won the American national championship in 2014, the company SmartStop Self Storage was able to use this prestigious result in their internal and external communication. The stars and stripes jersey of the American champion with the name of the sponsor on it is guaranteed to receive a lot of attention.

A good approach to sponsor relations is shown in a study conducted by Bradley Wilson et al.⁵⁶, which contained a questioning of eight senior executives, representing participants in the major professional team sports in Australia. The goal was to find out how to strengthen sponsor relationship during incidents of player transgressions e.g. scandals regarding an athlete’s private life. While cycling was not part of their research, the findings suggested

⁵⁴ Freyer (2011): 541

⁵⁵ See interview with Michael Roecklein, appendix line 618.

⁵⁶ Wilson, Stavros, Westberg (2008): 102 - 104

that open communication channels were critical in establishing long-term sponsor relations⁵⁷. Wilson suggests “that sport managers [should] institute a broader ongoing, formalized communication process that provides a constant flow of information between the two parties” by installing so called “communication posts” and thus establishing a platform for the exchange of documents, strategies and feedback. In order for a transparent communication to work, other members of company staff and the cycling team should have access to the platform. The two-way exchange is especially important for sponsors who feel that it is very important for them to “stay in the loop.” In Wilson’s study, a CEO of a basketball team mentions how sponsors, who are sometimes also fans of the sport, are supporting the team in order to have an “insider’s view” of the team. An effective sponsor relations programme could strengthen a sponsor’s connection to the team by providing information no one else has access to. In Michael E. Porter’s classic concept of the five competitive forces⁵⁸, information technology takes a core meaning in developing an advantage over any competitor. It is thus also a team’s task to highlight unique strategies in communication. If a unique platform can convince a sponsor that the company is fully embedded, this company will rather invest in the team than in any other.

2.2 Professionally “selling” the team to a potential sponsor

With currently only 17 out of 20 potential spots in the UCI WorldTeam league filled, one could argue that the sport of cycling has a problem finding the funds to sufficiently build a team at the highest level of professional cycling. Other than the popular argument of a shortage of sponsors, there are plenty of Belgian, French and Italian teams on the lower league level being supported by smaller companies – but most of these sponsors are not able to fund a WorldTeam with the needs for a bigger budget. A big share of sponsors in the current ranking have a personal connection to the sport. Some teams are being sponsored by companies, whose managers are sports enthusiasts eager to invest in the sport⁵⁹. This can be a stable source of income, as some of the more dedicated sponsors, who

⁵⁷ Also affirmed in: Nufer, Bühler (2013): 369 – 372

⁵⁸ Porter (2008): 92 - 96

⁵⁹ For example the Australian co-sponsor of the Orica-GreenEdge team, Gerry Ryan, has made his estimated fortune of \$180 million with his caravan business. He is a long-time supporter of Australian cycling and helped build the team despite uncertainties regarding a second co-sponsor.

are also cycling fans, have not left the sport throughout its doping scandals.⁶⁰ But those teams are deemed to be a lucky few, while others are scrambling for investors. The history of the sport regarding doping scandals and the reputation as a “dirty sport” among the public, does play a role in the company’s reservations to enter the sport as sponsors. Teams need to address this issue honestly and name believable arguments for the company to lend their name and reputation to a clean team. It is important to nurture the connection to the sponsor through on-going communication and the establishing of trust, which could in times of crisis prove to be very important in the preservation of a business relationship.⁶¹

But the sport’s shadowy past cannot always be blamed for the low amount of companies willing to invest in the sport on a bigger scale. According to Gerard Vroomen⁶², co-founder of the bicycle manufacturer Cervélo, teams often do not go into sponsoring negotiations with the needed business know-how. When it comes to communicating with potential sponsors, teams often lack arguments for selling the team with regards to addressing the needs of the company. As a sports consultant and former team sponsor of the Cervélo Test Team, Vroomen has advised companies interested in investing into the sport and saw potential deals break, due to teams communicating the wrong selling points. Vroomen said that, instead of proposing a concept of how to drive the company’s KPI and target their demographics, “their strategy consisted mostly of presenting a list of wins and inflated media exposure figures”. Here also lies the danger in using said figures, like the ones conducted in the Cyclingnews Sponsorship Report⁶³ as a selling point for sponsorship, because those figures are only valuable if the TV exposure of that team is sufficient – meaning a guaranteed invite into the Tour de France as the only largely relevant TV event for the whole sport. But only UCI WorldTeams are guaranteed to start at the Tour de France, while the five ProContinental teams participating are selected anew every year by the race organisers on a wildcard basis. Vroomen also said that the focus on wins is a risky strategy and easily exposed by potential sponsors. The team has to consider that some

⁶⁰ Andy Riihs has left cycling as a sponsor with his company Phonak after Floyd Landis’ doping scandal in 2006, but later returned to sponsoring a UCI WorldTeam with his bike company BMC.

⁶¹ Wilson, Stavros, Westberg (2008): 102

⁶² Vroomen, Gerard (2013). Selling Cycling. <http://gerard.cc/2013/10/30/selling-cycling/>

⁶³ One of the most recognized media exposure figures were calculated in the Cyclingnews Sponsorship Report of 2013 in cooperation with media analyst agency Repucom. While Vroomen says the report taking a “reasonable approach”, the concluded numbers are taken out of context and proportion, due to the example of Team Sky being a “best case scenario”. Ferrand, Stephen (2 May 2013). Cyclingnews presents the first sponsorship report on professional cycling. <http://www.cyclingnews.com/news/cyclingnews-presents-the-first-sponsorship-report-on-professional-cycling/>

sponsors, as Vroomen mentions, might not even target the French market, where 30% of all TV exposure is measured due to the popularity of the Tour de France. Vroomen suggests for the teams to work with professional agencies, which could “pitch” the team’s selling points more professionally and with the needed business know-how on what a company wants to know in order to make an investment. He also says that teams and sponsors alike should find an innovative concept of communication and highlighting sponsorship, because “if you sponsor a team the same way as everybody else, you’ll get the same exposure” also reinforcing Porter’s ideas on how to outrun your competition.⁶⁴

Using media exposure figures might not work for some companies, but for others it can be a convincing argument, which should be used in communication towards a potential sponsor. The goal of globalizing a product can be a reason for a sponsor to enter cycling, thus media exposure is important especially for retail brands marketing their product to consumers. As seen with the German team Giant-Alpecin, whose sponsor Alpecin admits the closeness of the co-sponsor and bike manufacturer Giant to the Asian market was a reason to get involved, where the bike company enjoys the most popularity and where Alpecin wants to boost its sales. Alpecin as a hair-product company mentions in a German press release by parent company Dr Wolff⁶⁵, “a study from a reputable research institute for sports marketing”, presumably meaning the aforementioned Cyclingnews Sponsoring Report in cooperation with Repucom, to underline that “cycling as a communication- and marketing tool is very interesting to companies in terms of cost-benefit.”⁶⁶ Here we see how the media exposure analysis did have an influence on the decision for a company to sponsor a team, especially if the sponsor targets the consumer market. Also worth mentioning is the fact that Giant-Alpecin is a WorldTeam, guaranteed to start at the Tour de France, and that team members Marcel Kittel and John Degenkolb, as strong sprinters with a stable history of success, can almost be seen as a guarantee for wins and media exposure.

⁶⁴ Porter (2008): 92 - 96

⁶⁵ Dr Wolff company press release (German) (2015). Radspport: Sponsoring als Teil der Globalisierungsstrategie. <http://www.drwolffgroup.com/de/unternehmen/presse-435-Radspport%3A%20Sponsoring%20als%20Teil%20Oder%20Globalisierungsstrategie.html>

⁶⁶ The report mentions a 5.4 to 1 ROI, see page 12 in the report. Ferrand, Stephen (2 May 2013). Cyclingnews presents the first sponsorship report on professional cycling. <http://www.cyclingnews.com/news/cyclingnews-presents-the-first-sponsorship-report-on-professional-cycling/>

2.3 Involving riders with sponsor related activities

After discussions about over-involving popular riders in sponsor-events throughout the season, even going as far as assuming that those duties can lead to ill health⁶⁷, I have questioned riders at the Tour of California about their workload regarding sponsor relations. None of the riders I have asked gave me the impression that they are too much involved in that regard. And although it would be unrealistic to assume that riders would publicly complain about sponsor relations, riders seem to be aware of the importance and necessity of their involvement. Gerald Ciolek answered that sponsor events are part of his job as a cyclist⁶⁸, and apart from signing autographs at bike fairs, participating in smaller races and photo shootings, riders also actively push the sponsor's product on social media. While generally all teams want their riders to actively get involved with sponsor relations, there is a difference between suggesting to use social media to promote a product and to give clear guidelines to how and when what to post. Michael Schär of Team BMC said that he had a team meeting, where the team was briefed on which hashtags to use when publishing sponsor related posts on social media⁶⁹. Ruben Zepuntke of Team Cannondale-Garmin mentioned, how his marketing executive sends him pictures and texts for him to post on his public social media accounts. Zepuntke clearly is not the only rider given ready-made posts to advertise a range of products, the problem here is believability. When Swiss rider Fabian Cancellara, known for his intelligible but broken English, publishes posts without the usual mistakes, some fans easily see through the marketing scheme. But with Cancellara having 420.000 fans on Twitter alone, teams feel obliged to use the rider's reach towards their fans in order to advertise a sponsor's product and probably also use this as a selling point. With general race-related topics, Cancellara has often garnered over 500 likes and 300 shares (retweets) on Twitter. Some posts, like a picture of him in the yellow jersey at the Tour de France 2015⁷⁰ going up to 1,3 thousand retweets. On the other hand, clearly sponsored posts

⁶⁷ Wynn, Nigel (9 March 2015). Mark Cavendish picks up illness in South Africa. <http://www.cyclingweekly.co.uk/news/latest-news/mark-cavendish-picks-up-illness-in-south-africa-161358> - Mark Cavendish and Mark Renshaw have caught a virus during a charity race event in South Africa in March 2015, which put both rider's participation in following WorldTour races in danger. The event was held on a wine estate sponsoring his team Etixx-QuickStep, which is also owned by team manager Zdenek Bakala.

⁶⁸ Interview with Gerald Ciolek originally conducted in German, appendix lines 435 - 439

⁶⁹ Interview with Michael Schär originally conducted in German, appendix lines 126f

⁷⁰ Fabian Cancellara's twitter post in the yellow jersey at the Tour de France 2015 https://twitter.com/f_cancellara/status/617774439237861376

of his team's mobile phone sponsor⁷¹ and ride-along races with him rarely reach more than 30 retweets. Even if the fan participation is low, his followers nonetheless see those posts and the sponsor advertised in it. Another example is a Twitter post by Peter Sagan, who advertises an online presence of Saxo Bank⁷², the co-sponsor of his Team Tinkoff-Saxo. On this website, where users can trade stock options in a sort-of mock trading floor, one gets the impression that Peter Sagan himself is keeping his profile up to date, while inviting users to share comments and suggestions with him. In terms of the product-match-up hypothesis⁷³, where a product and the image of a testimonial should match up in order for the message to be effectively communicated towards the consumer, it would be easier for a rider to advertise nutrition and equipment than bulky products like a mock-trading website. But not always does a sponsor's product match perfectly with the team's image and the sport itself, because cycling teams are rarely in the position to evaluate who provides their funds. Teams and sponsors have to use a popular rider's reach to advertise a product, but the way it is done today is rarely creative and convincing.

2.4 Problems of sponsor involvement in the teams decision-making process

Team owners or sponsors rarely get involved with the sportive side of the team they are supporting, as it is generally considered an interference with the "money side" of a team into team management as fully capable decision makers. Some sponsors, as Michael Roecklein mentions⁷⁴, try to advocate the signing of a rider out of sympathy for him or an on-going friendship, which has, according to Roecklein, no influence on rider selection at Team SmartStop, even though it might benefit their relation to the sponsor.

It is nonetheless fairly common for a team to oblige a sponsor's wish to include riders of a certain nationality in order to increase local media coverage, if the sponsor wishes to

⁷¹ Example of Fabian Cancellara's twitter posts for Samsung and
https://twitter.com/f_cancellara/status/586460072542347264
https://twitter.com/f_cancellara/status/604690253220159489

⁷² Peter Sagan's tweet on Saxo Bank <https://twitter.com/petosagan/status/610496040605716482>, teammate Ivan Basso does post similar tweets in Italian <https://twitter.com/ivanbasso/status/615569816968105985>

⁷³ Schaaf, Daniela in Nufer, Bühler (2013): 338 (cited after Kahle, Homer (1985): 954 - 961)

⁷⁴ Interview Michael Roecklein, appendix lines 597 - 605

advance into the rider's home market. I have explained the problems this could pose in chapter 1.1 with the examples of Michael Creed and Ted King.

There is an example of a team owner having a large influence on the team's activity on a bigger scale, causing a lot of arguably negative media attention for the team. Team Tinkoff-Saxo's Oleg Tinkov⁷⁵, is known to be very vocal about the performance of his team and its riders. As the owner of a credit card company, the Russian businessman and cycling fan first entered professional cycling in 2006, sponsoring a Russian Continental Team, before he joined Team Saxo Bank in June 2012. Team Saxo Bank-Tinkoff Bank was founded with former professional cyclist Bjarne Riis managing the team since its inception in 1998. Tinkov is deemed to be a controversial, provocative figure, criticising riders and management alike in the media and on his Twitter account. He has talked about wishing to cut the salary of two of his most well paid riders, Peter Sagan and Alberto Contador⁷⁶, due to underperformance. After several public arguments⁷⁷, manager Bjarne Riis has left the team in March 2015. According to Lars Seier Christensen, Saxo Bank CEO and long-time main- and co-sponsor of the team "neither of the two, in fact, were particularly keen on finding a solution." The personal friend of Bjarne Riis went on in saying on his public Facebook account⁷⁸:

"Saxo bank continues his sponsorship in accordance with the agreement we have concluded with [T]eam [T]inkoff-[S]axo 2015 season. Although we have always made it clear that [B]jarne was a very important factor for our funding (...)"

Here Tinkov's decision to intervene with the sportive side of the team has caused a clash with the general manager, also putting the team's finances in danger due to the close connection between the co-sponsor and former manager.

⁷⁵ For naming his companies, Oleg Tinkov adopted writing his surname ending in -ff.

⁷⁶ Tinkov tweeted on 22. July 2013 „His salary doesn't match his performance. Too rich and isn't hungry, that's my opinion, and I deserve it. He must work harder”
<https://twitter.com/olegtinkov/status/359384981296005123>

⁷⁷ According to the French newspaper L'Equipe, Tinkov and Riis publicly argued about the low number of wins during the season at the 2015 Tirreno-Adriatico in early March. In an earlier instance, Riis said he was looking for a new co-sponsor in July 2013, as he could not find an agreement with Tinkov. Tinkov then bought the team from Riis for an alleged sum of €7 million. Martinez, Manuel (19 March 2015). Tinkov-Riis : le clash. <http://www.lequipe.fr/Cyclisme-sur-route/Article/Tinkov-riis-nbsp-le-clash/43618>. CyclingNews.com (25 July 2013). Riis ends association with Tinkoff Bank. <http://www.cyclingnews.com/news/riis-ends-association-with-tinkoff-bank/>

⁷⁸ Christiansen originally posted in Danish
<https://www.facebook.com/lars.s.christensen.716/posts/10153965212963475>

Nonetheless, Tinkov mentioned that if Saxo Bank leaves the team and no new sponsor can be found, his company would finance the team alone⁷⁹. On the other hand, he has also stated on Bloomberg television⁸⁰ that the sanctions being put on Russia due to the crisis in the Ukraine could put his company in trouble and thus lead to an end on sponsorship of the team, if he does not find a partnering sponsor in Europe. It is clear that Tinkov produces a lot of public attention, but can also be argued that he provokes a lot of unrest in the team.

3. Communication Towards Fans

3.1 Fan communication only plays a small role in team PR

Other than in most other popular sports where a team's income is also generated through sales of merchandise and especially tickets for the games, fan communication takes on a special role in cycling, as it, on an economical level, does not serve a particular purpose. Here fans seemingly only play a role when it comes to pleasing a sponsor and using the team's reach to promote a product.

Considering that, apart from the few "wealthier" teams in the first division of cycling, most teams operate on a small budget and not many resources are put into employing one or several people exclusively in charge of fan communication. From my own experience while working as a marketing intern at team NetApp-Endura in 2013, the two-man agency overseeing team PR and sponsor relations, FlessnerSchmitz GmbH, rarely had time to actively indulge into fan communication but was rather occupied with servicing the teams sponsors during big races such as the Vuelta a España in 2013. While both PR managers (Stefan Flessner and Sandra Schmitz) were travelling with the team, organizing, among other, sponsor events and journalist's requests, my task was to host daily raffles on the team's social media channels, update the website with race reports and picture galleries and to conduct fan interviews with the riders. According to Flessner and Schmitz, contractual clauses obliged them to have a race report online on the website at a certain time. Raffles and social media activity were important to race organizers, as team NetApp-Endura as a

⁷⁹ Staehelin, Jakob (18 July 2015). Oleg Tinkov smider bombe midt i Touren: Dropper Saxo Bank som sponsor <http://www.bt.dk/cykling/oleg-tinkov-smider-bombe-midt-i-touren-dropper-saxo-bank-som-sponsor> - A boulevard medium, but Tinkov was originally quoted here

⁸⁰ Chilcote, Ryan (24 December 2014), Oleg Tinkov on Putin, Obama, and Cycling. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/videos/2014-12-24/oleg-tinkov-on-putin-obama-and-cycling>

ProContinental team relied on wildcard invitations to top-tier races such as the Vuelta a España. It seems like fan communication is seen as secondary to sponsor relations, which at NetApp-Endura was the utmost importance when it came to team PR. As I have mentioned before, pleasing a sponsor is detrimental to this sport relying on income through sponsoring money. This highly experienced and professional two-man team at NetApp-Endura had their hands full with the demands of all parties involved: the team, sponsors, journalists and fans.

It is supposedly easy to reach fans, as nowadays almost all fan communication happens through various social media outlets. A noteworthy development is the fact that riders themselves participate in fan communication in a rather unfiltered manner, especially through Twitter. A team's PR department, if even in existence, does not "screen" postings, as it is sometimes the case in other sports. Riders have the chance to communicate an image of themselves via social media and thus create connections with their fans. Riders are able to surpass the media or team as the former first medium for fan communication and are also able to make statements or voice their opinions. This on the other hand has proven to be a problem for some riders, most notably for Greg Henderson of Lotto-Belisol, who sees himself confronted with a lawsuit after indirectly accusing Fabio Aru of Team Astana of doping on Twitter in April 2015, where he has close to 40,000 followers. Aru published a press release stating that he would take legal action against Henderson "to protect his good name and honour"⁸¹. Although fans like to see riders speaking out especially concerning doping, as riders should be the first to notice wrongdoings, Henderson's statement seemed hasty and unsportsmanlike. Henderson later deleted the tweets and apologized.

There are also, unlike in for example in the American National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)⁸², no compliance regulation in place by the international federation UCI. The NCAA has reacted to not only privacy concerns of the young athletes, but also to concerns of the federation for the communication of their brand. In professional cycling, teams themselves undertake more or less strict approaches to teach their riders about communicating with fans and the media. During interviews at the Tour of California, six out of seven riders I have asked that specific question stated that their team has communication

⁸¹ FabioAru.it (24 April 2015): Fabio Aruadirà le vie legali nei confronti di Greg Henderson. <http://fabioaru.it/comunicato-stampa/>

⁸² Blohm (2012): 277 - 296.

guidelines, mostly passed on through a team meeting in the off-season. On whether those guidelines are especially strict, 22-year old Ruben Zepuntke of Cannondale Garmin confirmed that notion, and that he is supposed to “rethink five times before posting anything.”⁸³ For cycling Journalist Anthony Tan the direct connection to the riders on Twitter is understandably exciting in the light of the press officer’s growing influence in some teams:

“I think Twitter is great for athletes. I know a few WorldTeam press officers who get constant migraines from some of their riders tweeting all sorts of weird and wonderful stuff, but it definitely allows the athlete to get closer to their fans and reveal a little more of their personalities, and that’s good for the sport.”⁸⁴

But with regards to the influence of sponsor relations on fan communication, it is important for riders not to put the team’s finances in danger through rash actions, such as posting an image with equipment not coinciding with the team’s sponsors. As Michael Creed of Team SmartStop mentioned, especially in lower-level teams it might only take a minor action, for example posting a picture of a rider wearing a different helmet, for the original equipment sponsor to leave⁸⁵. Another example would be that of Team Jelly Belly, a US continental team, which has lost a sponsor to it’s financial (or, as Phil Gaimon suggests, intentional) inability to bring a second team mechanic to races, who could have taken on the time-intensive task of preparing the team’s new high-end tubular wheels provided by the sponsor Zipp. Instead the team had to use their low maintenance training wheels by the same sponsor. Zipp did not continue to support the team for the next season, because, according to Gaimon, the team rarely used the equipment the sponsor intended to advertise.⁸⁶

Although teams are not always employing PR personnel inside the team, most highlight the importance of fan communication and encouraging riders to participate in social media, but also implement more or less strict rules. Just highlighting the consequences of a rushed post gone wrong, be it a lawsuit or the loss of a sponsor, can call on a rider’s use of common sense in dealing with social media. Adding to that, communication or compliance guidelines

⁸³ Interview Ruben Zepuntke, originally conducted in German, appendix lines 339f

⁸⁴ Schmalz, Dan (14 December 2010): Interview Anthony Tan. <http://nyvelocity.com/articles/interviews/anthony-tan-interview/>

⁸⁵ Interview Michael Creed, appendix lines 775 - 778

⁸⁶ Gaimon (2013): 100

on fan and press relations become more and more important with regards to a younger generation of riders, eager and very much used to participating in social media. This is understandably not in the fans or journalists interest who want to get a private and rare insight into a rider's mind, but in terms of the professional running of a team, employing several riders and staff dependent on sponsoring money, guidelines are a "necessary evil". Taking the NCAA report by Vicky Blohm as an example, coherent rules outlining the consequences would help the athlete as well as the institution he works for, and that "He (...) must be given an opportunity to learn that nothing done on the internet is private, and actions have real repercussions in the media (...)."

3.2. Creating a corporate identity in order to secure recognisability

As I have already mentioned regarding a rider's involvement in sponsor relations, marketing of a product takes on a very important role in external team communication. But there is also the aspect of marketing the team image itself as an attractive investment for future sponsors.

The current structure of professional cycling is, compared to other sports, relatively hard to market for a longer period of time, especially due to the fact that team names change when main sponsors replace a former sponsors name. The instance of riders changing teams regularly is further complicating an understanding of the league for fans and outsiders alike. While comparing the current organization of professional cycling to that of typical American team sports, Chris Deubert in his article on improving the sport of cycling, saw free agency and rider movement as a problem for marketing the sport to the audience and making it hard for fans to follow the sport during its most popular event, the Tour de France. He states that

"However, from 2001 to 2010, on average, 52% of the riders of the Tour de France were either new riders or with a new team as compared to the previous year's Tour. On average, a team returning to the Tour from the previous year did so with four new riders out of a team of nine."⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Deubert (2011): 98.

Deubert highlights the important aspect of recognisability and consistency for a team to build a fan base. Cycling is a team sport after all, but fans usually side their sympathies with a singular rider, rather than a team. But Deubert misses an important aspect, in that fan solidarity in cycling is not always exclusive to one team or rider, like it is common in the American team structure and their fans lifelong loyalties. Especially long-term cycling fans stay loyal to “their” rider, but also follow other teams and their members. The need for fans to keep up to date with team names and transfers could lead to the assumption, that cycling fans are more attentive than “regular sports” fans, a notion confirmed by the Cyclingnews.com sponsoring report⁸⁸. Deubert comes to the conclusion that the collective bargaining process, which is common in American team sports leagues, should be adopted in cycling as well. But due to the absence of a riders union and a missing long-term financial stability for almost all teams, it is a far stretch for collective bargaining to be implemented in cycling. A faster and more sensible approach would be to make fan communication a solution to the problem of team recognisability – through the creation of a Corporate Identity.

According to Walter Freyer in his book on Sports Management⁸⁹, a Corporate Identity is described as the “personality” of an institution. A coherent, consistent and credible set of behaviour outside as well as inside a team. Through this, Freyer mentions, credibility and trust for the organisation can be established – an important aspect regarding the sport’s reputation tarnished by doping scandals. He divides three components as most important to create an identity: Corporate design, behaviour and communication. A standardized design used throughout many years is difficult to implement in cycling, because team jersey design and colours depend on a sponsor’s corporate design, so the jersey is often drastically modified whenever a change in sponsors happens. But teams could create reoccurring elements, like the argyle pattern on Cannondale-Garmin’s team kit seen throughout many seasons, as a recognizable symbol for fans.

⁸⁸ The report highlights that fans of cycling are more informed and engaged with sponsors in sport from page 16 onwards. Ferrand, Stephen (2 May 2013). Cyclingnews presents the first sponsorship report on professional cycling. <http://www.cyclingnews.com/news/cyclingnews-presents-the-first-sponsorship-report-on-professional-cycling/>

⁸⁹ Freyer (2011): 481 - 483



Fig. 2: Reoccurring argyle pattern on a team jersey from 2009 - 2015

The second component, corporate behaviour, includes how a team chooses to present itself to the outside in terms of demeanour. This is signalled through determining who is talking to the media (a manager or a press officer) or how the team sees itself (open or rather closed off, modern or old-school etc.). Corporate communication is, according to Freyer, the “strategic roof of every communication”, where the first two components, design and behaviour, are being communicated inside and outside a team. When it comes to cycling, it is important to find a more or less fixed approach to talking to the media and to riders, as roles in cycling often mix and different members of team and management follow different ways of communication, which makes it hard to establish a one-voice approach.

3.3. The effects of good communication on a team’s image

If corporate communication reaches its desired effect, the corporate image of a team is seen as coherent and positive. A team’s public image plays a role for the sponsor to be able to “buy into” a positive kind of communication towards fans and the media. Popular teams can try to translate their positive image towards their sponsor – which the company on the other hand can use for marketing their own brand.⁹⁰ An example of a coherent communication strategy conveying a positive image can be observed at Team Orica-GreenEdge, well known among professional cycling fans for their YouTube channel and their “Backstage Pass” series. The Australian team publishes one video a day during big races and has 57,524 subscribers as of August 5th 2015. Their most popular video is a clip set

⁹⁰ Nufer, Bühler (2013): 369 – 372

to the music of the song “Call Me Maybe” by singer Carly Rae Jepsen with riders and staff lip-syncing and dancing to the song. The video has garnered over 984,556 views in two years⁹¹. Orica-GreenEdge highlights a distinctive “Aussie” spirit in their videos, combining the protagonist’s humour with informative race reporting from inside the team, giving the viewer an insight into race tactics and the goings-on in a team car. The French Team FDJ follows a similar approach on their YouTube channel⁹², employing a so-called “Stagiaire” who followed the team during the Tour de France 2014 and 2015. In cycling terminology, a Stagiaire, or Neo-Pro, is an “intern” for the team on his first contract on a professional level. In playing his role, Alexandre Porcheron does not ride a bike but acts as a comedic and intentionally clumsy addition to the team. Team FDJ also publishes short interviews and the series “Le Zap” on their YouTube Channel, a collection of clips describing a stage from different angles. Presumably due to the teams overall social media communication happening exclusively in French, the channel with 5,643 subscribers (August 5th 2015) does not reach Orica-GreenEdge’s popularity. Team FDJ’s YouTube channel, with its different formats providing a collective overview of cycling and life inside a team is a very good example of overall fan communication and also native advertising⁹³ with regards to sponsor placement and the development of the team as a brand. As Campbell and Marks in their article on native advertising on social media suggest:

“Consumers follow brands that they believe will make a positive contribution toward the atmosphere of their social media presence. Brands that have a positive personality and are not afraid to engage in appropriate ways will be invited, and invited back.”

Thus, if a team is successful in producing likable and fun material, a fan will want to share this content to enhance his or her “image” on their own social media presence. While comparing both YouTube channels, we see that beside the comedic videos, Team FDJ mostly provides information and unfiltered interviews to its fans, while Orica-GreenEdge focuses on exciting, rapidly edited videos conveying the team’s spirit and humour. Worth

⁹¹ Orica-GreenEdge YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/GreenEdgeCycling/> The most popular video on the channel is not the music video, but a video of a team mechanic with a GoPro camera attached to his chest, filming the scene during a crash at the Tour de France 2015. It is not produced by the team but the organization Velon CC, which is selling on-board camera videos to TV and providing YouTube coverage as a joint-business venture of eleven WorldTeams.

⁹² Team FDJ YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/EquipeCyclisteFDJ>

⁹³ Campbell, Marks (2015): 7

mentioning is that because Orica-GreenEdge uses licensed music in their videos, some videos are not viewable in Germany due to restrictions set by YouTube concerning their ongoing dispute with GEMA over copyright infringement suits. Uploading their videos to their Facebook page as well as onto YouTube could circumvent this problem for German fans, albeit complicating the analysis of a video's success.

But not all teams have the resources of providing regular, well-produced videos to their fans. As Michael Creed mentioned⁹⁴, it is hard to find someone who wants to travel with the team more often than some of the riders themselves, who does also have the skillset and eye for shooting and editing videos and who is willing to work for a presumably low amount of money. Creed, as a sports director and former professional rider, followed the development of social media and fan communication throughout the last years and commented, that it is hard for teams to generate content, which is also different to what other teams do. As there is so much noise, it is hard to create something unique in order to be heard. For his riders he admits that there are a lot more demands to participate in content creation, while during his active days of racing, his role more or less ended after a race was over. Nowadays, as Creed says, riders have to first create an idea of who they are, their own "Corporate Identity", before communicating publicly.

For the whole sport of professional cycling, another important aspect of creating a fan connection through an open image is the fact that it could be considered to be one of the most up-close and easily accessible of professional sports. A spectator does not have to buy a ticket in order to attend a bike race. The team busses are close to the race start, where riders can be seen and talked to face-to-face. And although fans only indirectly contribute to the income of the team through, ideally, buying the sponsor's product, the sport of cycling includes an inherently fan-friendly environment. But this physically close proximity to the fans can be demanding for the riders. Teams have put up screens around the team bus in order to shield the riders from the fan's gaze and comments, especially during the warm-up phase before a time trial stage.⁹⁵ With the emergence of big team busses, the idea of the "Village Depart", a meeting point and relaxation area for riders before the start and

⁹⁴ Interview Michael Creed, appendix lines 1083 - 1099

⁹⁵ Friebe, Daniel (19 November 2010). „Brailsford: Sky must avoid "isolated and robotic" approach“ <http://www.cyclingnews.com/news/brailsford-sky-must-avoid-isolated-and-robotic-approach/> Here team principal David Brailsford admits that the screens have been a mistake. I have seen Team Garmin-Sharp erect a similar „box“ around the bus at the start of the Tour the France 2012 in Liège.

for spectators to watch, has lost most of its appeal for the riders, who often prefer to focus by themselves inside the team bus. Then there are the ever-growing VIP areas at the most sought-after places, the start and finish of a race and even in certain areas on the course during mountain stages. For professional cycling it is important to highlight its appeal as an approachable sport by keeping the riders close to the fans and, while respecting a rider's need for privacy, allow fans the experience and excitement of being able to meet riders before a start and to see the race free of charge.

3.4 On why Team Sky is leading the Social Media ranking

Team Sky does not only have the highest budget among WorldTeams⁹⁶, it has also won the Tour de France three times in the five years since its inception, arguably a result of their budget's influence on team performance.⁹⁷ The first ever British UCI WorldTeam is also leading the ranking in terms of Facebook "like" count and popularity on social media. As displayed in Fig. 3, Sky Pro Cycling has, as of 28 June 2015, garnered 614,450 likes on Facebook since the creation of the site on 2 January 2010, while Trek Factory Racing has the second highest count with 517, 229 people liking the teams Facebook presence.

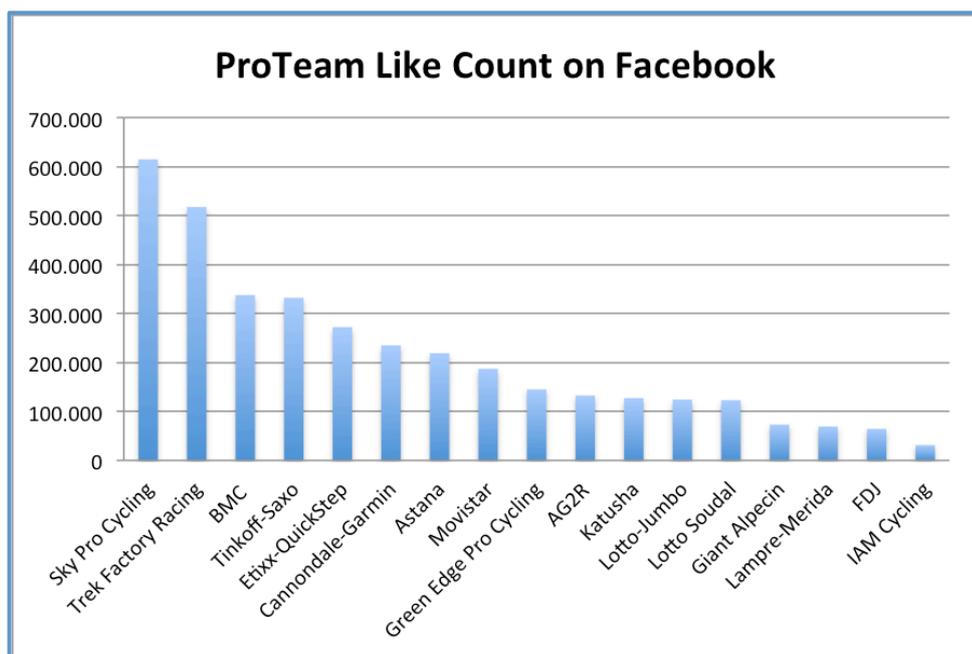


Fig. 3: WorldTeam like count on Facebook as of 28 June 2015

⁹⁶ Inrng.com (2 October 2013): The Finances of Team Sky. <http://inrng.com/2013/10/finances-team-sky-accounts/>

⁹⁷ Brandes, Franck, Theiler (2009): 61f as mentioned in chapter 1.1

Several factors play into Team Sky's their success on social media:

- Resources

Due to Team Sky being sponsored by the media conglomerate BSkyB, the team is able to source their communication staff from Sky Sport news reporters. Chris Haynes for example has held the position of director of external affairs at Team Sky and Sky Sports simultaneously until March 2015. Sky is in the unique position of being supported by a highly professional news outlet and their staff in their external communication.

- Frequent, high quality content

During the main season, the Team Sky Facebook site contains daily updates with up to four posts a day. Sky mixes the content posted on the Facebook site, especially during the most important races such as the Tour de France, by adding picture galleries by professional photographers as well as fans, further encouraging them to send in their own photos to be published. A video series was made during the Tour de France 2015, adding to the regular videos of live clips shot by staff members along the route. Another part of the extensive content created during the Tour were several fan competitions, for example asking fans to guess the team roster before it was officially announced, to participating in a challenge to win a Team Sky Lego set, won by a fan transforming himself into a cardboard Lego figure. Sky is able to engage fans and, due to posting the results of their effort, manage to lead fans to create content for the team to share.

- Understanding of the Facebook algorithm

While the Facebook algorithm is mostly secret, understanding what Facebook choses to highlight in the user's timeline is essential to a high user engagement rate and visibility on Facebook.⁹⁸ The algorithm for example prefers high quality pictures in a landscape format instead of just links or text only. Those pictures catch the eye of Facebook users in their main newsfeed, who then ideally like and share the image for a farther reach among their friends list. Sky only adds short texts above the pictures, as Facebook cuts texts after a certain length and hides it under an inconvenient "read more" link. Team Sky mainly posts teasers for race reports in form of a short quote or an interesting excerpt from the main

⁹⁸ A good resource for social media managers is the distinguished German website allfacebook.de. This site also explains the importance of high quality pictures and short texts, for example via the Facebook ads guide: Roth, Phillip (2 October 2014). Warum der Facebook ‚Ads Guide‘ von Facebook die kleine ‚Bibel‘ für jeden Community Manager werden sollte. <http://allfacebook.de/pages/ads-guide-community>

text, before adding a link to the website in their posting. Sometimes they add a hint to when and where to see a race on TV – extra information leading the user to click the link.

- The Bradley Wiggins Factor

A factor, which should not be underestimated, is the impact that Bradley Wiggins as the first British Tour de France Champion had on the success of the team. Wiggins won the Tour in 2012 in the midst of a cycling boom happening in Great Britain, on top of the Olympic games being held in London that year. Wiggins rang the bell at the London opening ceremony and won the Olympic Time Trial shortly after his Tour de France title, while the British track cycling team (also the starting point of his career) dominated almost all track disciplines, winning eight out of ten gold medals. The attention Wiggins received was a big factor for the popularity of Team Sky. Bradley Wiggins is seen as a distinctive British persona, visibly embracing the British culture in terms of music and fashion, which makes him a relatable figure for many British fans. Wiggins was a distinguished track cyclist and Olympic gold medallist before he joined Team Sky and has also reached fourth place at the Tour de France 2009, one year before Team Sky was formed around him as a prospective Tour de France winner. It could thus be argued that without Wiggins, Sky would not enjoy the popularity it has today. Bradley Wiggins has retired from his professional career in early 2015, but is still closely associated to the team also due to his new development team, Wiggins, also being funded by the BSKyB Corporation.

Team Sky cannot only rely on a high number of staff members and the popularity their riders enjoy in Britain, it also understands social media management, making their site interesting and popular among users. On the other hand, Team Sky have faced criticism regarding the management of their external communication during the Tour de France 2015, where the team was confronted with doping allegations. I will elaborate on that at the end of next chapter.

4. Communication Towards The Media

4.1 The need for teams to open up towards the press

A change in the attitude towards the press can be closely connected to a change in cycling itself, as most teams have put in a visible effort of opening up towards the press with regards to questions of doping. Looking back at the 1990s and mid-2000s, the years

where doping positives have tarnished the reputation of the sport, questions of doubt coming from the press have been undermined by most riders as nonsense, going as far as Lance Armstrong personally insulting reporters⁹⁹ daring to question the legitimacy his success.

After the latest big scandal in 2006, in which German media favourite Jan Ullrich was involved as well, the press seemed to have turned on the sport, most notably in Germany, with newspapers seemingly either reporting on doping or not about the sport at all, and the public service TV stations in 2010 ultimately deciding not to broadcast the Tour de France anymore. A retreat of the press from the sport is also felt with less and less American media outlets reporting from the Tour de France, especially after Lance Armstrong's doping confession. Cycling journalist Caley Fretz¹⁰⁰ admitted that the magazine he writes for, VeloNews, was the only American cycling publication at the Tour de France 2015 with two journalists reporting from start to finish. On the question why, he says that Lance Armstrong has caused a cycling boom in the US with major daily news outlets sending reporters to the Tour de France, but during Armstrong's comeback in 2009, lesser outlets appeared because of the newspaper crisis in the US and the costs involved with sending journalists to France. According to Fretz, the financial constraints are almost a bigger factor for the absence of reporters, than Armstrong's doping, because sending a correspondent to the race would cost the medium up to \$10,000. Fretz ends the comment he gave on the Cycling Podcast, run by three British Journalists, by saying that he is seeing more and more British reporters in the press room due to the cycling boom in Britain. A greater attention on cycling seems to come in waves and media spending money on reporting is always a matter of the public's demand to see or read about the sport. But while the German public service TV station's retreat from reporting at the Tour de France was not a matter of money, but the problem of the sport's repeated positive doping tests, it is now the team's responsibility to open up towards the press in order to give the sport a sense of credibility among the public again.

⁹⁹ As an example, during a press conference for the 2009 Tour of California, Lance Armstrong said to reporter Paul Kimmage "You are not worth the chair that you're sitting on" after a dispute between the two stretching over several years. A background: Gannon, Willie (17 February 2009). Lance Armstrong v. Paul Kimmage: For the Soul of Professional Cycling. <http://bleacherreport.com/articles/125656-lance-armstrong-vs-paul-kimmage-for-the-soul-of-professional-cycling>

¹⁰⁰ The Cycling Podcast (21 July 2015) VeloNews Tour de France Podcast - Episode 2. <https://itunes.apple.com/de/podcast/velonews-tour-france-podcast/id665713706?i=347642070&mt=2> 18:35 - 20:02 minutes

As a reaction towards the criticism regarding their secretive internal doping test scheme in 2009, Jonathan Vaughters¹⁰¹ claimed to have opened up the team towards journalists as an “all access team”, to oppose doubts directed towards the testing and to underline the team’s stance on anti-doping. Vaughters said that because of the sports past, “sometimes extreme times require extreme measures”, which led to “journalists trampling all over us constantly” during races. Vaughters is an avid Twitter user, engaging in debates and arguments with critics, fans and journalists alike, thus also using the social media platform to give his team an open image. In a 2010 Interview, cycling journalist Anthony Tan¹⁰² criticised the behaviour of some team managers, who refuse interviews based on the direction he was perusing at the time regarding payment of riders. He explains how Jonathan Vaughters is almost always available for comments and that he “realized his openness is also representative of his team’s ethos and for the most part, makes him and his team’s riders very well liked.” According to Tan, Vaughters rightfully confronts the public’s cynicism with an invitation to talk openly.

4.2 Pros and cons of a press officer’s involvement with the media

An open approach makes it easier for the press to report on cycling, but complete openness in regards to sponsor relations is not always easy for a team to pursue. In a talk with journalist Neal Rodgers on his podcast,¹⁰³ Michael Creed explains that some teams might refuse to talk to a certain journalist, if they see their team’s and sponsor’s public reputation in danger. Michael Creed cites a talk with another Journalist, Daniel Benson, as an example, where Benson complains about Team Radioshack’s refusal to talk to him. Creed states that Benson’s behaviour on Twitter is the reason for the team’s dismissal of him, as according to Creed, Benson’s “snarky” remarks led the team to deciding not to talk to him as a journalist. It is ultimately on the teams and sponsors to decide how open they want their brand to be portrayed and what corporate behaviour strategy in terms of press

¹⁰¹ Schmalz, Dan (18 March 2009): Jonathan Vaughters Interview. <http://nyvelocity.com/articles/interviews/jonathan-vaughters-interview/>

¹⁰² Schmalz, Dan (14 December 2010): Interview Anthony Tan. <http://nyvelocity.com/articles/interviews/anthony-tan-interview/>

¹⁰³ Creed, Michael (16 August 2013): Open Mic with Mike Creed, Ep 8 - Neal Rodgers. <https://itunes.apple.com/de/podcast/open-mic-mike-creed-ep8-neal/id668459898?i=286718632&mt=2>
42:00 - 42:43 minutes

relations to pursue, but a journalist's professional behaviour plays a role in a team deciding about whom to talk to.

The interference of the team's press officer in communication with a rider or staff member can be an annoyance for journalists and according to some, the tendency for a team to dictate a tame narrative is overly apparent. Journalists do ask more direct questions with regards to doping, but this led to some teams becoming more careful in their communication. Delicate sponsor relation agreements could also play a role in communication seeming ostensibly arranged. Anthony Tan said "riders are becoming far more formulaic with their responses". He claims that press officers try to influence their reporting by:

"(...) issuing press releases and keeping the riders hidden in their team buses, instead of allowing journalists access to them straight after the race/stage when emotions are at their most raw."

During my research for this thesis, I was holding a media accreditation during the Tour of California and noticed the tendency of riders to remain inside their busses until the last minute myself, which made it difficult to conduct interviews. After the day's race, riders were not eager to talk to journalists due to being exhausted from the race and the team pushing for a quick departure to the hotels. But it was never a problem to initially get in contact with the riders, as it was easy to speak to attending team members, be it mechanics or the press officer, in order to ask for a specific cyclist to interview. Whether or when the rider had chosen to give the interview was another question. I have seen a good approach by the Australian team Drapac Racing, with their Director of Marketing Communications, Kelly Reed, approaching me outside the bus and asking whether I'd be interested in talking to any of the riders, further along also introducing me to the team sponsors after I have mentioned my reason for following the race - maintaining a German language online magazine on cycling while also writing my thesis on communication. In the case of Drapac Racing, it was made clear to me from riders¹⁰⁴ and management alike, that the team is aiming to expand internationally, which might have been the reason for this open, engaging approach, while other teams see their role in press relations simply as managing requests. The role of press officer is volatile after all, as some actively approach journalists, others

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Martin Köhler, appendix lines 197 - 202

rather see their role in updating fans with live reports on Twitter and accompanying their team's riders to interviews and video shoots.

Sky is a team, which in this thesis was named as a positive example in terms of internal- and fan communication. But when it comes to press relations, Sky has followed a seemingly fluctuating plan. In an opinion article on TheDrum.com¹⁰⁵, communications consultant Euan McMorrow evaluates Team Sky's PR approach during the Tour de France 2015. The team has been criticised for their cold and technical demeanour and the tendency of team officials to speak in a business-like manner, using stiff vocabulary. Adding to that was the innuendo of doping around the team leader and two-time winner of the Tour de France, Chris Froome. This stems from the reluctance of the team to publish his power data containing wattage and heart rate numbers in order for the press to evaluate any trace of "abnormal" coherences. Team Sky failed to fully communicate that the release of the power data could spark more innuendo when interpreted by laymen, which was only mentioned by singular riders towards journalists. They ultimately released some of the data in a press conference, read out loud by Head of Athlete Performance Tim Kerrison. McMorrow mentions in his comment that most public press communication is handled by Team Principal David Brailsford, who albeit his numerous professional achievements "is in danger of being known as the guy who was constantly defending Sir Bradley Wiggins and Chris Froome", hinting at Bradley Wiggins facing similar questions in 2012. One could argue that because this matter is being handled by the highest instance in the team, it underlines Sky highlighting their clean stance and the importance of the topic. But, as McMorrow suggests, a "good spokesperson" could change the focus away from Brailsford, who sometimes comes across as "aggressive and spiky". Another argument for the implementation of a press officer, is Brailsford's role as team principal being watered down due to his constant media presence, while a spokesperson could act as a filter and prevent Brailsford's name to appear too frequently in the media. Instead a spokesperson could call on Brailsford's opinion when he is really needed in order "to put a foot down". Euan McMorrow also suggests involving a PR agency to soften Team Sky's current perception as a cold and robotic team. Just as mentioned in chapter 2.2 with the possibility of seeking help from PR agencies when it comes to sponsor pitches, professional involvement from parties outside

¹⁰⁵ McMorrow, Euan (22 July 2015): How Team Sky can put the brakes on negative Tour De France coverage and soften its image. <http://www.thedrum.com/opinion/2015/07/22/how-team-sky-can-put-brakes-negative-tour-de-france-coverage-and-soften-its-image>

of cycling, could advance some of cycling's long standing insular demeanour and open its communication to the public.

III. Conclusion

The findings of this thesis suggest the following approaches to be implemented in a team's internal and external communication:

- In internal team communication, language barriers seem to be easily overcome by most riders, but it can pose a problem for a rider trying to integrate into a foreign team culture. The role of a sports director as a communicator is important but often vague and overloaded, while a coach employed by the team could act as an intermediate, strengthening team communication and helping a new rider with his transition into new team structures.
- Management roles in teams should be clear in order to establish fixed responsibilities and definite ways for efficient internal communication. But some teams lack a business approach to the sport and do not have effective human resource management strategies installed, leading to low motivation and overburdening a sports director in managing staff and riders on the road.
- Mismanagement inside a team can have serious consequences not only on performance but also on the team's sustainability, which is why a constant and effective exchange between riders and management plays a vastly important role.
- Sponsors not only seek name recognition, but new, natural B2B connections in supporting a team. Getting an inside view and continuous two-way communication is also important to companies. When talking to new sponsors willing to invest, teams should not rely on potential wins and out-of-context media exposure figures, but highlight the possibility of B2B connections and also seek outside help from PR companies.
- The current handling of sponsor relations with regards to riders advertising a product on social media is inadequate due to an often very low match between the sport itself and a sponsor's product. While a cycling team looking for funding is basically unable to choose its sponsor due to the dependency on the sponsor's money, marketing the product should nonetheless be handled more creatively and authentically.

- Fan communication plays a secondary role in professional cycling, because of fans not directly contributing to a team's finances. In the current state of dependency on sponsoring money, sponsor relation always comes first, thus creating the need for clear and sometimes strict communication guidelines with regards to a rider's communication with fans and the media.
- In order for a team to be recognisable throughout sponsor- and name changes, a team should try to establish a clear corporate identity. For a team to be successful in communicating to fans, it should work on a coherent image as well as producing unique content on social media, which in the end can also prove to be beneficial towards sponsor relations and the funding of a team.

Appendix

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Table of figures

Fig. 1: A catastrophe model of anxiety and performance (Fazey, Hardy (1988): 167)

Fig. 2: Reoccurring aryle pattern on a team jersey from 2009 - 2015

Fig. 3: WorldTeam like count on Facebook as of 28. June 2015

Transcribed Interviews during the Tour of California 2015

Laurent Didier, Luxemburg, Trek Factory Racing (USA)

- 1 **How many languages do you speak?**
- 2 I speak Letzenbuergsch, French, German.
- 3 **Dann können wir uns auch auf Deutsch unterhalten**
- 4 Genau, auf Deutsch
- 5 **Was ist deine Rolle im Team, was hast du bei diesem Rennen zu**
- 6 **tun?**
- 7 Hier bin ich Teamkapitän, das heißt, dass ich ein bisschen schaue wo wir im
- 8 Feld fahren und die Strecke auch kenne, vorher in die Karte schaue und so.
- 9 **Bei anderen Rennen, was ist da deine Stärke?**
- 10 Da ist es mehr bei dem Leader zu bleiben bis ins Finale, um ihn längst möglich
- 11 zu begleiten, aus dem Wind zu halten, Flaschen zu holen.

12 **Wie sprichst du mit dem DS, auch außerhalb der Rennen. Ist das**
13 **per Email, per Telefon, wie macht ihr das?**

14 Wir haben ja verschiedene Sportliche Leiter, aber ja, per Email und per
15 Telefon, je nach Rennen.

16 **Was ist hier der größte Unterschied zu den Teams, bei denen du**
17 **vorher gearbeitet hast - in Sachen Kommunikation?**

18 Ich war vorher nur bei Saxo Bank, dann kam ich hier her.

19 **Wie war das unter verschiedenen DS, gab es da große**
20 **Unterschiede, hat Bjarne zum Beispiel lieber persönlich mit dir**
21 **gesprochen?**

22 Ne, Bjarne ist ja Manager, das ist ja kein DS, also die Kommunikation geht
23 immer vom Sportlichen Leiter aus.

24 **Wie ist Saxo Bank auf dich aufmerksam geworden und wie bist**
25 **du dann zu Trek gekommen?**

26 Saxo Bank, weil auch Fränk und Andy [Schleck] da waren und die hatten auch
27 ihren Service Course¹⁰⁶ in Luxemburg.

28 **Sprichst du selber auch mit dem Management und hast du selber**
29 **ein Management was dich vertritt?**

30 Nein, ich bin alleine.

31 **Verträge machst du persönlich?**

32 Das mache ich persönlich. Wie jetzt hier dann mit Luca [Guercilena, Team
33 Manager].

34 **Wie ist das mit den Sponsoren, ihr habt wahrscheinlich auch viele**
35 **Sponsorevents...**

36 Nicht so viele, wir haben ja nicht sehr viele Sponsoren. Wir haben ja eigentlich
37 nur Trek. Trek und Bontrager ist das gleiche [Bontrager als Helm- und
38 Schuhaustatter gehört zur Trek Group] und dann haben wir noch Samsung.

¹⁰⁶ A service course is a location for cycling teams, where bikes, cars and equipment are maintained and prepared for the races, a sort-of bike shop and storage unit. As most races happen in Europe, most WorldTeams keep a service course in central Europe.

- 39 Da macht ihr keine speziellen Events oder Rennen?
- 40 Die meisten Sachen sind von Trek aus.
- 41 Promotest du aktiv das Produkt deines Sponsors, zum Beispiel
42 auf Social Media. Postest du da Fotos?
- 43 Ich habe kein Facebook
- 44 Machst du gar nichts auf Social Media?
- 45 Ich habe Twitter, aber kein Facebook.
- 46 Müsst ihr das nicht machen, vom Team aus? Werdet ihr nicht
47 dazu angehalten?
- 48 Ne, ich hab's ja nicht, sonst hätte ich's ja wenn wir es müssten.
- 49 Habt ihr irgendwelche Guidelines, wie ihr reden solltet auf
50 Twitter? Gibt es da Empfehlungen, Einschränkungen?
- 51 Nein. Wir hatten da mal ein Meeting im Winter.
- [Janez Brajkovič, Slovenia, UnitedHealthcare \(USA\)](#)
- 52 First of all, how many languages do you speak?
- 53 Fluently?
- 54 Those in which you are able to communicate...
- 55 I can communicate, obviously, in Slovenian, English, Italian and Spanish
- 56 How do you communicate with your DS, is it mostly via Email,
57 Telephone or at races?
- 58 By phone, Email, WhatsApp, there is a lot of communication, compared to
59 previous teams and years.
- 60 That would be my next question, what was it like on Astana, how
61 did you communicate there?
- 62 Emails, mostly Emails.
- 63 Did you also have your own [especially assigned] DS?
- 64 Yes.

65 **How often do you talk to team management? Do you have a**
66 **manager yourself?**

67 I do.

68 **Does he talk with the management and you don't?**

69 Yes, mostly that's the case, in previous years... well obviously when you have
70 good results it's very easy to talk with everyone, they come to you and talk to
71 you. But when things are not so well, it's better to have somebody to take
72 care of you, so...

73 **Do you have any communication guidelines here at**
74 **UnitedHealthcare, how to talk to the press...**

75 Yes, sure, I think it's important to communicate with the press and to know
76 how to communicate with them.

77 **So you had some meetings, or...**

78 Yes, we actually had some meetings at the training camp in December, just to
79 educate us a little bit. Because it's pretty clear that you need us as much as
80 we need you, so we have to know how to communicate.

81 **Do you do a lot on Social Media as well?**

82 I try to but I'm not really obsessed with it.

83 **No breakfast pictures?**

84 [laughs] Exactly I'm not posting everything I do.

85 **Does the team want you to be active on Social Media just to get**
86 **involved a bit?**

87 Of course, it's also promotion for the team and obviously we have to be
88 careful what we are tweeting or posting, because sometimes that's not
89 appropriate for our team and our sponsors as well.

90 **How was it on Astana, was there any guideline on how to**
91 **communicate?**

92 Well roughly there was but nothing like here.

93 There are not as active on Social Media as UHC are, do you think
94 it has to do with Astana as a sponsor as well, which is not a
95 company itself?

96 Yes, exactly, [...] it's a government organization and it's not as important [to
97 promote the product] as [it is with] UnitedHealthcare.

98 Do you have sponsor events, races?

99 Yes.

100 Do you have to or do they ask you to post sponsor-related things
101 on Social Media?

102 Well sometimes, yes.

103 Like pictures, or...

104 Pictures, clothes [the jersey]...

105 What is the most significant difference to riding on Astana and
106 riding now in the US circuit?

107 The environment itself, it's way more relaxed, communication is much better,
108 we're having fun. Of course there's always problems but we fix our problems
109 with no problem and we go on. So it's in general that's a happier team.

Michael Schär, Switzerland, BMC Pro Team (SWI)

110 Welche Sprachen sprichst du eigentlich?

111 Deutsch, Schwyzerdütsch, und andere Sprachen

112 Englisch zum Beispiel?

113 [lacht] Ja, Englisch, Französisch, ein bisschen Spanisch. Italienisch verstehe
114 ich, spreche ich aber wenig.

115 Aber im Team selbst ist alles auf Englisch?

116 Auf Englisch, ja.

117 Wie sprichst du mit dem DS, ist das per Email, oder Telefon.

118 Viel [per] Email, auch wöchentlich [per] Telefon.

- 119 **Hast du immer einen fixen DS?**
- 120 Ja jeder hat so eine Gruppierung, jeder DS hat 5-6 Fahrer.
- 121 **Machst du viel Sponsor Relations – zum Beispiel dass du auf**
- 122 **Events gehst...**
- 123 Ja nicht so viel. Bei uns probieren wir das ein bisschen abzuschotten, wir
- 124 gehen auf Velo-Messen, halten Autogrammstunden.
- 125 **Bist aktiv auf Social Media?**
- 126 Instagram, sehr aktiv.
- 127 **Machst du da auch viel Sponsor Relations, auf Instagram selber,**
- 128 **wirst du dazu angehalten?**
- 129 Ja, ja ich mache viel für die Räder.
- 130 **Habt ihr Guidelines, Kommunikationsguidelines?**
- 131 Wir hatten so ein Briefing, ja. Darüber was für Hashtags für BMC, was wichtig
- 132 ist und so.
- 133 **Sprichst du selber mit dem Management oder macht das dein**
- 134 **Manager?**
- 135 Ach unser Och [Jim Ochowitz] ist immer da, spricht unkompliziert. Die
- 136 Verträge macht natürlich [mein] Manager.

Christian Knees, Germany, Sky ProCycling (GBR)

- 137 **Wie redest du mit deinem Sportlichen Leiter?**
- 138 Email, Telefon, alles mögliche.
- 139 **Gibt es da irgendwelche Missverständnisse oder weißt du schon**
- 140 **vor dem Rennen, was du eigentlich machen sollst?**
- 141 Ne, ich weiß eigentlich, was von mir erwartet wird.
- 142 **Wie oft sprichst du mit dem DS?**

143 Ich hab meinen Coach, mit dem spreche ich öfter, und dann geht das struktur-
144 mäßig durchs Team durch. Mit dem DS spreche ich eigentlich nur vor dem
145 jeweiligen Rennen.

146 **Und mit dem Management selber, mit Dave Brailsford?**

147 Selten, selten. Wenn man sich sieht. Aber ansonsten wenig Kontakt.

148 **Wie sind die Unterschiede zu deinen vorherigen Teams, gibt es
149 da in Sachen Kommunikation - Ist es hier etwas mehr geplant, ist
150 das ein bisschen professioneller?**

151 Sehr gut, sehr gut organisiert alles. Und es wird sehr viel Wert auf die
152 Kommunikation gelegt auf jeden Fall.

153 **Wie kamst du in Kontakt mit Sky?**

154 Über mein Management.

155 **Wieso haben sie dich genommen?**

156 Keine Ahnung, weil ich gut bin?

157 **Haben sie einen Typen wie dich speziell gesucht und gebraucht?**

158 Ja, genau.

159 **Machst du viel über Social Media?**

160 Ja ich versuche schon ein bisschen was zu machen.

161 **Wird das vom Team vorausgesetzt?**

162 Nein, also das ist freiwillig. Jeder macht was er will da.

163 **Wie oft machst du Sponsor Relations-Sachen?**

164 Immer dann wenn es vom Team gefragt wird, keine Ahnung, ab und zu halt.

165 Ein paar mal im Jahr.

166 **Sind das dann Rennen?**

167 Ne, das sind Sponsorentermine mit Interviews oder einfach nur da sein,

168 Autogramme schreiben und so Sachen halt.

169 **Habt ihr Guidelines in Sachen Kommunikation mit Fans und
170 Medien?**

171 Weiß ich gar nicht, mag sein.

172 **Hattet ihr Schulungen?**

173 Ne, nicht wirklich.

Martin Köhler, Switzerland, Drapac Racing (AUS)

174 **Wie kommuniziert ihr überhaupt, schreibst du Email mit Tom**

175 **[Southam, Sport Direktor] oder wie läuft das.**

176 Ja, mit dem Team Email, aber auch Telefon, aber Probleme hatte ich
177 eigentlich keine bisher. Aber auch vorher bei BMC war schon alles in Englisch.

178 Ich bin es schon gewohnt. Manchmal versteht man nicht alles ganz genau

179 aber es geht immer um die gleichen Sachen. Dann kann man ja auch mal

180 nachfragen. Das ist eigentlich kein Problem.

181 **Was du zu tun hast während des Rennens oder was deine**

182 **Aufgaben sind, das wird im Voraus geklärt?**

183 Ja, das ist klar. Ich war sogar mal in einem Team wo alles auf Italienisch war.

184 Ich konnte kein Italienisch vorher aber ich habe immer verstanden, was ich zu

185 tun hatte. Es geht immer um die gleiche Sache, es sind dann auch immer die

186 gleichen Wörter. Das lernt man schnell.

187 **Wie oft sprichst du denn mit Tom, wie oft schreibt ihr euch?**

188 Während der Rennen oder sonst?

189 **Während des Rennens? Also schon täglich. Spricht er auch**

190 **persönlich mit dir?**

191 Ja, also er kommt am Abend auch mal ins Zimmer und spricht über die

192 Etappe, oder auch am nächsten Tag. Und dann haben wir vor dem Rennen

193 immer ein Meeting - was der Plan ist. Dann manchmal auch während dem

194 Rennen, wenn es Änderungen gibt im Rennen oder Abstände von Gruppen

195 oder was auch immer. Oder manchmal gehst du mal Flaschen holen und er

196 gibt dir zusätzliche Infos - vielleicht „in 5 Kilometern kommt ein Berg“ -

197 eigentlich also schon ständig.

198 **Wie wurde das Team auf dich aufmerksam, wie bist du nach**
199 **Australien gekommen? Das ist ja schon relativ ungewöhnlich...**

200 Ja, gute Frage eigentlich. Ich bin mit BMC immer [bei] der Tour Down Under
201 gefahren und hatte viele Kontakte in Australien. So ist das eben zustande
202 gekommen.

203 **Weil es ja doch ein recht homogen-australisches Team ist aber**
204 **sie haben jemanden wie dich gesucht und dich dann kontaktiert?**

205 Es ist schon auch der Plan vom Team in Zukunft größer zu werden. Und das
206 bedeutet auch mehrere Europäer fürs Team. Und wenn dann auch mehr in
207 Europa [Rennen gefahren werden]... [Wouter] Wippert war schon da, der
208 Sprinter, und es ist jetzt auch noch ein zweiter Holländer dabei, und ich denke
209 es ist gut für das Team Leute wie Greame Brown [ehem. Rabobank] von der
210 ProTour zu haben für die Erfahrung und das Team weiterzubringen.

211 **Was ist für dich der größte Unterschied in Sachen**
212 **Kommunikation zwischen BMC, [einem europäischen Team], und**
213 **[Drapac als australisches] Team?**

214 Bei BMC waren noch viel mehr Nationalitäten verbunden. Da war es teilweise
215 schwierig mit Leuten die überhaupt kein Englisch sprechen. Die Fahrer
216 untereinander und teilweise mit Pflägern, die sind dann auch von überall –
217 Italien, Spanien, Belgien... Und wenn dann drei, vier Belgier zusammen sind
218 dann sprechen sie miteinander Flämisch, aber schlussendlich hat es nie große
219 Probleme gegeben, es ist mehr das Hauptproblem, je größer das Team, desto
220 schwieriger die allgemeine Kommunikation, z.B. kommen die Kleider an bei
221 den Fahrern. Organisationssachen, weil dann so viele Leute involviert sind.
222 Dann auch mit verschiedenen Nationalitäten, dann bleibt mal wieder was
223 hängen. Aber schlussendlich hat es funktioniert.

224 **Hast du bei BMC überhaupt kontakt zum Management gehabt**
225 **oder lief die Kommunikation nur über deinen DS?**

226 Ja schon, der erste Kontakt war schon über die Sportlichen Leiter, aber das
227 Management war auch nah. Da ist hier auch nah. Einen persönlichen Manager
228 hatte ich bei BMC, jetzt momentan nicht. Das war dann außerhalb vom Team,
229 das hatte mit BMC nichts zu tun.

230 **Hast du bei BMC oft Sponsor Relations gemacht, warst du auf**
231 **Events?**

232 Ja, als Schweizer mit einem Schweizer Hauptsponsor hab ich schon einige
233 Sachen gemacht aber das war nicht so viel. Vielleicht zwei bis drei Mal im
234 Jahr.

235 **Machst du viel auf Social Media, wird das vom Team auch**
236 **unterstützt?**

237 Zu wenig!

238 **Sagt das Team?**

239 Nein, also ich hab Twitter, ich hab Facebook, ich hab Instagram aber ich bin
240 nicht so der Typ der jeden Tag etwas schreibt.

241 **Das wird vom Team auch nicht unbedingt verlangt...**

242 Nein, also sie würden es begrüßen, aber es ist nicht so, dass wir müssen. Aber
243 ich weiß natürlich, dass es gut wäre für die Sponsoren, je mehr darüber
244 geschrieben wird.

245 **War das bei BMC anders, haben sie dich da etwas gepusht?**

246 Die haben uns eigentlich gepusht, dass wir Twitter und das alles machen, aber
247 dann hatten wir so viele Regeln was wir nicht dürfen, dass ich dann eben auch
248 aus diesem Grund gedacht habe, am besten schreibe ich gar nichts, dann
249 bekomme ich auch keine Strafe.

250 **Das wäre meine nächste Frage gewesen - also hattet ihr bei BMC**
251 **schon Communication Guidelines, oder?**

252 Ja.

253 **Und das war: Verhalten auf Social Media, Verhalten mit Fans...**

254 Ja, auch mit Interviews, sogar für Zuhause für deine lokale Zeitung, wir
255 mussten das Interview erst mit dem Team abstimmen.

256 **Im Gegensatz zu anderen Team habt ihr hier [bei Drapac] eine**
257 **Pressevertreterin die auch direkt auf mich zugekommen ist, gibt**
258 **die da irgendwelche Vorgaben, liest sie eure Interviews noch mal**
259 **quer?**

260 Ja es kommt wahrscheinlich ein bisschen darauf an, für was genau das ist.
261 Wenn ich jetzt Zuhause ein Interview mache, glaube ich das weiß gar
262 niemand. Wenn ich da in der Zeitung einen kleinen Bericht mache, muss ich
263 das nicht zum gegenlesen bringen. Ich weiß nicht, vielleicht beim Fernsehen
264 oder so, aber bisher war es nicht sehr strikt.

265 **Habt ihr jemanden fürs Marketing? Oder Sponsor Relations?**

266 Die Leute von Drapac, die sind auch hier, aber wir haben eigentlich wenig zu
267 tun.

Wouter Wippert, Netherlands, Drapac Racing (AUS)

268 **What is the biggest difference regarding communication**
269 **compared to the teams you have been in before?**

270 I think everyone is believing in the same thing...

271 **Even though it is not your native language, do you encounter any**
272 **problems?**

273 Not anymore. I had before, but not anymore. I can make myself [understood]
274 now pretty clear[ly]. And I can follow the conversations the guys have,
275 making jokes and stuff like that. It was hard in the beginning, but after a
276 couple of months that's been better.

277 **Are there any misunderstandings in terms of what you have to do**
278 **at the races?**

279 No, it was more like they're making jokes at the dinner table and you try to
280 understand, to follow them and by the time everyone stops laughing you get
281 the joke. But it's fine now.

282 **How do you communicate with Tom [Southam, Sports Director],**
283 **is it mostly phone or Email?**

284 We speak [a lot] to each other. Weekly on WhatsApp or via phone or Skype...

285 **Do you have to do any Sponsor Relation type of things, do you**
286 **have to sign auto...**

287 Yes, sometimes. But it's in control, not too much.

288 **How did the team get to know you, how did you get signed?**

289 My own management got in contact with team management, so that's how
290 they found me. It worked out pretty well until now!

Ruben Zepunkte, Germany, Cannondale-Garmin (USA)

291 **Wie viele Sprachen sprichst du eigentlich?**

292 Niederländisch, Deutsch und Englisch.

293 **Hast du schon Probleme erlebt, dass wenn du Englisch sprichst
294 du nicht verstanden wirst oder dass du irgendwas nicht
295 verstehst?**

296 Ja es gibt auf jeden Fall unterschiede, aber generell verstehe ich alles.

297 **Wie sprichst du mit dem DS oder mit dem Management, ist das
298 alles per Email?**

299 Der höchste ist ja Jonathan Vaughters, der Team Manager, dann gibt es ja
300 noch die Sponsoren, aber wir haben halt sozusagen unsere Managerin, das ist
301 Louise Donald, die organisiert alles, Flüge, Transfers. Wenn man sich mit ihr
302 nicht versteht, dann hat man ein Problem.

303 **Aber das läuft?**

304 Ja, das läuft sehr gut. Sehr gut.

305 **Und die Taktik [-Besprechung], das passiert alles vor dem
306 Rennen?**

307 Genau, ja das ist im Bus dann. Die Sportlichen Leiter kommen rein, dann
308 haben wir zehn Minuten Besprechung wie es gestern gelaufen ist und dann
309 zehn Minuten die Rennbesprechung für den nächsten Tag.

310 **Weißt du dann auch was deine Rolle sein wird, weißt du das
311 schon im Voraus?**

312 Ja generell wenn man zum Rennen fährt, weiß man schon welche Rolle man
313 hat als Radfahrer. Zum Beispiel haben wir Joe Dombrowski hier, der ist dann

314 unser Bergfahrer, für das generelle Klassement und ich bin dann eher ein
315 Helfer, Sprintertyp, Zeitfahrer, jemand der dem Joe dann hilft, auf dem
316 Flachetappen im Crosswind [Seitenwind].

317 **Da gibt es auch keine großen Verständigungsprobleme?**

318 Nein. Wir fahren ja schon lange Rennen zusammen und man versteht sich
319 schon blind.

320 **Wie oft sprichst du mit dem Sportlichen Leiter während des**
321 **Rennens?**

322 Hm, ein Mal?

323 **Gibt es Einzelgespräche nach dem Rennen?**

324 Im Hotel? Ein Mal vielleicht aber.. nicht oft. Im Rennen gar nicht, vielleicht ein
325 Mal wenn man die Flaschen holt vom Auto. Es ist ja auch kein World Tour
326 Rennen, wir haben ja keine Radios hier. Und wenn wir bei einem World Tour
327 Rennen sind dann ununterbrochen.

328 **Bei welchem Team bist du vorher gefahren?**

329 Bei Axel Merckx¹⁰⁷, und davor bei Rabobank [Continental Team].

330 **Wo sind die Unterschiede in Sachen Kommunikation. Hattest du**
331 **mit Axel mehr gesprochen?**

332 Der Unterschied ist, dass das [Cannondale-Garmin] ein ProTour Team, das
333 andere [Bissel] ist ein Development Team, die wollen einen sozusagen zum
334 Profi machen, und da spricht man schon viel mehr. Was man falsch gemacht
335 hat, was man besser machen kann. Die helfen dir schon aktiv. Wir hatten pro
336 Tag bestimmt eine halbe Stunde Besprechung gehabt.

337 **Hast du den Kontakt zu Garmin hergestellt oder wie sind sie auf**
338 **dich aufmerksam geworden?**

339 Über mein Management. Aber letztes Jahr war ich relativ erfolgreich. Da hat
340 sich das Team bei meinem Management gemeldet.

¹⁰⁷ Axel Merckx has led several development teams for young cyclists in the US. Ruben Zepuntke was part of Bissel Development Team, which in 2015 changed sponsors and was renamed Axeon Cycling Team.

341 **Gab es ein paar Optionen dann?**

342 Ja, ich hatte ein paar Optionen.

343 **Sprichst du auch mit dem Management [von Cannondale-Garmin]**
344 **selbst, mit Vaughters?**

345 Nein, generell nicht. Er kommt manchmal zum Rennen, aber sonst eigentlich
346 nicht.

347 **Machst du selber viel über Social Media?**

348 Ja, wir müssen Twitter und Instagram benutzen...

349 **Müsst ihr benutzen?**

350 Ja, sollten wir benutzen. Es ist kein muss, aber sollten wir.

351 **Stellt ihr dort dann den Sponsor in den Vordergrund?**

352 Wir kriegen Fotos zugesendet von unserer Team-Marketing Chefin, die wir
353 dann benutzen müssen.

354 **Habt ihr irgendwelche Guidelines dazu?**

355 Ja.

356 **Sind die recht streng?**

357 Ja, wir sollten zum Beispiel fünf Mal nachdenken, bevor wir etwas posten.
358 Wenn wir ein Interview haben oder sowas...

359 **Bist in Deutschland in der Liga gefahren?**

360 Ja, ein bisschen.

361 **Wie meinst du wird sich das entwickeln, was für ein Gefühl hast**
362 **du da. Du hast es nach Amerika in die ProTour geschafft, meinst**
363 **du es wir einen Aufschwung geben?**

364 Ja, es gibt ja nun ein ProTour Team in Deutschland, [Giant] Alpecin, dadurch
365 hat es einen Medien-Aufschwung gegeben, ich denke mal der Radsport ist auf
366 einen guten Weg aber es ist noch immer nicht optimal. „Was machst du?“ –
367 „Ja ich bin Radsportler“ – dann heißt es sofort, ja du dopst. Das ist echt
368 schade. Aber ich denke mal es ist auf einem guten Weg.

Gerald Ciolek, Germany, MTN-Qhubeka (RSA)

369 **Seit zwei Jahren fährst du nun bei MTN Qhubeka. Gibt es im**
370 **Team noch Missverständnisse oder Kommunikationsprobleme**
371 **aufgrund der Internationalität im Team?**

372 Klar ist es einfacher wenn man in einem Deutschen Team fährt und seine
373 Muttersprache spricht um mit den Leuten zu kommunizieren aber
374 andererseits gewöhnt man sich da auch relativ schnell dran, wenn es ein
375 englischsprachiges Team ist. Es ist schon besser, wenn es eine gemischte
376 Mannschaft ist, wie bei uns, als wenn es, wie bei [OmegaPharma] Quick-Step
377 hauptsächlich eine niederländischsprachige Mannschaft ist.

378 **Hast du denn dort auch niederländisch gesprochen? Welche**
379 **Sprachen sprichst du eigentlich?**

380 Deutsch, Englisch. Es war dann doch recht schwierig. Man wird immer auf
381 Englisch angesprochen, man spricht auch Englisch, deshalb ist man auch nicht
382 gezwungen eine andere Sprache zu sprechen. Aber klar, die Konversationen
383 unter den Leuten finden hauptsächlich auf Niederländisch statt.

384 **Gab es da Kommunikationsprobleme, Missverständnisse?**

385 Eigentlich nicht, nur dass man, wenn viele niederländischsprachige Fahrer im
386 Team und unter sich sind – da den Anschluss zu finden ist natürlich nicht so
387 einfach wie in einem deutschsprachigen Team.

388 **Also nur unter euch Fahrern...**

389 Ja genau.

390 **In Sachen Taktik ist es aber immer klar gewesen, hier auch?**

391 Ja, die Besprechungen und alles funktioniert auf Englisch, da gibt es eigentlich
392 keine Kommunikationsprobleme.

393 **Wie kommunizierst du mit dem DS, per Email oder persönlich vor**
394 **dem Rennen?**

395 Telefon, Email, man nutzt da alle Kommunikationswege.

396 **Ist das recht ausführlich oder wird das kurz und knapp gehalten?**

397 Es kommt immer auf die Person an, jeder hat da auch seine eigenen Wege wie
398 er mit dem Fahrer kommuniziert. Es kommt auch auf die Situation an, wenn es
399 da um ein bestimmtes Thema geht, dann wird das auch ausführlich
400 kommuniziert. Grundsätzlich ist das eher eine knappe Kommunikation,
401 zwischen dem Sportdirektor und dem Fahrer.

402 **Hat dein Manager kontakt zu MTN aufgebaut oder wie kamst du**
403 **an das Team heran?**

404 Das funktioniert über den Manager. Das war bei mir zumindest so. Es ist halt
405 auch irgendwo alles eine ziemlich kleine Welt im Radsport – der kennt den,
406 der weiß die suchen einen...

407 **Sprichst du selber mit dem Team Management oder läuft das nur**
408 **über den DS?**

409 Ne, der Team Manager [Brian Smith] ist ja auch hier, man hat da also auch
410 persönliche Kontakte.

411 **Worüber redet ihr so?**

412 Oft sind das Belanglosigkeiten, keine Ahnung, aber mit Sicherheit wenn es
413 Probleme gibt und es nicht so läuft wie er es gerne hätte dann spricht er das
414 auch direkt bei den Fahrern an.

415 **Habt ihr Kommunikations-Guidelines, Vorgaben, gibt es da aus**
416 **dem Marketing etwas?**

417 Bezüglich Kommunikation mit der Presse?

418 **Genau, Sponsoren...**

419 Gerade für uns gibt es Richtlinien, wo wir sagen: das ist unser Team, das ist
420 das, was wir repräsentieren wollen und man wird dann auch gebeten das
421 entsprechend zu kommunizieren. Unser Projekt Qhubeka promoten, das
422 immer wieder zur Sprache bringen und so weiter. Dahingehend gibt es schon,
423 ja, Richtlinien, Vorgaben, Empfehlungen...

424 **Du machst gar nicht so viel auf Social Media, oder?**

425 Teilweise. Aber ich bin jetzt nicht der Typ, der jeden Tag sein Frühstück postet
426 und sein Abendessen, also das nicht.

427 **Habt ihr da Vorgaben, sollt ihr da ab und zu etwas über den**
428 **Sponsor sagen...**

429 Ist schon erwünscht, dass man viel auf Social Media macht, es geht dann bei
430 uns weniger um den Sponsor, als über das Projekt. Gerade wenn bestimmte
431 Aktionen sind, jetzt gerade haben wir das mit den 5000 Rädern die wir
432 promoten wollen. Das man solche Sachen auch auf Social Media immer
433 wieder zur Sprache bringt.

434 **Ich habe von Garmin gehört, dass sie immer Fotos bekommen,**
435 **die sie dann posten. Das ist bei euch wahrscheinlich nicht so**
436 **strikt.**

437 Nein, nein, das läuft dann schon ein bisschen persönlicher ab. Da kann jeder
438 schon selbst entscheiden, was er macht.

439 **Hast du Sponsoren Events, Sponsor Relations-Events die du**
440 **mitmachst?**

441 Teilweise, ja.

442 **Sind das Rennen?**

443 Können ganz unterschiedliche Sachen sein, von Fotos, Autogrammstunde bis
444 einfach anwesend sein. Vor zwei Wochen gab es ein Event, das war eigentlich
445 eine Autoshow, aber durch den Sponsor hängt das zusammen mit Cervélo
446 [dem Radsponsor] die wollten einen Fahrer da haben. Dann fährt man halt da
447 hin und zeigt halt ein bisschen Anwesenheit.

448 **Was siehst du als größten Unterschied zwischen, in deinem Fall**
449 **Europa und Südafrika. Was gibt es für Unterschiede in Sachen**
450 **Teamstimmung, Rennen an sich...**

451 Es gibt schon kulturelle Unterschiede, das sind Kleinigkeiten. Häufig bei den
452 Südafrikanern oder den anderen Afrikanern was so Zeiten angeht, die sehen
453 das alles ein bisschen gelassener. Aber ansonsten, das Gesamtkonzept des
454 Teams ist so international geprägt, dass die Unterschiede da gar nicht mehr
455 so groß sind. Das Renngeschehen findet zu 95% eh in Europa statt, das
456 gesamte Staff [Mitarbeiter] kommen aus Europa, von daher...

457 **Wie war das bei Quick-Step, gab es da Sponsorenaktionen, ihr**
458 **hattet da zum Beispiel das berühmte Fotoshooting mit den**
459 **Kissen...**

460 Das sind so Aktionen die man immer mal macht, bei Milram ist das halt ein
461 Fotoshooting mit einer Tüte Milch, bei Quick-Step war es wegen dem
462 Matratzensponsor mit den Kissen.

463 **Danke!**

464 Mal ein paar andere Fragen, ganz interessant!

[Jure Kocjan, Slovenia, SmartStop Pro Cycling \(USA\)](#)

465 **What languages do you speak?**

466 In school I studied English, but then I signed for an Italian team when I was 21
467 years old, so I was in Italy for three years. So I learned Italian, which I like. In
468 the peloton are a lot of guys who speak Italian, so it really helps me. Before I
469 signed with SmartStop at the beginning of 2014 I thought my English was
470 good because I studied it in School for three or four years, but when I came
471 here I realized how bad it is. It sucks sometimes when they speak slang, I don't
472 understand all those jokes. And the accents and they speak so fast,
473 sometimes I don't get their jokes.

474 **Do you think that's a problem?**

475 No, all the other guys understand me. I was racing in Spain too so I speak
476 Spanish, after [learning] Italian, it's easy. The only language – I had some
477 French teammates – but I hate French. It's so hard.

478 **How do you communicate with Mike [Creed, Sports Director],**
479 **only via Email?**

480 Email, yes. While I'm at home we [keep in] contact via Email and sometimes
481 Skype. If there's something special I can call him.

482 **But it's very clear, no misunderstandings?**

483 Yes, it's clear.

484 He [Mike] told me he writes Emails explaining what he expects of
485 you in the race. So it's very clear for you that you go into it and
486 you know what to do?

487 It's this cycling thing so we all know and if there's some special cycling words I
488 just Google it.

489 **What is your role in the team? You're not one of the skinny
490 guys...**

491 At this [race] I'm one of the sprinters, I'm one of the fastest guys here. But
492 when it's flat I can not compete against the best guys in the world. Maybe top
493 five. Which is still okay for our team, our team cannot compete against the
494 biggest team in the world, we are a division three team but when the stage or
495 the course suits me very well and when I'm in shape I can race against the
496 biggest riders in the world. I brought some experience to the team, I'm one of
497 the older guys.

498 **Racing in Europe is harder...**

499 Yes, it's harder and I did a lot of good and strong races, so I'm trying to help
500 the guys. We have a lot of talented guys and they're still developing their
501 talent.

502 **When you were on the Italian team or racing in Spain, were there
503 any communicational problems with the Italian team? Did they
504 expect you to learn the language?**

505 Yes, of course. It was really hard when I just came there, the first time in
506 January all I knew was "Ciao" and "Uno, due, tres", that's all I knew. Just a few
507 words and then I learned. But it went so fast because you have to, you're
508 there you just listen. If you stay at home and just learn every day one hour it
509 takes forever, but if you're there in two or three weeks I learned a lot. Then I
510 went home for two weeks and I forgot a little bit...

511 **Did you speak a lot with your DS there?**

512 Yes. There were two and the second one spoke a little bit of English so he
513 helped me a lot. But after six months my Italian was really good. I like Italian,

514 it's easy and it's easy to write for me because if you write the words you can
515 say it, which is different in French, the words are so long.

Interviews conducted via Email

These interviews are not spell checked, only copied and its layout adjusted

Michael Roecklein, USA, Sponsorship Director at Team SmartStop (USA)

516 **Tell me a bit about yourself, how you got into cycling, building**
517 **your own team and getting your current position at SmartStop.**

518 I only became a fan of cycling in 2006 when Floyd Landis won the Tour de
519 France. I was on my way to getting a teaching credential to be a high school
520 teacher when I started training with some local juniors who were worried
521 what would happen to them after they turned 18. In 2011 I started working for
522 the Monster Media Team of Kayle Leogrande (the team created for his return
523 from a doping ban). I didn't know much about him other than he was a tattoo
524 artist and had been banned, so I used his return as a way to test the cycling
525 public via social media. Unfortunately, Kayle refused to participate in the
526 public apology, so he was never accepted and his ego grew so large and the
527 budget so small that I moved on 3 months into the project. Immediately after I
528 started Stage 17 and realized I could essentially start a team even without any
529 prior experience and race against some of the top teams in the country just
530 by being nice to race promoters. Our team grew for 3 years until last year
531 when we got BMW to come on as title sponsor. I realized I had undervalued
532 my team for years and made the same mistake many teams make. I didn't
533 account for my own time and financial needs. Mid 2014 I started a dual role
534 with BMW Development Team and Team SmartStop, BMW came on board
535 with Team SmartStop and I was able to immediately show my value.

536 **What is your main task at SmartStop? What does your "day in the**
537 **office" look like?**

538 My tasks change as the needs of the team change. Each month has a different
539 outline based on what is on the horizon. In the fall we are securing
540 relationships with industry partners. Much of this is asking what it will take to
541 grow with them, what do they need from us in order to earn a greater

542 investment. After the season starts I work with our current sponsors to see
543 how they would like to engage with the Tour of California and make sure we
544 are executing on our promised materials from their contracts (content
545 creation). At a race like the Tour of California I am the face of the team for our
546 sponsors and my main job is to make sure they have a good time and get the
547 most out of their investment in the team at the race. The same goes for the
548 other large race (Utah, Colorado, and Alberta). About halfway through the
549 season we start negotiations with current financial sponsors and meet with
550 each of our potential sponsors, it is usually around this time that we receive
551 the Tour of California attendance numbers and media metrics. My office looks
552 like a laptop with a cracked screen on a messy dining room table or a cell
553 phone in a BMW. The cell phone does not have a cracked screen.

554 **Does the team have any contractual rules set by the sponsors (in**
555 **writing)?**

556 Every team has contractual rules, as most contracts are boiler plate. Its tough
557 to say without breaking those contracts specifically what we are bound to,
558 but for the most part they define how the riders must look at all times and
559 what companies we can enter into relationships with. Other important rules
560 have to do with delivery dates and payments.

561 **What does the team have to do in order to make the sponsors**
562 **happy (apart from winning of course)?**

563 Winning is the thing I am least concerned about. companies want impressions
564 most of all. They see buying impressions from us as less expensive and more
565 fun than other options. Companies often have specific requests like lead
566 generation (introducing them to potential new customers) or having a
567 connection to a charity. Branding is often the least discussed item in
568 negotiations with sponsors, as only the title sponsor truly benefits from
569 branding; some people still really want to see their logo on the kit and so we
570 make sure they get a decent spot. Back to winning, what winning offers
571 brands is the opportunity for their brand to actually win something. So
572 instead of being excited that Eric Marcotte won a national championship,
573 SmartStop Self Storage can be excited and promote that THEY won a

574 national championship. This is where winning and branding are valuable for
575 companies.

576 **How and in what way do the sponsors keep in contact with the**
577 **team? Do they ask questions, make demands etc?**

578 Email, text, phone, FB chat, Instagram, Twitter, Direct MESSage, Skype... Really
579 every method available. Oh yeah, LinkedIn too. Everyone has the method they
580 prefer to use to keep in contact and you figure that out pretty quickly. Some
581 sponsors feel comfortable enough to call you on a Sunday on your personal
582 phone. This means we have done a great job of making our relationship more
583 than simply a business contract. Sponsors always want more than we
584 discussed and put in writing in contracts, but that is usually because they
585 don't know until something comes up that they want something else. We too
586 come to sponsors with other opportunities mid year, so its a two way street.
587 Sponsors really like being introduced to other sponsors. Working with the
588 team gives them a natural connection to other companies that they want to
589 take advantage of.

590 **How are successes and losses are being communicated to**
591 **sponsors? Are they even interested? Do you get feedback?**

592 Some sponsors are actively following races on twitter or come to most of our
593 events, so we don't really need to do much there to inform them. However
594 other sponsors, often your big money sponsors, are out of the loop and need
595 to be personally informed. We compile weekly reviews of our past racing and
596 our sponsors look for those emails on Mondays after races. You'll often see
597 companies share things on Monday well after a race ended, which actually
598 extends the life of an achievement for us on social media so it works for us as
599 well. This isn't to say that these sponsors aren't interested and if we do a great
600 job we will get their focused attention on the team by bringing them to races
601 as our VIPs. This often reminds them of the value of the team. Bringing
602 someone who reads emails every monday about the team to the Tour of
603 California and putting them in the follow car is extremely important to me and
604 my job.

605 **How do you get new sponsors? How do you „sell“ the team to**
606 **potential sponsors?**

607 I pay attention to who is spending money on sport and try to connect with
608 them via cold email. This method gets a response 30% of the time. Its not
609 easy, but all we need is one valuable partner. Other partners come through
610 cycling insiders who know someone at a company and makes an introduction
611 for us. Sometimes teams have multiple contacts that they can't use, so they
612 may share or trade. The goal is to bring as many companies into the sport as
613 possible, so I am always happy to connect a sponsor I cannot use with
614 another team I trust if I have the opportunity. When we sell the team we first
615 look at what we perceive the sponsor would need from a sponsorship. If its a
616 company like coke, well they just want to give away as much product as
617 possible and they love branding, so we package those things together for
618 them. Someone else like USB bank works with a lot of VIPs and would
619 probably want to have a private party and ride with the team, something
620 more exclusive. The goal is to present the company with something they can
621 use from the first contact.

622 **How did BMW end up sponsoring SmartStop? What do they**
623 **contribute?**

624 BMW was a sponsor of my development team so I knew the people at BMW
625 very well and they had really liked what I was doing for them with an amatuer
626 team. Once I knew my future was at Team SMartStop I knew I wanted to bring
627 them with me if possible. So we presented Team SmartStop as a completely
628 different opportunity than the development team. SmartStop was in Utah and
629 Colorado and was going to be on TV. We were also willing to use
630 nontraditional vehicles in the race to follow the riders to try to create a buzz
631 (electric cars). I can't get into the contribution past the 2 X1s and i3 that we
632 used last year.

633 **Do sponsors have a say in selecting riders?**

634 sponsors don't have a say, except for when they do. Recently an american
635 bike company was sponsoring an Italian team and they wanted to ensure the
636 team had American riders that they could market in the US, so they didn't

637 select specific riders, but they did make specific requests. For our team, we
638 have sponsors that like certain riders and they advocate for them like you
639 would for any friend. We know signing these riders would help our
640 relationship with the sponsors, however we don't make decisions on riders
641 based on that, we just keep it in mind if we already like someone.

642 **How much is team PR affected by the sponsor - is there a rule**
643 **when to send a press release/race report? (At NetApp the race**
644 **report had to be online 3hrs after the race finished e.g.)**

645 Team ownership dictates the timeline for most press releases and frequency
646 of social media. SmartStop corporate doesn't have any specific rules like
647 NetApp did. We do have press releases that indicate sponsor specific
648 announcements that do have strict timelines and style and have to go
649 through a dozen people to get the quotes right. We usually have a greater
650 timeline for these though, so we aren't looking at a 3 hour turn around.

651 **If you're able to talk about that: what is your annual budget? If**
652 **not: Can you give me a percentage of how much each sponsor**
653 **contributes to the overall budget?**

654 We work with just over a million dollars. Our budget is split more evenly
655 between sponsors than some other teams, which means we are not solely
656 dependent on one sponsor to succeed, but it wouldn't be easy. With
657 SmartStop leaving at the end of the year, we have a hole to fill, but they don't
658 supply 100% of our budget so we are able to prepare for the worst.

[Grischa Niermann, Germany, Trainer at Rabobank Development Team \(NDL\)](#)

659 **Wie oft und wie lange spricht ihr als Trainer mit den Fahrern -**
660 **während und außerhalb der Rennen? Ruben z.B. erwähnte eine**
661 **mnd. 30-minütige persönliche Nachbesprechung jeden Abend.**

662 Als Trainer (ich trainiere 5 von unseren 19 Fahrern, neben meiner Rolle als
663 sportlicher Leiter, habe ich mit den meisten Jungs täglich Kontakt- entweder
664 per Telefon, Whatsapp oder unsere Trainingsplanungswebsite IQO2. Auf
665 letzterer finden die Jungs Ihre Trainings und Rennplanung für meist 3 (
666 Training) und 8 (Wettkämpfe) Wochen im vorraus. Die Trainings und

667 Rennplanung bespreche ich mit den Jungs persönlich, d.H. es ist weniger eine
668 Mitteilung über was Sie zu tun haben sondern sie haben da auch durchaus
669 die Möglichkeit ihren eigenen Senf dazu zu geben. Was Sie dann trainiert
670 haben sehe ich dann mittels der SRM Daten die nach Möglichkeit jeden Tag
671 auf IQO2 heruntergeladen werden. Daneben ist es mir aber sehr wichtig ein
672 Feedback zu bekommen, wie schwer das Training oder der Wettkampf (
673 wenn ich selbst nicht dabei bin) vom Gefühl her waren, ob sie frisch oder
674 müde sind und was sonst noch so los ist in ihrem Leben (jedenfalls wenn das
675 Dinge sind, die relevant sind für ihre Leistungsfähigkeit und Belastbarkeit).
676 Letzteres funktioniert natürlich nur, wenn es wirklich einen 'klick' gibt
677 zwischen Fahrer und Trainer, aber um Jemanden optimal begleiten zu können
678 muss ich auch wissen mit was für Problemen oder Problemchen ein Fahrer
679 sich neben dem Sport noch so herumschlägt.

680 Als sportlicher Leiter ist der Ablauf bei Rundfahrten und Eintagesrennen zu
681 denen wir am Vortag anreisen der folgende. Am Tag vor der ersten Etappe
682 führe ich mit jedem Fahrer ein individuelles Gespräch über seine persönlichen
683 Ambitionen für das Rennen und alles was sonst noch zur Sprache kommt.
684 Dies dauert meist so 10 Minuten pro Fahrer.

685 In der Regel folgt dann am Abend die Vorbesprechung für das Rennen des
686 kommenden Tages. Dauer ca. 20 Minuten. Am Renntag selbst gibt es dann
687 noch ein paar letzte Tips oder individuelle Anweisungen und
688 Motivationsgespräche in der letzten Stunde vor dem Start. Dafür kann ich
689 nicht wirklich eine Dauer festlegen, das ist sehr unterschiedlich.

690 Nach dem Rennen gibt es Abends im Hotel oder bei Eintagesrennen im
691 Camper nach dem Duschen eine ca. 30 Minütige Nachbesprechung.

692 **Was ist der typische Inhalt in diesen Besprechungen - konkrete**
693 **Tips, Taktik?**

694 Die Vorbesprechung beinhaltet

695 die Logistische und Zeitliche Planung: Wann Frühstück, wann weg zum Start,
696 wann Start.Ist Hotelwechsel- müssen die Koffer mit etc. etc.

697 Infos zum Rennen: Wetter, Wind, Streckenverlauf, Verpflegungszone,
698 Neutralisation, Zwischensprints, Bonifikationssekunden, Länge und
699 Schwierigkeitsgrad der Anstiege, Streckenführung im Finale etc.

700 Taktik:

701 Die Renntaktik wird von uns oft vorgegeben, wobei die Fahrer durchaus
702 selbst etwas dazu sagen/ beitragen können und dürfen. Die meisten Jungs
703 sind aber noch sehr jung und unerfahren und dann passiert das häufig nur,
704 wenn wir mal sagen: So Jungs, wie nehmen wir das Rennen heute in Angriff,
705 macht mal eine Taktik.(Was durchaus vorkommt).

706 Hinzu kommen noch recht banale Anweisungen wie Essen und Trinken nicht
707 vergessen. Es gibt durchaus ganz junge Fahrer mit denen muss man Anfangs
708 eine individuelle Planung machen, wann sie im Wettkampf Nahrung und
709 Getränke zu sich nehmen.

710 Bei uns wird so gut wie nie mit einem Teamleader gefahren, für den alle
711 fahren müssen (Ausnahme natürlich wenn jemand in einer Rundfahrt z.B.
712 schon das gelbe Trikot erobert hat, dann wird es natürlich verteidigt). Im
713 Prinzip (so ist die Philosophie des Teams) hat jeder Fahrer in jedem Rennen
714 die Chance für sich selbst ein Ergebnis einzufahren. Für mich ist es daher ganz
715 wichtig, den Jungs immer wieder und wieder einzuschärfen, dass sie als Team
716 fahren müssen um Erfolg zu haben (was ja durchaus im Widerspruch steht zu
717 der Idee dass jeder immer seine eigenen Chancen wahrnehmen kann).

718 Die Nachbesprechung:

719 Beginnt damit dass jeder Fahrer seine eigene Sicht des Rennverlaufs schildert
720 und wie es für ihn persönlich gelaufen ist. Das dauert so zwischen 2 und 5
721 Minuten pro Fahrer

722 Dabei kommt dann häufig schon alles zur Sprache, auch z.B. wenn der ein
723 oder andere sich nicht an die vorab besprochenen Taktik gehalten hat, dann
724 sprechen die Jungs sich da persönlich drauf an.

725 Als letztes kommt dann mein Fazit des Tages mit den Dingen die mir
726 aufgefallen sind bzw. die mir gefallen oder nicht gefallen haben.

727 **Wie seid ihr als Coaches erreichbar, kommen auch von den**
728 **Fahrern selbst Fragen oder ist die Kommunikation eher einseitig?**

729 Ich bin quasi 24 Stunden am Tag 7 Tage die Woche erreichbar. Egal ob ich
730 beim Rennen persönlich dabei bin, oder zuhause auf dem rad sitze oder mit
731 der Familie im Urlaub bin, will und muss ich immer erreichbar sein. Coach sein
732 ist halt kein normaler Bürojob, bei dem man um 17 Uhr nach Hause geht und
733 dann bis zum nächsetn Morgen um 9 Uhr Ruhe hat. Ich lege sehr viel Wert
734 darauf das die Kommunikation zweiseitig ist und ich wirklich Regelmässig mit
735 jedem Einzelnen in Kontakt stehe.(Bei dem einen ist das mehrmals am Tag
736 und bei einem Anderen vielleicht 3 mal pro Woche) Wenn es immer nur an
737 mir hängen bleibt, das ich hinter den Jungs hertelefonieren muss um zu
738 fragen wie es ihnen geht, dann spreche ich sie darauf an und beende dann ggf
739 auch so eine Zusammenarbeit und dann muss derjenige seine Trainingspläne
740 selber schreiben und bekommt nur noch eine Mitteilung wann er zum
741 nächsten Rennen kommen muss. (Kommt nicht häufig vor, ist aber durchaus
742 schon passiert das ich irgendwann gesagt habe, das so für mich keine
743 Zusammenarbeit mehr möglich ist)

744 **Im Bezug auf Kommunikation: was lernen die Fahrer bei euch,**
745 **was sie in „normalen“ Teams nicht mitbekommen würden?**

746 Das kann ich schwer sagen, da ich die Arbeitsweise von anderen Teams nicht
747 genau kenne. Wir legen jedenfalls viel Wert auf sowohl individuelle
748 Kommunikation als auch auf deutliche und strukturierte Vor und
749 Nachbesprechungen. Diese Besprechungen macht jeder von uns 3 sportlichen
750 Leitern nach dem selben Schema und es gibt sie auch wirklich immer und
751 nicht nur ab und zu oder nur bei wichtigen Rennen.

752 Unsere derzeit 19 Fahrer sind aufgeteilt auf 3 Coaches (Davon 1
753 hauptamtlicher Trainer und 2 Trainer und sportliche Leiter), sodass die
754 individuelle Kommunikation und Trainingsplanung sehr intensiv ist.

755 Wenn ich auf meine eigene Karriere zurückschaue und das vergleiche mit
756 dem was ich jetzt mache, würde ich sagen, das wir mit unseren Jungs sehr viel
757 individueller arbeiten als ich das von den Profis kannte und viel mehr echtes
758 Coaching stattfindet um die Jungs zu verstehen und zu motivieren.

759 **Sehe ich das richtig, dass ihr bei RaboDev keine Unterscheidung**
760 **zwischen DS und Coach macht? Was hältst du von der Idee, auch**
761 **als WorldTeam nicht nur DS' zu beschäftigen, sondern auch fest**
762 **angestellte Coaches?**

763 Im Prinzip haben wir 5 Coaches bei uns im Team. Und was Coachgespräche
764 etc. angeht stimmt das auch, allerdings gibt es trotzdem Unterscheidungen.

765 Arthur Van Dongen ist unser Chef und Teammanager und gleichzeitig auch
766 sportlicher Leiter bei den Rennen.

767 Richard Groenendaal und ich sind das was man am ehesten als Coach
768 bezeichnen könnte, d.h. wir sind sowohl Trainer als sportliche Leiter.

769 Sierk-Jan de Haan ist Hauptamtlich Trainer und hat deshalb ca. die Hälfte der
770 Fahrer unter seiner Obhut. Er ist allerdings eher selten bei den Rennen dabei,
771 weil er halt kein sportlicher Leiter ist und im Prinzip mit der Renntaktik etc.
772 nicht zu tun hat.

773 Niico van Hest zu guter Letzt ist die rechte Hand von Richard Groenendaal im
774 Cross bereich und steht uns vor allem als Mentor mit Rat und Tat zur Seite.

775 **Aus deiner eigenen Erfahrung als Ex-Profi, hast du gute und/oder**
776 **schlechte Beispiele in Sachen Kommunikation mit dem DS oder**
777 **Management?**

778 Ja sicher. Im nachhinein muss ich sagen das wir bei Rabobank gute sportliche
779 Leiter hatten, was die Taktik etc. im Rennen betraf, aber im Bezug auf
780 Coaching , individuelle Kommunikation undsoweiter war es zu meiner Zeit
781 ziemlich mager.

782 Das machte sich vor allem bemerkbar wenn es z.B.in der Tour de France nicht
783 so lief wie geplant, dann gab es Niemand der in der Lage war, oder es
784 zumindest versucht hätte und Fahrer wieder zu motivieren oder aufzubauen.

Interview with Michael Creed, conducted via Skype

785 **With your team you said that Marcotte does it by himself, he**
786 **posts helmet and an energy bar with the sponsor...**

787 We don't tell the riders to say anything, the only thing I tell them at the
788 beginning of the year is just: don't fuck with the money. Whatever money the
789 team is getting, just don't fuck with it. That means everything, it means that if
790 we're sponsored by Giro, don't put photos of you wearing – even if it's away
791 from the race, on a different bike or whatever – but a photo of you wearing a
792 different helmet... And I'm not saying you can't wear the helmet, I'm not
793 saying you have to wear team clothing on your training, do whatever you
794 want, but don't put it on social media. Not everything in your life needs to be
795 photographed, you're not as cute and as funny as you think you are.

796 **But I don't think the guys are like that, they're not selfie guys...**

797 They're not there were a couple of guys last year that I have to.. Marcotte a
798 couple times, there was this other rider, Josh, where I had to just: what the
799 fuck were you thinking? For example they would do a race and they were in
800 national team kits, and they were like "oh it's just a local race." I don't care, if
801 you're going to do that: one it's kind of shitty and two: why would you out a
802 photo of that on the internet. It's ridiculous, it's kind of stupid.

803 **Giro the helmet sponsor, what's the deal behind it? There is no**
804 **money going anywhere, it's just helmets?**

805 Yeah but you want to. even if the sponsor doesn't give money, those
806 relationships – if the team grows, you can ask more for the team. So if the
807 team grows it gets more money and better riders – now we can go to Giro
808 and say look, this is a good relationship and we want to continue it but we
809 need this now. You know they keep score in their heads, they say "oh we liked
810 you but we don't know if .. we can't trust you guys with any kind of social
811 media or press, this and that. You want to eliminate any question, so the less
812 emails I get the better. I don't want emails. I don't care, I don't own Champion
813 System, I don't own Giro, I don't get any money if they sell more... They don't
814 worry about me I don't worry about them. But because I worry about me, I
815 don't want to get an email, I don't want to lie for you and feel stupid. I have
816 so much other work to do. And if you make me do it, I'll be upset with you.
817 Just because I have more work to do.

818 **And how quick does it go that a sponsor leaves the team?**

819 Instantly, they can just say “we have five more kits to deliver and you need
820 them by this day” and maybe they don’t give it to you right away, maybe it
821 takes a long time, you can’t be hard with them if you’re fucking up all the time.

822 I’m using Phil Gaimon’s book as well because he writes a lot
823 about sponsor relations and PR, and one time when he was with
824 Jelly Belly at Quinghai Lake, they had the newest Zipp wheels,
825 but they were all tubular and they didn’t have a second mechanic
826 to glue them, so they didn’t use any of the fancy wheels. So next
827 year they weren’t sponsored by Zipp anymore...

828 That’s typical fucking cycling sometimes. They don’t...I don’t know. I think
829 most managers are just really shit. And some staff members are shit. Because
830 it’s such a stupid job. “Why don’t you travel for like 250 days of the year and
831 get paid not very much money and just be overworked and have people
832 always upset with you. Do you want this job?!” People who say yes to this
833 job: most of the time they are not very smart people.

834 **They don’t stick around too long... You can do it for a season or
835 so.**

836 I’ve noticed it a lot with... You know that one Soigneur I had a lot of problems
837 with and I think it was a week after California I fired him. Because he was just
838 tired, and he was just shit. This isn’t like a job you just have, this isn’t a lifetime
839 job, it’s too much. You’d be a crazy person if you kept this job for too long.
840 It’s just an experience, you just go for the experience and when you get tires
841 you just: see you later, bye.

842 **But he did get paid on a daily basis, the extra staff?**

843 No, I didn’t fire a day-rate staff, he was on salary. Daily staff is usually very
844 good because they come in and out really quick. They don’t need. They’re
845 usually fresh.

846 **They cost more...**

847 They do cost more. But usually they’re okay.

848 **What’s the hardest part about being a - just from the physical
849 side. I know you currently have problems telling people bad news**

850 – but what’s the hardest part about your job. Is it logistics, is it
851 the workload...

852 Not it’s just you can’t – and this may sound like I feel really bad for myself –
853 but you can’t make everybody, you can’t make, really, anybody happy.
854 Especially on a small team. Maybe on a bigger team it’s better. I say small
855 team problems are that, at best, you disappoint everybody 15-10%. You give
856 them 80% of what they want. That’s a good day. So you had a really good
857 day, but you still weren’t able to give them everything. And the only time
858 people come to you, riders, staff, owners, is when they need something, or
859 they have a complaint. They don’t come to share their good news, if riders
860 have good news they tell other riders. If the staff has good news they tell the
861 riders. When you’re removed from that and you’re the boss – they just know
862 that you know the good news. They assume that you’re happy. But they tell
863 you bad news because they want you to fix it. And I can only fix it 80%
864 maybe. So all day I hear bad news, all day I see people who can’t help
865 themselves or do it themselves. It’s just hard because you feel really bad about
866 yourself and you get angry about other people. Simple things that normally
867 wouldn’t bother you, but because you’re tired and on the road you get so
868 angry. You know a rider comes to you and says, “we don’t have any more
869 beet juice powder” – some shit like that. And you’re just: “yes, yes.”. And he
870 goes: “can we get some?” – “yeah, yes. But you can also, in the meantime,
871 waiting three or four days for it to show up you can just go to the store and
872 buy some. I’ll give you the team credit card you can just do it.” - “Ugh, why do
873 I have to do it?” And you’re just... I don’t know, because you’re on a small
874 division three team with just three staff members, driving everything across
875 the country, and we just got here. And Ashford’s giving massages and the
876 mechanic is working on bikes and I’m motorpacing the riders... You can go
877 down this whole tirade but you can’t... You just have to stop and... It’s stuff like
878 that, you just feel bummed out because people come to you with bad news or
879 needing something. Nobody comes to you with... joy.

880 You think that’s common among division three teams? That
881 they’re as understaffed and that everyone has to do everything?

882 I assume so. There are some division three teams that have a lot of money.
883 Optum has a lot of money, so they probably don't have that problem that
884 much, but I think they're the exception. I think most of them probably have a
885 little bit of that problem.

886 **Your role as a DS is a bit uncommon. You also do logics and stuff.**
887 **But just the basics: what is your day to day stuff. At a race you**
888 **just look at the road book or is that all beforehand. What do you**
889 **do in your basic role as a DS?**

890 Before the race, a month before the race or three weeks before the race, you
891 make sure that all the light tickets are made, have the arrival of the vehicles -
892 all that planes. Managers meeting, what ever. You make the master sheet,
893 with everybody's times in and everybody's times out. When you need the car,
894 when the car is not to leave the hotel because I need it for this. And a real
895 basic daily sheet with: the race starts at this time, it's this long. Something
896 very basic. And then when you get to the race, you pick the riders up, you
897 drop them off. And then you get the race book and you look, you make a
898 more detailed daily sheet. So every day I email them and I hand it to them. It
899 just has the stage, the weather, what KOM points at what kilometres. What
900 time we're leaving, how long of a drive, or if we're on the bike, to bring a
901 change of clothes or not - all that 24 hours before. And then you go to all the
902 riders room and you talk to them, see how they're feeling and where they're
903 at physically and mentally. And then you just make the plan, you make the
904 tactics.

905 **I was thinking about... Did you see Het Nieuwsblad at the**
906 **beginning of this year, where Ian Stannard won against Tom**
907 **Boonen and Zdanek Stybar? What went wrong there, how did**
908 **that happen? When you have three guys and the rival team is**
909 **winning with one guy, how does that work.**

910 They weren't calm. You have this unreal situation where there's three out of
911 four in this breakaway. It's unreal for this to happen. And they were so
912 excited, that they just, they wanted it to work. They went with hope, and hope
913 is a horrible teammate. Hope is not a plan. You can't say two plus hope equals

914 four. You can't. Get the other two. And then we can make four. We can't do
915 hope. And that's what they did, they played with hope. "Oh we will get there
916 and then we will figure it out."

917 **Didn't they talk to each other?**

918 Maybe, maybe they just said: fuck it we're gonna go and then we'll figure this
919 out. And instead, what they should have done, with 5km to go, just sat up and
920 say fuck it, we're this good. We'll risk going back. And we catch our breath,
921 we flush our legs out and then we'll attack Stannard. But we'll have to race for
922 the win. And just pulling, Stannard to the finish line is not a plan. You have to
923 have more respect for your abilities and your rival's abilities. You're strong but
924 you're not strong enough to be that stupid.

925 **They just waited it out and hoped for the best?**

926 Yes, they should have just said, with five, six kilometres to go: sit up, catch
927 your breath, relax. If the group from behind catches you, then it doesn't
928 matter because you guys are strong enough to win, but we won't win like this.
929 So it's unfortunate. Because it would be nice to win with all three but we can't
930 so...

931 **Did they have radios? I don't think so... Well it's a WorldTour
932 race so...**

933 I think so, but then it's funny when you read the press and they were mad at
934 Stannard for not pulling...

935 **I mean what can you say when you're Pat Lefevre and you've
936 been around for such a long time... I think he just wanted to
937 protect your riders. Because it was such a stupid move and you
938 just can't admit...**

939 I don't know. If I was Lefevre I'd be mad at my director. That's not being calm.
940 You have to race very... without emotion. Just 100% facts. And if you do that
941 then you're fine. But once you start hoping and wishing, then you're just...
942 And you see that a lot, you see teams race with hope. I don't know. Not for
943 me.

944 **So what's your opinion on radios? You've ridden with them**
945 **personally, but in the team, not much?**

946 Yes I think it's stupid that they're not allowed. For some reason we think: oh
947 well, hearing the race radio is exciting, and having more information, bike on
948 cameras is exciting. And we would see more things. So only in some way we
949 allow technology and the other way we don't. Its so stupid. That's like saying
950 we're going to play a baseball game, or football game, and we're gonna take
951 the score sheet down. Because if the players don't know the score, then
952 maybe the game's more exciting, or if they forget the score, only very smart
953 players will remember the score all the time. If you want to make racing
954 exciting and create chaos in the pack, then have no rider allowed with a
955 fucking bike computer. Because then nobody's sure how many kilometres
956 they've done. No "one kilometre to go" – sign, nothing. If you want to make
957 racing chaotic, then there you go. So it' bullshit to say a little bit of information
958 is good but not all information. You're playing games. You're wishful thinking.
959 People just don't want to accept that road racing almost always is pretty
960 boring. If you want to make racing exciting, then make it shorter, with climbs
961 closer to the finish and... I don't know... In crosswinds all day. But
962 unfortunately that's not the very real world. And it's always under this think
963 being more masculine. It's more masculine. "Oh do you need to race with the
964 radio? You can't do it yourself?" It's this challenge. The UCI agrees that
965 directors need information because they put race radios in everybody's care.
966 The commissaires have radios so they can talk to each other. So the only
967 people that are not allowed to have radios are the people actually racing the
968 bikes.

969 **I don't know if it was a very experienced rider but do you believe**
970 **that it can be counterproductive, to always have a guy yelling in**
971 **your ear, who is not up front at the race himself?**

972 Sure, there were times as a rider when I would take the earpiece out because
973 they were talking about something that didn't matter to me. But I was in
974 control of that, not the organisation. You have the power. I remember that
975 time when Vaughters was my director, he would talk one time – I swear –

976 without breaking for 15 minutes. It was just... so much information. I remember
977 riders telling him to shut up on the radio.

978 **What was it about? What was he saying?**

979 Just about the stage, and what's gonna happen... "If you look to your right you
980 see this and then this will happen and that will happen"... In the meantime
981 you're racing and slamming against people... If you want to make racing
982 exciting, there are other ways to do it. But just the ability to tell my rider that
983 there's a truck on the road, that somebody's crashed on the descent... these
984 things are infinitely more important than anybody who is spectating the race
985 from home, thinking that they know what cycling is. But I am there and the
986 race radio tells us, that there's a truck on the road with one kilometre ahead.
987 But not the riders. So I think it's just bullshit that I can't tell my riders that so
988 that everybody who won't take credit for the rule did it. I'm going to be the
989 guy who has to clean up his riders from the road. Three weekends in a row I
990 had to pick riders up. That's me, not them. If you want to make racing exciting
991 just put everybody on one gear and choose what gear to ride...make races six
992 men rosters so you can't have three dedicated domestiques. There's so many
993 ways.

994 **Even as a division three DS you're voting for having smaller
995 teams and rosters?**

996 Year it would boost salary because now good riders are at a premium, it
997 would make racing more exciting because now you have two guys just
998 dedicated to riding 120 kilometres as a two man team trial. Nobody can go to
999 sleep, everybody has to race from kilometre zero. It would make racing a lot
1000 harder, a lot more exciting, unpredictable. Right now if QuickStep gets into
1001 problems they have three guys to go in the front and just ride as hard as they
1002 can. But that's not going to be the case now, that's a lot better racing. Every
1003 move is dangerous

1004 **You see a lot of time teams who would just bring a lot of riders,
1005 very talented riders, but they are just being used for the one GC
1006 guy, they can't ever ride for their own. There are different
1007 stages, but they still have to shelter their team leader. And you**

1008 **don't see any results from them. Even today, I kind of expected**
1009 **Ian Stannard to do something but all he did was to stick with**
1010 **Froome...**

1011 If the rosters were smaller, they would have to choose between a guy like
1012 Leopold or Stannard. Today Leopold has a day off. "Stay out of trouble, we
1013 need you for the mountains." As soon as the first big split happens, go into
1014 the second split and try to make the race as easy as you possibly can. Do not
1015 worry about making the front group. But now, as you have a smaller roster, he
1016 can't do that.

1017 **I kind of met Leopold König when he was at NetApp, and you**
1018 **can't blame him for taking the big cheque, but he will never be**
1019 **able to race for a top 10 GC in a Grand Tour anymore while he's**
1020 **at Sky. And that was his freedom at NetApp.**

1021 Maybe if Porte leaves. He got seventh at the Giro, didn't he?

1022 **Yes and also Vuelta, seventh...**

1023 Maybe that's his number; if Froome crashes he gets seventh at the Tour.

1024 Lucky number seven.

1025 **Getting back to your career a bit. How did you get to Saeco, how**
1026 **did they find you?**

1027 I did the Junior World Championships, in Verona in 1999. And that was when
1028 they had the Junior and the Pros together - I think they still do that. Or the
1029 under 23 at least. And I attacked with two laps to go and got caught with a
1030 half lap to go. And one of the directors there saw it. We got out after the race
1031 and got really drunk.... And I came back at midnight and the USA cycling
1032 coach was there and said "Mike this Italian guy wants to talk to you". And I
1033 was like "yeah sure!" And I just said yes to everything. "Do you want to race in
1034 Italy?" And I was like "yes!" "Do you know the team Seaco?" And I'm like "yes
1035 of course!". "I'll be in touch, I'll call you. Give me your phone number." So I
1036 gave him my phone number. Never thought about it. And it was December
1037 and I was over at my house. Danny Pate was with me and we were playing
1038 video games. And we must have been playing video games probably all day.
1039 He would come over at eleven, we would ride for two or three hours and then

1040 we'd be done riding and we'd be playing video games still in our chamois. We
1041 wouldn't even change. We'd be playing until nine at night. And he called when
1042 I was playing video games, "Do you still want to come to Italy?" And I was like
1043 "yeah sure." "Okay we don't want to get you homesick when you're over there
1044 and we need two Americans. So if you have like a friend who wants to do it
1045 too..." And I just said: "Danny do you want to go with Saeco." Danny said:
1046 "Yeah, cool, let's just do that!". So when everybody tells me how hard it is to
1047 get a ProTour contract... Sometimes it's not that hard. Sometimes being an
1048 American on a European team with an American bike sponsor has its
1049 advantages because you can be the token American.

1050 **I don't know if it's still so easy...**

1051 It's not that easy anymore, now with the Internet you can just find people, you
1052 know better. You can track somebody. But it was 1989, 99. You couldn't just
1053 put my name into Google and find every results, or find the best American.
1054 You saw an American at the World Championships and he looked pretty good
1055 and he was excited to come to Italy so he just said, "fuck it".

1056 **Everyone nowadays has agents. Even the NeoPro at Garmin, he's**
1057 **21 I think and he has an agent, that's how he got to Garmin.**
1058 **That's what I heard in interviews, everybody has an agent now.**

1059 I have had a couple riders with agents and I don't really talk to them. It's not
1060 like we have a lot of money. We're a division three team, there's nothing
1061 below us. If you can go to another division two team you should just go.
1062 There's a reason I have access to you. It's because you need us. There's not a
1063 lot of discussion or a lot of debate. I need a rider like you and you need a team
1064 like us. There's not a lot of discussion.

1065 **Because my thesis is about communication and I already heard**
1066 **there wasn't much communication going on in Italy? How did**
1067 **things even work?**

1068 I don't really remember. I remember Claudio Corti would show up maybe
1069 like... because we didn't have bank accounts. And he said: don't worry it's not
1070 a problem. If I make you go get a bank account then you have to file for taxes,
1071 then I have to pay taxes... It's better you don't have a bank account. So once

1072 every two or three weeks, Claudio Corti would show up with a bunch of
1073 money, in Lira, so it'd look like you're getting paid a million dollars. These bags
1074 of cookies, really big bags, grocery store bags, I don't know if he had a deal on
1075 them or what. Every time he' show up with three bags of cookies. Which for
1076 an Italian director was rare because they were always so particular about your
1077 diet. So we'd see Corti every two or thee weeks. We'd get a phone call two
1078 days or one day before a race and he'd say "you're coming to a race? I'll be
1079 out in front of your apartment at this time." And then the team car would get
1080 you to the race and that's it.

1081 **And you didn't talk to the DS' much, no tactics, you just knew**
1082 **what to do?**

1083 They were so fast and you're so young.. The races were so fast. Fuck, what
1084 could I do? They'd just give you a number.

1085 **You didn't have any contract negotiations...**

1086 There was never a money amount. Like "we're going to pay you this much
1087 money." It was just...

1088 **You never signed anything?**

1089 I may have signed something. But I don't remember. But I was 19, I didn't care
1090 at that time. There was nothing keeping me attached to home. I couldn't text
1091 my friends or go to Facebook. So when I was over there, you were on a
1092 different planet. It was fine, I didn't care. For me it was, not vacation, but it
1093 was a trip. I wanted to go race bikes. All people would say was that, Italy and
1094 France are the best places in the world to race bikes and now I'm in Italy, you
1095 know, on Mario Cipollini's team. This is pretty cool, I don't care.

1096 **Was there anyone showing you the ropes? Was there any contact**
1097 **to other riders except for the ones you were living with?**

1098 No but you know I didn't ask either. When I was younger I was so cocky and
1099 confident, I thought I knew everything. I never asked a single question. I think
1100 I was 27 years old before I asked a single question. I believed I knew
1101 everything.

1102 **Did you go there 2 years or just one?**

1103 Just one.

1104 **How did it go from there?**

1105 I went to a smaller American team for a couple of years. But I did a lot of stuff
1106 with the national team too in Belgium, so I would go back and forth between
1107 the small division three team and then the national team. I would do two or
1108 three trips to Europe a year with the national team and then two or three
1109 months on the American team. It was good, I liked it. It was perfect, exactly
1110 what I wanted.

1111 **And then you got a contract from Postal?**

1112 Yes it was my last year as an under 23 rider and I got sick in the winter because
1113 I knew it was my last year. My friend Danny won the world under 23
1114 championships and I felt I was just as good as him in the time trial and Danny
1115 won it so I have to win it. We would always push each other: he wins
1116 something so I would have to win something. The other one would have to do
1117 it. Before Strava, we have climbs in Colorado Springs and we would call each
1118 other with our new time: "Okay this is the time now motherfucker." You know,
1119 and you'd get so amped up and you'd just go attack the climb. We were
1120 always so competitive with that. So I trained so hard that winter, and I got too
1121 skinny. I fucked myself up. I couldn't race for two or three months, then I came
1122 back and there was this rush job for the World Championships. I did okay, I
1123 got fifth in the time trial and then at the last second, Postal offered me a
1124 contract.

1125 **How did that go, did they just call you?**

1126 I got this email from Johan, saying that he was interested and I didn't believe
1127 that it was really from Johan. It was just really the most boring email ever. It's
1128 johan@johanbruynel.com. And I thought for sure this is my friend fucking
1129 with me. I was calling everyone for a job and I couldn't get a job with any
1130 American team. Had no options. And then I have one option and it's at the
1131 time the biggest team in the world, this can't be right. So I responded as if it
1132 was my friend "yeah Johan that'd be great, call me anytime." No emotion,
1133 something where my friend couldn't really laugh at me. So then I was in New
1134 Mexico training, and Johan said "On this day I'll let you know". And that whole

1135 day I was so... shitting my pants. So nervous. And of course he doesn't email
1136 that day. It as a day or two later when finally he said: "Okay we'll do this." So
1137 yeah, that was it. No negotiation, "this is how much we have to offer." Fine, I
1138 don't care.

1139 **Communication-wise, how was it back then, I don't think they did**
1140 **a lot of PR. Did they have some press officer?**

1141 They did but everything was about Lance. That whole thing was about Lance.
1142 For a young American it was a great team to be on. I think typically young
1143 Americans don't have a grasp on the European cycling culture, we have the
1144 American cycling culture and it's really different. So they still have time to
1145 teach you I guess. And as I said before I never asked a question until I was 27.
1146 It's not all their fault, some of it is my fault too, because I didn't have the
1147 humility or ability to humble and say "I need some help, I don't know what I'm
1148 doing. How do I be better." I never asked anybody "How do I be better."
1149 Because I didn't want them to think I was weak. But obviously I was.

1150 **How do you think it progressed over the years, there are a lot of**
1151 **teams working with a press officer and having a PR team... From**
1152 **your perspective, was there any visible change going on with**
1153 **Facebook coming up?**

1154 I think they have to generate so much more content now, there's so much
1155 noise, that to be heard you have to create something that's clearly better.
1156 Which is hard. Or you just make more noise. And whoever makes the most
1157 noise wins. Orica, they don't make a lot of noise but they have this one special
1158 thing with the video, that's regular and clearly better than anybody else's. But
1159 that's a hard thing to do because you have to find someone who doesn't want
1160 to be home, who likes to travel, and you have to find the money to pay them.
1161 And they have the skills and the eye for that.

1162 **I haven't seen it in a while, there was this one guy who did it, and**
1163 **he did everything...**

1164 He's doing it at the Tour again. I think he's doing less, because he was doing
1165 so much before. So now he does the big races now. So I think there's more

1166 noise and more demands on the rider I think. Now you have to... It's not over
1167 when the race is over. You have to create an idea of who you are.

1168 **They're always sticking a camera in someone's face... Even in the**
1169 **bus or in the hotel, you always have a camera around you.**

1170 Even if you don't, if your team doesn't do that and you say "I don't want to be
1171 on Twitter, I don't want to be on Facebook." Then people don't know anything
1172 about you, you don't have any fan support.

1173 **You think that plays a role, I mean not in your division, but**
1174 **popularity of a rider...**

1175 I think for getting sponsors, yes. Sponsor say "what riders do you have," and if
1176 they're riders they know, or have an idea of their personality, they like their
1177 personality, yes, for sure.