

## The National Championships:

The time trial was Thursday in Augusta, GA. I will cover that later.

Yesterday was the criterium national championships held in downtown Augusta on a classic four corner, old school downtown course. As you would expect for GA in June, it was hot. We had a full team but no super fast finisher so we needed a plan if we were going to win. There were 160 riders registered for a race on a course that was just over a kilometer long. These are the kinds of races that show me how far we have come as a team since our training camp in Georgia in the spring. Most teams look to their fastest finisher for their chance at a respectable result for a race like this. I care less about the result than how we race as a team so that gave the team some freedom to try to mix it up. If we lose it, we lose but I wanted the field to know we were there and it was a good chance for us to practice some team riding.

The start is important in a race like this since the field can get so long, instantly that there is the chance you get pulled as the field splits under the pressure, pace and heat at the front. By the time it settles down as much as half the field can be asked to withdraw so they are not lapped. We survived the opening laps in tact but lost two of our youngest riders due to heat related sickness by the half way mark.

The plan was to let the field and all those who wanted to impress parents, girlfriends and sponsors race themselves out before halfway without us. We were not going to let them ride away to any big gap but we were willing to let them have their day, at least for a little while. The race played out as expected. One's and two's would get ten seconds, sit for a while, cook and come back on their own. In the second half we would start to test them. Thomas, Paul, Austin and Colin "shared equally the duties of monitoring the front but the pace was fast enough that nothing was going to stay for long.

Even though I know nothing was going to stay away we had a plan to try to get one of the guys away late. When you go late, the sprinters don't want to chase since there would not be enough time to recover for the finish. Sometimes it works and since I didn't have a field sprinter on the team this year, we needed to do something to try to win. I had spoke to Thomas about trying to go with a few laps to go. He is fast and tough, I learned that in France this spring, so that was the plan. We had Colin and Paul who would cover anything that tried to go after Thomas. Colin and Paul can both win from a small group so it came down to that, if Thomas' move didn't work, Paul and Colin would try and we at least went down swinging.

With about five laps to go Thomas took off. One rider, probably the tallest rider in the field tagged along with the smallest rider in the field and we had played our cards. With two to go they were still away by about fifteen seconds when another rider joined and they were three. When you look at Thomas, your first thought is not, "That one there, he's a sprinter." Thomas is, maybe 119 lbs soaking wet but there is an athletic hardness in him that I see but was hoping the others had not. At the bell for the final lap the gap was the same so unless they started messing around, the three of them would be sprinting for the win. That is at least what they thought going into turn one and two.

Going into the first two turns Thomas was sitting third wheel. As they approached the second turn Thomas went on the inside. You hear the term, "he dove into the turn", well, from what I'm told Thomas dove like a bat after a mosquito into turn two and had a gap. Thomas later told me in his recap of the race that he sprinted for the third turn like it was the finish line. He figured, rightly so, that if he made it there clear, that he could win. The other two chased but did not close on Thomas so they began thinking about who was going to get the silver. The second they did that, Thomas had won. Thomas breezed through the last two turns and the final four hundred meters unchallenged to win his first national championship.

Once the team was sure Thomas would stay clear to the line, the team went about the business of trying to win the field sprint for fourth. Paul led out Colin who missed the fourth spot by about five inches netting fifth and our second podium spot of the race.

We had one of our young guys, Jonny Brown, younger brother of long time team member and Trek LiveStrong rider Nate Brown earn a fourth place in the younger junior race earlier in the day. Jake King,

younger brother of Hot Tubes alumni and Radio Shack rider Ben King placed in the middle of the bunch in the 15/16 race. These younger guys are here to learn. not all that come to us are front of the packers right away. They race, they lose, sometimes they win but every race they learn how true champions are made, one at a time, one team at a time.