

Fitchburg was somewhat uneventful. The format changed a little having the time trial on day three instead of day one. This made the race wide open. Lawson won all of the sprint points so he is in the green jersey. Anders was attacking all day but the layout of the course and junior gears meant that getting away and staying away would be next to impossible.

In the end it was an up hill bunch sprint that was won by someone I don't know. Ben Gabardi, our team mate from last season, finished second which I called before the last lap. I told his Mom he was going to be either first or second.

Saturday is the big mountain day and we have a plan. I'll let you know how it works out.

Thanks for reading,

Toby

Today was the mountain stage and usually the decider for this race. It may not be this year but it was a good indicator of who has form and who is faking it. The plan was simple, Austin and Anders were to try to get away early, get some time and Lawson was to try to cross the gap once it got to about a minute. They tried but were not successful but their efforts cleared the way for Lawson to go. He went and three guys went with him. It was OK for us but not great. Garmin's top guy was covering it and I didn't want to take him up the road. They got caught and Anders went, this time with three others. Two of the guys with him were not overall contenders but the yellow jersey was in there.

I know, it sounds stupid to take the leader up the road, all it does is increase his lead on some of us. Two things about that, firstly, he's not a note worthy time trialer so we should take big time out of him on Sunday and secondly, his team is weak so if, by some stroke of luck for him, he were able to keep the jersey until Monday, we could probably take some time in the criterium.

Anders should have left the three of them with about 10 km to go. I knew he could solo the rest of the way since he was the strongest in the break but at 10 km to go, he flatted. At this point the field was at about a minute with Garmin doing the chase. Anders got a quick wheel change from SRAM and was back after them. He caught the much slower group and attacked with a kilometer to go. Only the yellow jersey was able to hold his wheel. He was not able to come around Anders in the uphill finish so Anders won. Lawson won the field sprint for fourth nineteen seconds back and that was it.

We have a stage win and two guys, probably the two best time trialers in the race, within seconds of the lead and we have the green points leaders jersey too.

The boys are all back at the house watching the tour and talking a lot of smack about some wiffle ball game later today in the driveway.

No news on Stuee and the Canadian national road race. When I know, you will know.

Thanks for reading,

Toby

The time trial stage is usually where the overall classification is decided. That was the usual case but since the order of stages was changed this year, everything could be different.

We won the mountain road race but not by enough of a margin to make the time trial gains or losses moot. It was going to matter that everyone had a good ride. We started the time trial in second place with Anders only nine seconds out of the lead. Anders is a good time trial rider, having placed second last year at nationals so I was confident he would be in the mix.

Lawson, our time trial monster so far this year was thirty-nine seconds out of the lead and well within striking range. Everyone was, for the most part, within range since most gaps were small. What I didn't know was how good the competition was. The race leader was not at nationals so I didn't know if he was good or not. There were several Garmin guys there as well. I had seen most of them but there was one in particular that I was concerned about. His name is Lachlan Morton and he's an Australian so he did not do our nationals. I had seen him at Redlands in the pro race and knew that he was good; very good.

We had done all we could, the table was set. The team was all there on time, everyone was fed, had fast wheels, now all I could do was wait. First off were our twin McCormack boys, Cameron and Brendan. They are fifteen years old and doing their first race with the team's older guys. Also doing his first race in the team kit is Nate Brown's younger brother, little Jonny. He's thirteen and not new to Fitchburg having made the trip to watch for the last five years with his Dad. They were here to learn and have some fun. They posted solid times so could guess what the fastest times were going to be. Again, nothing I could do but watch and wait.

First off for the older ones for us was Austin followed by Lawson and second to last, Anders. The race leader looked nervous. Gabriella, Dave and I walked to the finish and started noting the finish times. The first fast time was set by Lawson. He was over half a minute faster than anyone so far. He came up to me right after saying he had a bad ride. "I felt terrible today. I felt like I had nothing."

I was OK with Lawson's ride right up until the Garmin super junior came in with the same time, actually, he beat Lawson by .0100 of a second, oh crap.

Anders came in with a time thirty five seconds slower than Lawson so that was good. All that was left was the yellow jersey. The time came and the time went for him to keep the jersey. Anders beat him by forty-five seconds and needed only nine to move ahead. It was close. I needed to start doing the math. As I did, it was closer than I thought.

Here is how close it is. The Garmin rider is in the lead by .0100 of a second on both Lawson and Anders. Fourth place is the former yellow jersey, twenty nine seconds back so it's a three way tie for the lead with a criterium with time bonus sprints in the morning.

In all the years of this race, there has never been a tie by three with one stage to go. I'll let you know what we do.

Thanks for reading,

Toby

Today was the criterium. Most teams that have never done Fitchburg take the criterium lightly, why not, it's only fifteen miles and at 8:00AM, how hard can it be? Those that have done it before know, it's hard. We were sure going to try to make hard, we needed to.

I knew that Lawson was going to be the most marked man in the race. Everyone knew he was strong and a great time trial rider. For us to win we needed to either finish first, second or third in a field sprint beating the Garmin rider and earning the time bonus's that come with it or the more likely thing was to get away. We do that every year and it was what was expected.

As expected, it was fast from the gun. My friend Sam, new to running a junior team, was trying to anticipate what we might do. I had told him the day before that I didn't mind helping them out at all but we could do nothing together, at least if it was decided or discussed beforehand. The team and I discuss this in depth at training camp and before this race.

There is a fine line between helping your friends and cheating. In this case, it's called collusion and it's not legal or fair but it happens all the time and is UN-enforceable. I think it's just plain wrong and won't do it, ever, even if it means we lose. You can make a deal once the race starts and the break happens, "you work in the break, I get time for the GC and I'll give you the stage win." That, you can do but to decide it before the start is the line, thin as it is but you can't cross it. You can tell someone your general attitude to the race or that you will be very aggressive but not who, what or when.

I told Sam that his idea of watching the move go and sending his strongest guy to it was probably not going to work. I told him "if he lost two or three minutes to Lawson or Anders in the time trial at nationals, it was unlikely that he would have the strength to get across once the gap formed. If you want to be in the move, it's better to be there beforehand and let it form with you there." That is what they did.

From the gun Ben Wolf, their best chance in the stage, was off like a shot. The problem for him, though, was that we were not. It was not our plan to go so early since everyone can go fast for a few laps. Ben stayed out there for three or four laps and then found his

way back in the bunch. We went shortly after that. First it was Anders, being covered by a Garmin guy and a couple of others.

I think the Garmin guys thought it would discourage Anders or Lawson if they covered and sat on them. It doesn't. You see, all we needed was one second so if they won, so what? As long as it was not the race leader, we win the overall and that was what we wanted. Nothing lasted even though we tried hard. Anders would get away for a lap, Lawson would too but nobody would work with us which worked out for the Garmin man. I looked like a field sprint but I was still confident.

Lawson is just plain strong and Fitchburg is a strong man's finish. It's long and slightly up hill and easy to misjudge. We only needed to be top three with either one and not have the yellow jersey ahead of us which was unlikely. He is a strong rider but not noted as a sprint finisher whereas Lawson finished third at Paris Roubaix and won a road race in Germany this season.

A lone rider attacked with a lap to go and got a gap and nobody chased. I guess everyone thought it was our job. We didn't. They let the natural flow and pace of a last lap keep him within reach. They came into view a long way off and he was still away. As they got closer the announcer started yelling about Lawson this and that but they seem to get it wrong more than right so I waited to see for myself. At the line, the lone rider just held off the field by less than a bike length. Lawson finished second on the stage and won the overall and that was it.

Lawson gave a one armed, mild fist pump and that was the end of the visible celebration. It was over and we won the race overall and third overall. We won the points competition and a stage and I was happy. They were all as excited as Lawson with his taking the win as much as he was. The fans let them all know that they appreciated the early morning drama as well.

We took the team to a well earned breakfast and it was back to the house for bike packing. We were racing the next day in Ireland and flying in five hours so it was going to be a long day.

Ireland the next day, six days, six races and an international field. What a life these guys have, thanks to all of you. I'll let you know how it goes.

Thanks for reading,

Toby