

Herzele Kermesse April 25, 2011

Right after the Trophee race, we drove straight through across France and Belgium the seven hundred kilometers back to our host hotel. We arrived about 3:00 am and unloaded the van. We let the guys sleep until 10:30 and presented the option of doing a bonus race later that day. In Belgium, the day after Easter is called Easter Monday and it's a holiday so there was a lot of racing. Franky told me there was a good Kermesse about twenty-five kilometers from our hotel starting at 3:00. All the guys said they were tired but all wanted to race one more time. Maybe it was unfinished business maybe racing puts off thoughts of going back to school, I don't know but they wanted to race so we race.

The day was again sunny and hot. The course was part of the Tour of Flanders with cobbles and all the trimmings. As we rolled into town I was surprised how big an event it was. There were thousands of spectators there, crowd fencing, big inflatable arches over the road, everything you see in the big races. In Europe there is one race and only one race. If it's pro, it's pro, amateur, then amateur and this was a junior race so everyone was here for this and only this. As we rolled into town we started to get the looks. Maybe it was five identical white Cervelo bikes all with SRAM parts and all the same wheels on the roof, I don't know but something caught their attention. We went to register and saw that the field was ninety riders.

Numbers on, bottles filled the guys lined up and we were ready. Franky brought his bike so he could watch the race from different points. The race was eight laps of ten kilometers, again with a cobbled climb and a strong wind, great. The plan again was to try to split it up early and hard. In this wind you can hurt guys if you know what you are doing. If we could reduce the race to small groups, we could use our team strength to our advantage. For the first couple of laps, it was, for the most part together. We had led with two guys in four, three guys in eight, but these leads were ten to fifteen seconds, nothing substantial until lap four.

Once in a while you have good days as a team where everyone feels good. Today was one of those days. It happened on the cobbled climb but I don't know who started it but coming through to start lap five, there were eighteen riders clear by thirty seconds and we had all five us in it. Usually in this situation everyone will look to us to do all the work, we did, after all have the most riders in the group. The guys made it clear that if everyone didn't ride, we would try to blow the group apart. With Belgian riders, especially in kermesse racing, it's all about how it looks and your result. If you get a result, you get picked for a bigger race with the team abroad. One chance in eighteen was better than going back to the field as a group and trying again so they all rode.

The laps ticked by and Franky was getting nervous. I don't know if he over estimated the Belgian riders or was under estimating us but he wanted it broken up earlier and one of us riding in solo. He told me that we didn't want a sprint from that group as the Belgians are good field sprinters and we would lose. I had no intention of letting it come down to a sprint and neither did the team but I had to let the guys work it out. That's my problem with team radios in the pro bunch. If you have a director constantly yelling in your ear what to do you never learn to think for yourself or as a team, "what do we need to do to win this?"

With one lap to go the pace car came into sight. Four riders away, Yannick and Austin and two Belgians. The remainder of the break was at thirty seconds and the field at a minute. Now all we can do is wait. I sipped a lemonade while Franky sweated. The lead cars came into view on the very long uphill finishing straight and nothing, no riders. Finally one rider came into view. I knew it was us because I could see the bright yellow Mavic shoes from a mile away but I didn't know which one it was. The remaining three were at about twenty seconds with five hundred meters to go so I knew we were going to win again.

At one hundred meters Austin started his arm pumping victory celebration and I say celebration because that's what it was. He was happy and proud to win their race. It was not a "look at me, look at how good I am" show, it was just pure joy coming out. Austin is not the kind of rider that wins many races but he is a reason we win a lot of the races we do. Yannick easily took the sprint for second as the field closed in on his break. Paul won the sprint for fifth with Colin getting eleventh and Thomas, fifteenth and that closed our spring European racing trip.

We had a great dinner after the race with Jonathan Page, alumni 92'-94' and his wife Cori and there three kids as we began to digest the last two weeks. I have never been more impressed or proud of the team we have than I am for this team this year. My sincere thanks to all of you that have helped make this happen for all of us.