

Classica Sarda: 210 km



This will catch us up on racing, as I'm back in Lucca for a while. After the Giro Sardegna ended we stuck around to ice the cake with a hard one day classic. Our director Gallopin told us to expect a full gas start and to race for the breakaway. Last year a group of 25 went to the finish.

After 10 km of neutral, riding beside my friend, Chad Byer, and getting ourselves pumped up for the start, I attacked. He followed. We ripped a group of seven off the line. Small groups began to bridge across. One by one, I recognized the hitters, Nibali, Sagan, Cunego, and many more. "What have I got myself into?" With such talent

in the breakaway, the field began to chase. 22 of us pulled out a lead of 3 minutes. Then we began a shallow 15 km climb.

At first it was hard tempo, then a decreasing time gap indicated a desperate chase from the peloton. Our escape group began a grueling flight. On some switchbacks we saw the chase group. Nibali drifted back from a hard pull. Tongue in spokes, I suffered to hold the wheel. Nose breathing, Nibali took a calm, calculated look at me, as if to say. "Is something the matter?" Yes! This is the 6th day over 100 miles, and you're killing me!

"I made a mistake." To get dropped from the break would put enormous pressure on my team. My roommate, Matthew Busche, also in the break, would be alone and outnumbered. After 120 km, we broke free. We cracked the chasing peloton. The moto official held up a time check. 8 minute lead. A chance to compose myself.

Now we rode to cover distance. On a decent I took off my leg warmers and changed gloves to prepare for the finish, when a bike flipped in the air. Four riders and their bikes clattered down the pavement. Out of respect we waited. Everyone came back OK. Gradually restarting the race with 25 km until the finishing climb, where I assumed the race would be decided, we rode a straight highway downhill. Someone attacked. A group went across. Surely at this speed that is a waste of energy. To me it seemed foolish. But nobody in my group responded and nobody could cross the gap alone (Except eventually, Sagan and Nibali on the climb). 11 riders pulled away.

The rest of us raced to the finish and I came in 13th. Matthew, one of the crashers, was 17th.

A drug test, a shower on the bus, two flights, and a very fast car ride involving a ticket later, I crashed in my Lucca bed.

Of possible interest:

http://velonews.competitor.com/2011/03/news/ben-king-diary-inside-the-team-radioshack-bus-still-a-novelty_162224

Critérium International: 2 days 3 stages by Ben King

Stage 1: 203 km

I was ashamed to face my roommate, Andreas Kloden (2nd in the TDF), but he said, "good job." I said, "no, I was terrible." He said, "Hey, you did your job. It's normal. Anybody who races like you in the beginning is dropped." I received the same encouragement from Gallopin, and during my massage I heard that other riders had said I rode well in support of the team. I didn't feel like quitting the sport anymore. Corsica is mountainous-ups and downs.



Restarting my race season a month after the Giro Sardegna, I had all the same nervous jitters. I followed orders and raced for the break away.

Over the first 3 km climb at 40 km, I found myself in a small group containing 6 time race winner, Jens Voigt and Vinokurov. Our group gained about a minute. We ripped over another climb, and I thought we might last. After 75 km of attacking, however, I realized that other teams wanted to keep RadioShack out of the break. That way they secured our help in chasing any threats. And when a group of six got away just before the tallest mountains, I was the first to start pulling.

Eager to do my job, I lead the chase with three others. A pain in my back steadily worsened until it became an unbearable cramp that soaked up all my power. I remember only three times on the bike when I felt such misery, not physical but emotional. I felt like a wimp. I wanted to cry and punch myself at the same time for being such a girl. I couldn't sustain normal training power.

Jens Voigt attacked a hill. I fell into the caravan. Gallopin drove the first car. I knew he could see me dropping. He pulled up beside me and I said, "I'm cramping." He said, "it's ok, just try to hold the wheel." I sprinted back to the field and couldn't stay. Gallopin drove by without a passing glance.

The rest of the day, 50 km further, I rode with ten guys. The company made it endurable. Struggling in the same group was Olympic gold medalist, David Millar, and TDF star, Jon Gadret. How hard is it just to finish these races?

P.S. Seeking explanation for the abnormal back pain, I had the mechanics recheck my position. It was my first time on this bike. The saddle and bars were significantly wrong.

Pic from breakaway- I'm on the far left beside Vino.