

Team Swift International Race Reports

2016

Race Reports for:

1. Gianni Lamperti at the USA House in Holland
 2. Ben Cook at Tour de l'Abitibi in Canada
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1. Gianni Lamperti's Reports from Holland

7/10 thru 8/1/16
Sittard, Holland

Overall:

This trip is a selection of six junior 15-16 cyclists from across the country. We went over to the Netherlands and stayed for three weeks. Every weekend we raced two Kermesses. A Kermesse is exactly like a circuit race, however in Europe it is a relatively large event. They have bumper cars and many other carnival-like rides for spectators and riders. During the week we usually rode into Germany and spin our legs out to get ready for the weekends. It was a great experience learning how to live and race independently without my team and family.

Gianni's Race Results

32 nd	Place	Dentergem Kermesse
22 nd	Place	Budingen Kermesse
6 th	Place	Kerniel Kermesse
20 th	Place	Dilsen Kermesse
13 th	Place	Tremelo-Baal Kermesse
12 th	Place	Kerkom Kermesse

Day 1

It's my first day in Europe, and the beginning of a new adventure. Today after I flew in and went through customs, I met Billy Innes, the USA Nationals Junior Coach, and the rest of the team. Then, we were picked up by John and were off to the house in Sittard, Holland. It was a long drive but we passed the time by talking and enjoying the Dutch countryside. Once we arrived, we spun after putting our USA-sponsored bikes together. My first ride in Europe was stunning and I'm excited for the next rides and races I have the opportunity of doing. To add to my European racing experience, we all gathered to watch the Tour de France. After a decent dinner of couscous and chicken, we headed to bed early to keep up with the time change we'd all just been exposed to.

At least I did have more than enough time to adjust. A great first day here, and I'm so grateful that my hard work this season has paid off to allow me to race on the international circuit!

Day 2

Just like we'd be doing the next 20 days, we woke up at 8 am and I made myself some scrambled eggs and PB&J. After that hearty meal, the team hung out for a bit before leaving for a 2-hour ride at 10. Not only are the buildings and countryside beautiful, but we were also engulfed in the history of World War II. During our first stop, we came across a propeller from a B-17 that had crashed. Soon after, we took a peek into a Dutch bunker in which the soldiers had stowed away while Germans threatened to bomb the Netherlands. Once we got back, we all showered and went to get the Townie Bikes. After all, we were here to expose ourselves to the culture in addition to racing. They first had to be serviced, so we walked into town and ate lunch at a restaurant on the square. After walking around for a while and grabbing the Townies for a spin, we headed back for dinner. We then came back to the house and played an intense game of poker. The next time we went out to lunch, the winner would be eating for free. I came in second, but just barely. That capped off a fun day with the team and we promptly went to bed at 9:30.

Day 3

Today we woke up in the morning and made eggs and toast before riding a little bit early because the rain was going to be coming in around 10 or 11. The riding is all flat and in the Netherlands you can only ride on bike paths which are everywhere. Every ride we have gone on we have ridden into Germany and the same rules apply there, except they are a little more lenient. About 5 minutes into our ride it started to rain lightly and stayed like that for the rest of the ride. When we got back we all went and washed our bikes because they were all muddy. We made some lunch and were planning on walking into town again. It was raining when we were about to leave so we just hung out at the house for the rest of the afternoon. Tonight we had pasta for dinner that was actually not too bad. We then came back, watched a movie, and then went to bed.

Day 4

As usual, I woke up and made eggs for breakfast. We watched some of yesterday's Tour stage before going out on a recovery ride. The dirt roads that we rode on were muddy and wet, so by the time we had finished the ride, we were all soaked and dirty. On the way back we stopped at the Service Course, where USAC keeps all of their supplies and where the mechanics work. It was a really cool and neat place to observe! When we came back, we hung out for like usual and went to dinner where we ate rice and meat. When we got back from dinner, we went to the girls' house and played some cards and other games to finish off a fun day before heading back to the house to go to bed.

Day 5

This morning when we woke up we heard about the Terror attack in Nice. It is scary because it is a lot closer to me now than it is when I am home. We were shocked by the news and sent our thoughts out to those affected by the tragedy. Despite that, we still went on our ride and did a pre-race ride: practicing lead-outs. Once we got back, we just hung out for the rest of the day. I cleaned up my room, and got my stuff ready to race, because we were leaving at 10 in the morning tomorrow. The cook made hamburgers and potatoes for dinner, so I ate one burger and several potatoes. I then got to sleep around 9:30 so I would be ready for tomorrow.

Day 6

32nd Place Dentergem Kermesse Juniors 15-16

Today when we woke up, we heard about part of the Turkish military trying to overthrow Turkey, and they all got shot down. It was sad news following another tragedy yesterday, but I still focused on preparing for the race. I had scrambled eggs in a wrap and then waited and relaxed during the two hour drive to the race. Once we got there we went to registration and then came back to the van to get ready to go. We got all our stuff together and rode a pre-race lap on the short, technical course. When we got back everyone was lined up so we went to the back.

It was my first kermesse! My captain back home, Ben, had given me plenty of advice about the racing in Europe from his experience last year, and I've heard a lot from other people. Just like the rumors, it was fast and fun. When the race started it took me 300m to get clipped in but once I did I was way at the back. I started to move up, but it was going pretty fast and there were already groups getting dropped around me. I kept moving past them knowing I had to move up. I got to the front by the end of the second lap and soon my teammate, Jake, attacked and bridged to three guys up the road and it became a group of 7. They got a pretty big gap and on the next lap, Kyle, another teammate, initiated a small group that bridged all the way up in a lap and a half. I didn't make either of these and it was now getting hard for me to stay towards the front. Once I got there again, I covered a few moves and sat towards the front. Nobody was doing anything on the last lap so we ended up slowing down a lot on the last lap. Coming into the second to last corner, about 600m out, I was third wheel behind a two man lead out. They were not going fast enough to hold off the rest of the field and this is where I should have jumped, but I did not and learned from that mistake. The field came from both sides and swallowed me up. I finished in the middle of the field in 32nd place, but I learned a lot about racing here and will use what I learned to do better tomorrow. One of the many things I learned was that the other racers yell a lot to try to get to your head, but when it comes to down to actually doing what they say, they get scared and won't do it.

Once we got back in the car we stopped at the gas station and got something to drink. It took us about 2 hours to get home and when we did get here the Axeon guys were here. We went to dinner and ate good pasta before I helped do all the dishes

because it was my turn again tonight and then we came back to the house and I did all my stuff to get ready for tomorrow. Today was awesome and I am really excited to race tomorrow.

Day 7

22nd Place Budingen Kermesse Juniors 15-16

Since we weren't racing until 3, I was able to sleep in a little. I made the usual egg sandwich and prepped all of my stuff before we headed off to our second race. The drive was shorter and I had a quick 10-minute power nap.

When we got there, we registered then rode a lap before lining up as we did yesterday. After all the craziness I ended up third row. It started out pretty fast for the first lap and I was right there at the front. It stayed pretty consistent for the first laps. On the second lap a kid attacked and nobody chased. I then bridged by myself and eventually made my way to him. When I got there we stayed away for the rest of the lap and then got caught. When I got back there were a few counters, but I stayed close to the front. There were small attacks but it stayed pretty smooth and fast for a few more laps. The faster it was, the safer it was. I chased a few more moves on lap seven and then all the sudden I was at the back going as hard as I could. It stayed like this for two laps. I started moving up slowly and was at the front again at 3 to go. Coming out of the first corner someone attacked and got a gap. We slowed down, and the gap opened up. Coming into the last lap there were a few attacks but the field almost stopped when we got to about 2 km to go. I was on the left and the field was all the way across the road. At about 300m out, I was on the front and I felt everybody passing me on the right and I knew if I did not jump, I would get boxed in just like the last race. So I jumped. I got passed by a lot of people but still ended up 22nd. It was a good day and I believe that even though I did not place, I am truly learning a lot by doing these races.

I took a shower when we got back and then waited about 30 minutes before we went to dinner. I was lucky that I had made two sandwiches and put them in the van for the way home, because everyone else was hungry when we got back. At dinner, I was really hungry so I ate a ton of pasta and then we came back and went to bed. I had a good day!

Day 8

Today we woke up a little late because we were scheduled to only ride to the coffee shop and back home. We ended up riding for about an hour, then on to the coffee. Billy kindly bought everyone coffee and I got a refreshing smoothie since I don't drink coffee. After sitting there for a while and taking in the typical European plaza atmosphere, we rode back home and passed a burger place that was supposed to be really good. Not only are the burgers here amazing, but they're also super popular. After a shower, we rode back into town and found an old pizza place. We all split some pizza, rode to the store, and then home. We were in the mood for some "water pong" so we bought some ping pong balls and played for hours until we grew hungry. We

were off to dinner, and today I was again starving and ate a ton. When we got back we watched a movie, then 5 more 17-18 guys and Liam Holowesko all showed up. We all talked for a bit before heading to bed.

Day 9

This morning, we rode into Germany and found an impressive castle that was built in the 12th century. On the way back we stopped at a German Bakery that was extremely good. I wish I could have brought some home! I made some lunch when we arrived home and we played some more water pong. I went into town a little later and got some sparkling water, because I think it's nice to have after racing and I was in dire need to get out of the house. It was incredibly hot today, with temperatures reaching 90 degrees. Tomorrow it is supposed to rain and be 93 at the same time, so compared to that, the weather hasn't been bad. Once again we played more water pong after burgers for dinner. We had a pretty relaxed day, but a good day overall.

Day 10

Today, we were going to ride about two and a half hours and see a castle on the way. We followed along the course for the Worlds TTT when it was here. It had about 100 turns in it and must have been crazy to race on a TT bike and with teammates. When we arrived at the castle, we took some pictures and then headed back towards Sittard. When we got back it was ridiculously hot out so everyone wasn't too motivated to go out much. We sat around for a while before I decided to go to the store to get some fresh air. When I came back, we watched the finish of the Tour, and subsequently went to dinner. Before bed, we watched the movie, "Road to Roubaix" that presented the history of the race and provided an insight into the difficulties and successes of the race.

Day 11

After waking up and making breakfast, Team Swift alum and a friend of mine, Tyler Williams, walked in! I didn't know he was coming and I was stoked to see a familiar face. We talked for a bit and then I got ready to ride. Billy was riding with the 17-18 kids and we were just going on a recovery ride. We rode to a bakery in Germany that was about 15 minutes into our ride and then rode to another coffee shop downtown. Everyone, except for my teammate Kyle and I, went to the store, so the two of us rode back to the house to see if Tyler had his bike. He did not yet so we just rode through the city. We rode for about 30 minutes then found our way back. It was pretty fun and it was nice to talk to Kyle and get to know him more. When we got back we hung out for a while and ate some lunch. Later in the afternoon, Kyle and I took the townies into the city and we got some water and juice. He got a haircut and I walked around to the different stores for awhile. With his fresh haircut, we came back to the house where I read for a bit before we went to dinner. We were to have sushi, which is supposedly a chef's special. The sushi was amazing. When we came back we watched a movie then went to bed.

Day 12

At 10, we went on a ride after a muesli breakfast, and Tyler came with us. We did openers to get ready for the race tomorrow. Tyler critiqued our sprinting, and gave us two thumbs up! We rode to a small road in Germany that is perfect for short sprints. We found a little circuit, and then rode home. When we got back I made some eggs for lunch, then we hung out for pretty much the rest of the day. For dinner, we went out to a pizza restaurant that was awesome. When we got home it was almost 9 so I got my stuff done then went straight to bed.

Day 13

6th Place Kerniel Kermesse Juniors 15-16

This morning when I woke up at 7, I made an egg sandwich as a pre-race meal. At 8, I spun with two other guys since we did not leave until 1:30. We rode to Fitland, the local professional soccer team's stadium which was a unique experience. We then rode into town to a coffee shop. We relaxed there for a while, then came back to get ready. I made myself a sandwich for when the race was finished. I already had my bag packed and my bike clean, so I did some reading and started my Driver's Ed course. When we got to the race, it was blue sky and clear. We walked to registration and suddenly we were drenched in a downpour. Our race started at 4 and it rained until 3:30, but luckily stopped before our race. I spun around for a while, and then managed to get a spot in the front row.

The race went hard off the gun but started on a downhill slope, so everyone was spun out. The first lap was steady and I stayed at the front so I could see the course. The course had two climbs: a relatively short one and another that was at least a kilometer in length. The Belgians would go super hard up the climb every time, but slow down over the top. On the second lap Kyle attacked over the first climb and stayed away until about 200 meters before the prime at the sprint point on the 3rd lap. We approached the sprint line and I started my sprint. I just barely missed the 10-Euro prime by a bike throw.

It slowed down for a few minutes then went hard over the climbs like almost every lap. At 4 to go Kyle attacked and got caught at the perfect time and Liam countered. He stayed away for a lap then got caught on the downhill. At three to go there was another sprint and once again I just missed it. Coming into the final lap I was towards the front and at the bottom of the descent someone attacked but nobody followed him. The whole field sat up and he got a big gap. I sat behind a teammate and was on the right side. Bad move. I got swarmed at the bottom of the final climb. Luckily, it was going slow enough that I was able to hop onto the sidewalk on the right side and moved up to the front. When the front jumped, I waited as long as I could to jump and passed a few people and started to make a lot of ground in the last 100 meters. I had a great sprint and was really happy with my 6th and could not wait to go race tomorrow. Additionally, my teammate, Isaac, was able to pull off a 3rd!

Day 14

20th Place Dilsen Kermesse Juniors 15-16

We had another race today, the Dilsen Kermesse. We didn't leave until noon, so after making an egg sandwich, I went and cleaned my bike then watched some TV with the guys before we packed up the van. It was an hour drive and when we got there we went to registration and got our numbers. When we came back, we rolled around and warmed up a little before the start. People started lining up 20 minutes early. I rolled around the finishing straight and arrived about 20 seconds before our start.

For the first part of the race, I started moving up through people and trying to get to the front. I got to the front by halfway through the second lap. The course was about 4k and was all flat. It was pretty much a long crit. Once I got to the front I stayed there for a few laps before my teammate Isaac attacked. He got caught after about a kilometer and Kyle countered. His solid gap began to open up. People started to attempt to bridge, so I was there to cover them. The problem was that people were attacking everywhere so I had to choose what to chase, but if I let more than one go then they would work Isaac over. When he finally got caught after 3 laps, I was also toast. I tried to stay in the front as much as I could but fell towards the back when it got fast again. Then the bell rung for the last lap and I tried to get as many places as possible. Liam had just attacked so it slowed up a little and he had a gap. He held it all the way to the line and won! I finished mid field, although the camera must have broke because everybody officially got 6th place besides Liam. It was a solid race; I did not place well but rode a smart and effective race.

We rode home and took the ferry across the river. Once we had to cross the second river, the bridge was closed so we rode down the river for a while before we found another way to cross. And then we flatted. Twice. After taking some time to fix them, we finally got home and went to dinner before getting to bed early.

Day 15

Today when I woke up, I made some oatmeal then got ready to ride. We rode a little early, at 9, because we were planning on going to Maastricht around noon. We rode to the service course and around a bit more to make it a one-hour spin. Afterwards, we headed for town on the townies. When we got there we locked them up at the train station and then hopped on a train to Maastricht. Maastricht was a magnificent city, so we walked around and encountered a different culture. It is an old city with classic architecture, cool street shops, and a very pretty landscape. We came home around 5:30 to eat dinner, and eventually went to bed. Today was excellent and very fun!

Day 16

I woke up a little later than usual ate breakfast and went on a ride. There were 5 of us riding and we were planning on 1 or 2 hours. We rode to Valkenburg and the climb that we planning on riding was closed so instead we road up a dirt road to the top and went back into town for coffee and crepes. As we were leaving, two others wanted

to ride a couple hours more. I decided that it would not hurt to do a longer ride. We went into Belgium, got lost, and had a blast doing so. We got back 3 hours later, but it was a fun and adventurous ride. Then we hung out until it was time for dinner and had the regular salad and rice with meat. Later we watched a movie then headed to bed.

Day 17

Today we made breakfast then went out to ride at 10. We rode into Germany and did some zone 3. On the way back we stopped at the usual coffee shop and I got a muffin. I made some pasta for lunch, and later we went into town and shopped for a little bit before heading back for dinner. The day went quickly and I took some time to read and reflect on my experience so far as my trip nears the end. I also checked in with my family and friends before heading to bed.

Day 18

In the morning, the guys decided that they would go into town first on the townies then go ride. I knew that if I rode earlier, I would have an hour that I could read, stay focused, and prepare for tomorrow's race. I went towards Belgium then into town and saw the others at the coffee shop. I met up with them and we all rode home. They went out again but I stayed to read my book before they got back. We went into town again around 4 after Kenny Boots showed up. We hung out, talked about our experiences at nationals (which we had all raced in Kentucky this year) and decided we would come back for dinner a bit later. We had tacos and then watched some television before packing up for the race.

Day 19

13th Place Tremelo-Baal Kermesse Juniors 15-16

Winding down to my second to last day here, I was really excited to race today. I ate some eggs for breakfast then headed to get all my stuff ready. We waited until 11:30 for departure. After registration, pinning our numbers, and gearing up, we rolled around to warm up a little and went to the start line per usual. I started at the back again and it started pretty slow so it made it a little harder to move up because everyone was spread across the road. Within the first kilometer, however, I found myself at the front. Attacks started to go and the race increased in speed. At one point, I was in a break with two other teammates, but we were pulled back shortly. As we hit the crosswind section, my teammate Hunter was able to get into a break of 6. Their gap increased until they were 30 seconds in front.

With three to go, I was towards the front and attacked over the finish of the lap, and got a little gap. I was able to stay away for about 30 seconds before they caught up to me. On the last lap in the crosswind, both my teammate Isaac and I were in good position. Kyle wasn't feeling the sprint so he came to the front and went hard until 500m to the finish. That helped keep us in position so that no one was able to come around us. I unleashed my sprint a little too early and ended up in 13th. As I was crossing the finish, I heard the sound of bars hitting the barrier. Someone had come

too close to the barriers, and relative to me, he was way too close for comfort. He flew into the air next to me, and landed on his face. It was a terrible sight at the end of a race and he was eventually hospitalized.

We rolled back to the van and watched one lap of the junior's 17-18 race before leaving to go back to Sittard. When we got back, we ate dinner and hung out with the 17-18s when they got back. Bjorn Larson who rides for Holowesko Citadel won solo for the second time in a row, which was great to hear, and we listened as he recalled his race. We recovered and I prepared myself for my last day of racing.

Day 20

12th Place Kerkom Kermesse Juniors 15-16

Today being my last day, I was really excited to race. I had heard the course was really good and has cobbles and brutal crosswinds. To make it more interesting, it was supposed to rain. My teammate Liam Flanagan was going to do a stage race in northern Netherlands, so he was not coming to race. When I got there it was pretty good weather for racing, but looked like it was definitely going to rain later. Once we got registered and I put on my gear, we did a lap on the course. When we were done, we lined up with 60 other guys.

The first lap was tempo and on the second lap I attacked to make it harder. I was caught and Liam (Holowesko) countered and brought one kid with him. They were off the front for about 3 laps, and then got caught right before the crosswind section. I slowed down for a lap and then three kids got up the road and not one of us was in it. I attacked and attempted to bridge but made it about halfway before being caught. I was on the front, though, to bring down the gap as much as I could. Kyle came up next to me and said, "I've got a flat, dude! I'll pull for as long as I can." He pulled hard until he was on his rim when he had to drop back. The next lap in the same spot, Liam attacked again over the top of the hill and got a little gap. He held it into the corner and opened it up some more. Everybody then sat up and it kept opening up. We cruised until about 1k to go and I went to the back of the 17-man group and attacked. With my momentum, I got a gap but got caught right before going into the cobbles. In kermesses, everybody rides the sidewalk to the right side of the cobbles. I was second wheel into it and my teammate Hunter passed me on the right side and had a gap with the one other kid in front of me. Coming out of the last corner into the finishing cobble climb he got caught in between the cobbles and the sidewalk and went way wide. I went to the right side of a kid that was going faster than me at the time. I had to brake when I had no place to go, so there was nothing I could do to prevent being passed. I was bummed that I got boxed in but was still happy with my result and how aggressively I raced. We had a really great last day of racing! It was one of the most fun races I have done and I really hope I get the opportunity to do it next year.

When we got back to the house I went and washed my bike super quick, before going and enjoying my last dinner and heading into town with the guys. We took some cool pictures, but every store was closed. We came back to the house and hung around for quite a while before heading to bed for an early flight. This was such a good

experience for me to be able to go and race over here. I learned a ton in the first races and was able to use those lessons to get me a great result with 6th at the Kerniel Kermesse. I raced aggressively and pushed the limits of my body and mind. I really hope I can come back and develop even more next year.

Day 21

In the morning I woke up early at 5 and made some breakfast before leaving for Amsterdam at 5:30. I said bye to everyone and they took off at the same time for Brussels. It took us an hour and a half to get to the airport exit, but then another hour to get to the curbside drop off. When I got there I got through everything as fast as I could then grabbed two slices of pizza and ran to my gate while eating my pizza. My plane was already boarded when I got there and I barely made it on. The plane ride was 11 hours but I slept in a few 3-hour stents so it felt really short. It was a great trip and I hope the opportunity arises again.

-Gianni Lamperti

2. Ben Cook's Reports from the Tour de l'Abitibi

7/19-24/16

Rouyn-Noranda, Canada

Ben Cook

Racing Age 17, Category 2

Ben Cooks Tour de l'Abitibi Results:

Stage 1- 56th

Stage 2- 31st

Stage 3- 79th

Stage 4- 39th

Stage 5- 91st

Stage 6- 58th

Stage 7- 45th

Overall- 71st

Stage 1

It was a perfect day at the start of the Tour de l'Abitibi Desjardins; a 6 day junior stage race held in Rouyn-Noranda, a lake town north of Montreal. Our first stage started late, at 4:45 in the afternoon, and we would be racing 115km, or about 70 miles from Amos back to our host town of Rouyn, where we would race the last 15km around three laps of an in town circuit. My teammates and I lined up near the front, our team

being ranked 9th out of 25 teams in the starting order. My 5 teammates were Nathan, Charlie, Max, Maximilian (nicknamed Maxl), and Eben. Each of us had various strengths and weaknesses, but we all complimented each other and made a strong team. The president of the race made her announcements in French and then English, the mayor came to speak, and then we were counted down to the start.

"Cinq, quatre, trois, deux, une!" and with a bang of the gun our race was off! 150 riders rolled through the streets of Amos. We would begin the 115km race with a 2km neutral start. One of the things our Director, who we called coach Mark, taught us was that the race was on even in the neutral. One could make up or lose lots of position in the first 2 kilometers. I watched my sides as riders became aggressive and started moving up, and a few riders were even caught on the wrong side of the first roundabout. I kept my cool and located my Nathan and Maxl nearby. When the flag dropped and the race started I was in the top 50. I held my position as Charlie and Max rode further up in the field.

We were about 20km into the race. The goal for today was simple; stay safe, get a feel for the race, and try our best in the finish. I was just thinking that I should start moving up, when suddenly I heard braking and crunching as a massive crash opened up in front of me. I barely missed it as I flung to the right, when Nathan came flying along my left shoulder, accidentally bumping into me to stay upright. Well, I was correct, it was time to move up!

So I made my way into the top 30, just in time for the crosswind section we had talked about earlier. I pushed into the front line around the top 20 and stayed there for a while, but I soon realized that there was little threat of crosswinds after nothing had gone and stayed away. The next 50k were steady and flat, I got a feel for the race and calmed myself down more and more as the day went on. I was on bottle duty today, so I went back to the car and grabbed a bottle for Maxl and me. I made the mistake of asking who needed water and only getting water for those who requested it, instead of getting bottles for everybody. I came back to the field and gave Maxl his bottle, then moved back up to the front again.

As we neared the finishing circuits the road rolled upwards, and I moved myself into the top 30 again. I hit the circuits in the top 20, and soon realized just how hard and fast the pace was. I experimented with different sides of the field, trying to see which would help me move up the best, but couldn't find comfort anywhere. I slid back some places on the last lap, but gave it everything in the finish and ended up placing in the top 50 riders, a place I was happy with. Eben finished a few places ahead of me, and Max finished strong with a 14th place. Our mechanic, Bush, met us with chocolate milk at the finish. We all rolled back inside the school and got showered.

That night we talked about our ups and downs throughout the stage, what we noticed, how we felt, etc. With Eben, Max, and I being the top three finishers of the race, we would be protected riders for the next day in order to hold our team GC, and therefore our team car position in the caravan. I had a great first day at l'Abitibi, and really enjoyed getting to race with some of the best riders in the world and learn new things.

Stage 2

On the 2nd day of the Tour our team planned to protect myself, Eben, and Max, in order to hold our team GC position for the time trial tomorrow. Since the time trial course was too narrow for a car to fit on, the lower 15 teams had to give their mechanic up for the day to be a neutral mechanic, and every team had to donate wheels and a bike to any rider who may need it on course. Our team was sitting 9th out of 25 teams in GC, and we really didn't want to lose Bush for the time trial, so we had our work cut out for us on stage two!

Today we would be racing 116km, the race's longest stage, from Val d'Or to Rouyn. The course was very similar to yesterdays; in fact the last 50km were the same exact route as the previous day. Today was slightly warmer and we all felt more comfortable in the field than the day before.

As soon as the neutral ended, the race picked up. Winds were at 10-12mph coming directly from our left for the first 70km. A small group of 10 riders broke off the front in the first strong crosswind section, too fast for any of our team to react, but it came back quickly when the wind died down. We all took it as a sign that we should be at the front and represented in these moves. About 30k in the wind picked up as we headed uphill on a false flat, and I started to worry about a split. I moved myself into the top 20 and brought Eben up with me, where we met the rest of the team. Before I could blink an eye, I looked down the road to see all six French national team riders on the front echeloning, and the pace picked up. We spun out of our junior gears as we hung in the top 20, and at times the top 15 as the French tried to break away. The next 10k were brutally fast as my teammates and I hung on to every split we could. At one point about 30 of us were away, and I'm pretty sure that our entire team was represented!

After the crosswinds died down the race continued to surprise us. At about 80k, while I was stuck in a crack, I was greeted with the pleasant sound of a hissing and a rattling coming from my rear wheel. I put my right hand up and moved to the side of the field, Maxl dropped back with me. I tried to stay on the field but couldn't hang in on my flat tire, and pulled to the right. Our car came screaming up, Bush jumped out, Maxl reminded me to take a breath, and before I knew it I was off and in the caravan. The number one thing Mark taught us about flat tires was not to panic. Maxl, being a big and strong rider, was the perfect friend to have at my side. He helped me get to around car 15, and from there we worked together back into the field, moving left when the cars went uphill. At one point I accidentally dropped Maxl when I pulled around him, but he caught back onto the bumper behind me, and I knew that if I spent too much time looking back, I could end up hitting the car in front of me. We both made it back to the field eventually, him only a few seconds after me. I found it interesting the various forms of help I received while chasing back on in the caravan. When I jumped onto car 6, a national team car, the driver floored it on Maxl and I, and we were left helpless in the wind. However, the driver of another US composite team, Stingray Development, was very encouraging and helped us almost all the way back to the field.

Once I was back in and the stage had settled down, I managed to notice Charlie off the front with a group of four other riders. He was coming back right before a KOM hill, so I put myself in a position to counter. At the base of the hill a US rider attacked and I covered it. Other riders came with us and we had a small gap at the top of the climb! Charlie yelled for me to go as we rode by, cheering me on. It was so cool knowing this whole time that we were at one of the biggest races in the world, and I was able to follow moves when it mattered. We ended up coming back on the downhill, but the experience of chasing a big attack and being strong enough to do it was thrilling.

The finish of today's stage was nearly identical to yesterday's, except Charlie was involved in a crash, which took some of the spirit out of all of us. I entered the circuits a little bit further back this time, and used the rest I got to move up on the last lap, as Max did yesterday. Today I finished in the top 30, and was the team's top finisher! After the stage we regrouped again, had our recovery and got showered. That night we talked about the plans for tomorrow. We would have a double day, with a time trial in the morning and a short road race in the afternoon. Unfortunately, when most of the field has pack times, your finishing position matters for GC. Which meant that at the end of stage two, our team dropped to 11th place in GC, and we lost Bush for the time trial. As an added bonus, our road race called for rain, lots of rain.

Stage 3

Today I would have the chance to experience for the first time a UCI time trial. Every morning for the last three days we had ridden the course to make sure that we knew every turn perfectly. A majority of the course was on a bike path, making it a very technical 9.6km race. Despite not having Bush, my spirits were high for the time trial. I was fortunate enough to borrow a trainer from one of the other teams, and Bush set up my road bike with my aero bars and carbon wheels the night before. It was great having a mechanic at the race for us. As Coach Mark said, we no longer owned our bikes; we were just borrowing them from Bush for the week. He was an amazing mechanic, and our bikes were perfect everyday.

So after a good warm up I rolled over to the start 15 minutes early, as planned. My bike passed the UCI check (it was a road bike, so it wasn't too hard) and rollout, then I lined up at the start. Coach Mark reminded me not to start out too hard and to go have a good time. The official counted me down from 5, and I rolled down the start ramp and up the first hill.

I started off at a fast and hard pace, but not enough to blow myself up. I kept an eye on my power and heartrate as the race went on. After the first hill there was a very sharp right hander onto the road, where a motor ref pulled out in front of me to guide me through the technical course. It was a bit distracting, but Charlie did warn me about it and it didn't bother me too much.

I took the tight turns on the bike path as fast as I could without overshooting them. This was nothing like a time trial back home! The end of the course had a few more tight turns and a small hill. I powered up the hill as hard as I could, and could hear Bush standing on the road screaming for me to go all in. I came into the finish as

hard as I could, but was confused by two of the lines on the road, and thought the finish was about 50 meters before it actually was. Luckily it was on a downhill and didn't cost me more than a few seconds.

I showered, had some Clif Bar recovery mix to get ready for the afternoon stage, and returned to the room. I had a lot of fun in my first UCI time trial, and it was really cool to learn how to ride such a technical race, and how that changes pacing and tactics throughout the race.

Stage 4

Rain flooded our eyes, thunder rang our eardrums, and lightning shivered our spines as we drove out in what could be considered a flood for stage four. The whole bus full of riders was scared of what was to come, but it was comforting to know we were all in the same boat. We would be racing a 50km road race that started and ended in Malartic today, and we would be eating and showering in town.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the fourth stage of the Tour de l'Abitibi Desjardins" said the race director on the start line. For the first time all week, the entire field applauded and cheered, more excited than ever. The reality was we were shivering, scared, and soaked to the bone in the dumping rain. As the director counted down, I gripped my bars tightly, only to find my hands still slipping off.

Today's race would be fast and hard, and if there was a crosswind, our team would have to be represented in the split. The first 10km were all about survival in today's stage. We had a few tight turns and a treacherous wooden bridge to cross, with planks running parallel to our wheels, a deathtrap in the dumping rain and low light. Of course, to my luck, the rider in front of me dropped his water bottle, causing me to bunny hop on the wooden bridge, in the rain, in the dark.

After I survived the first 10k, the weather chilled even further as I made my way into the top 20. Our race was only 50k today, thankfully, so I was hoping to move up and stay there. However, the wind and rain persisted, and I couldn't stay in the single file line of 15 riders for more than a few minutes. Thankfully, with no major splits happening, there was no need too. I found Eben and Max in the top 40 with me as well, and we rode the rest of the race nearby. In the finish Eben and I were nearby each other and tried to move to the front, but I lost his wheel about 4k out. We both came in towards the tail end of our group for 39th and 42nd, with a split happening behind us.

After finally showering and eating in Malartic, we hopped on the buses for Rouyn. We were really thankful that there were no major crashes today, as the big teams had made a point to keep the race fast and safe from the gun. I was personally happy with how I raced in the rain, that typically being one of my weaknesses. I was also happy to learn how tactics and race strategy changes in the rain, as today's race was less about GC as it was about staying safe and leaving it for a field sprint.

Stage 5

I'll start off by saying that of all the stages, stage five of the Tour de l'Abitibi will be the one that I remember the most. After making it through the time trial and

following stage, we had three riders in the top 40, and were looking good to move up. We would be racing a 109km loop in Notre-Dame du Nord today that was supposed to be brutally hot, windy, and exposed. We had a big check in the night before, and discussed how everybody was feeling, and how everybody wanted to tackle the next day. The consensus was the same all around; we wanted to race harder and try more and more moves. So coach Mark came up with a plan for us. Every year that this stage has been done in coach Mark's time, four times in the last ten years now, a breakaway has gone at 36k and stayed away until at least 45k, taking both of the money sprints at 38 and 43km with it. The attack was made at the same place every time, immediately after a bridge at 36km in. Our plan was to have Max be the first to attempt the break, then if he came back Maxl would jump, then finally Charlie. If nobody was initiating the move, it would be our job to go for it and attack. The other three of us would be saved for later in the race, where we would try our hand at any break away that looked promising. We were all nervous but excited to try out hand and really race.

Things rolled smoothly for the first 20k, until suddenly a massive pile up mid field caught Nathan, Eben, and I up. I found Eben and began to wait for him to get on his bike so that we could chase together, but Nathan told me that I had to get on my bike and go as soon as I could. I jumped in a big group and we chased back into the group over the next 15km. It was painful and slow, but I came back just in time to see Max returning to the field at around 40k, meaning he could have gotten the first sprint. Maxl made his move at about 300m from the second sprint, but lost it a little before the line. I took my time to recover and move up in the field, which was now strung out and moving quickly. The heat picked up and I began drinking more and more water about 60k in. We were fortunate to have John's team, the other Flagstaff selection team, in the one and only feedzone for us. I took a bottle from Sergejs, one of my roommates at our camp in Arizona.

Once I ate and drank some I was beginning to feel better so I went towards the front of the field. The French and US National teams were both making attempts to break away, so I decided to go with some of the moves to see what I could do. I was feeling strong and in the top 10, when we hit a large climb, basically unheard of here at l'Abitibi, about 1k in length. I knew of the climb beforehand, but it didn't make things any easier. I drifted out of the top 10 and towards the back of the field as I could feel myself cracking. I survived the climb just fine, but later on the flats I found myself tail gunning and in lots of pain. It wasn't like me to sit at the back of the field, but I needed to take some time to rest and recover before moving to the front again. One thing I noticed as I moved back is that I couldn't find any of my teammates. I was thirsty, and needed Charlie for water, but he was nowhere to be found. I knew that if I fell off the back, Maxl would be there to help pull me back in. But there was nobody. I finally made the poor choice of going back to the car for a bottle myself, feeling that I would need it for the remainder of the race. The moment that I popped off the back of the group to go to the car, the wind slapped me in the face and pulled me further and further away from the group.

"What happened to everybody?" I yelled over the wind to coach Mark in the car.

"Just go!" He yelled as I he pushed me off towards the back of the group, but it was already too late. I hopped onto a bumper and tried to sit in. I remembered coach Mark asking us the night before how badly we wanted to prove ourselves today. How badly we wanted to race hard today and how much we would go through to stick into the group if we needed too. I was spinning out of gears as hung onto a random car in front of me. It wasn't the amount of pain that I was in that was killing me, but the time. It had been four days. 2 hours today specifically, and to quote my teammate Luke from San Dimas, I was going so hard I was cross eyed. I hung in with everything I had, but car after car I slid backwards. Finally I slid off the back of the group, but didn't stop going as hard as I could. It was a lost cause. The referee told me that I was out of the caravan. I passed random riders. I was lost on open Canadian roads. Fans cheered confusedly. I look down the open road and pedaled onwards for the next 15km alone or with small groups of other riders.

I was with 4 other riders, when suddenly I heard a noise coming from behind me. I knew that there was a car behind us; maybe that was what I was hearing. Finally, I was greeted with the screaming sound of Bush hanging out the window, yelling for me to catch on. Before I knew what was happening I was riding the bumper of Mark's car with four of my other teammates at 35 miles per hour. The last 10k went by in the blink of an eye. The most painful blink I've ever taken, by the way. I rolled onto the grass to find Maxl, Max, and Charlie, who were on the bumper with me, all either passed out or panting on the ground. I joined them. We all knew exactly why we went off the back today; because we wanted to. We told ourselves that we would risk it and go race, and we did. We got the money sprint, and as Mark said that night, many other team directors noticed and complimented us at the directors meeting that night. We tried our hardest and paid the price for it, but that was racing sometimes. None of us wanted to leave this race feeling that we hadn't raced hard enough, and today made us all sure that that wouldn't happen. And somehow, we all finished.

Stage 6

After a brutal stage 5, today's goal was to survive. That was it. We were the last team car, we were the lowest on GC, and we just needed to make it to the finish line. We would be racing a 100km loop that started and ended in Rouyn, ending with three finishing circuits around town.

Right off the neutral start, I looked up the road to see a large group of about 20 riders leaving us behind. I thought about jumping up to it, but soon remembered the goal today, and didn't want to blow up early. The group left us as the gap opened up. The US national team made frequent attacks that Max and I tried our hand in, maybe to bridge to the group, but nothing stuck away. It was strange race, and I counted all six US riders in our field. Finally, I asked one of them how many riders they had in the break, partly to be sure that they didn't have one, and also to encourage them to chase. "We have six." he said. "Sorry, I meant how many riders do you have in the break up the road, not here." I tried again. "Yea, six." he responded. One of us was

being played here, because he either thought I was dumb, or didn't care about losing the leader's jersey that day.

The race carried on and I sat in and drank lots of water and ate lots of food. The pace was fast and hard at times, but I mainly felt strong and stuck in the front of the group. Finally I asked Max if he had seen Nathan, since I hadn't seen him since the start of the race. He answered that Nathan was up the road. What!?! I couldn't believe it. The kid who rode a broken bike the whole race yesterday was now up the road and had a shot at winning the race. I was more than excited.

Knowing that Nathan was up the road took a lot of pressure off of my shoulders, and I finished with the group in the top 50 again. After the race we learned that Nathan had gotten 9th place, and we were all incredibly happy. Tomorrow was the last day, we were ready to go out and give it everything one last time. At this point, only five of the original 25 teams had all six riders with them, and we had managed to be one of them. Tomorrow we would give it everything we had!

Stage 7

Today was our last day of the Tour, and we were all excited to go out there and give it one more shot. Our team was one of the last five teams to have all of our remaining riders, a real accomplishment after 6 days of racing. Today's stage started in Saint-Germaine and raced 50km back to Rouyn, and then we faced 12 brutal circuits of our typical finishing course. I lined up near my teammates Nathan and Maxl. On the start line the rain started pouring down, unexpectedly, as the weather didn't show it raining for another few hours.

The neutral was easy, and I was in about 40th wheel or so. I looked down the road just a few kilometers in to see a break containing a US rider, a Danish rider, and a few others rolling. I really wanted to get up there and give a try to jump, but I was too far back and I risked getting shelled, which Coach Mark didn't want for the day. The goal was for all of our team to finish.

The rest of the stage was slower than previous days, making it dangerous in the rain. Our team sat in, and when it came time for the final circuits I noticed Charlie off the front. That's right, we were here to race. I moved up and found Nathan in the top 30 as well. The first few laps of the circuits were painful, mainly due to Charlie's awesome attacking. With about six laps to go I saw Nathan come up the left side of the field and decided to follow him. In one more lap I was at the front, and we were both in the top 10. Yes, there were other riders off the front which made our race easier, but it was still a lot of fun. We traded covering moves from some of the national teams and making some attacks ourselves, it was a blast.

The last lap came around and I was in the top 10. I felt strong and wanted to go for the sprint, when suddenly a Japanese national team rider came around my right side and I decided to go with him. However, I soon found myself at the front at around 700m to go. The field jumped and swarmed around me, I tried sprinting back in but had nothing for it. That was the place I needed to be. I finished with the group, having a great day with Nathan and Charlie, and was happy that the rest of my

teammates stayed safe and finished. We met for chocolate milk one last time and celebrated.

After thoughts

In the end, I had an amazing experience racing the Tour de l'Abitibi, and would love to come back next year. I learned what it is like to race against some of the best riders in the world, their racing tactics and their mentalities. I was really fortunate to have a great group of teammates that were respectful and cared about each other. If there is one thing I wish I could try next year, it would be racing not more aggressive, but smarter. Many of the moves that rolled, especially on the last two stages, were in my reach, and I would've loved to try to go for them, or be in the front when they happened. Other than that, I feel that I learned so much and had a great week in Abitibi. If they're reading this, a big thanks goes out to coach Mark and Bush for all of their awesome support along the way, and to the other Flagstaff team for racing strong and being great sportsman on and off the road.

-Ben