



# quiet storm

LEVI LEIPHEIMER

LEVI LEIPHEIMER HAS BEEN IN THE UNIQUE POSITION of being on both ends of the Bruyneel system. One riding against Discovery, now riding with. When Armstrong retired it was assumed that he was going to be the new leader of the squad. However a young Spanish phenom named Alberto Contador came to the squad and showed that he was one of the strongest riders in the world. Now in 2009 Leipheimer not only has a current Tour de France champion returning to the team, but also the man with the winningest Tour de France record ever now wearing the Astana colors. With all these strong riders filling out the roster how do you stay motivated to be the leader you feel you deserve to be? Leipheimer sat down with ROAD before the Tour of California to discuss what he does to lead a team to victory and describes how the biggest motivation can be something as simple as a thank you.

**There's a book by Phil Jackson called, "Sacred Hoops." He talks about how Michael Jordan elevated everyone's game**

**on the team. Is that something you try to do?** In a Tour of California or Tour de France I know I'm going there to win and do my best and preferably to win. I believe I have a chance and I work really hard to try and show that to the rest of the team. I'm taking it seriously and worked as hard as I can. We have to do it as a team and I need their support. It goes both ways. There are races that I would not have won without the team. And then I'm happy to help other people win races, like last year at the Vuelta or Giro. For example at training camp I've tried to show that I'm serious and I do my job the best I can by taking the training seriously. I tried to set an example so that everyone knows that it takes a lot of hard work to win the race.

**Do you have a mentor role as well?** I do, but not with everyone on the team. There are certain people on the team like Jani who is easy to mentor because he is young and super motivated and works as hard as everyone else. You can see that he has a lot of motivation and is very eager. He has more

enthusiasm than what his body is capable of right now. Sometimes he goes out and destroys himself. And this is someone you want to help because you see that. I consider myself a mentor for Scott (Nydam, BMC) and I enjoy helping him out. That's the same thing. He is super motivated and works really hard. Right now that exceeds his physical capacity. My philosophy is that the body will follow the mind so as long as he that level of enthusiasm and motivation the body will catch up.

**How does that mentorship play out? What do you do?** It's little things like offering advice. If you see someone like Jani making a mistake you can point it out to him to do it differently. Also more importantly is to tell someone when they have done a great job. Jani is a hard worker and will bust his ass at the front. Like last year at the Tour of California. He pulled half the race and never complained. You have to show your gratitude and tell them what a great job they've done. You need to tell them that there's no way I would've won without them. When you do that it will come back to because you may be on the other side of that some day.

**Looking back was there someone that mentored you through the ranks.** I've had people along the way, but I don't think I could name one person. I always seem to remember the other people, the people who told me I couldn't do it. They are the one's that probably motivated me.

**Do you tap into that?** It has given the perspective. Good perspective in the way that I wasn't the most genetically gifted. Obviously I have some good genes and some talent, but I don't think I am that one-in-a-million specimens like Lance Armstrong. So it has given me some perspective to work harder than anyone else to be able to compete. Maybe that's not true and I'm just as talented as they are, but I think my number one attribute or gift is how hard I work.

**That sounds like there is a twinge of self-doubt. You don't think you're the strongest guy out there so you need to make up for it by working harder?** I don't think it's self-doubt. Maybe in the beginning of my career, which is normal. At this point I don't have that at all. I'm 35 years old and I'm pretty confident when I go to a race. Of course I'm not going to show up for race like the Tour of California and say, 'This is over. Just give me the jersey now!' I'm not that confident! I'm confident that I worked harder than anyone else over the winter and if I do things correctly I should be able to win the race.

**When in your career did you become more confident in yourself?** It's not one date, it's little by little.

## SOMETHING YOU NEED TO KNOW.

*Levi was a competitive skier from age 12-19, Early on cycling was used to train for downhill ski racing. He turned pro in 1997, and rode for Saturn in 1998 and 1999.*

**It wasn't when you joined the Postal Service team or a certain team?** No. There are different levels of confidence. In 1997 I showed up at a race like Cascade and I was confident I could win the time trial there. But I wasn't confident then that I could go on and get third in the Tour de France and win a stage. It is step by step and that is what I think is something I can pass on to someone like Jani or Scott. I just work hard my whole career perfecting the craft and the process of training and getting stronger physically and getting stronger mentally. That's where I am now from all those years of hard work.

**What do you do to mentally train?** From all those years of taking it step by step and learning things the hard way. I think positively. If you have a negative thought to have to chase it away with a positive thought immediately. I ran into Josh Horowitz who is with the Ultimate Cyclists CD and I was really interested in it. He gave me the CD and I listened to it. It was another positive affirmation of all the things I have learned throughout the years to be confident, think positively and

relax, which is a huge issue. And we started a relationship and I ended up endorsing the CD. I think it is something that can help cyclists.

**Are you working with anyone on the sports psychology side?** That is the one thing that this team is probably the best at. It comes from the staff and from Johan. The environment is very positive for everyone on the team. After the race they are telling everyone good job no matter how the race went, pointing out the good things that happened. No one ever gets down on somebody unless it is blatant for not doing their job. Like the Vuelta for example, the team did fantastic, and the mechanic, and doctors were all super enthusiastic and conveyed that to the riders and to each other. They're working hard, we are working hard and it is a positive environment that feeds itself and that is what this team has which not a lot of other teams have.

**How do you encourage the positive feedback within the team?** A big tour for example, the Vuelta, we had to control from day one because Alberto was a favorite. I was also riding strong and that means there are seven riders instead of eight working for one. Now they're working for two. There's a lot more work on their shoulders. You don't get to see on television the work that a guy like Thomas Vaitkus, Bazayev, or a Muravyev do at the front for hours at a time. They're really suffering! They have the brunt of the work. In the beginning may have to control the race. And once the breakaway is gone they have to keep the break a certain distance and sometimes they have to step on it to bring it back a little bit. Two guys now need to be protected as long as possible in the stage. When those guys are doing that work, you have to tell them on the radio, during the race, and after the race that they're doing awesome. You know it is hard because you can see that they're beat down by the end of the race.



