



# gen. NOW

CHRISTIAN VANDE VELDE

CHRISTIAN VANDE VELDE HAS LABORED UNDER THE SHADOW OF SOME OF THE MOST WELL-KNOWN CYCLISTS. Riding with Postal, Vande Velde rode for Armstrong, helping him take his first Tour de France victory. Following Postal, CSC took a chance with Vande Velde. Under the tutelage of Bjarne Riis, Vande Velde started to come into his own. However with several leaders under the CSC banner, Vande Velde took the bold move and transferred to the Slipstream team, which at the time was not a ProTour licensed team and would have to rely on "wildcard" invitations. With the now re-named Garmin-Slipstream team, Vande Velde had a breakout 2008, including a Pink Jersey at the Giro, fourth place in the Tour de France and overall victory at the Tour of Missouri. Vande Velde is no longer going to be able to ride under the radar, and with the Garmin-Slipstream bolstered with some additional talent, Vande Velde could be the next American to stand on the podium of the Tour de France.

## Chicago must be a tough place to train?

It was made very tough this year. It was the worst winter we ever had. You just have to try to make the best of it. When it was dry I tried to get out for my own psychological well-being, and I did a lot of things in the gym. Some physical therapy and other things I wouldn't be doing if I was riding. Needless to say it was hard.

## Compared to last year where are you with your training?

Obviously Last year I had a great year. I didn't have any injuries at all, and I did a lot of racing and built a great base. I feel great right now. Compared to years past, I don't know where I am. Maybe a little bit behind on the bike, but that comes back pretty quick for me. And with all the gym work I did, it shouldn't take long.

## You had some chronic hip and back problems. Is that taken care of?

No. That will never be taken care of. That is something I work at every morning. I see a lot of doctors and therapists to loosen things up. It's a work in progress for me and for the rest of my life. I've accepted it and realize it will never be perfect. It is something I will always have to look after.

## What was your biggest moment last year?

Having the Pink Jersey at the Giro was a cool moment. That is a moment only two Americans have had. It was a neat thing to happen especially when you don't expect it to happen. We were on the underdogs going into the team time trial. We pulled it off and it was a cool feeling.

## The Giro this year is looking to be the most competitive we've had in years with Lance, Basso, Cunego, and yourself. What are some of the critical stages?

The Giro is crazy. All the stages are critical in the sense that you can't afford to crash. It could be raining, oily roads, and things like that, that make it pretty hectic. And that's just the first week! You have the Dolomites in the first week, and also the team time trial. There is attacking in the first week and it never ceases until the end. We have a very short and intense mountain stage in the third week, and the massive individual time trial too. They're all critical stages for the most part. It's a beautiful race and that's why it's so cool. I just need to stay healthy, stay up right and go fast up the hills and in the time trial.

## Are you looking to win the Giro or are you putting your eggs in the Tour de France basket?

I finished the Giro in the groupetto, more or less, so I'm not going to say I'm going to win the Giro. I was searching for the Pink Jersey a lot in the first week. I put a lot of effort into that. So I will probably more or less do the same thing. I'm not going to force it too hard. We'll see how the form is. It's one of those things that I can't say this early what I am going to do in May. I'm definitely going to give it my all in trying to get the Pink Jersey in the first week.

## Are you getting used to the fact that when you participate in a Grand Tour you will be a contender?

It is something I'm getting used to and Grand Tours do suit me more than I ever thought. I really do enjoy them and racing against the same people is really cool and to see how they change psychologically and physically over the course. Whether or not I'm going to be a contender or not, it's a cool thing and I like it.

## One of my questions was going to be, 'Are you the leader of the team?', but I saw a photo of your image on the team trailer. So you must be the leader.

I guess so. I didn't ask for that.

## That wasn't a provision in your contract?

Yeah, I want my picture on everything [laughing]. No it wasn't on my contract.

## What are you doing to improve on last season?

I'm taking things into my own hands and being a little more proactive about planning. Whether it is the best physical therapist in my area or trainer, those are the steps that I am taking that I haven't taken in years past. I had a very full off-season and I got a lot accomplished even though the weather was horrible in Chicago. I'm still quite fit. I think that's the difference from years past.

## On ESPN.com Jonathan Vaughters was interviewed and he pointed to a photo of you in the 2008 Tour de France. You're tucked behind riders and he says, 'Typical Christian. A little bit hidden, watching, but he's right there.' Is that the same approach you're going to take this year or are you going to be more proactive?

I think it is all a matter of circumstance. If it is right then definitely I will be more proactive, but I don't know if proactive is the correct word. It suggests that I don't have confidence, but I can get ahead of the contenders and can ride faster than them at times.

## Have you done any training psychologically to improve your confidence or is it just a matter of your fourth place and coming into your own?

I have worked with sports therapists for the past year, starting with the training camp from last year. Not all the time, but here and there. They don't work with me a lot.

## You will be one of the favorites for this year's Tour de France, does that make you nervous at all?

I'm trying not to put too much pressure on myself, but that is easier said than done. In the month before the Tour I'll be thinking of things and try not to put unnecessary pressure on myself. That doesn't get you anywhere. As far as the race is concerned, I will come to it in the same physical well-being than I was last year and can do as good if not better.

## Did you think Armstrong's return to the cycling world would create such a huge impact?

Yeah I did. When you see the in-flight entertainment he will pop up, so it's not just in cycling. It's a small world so if you put a household name onto a bike race, you are going to create a beehive like how it was in Australia [Tour Down

Under]. Hopefully it keeps cycling moving. I can't even imagine what it's going to be like at the Tour of California [with Armstrong attending].

## How are you approaching the Amgen Tour of California? Are you just going to ride through it for training?

No, I don't like to ride through any race. The Amgen Tour of California is a great race, a beautiful race. The organizers take great care of us and that is our platform as an American rider. We all want to do well there whether or not you want to admit to it. I've never been outside the top 10, and I was on the podium last year. I'm going to give it a go. Whether or not I go as fast as I did last year remains to be seen.

## You brought on Bradley Wiggins who will obviously be a big help to the team, but the rest of the team seems the same. Is it a case of "If it ain't broke, don't fix it?"

Don't forget about Svein Tuft. He got second in the Worlds [time trial]. That's not too bad. And he has a massive motor. There were a bunch of guys that were hurt last year like Zabriskie who had a broken back, Tom Danielson wasn't on the best form last year and Dan Martin was a little bit too young, so we didn't take him to the Tour. Those are three guys who can go uphill quite well and time trial. I don't even think about who is on the team, but we didn't even use our full team last year. That's how we're thinking of things right now. The team will be great for the team time trial first and foremost. For the Tour de France the team will be bigger and better.

## You have been at training camp for a couple of days, does anyone on the team look like they're going to have a breakout year?

I've been here with Tom Danielson for a week before anyone else. I think a lot of guys are going to have a great year. I think Dave Zabriskie is going to have a great year, and Dan Martin too.

## You have been teammates of Lance Armstrong, Ivan Basso, and Carlos Sastre. Do you see a weakness in any of those riders?

They're all good riders, but there are several weaknesses in every rider. Lance's are yet to be seen. It was 2005 when I last saw him, but he looks good now. Even Basso doesn't have too many weaknesses. They are all obviously great riders and have won Grand Tours, so for me to say they have weaknesses, who am I to say? I haven't won a Grand Tour or stood on the podium, but everyone has a weakness and someone could have a bad day at a Grand Tour. In all honesty there are other riders as well: my ex-teammate Andy Schleck, Alberto Contador, who I rode with in 2004, I hold them in high regard and how they ride.

## I spoke to Bobby Julich several months ago and he thought Sastre could only win once. Do you think he could do it again?

I think he can do it again. Carlos has a lot on his plate this year: he has his own team, being away from Bjarne for the first time in six years and change isn't always as easy as you think. We'll see how he does. I know Carlos really well and I have a lot of respect for him.

## Last year your team was always considered the underdog. Now in any race you line up for you

## will be a contender. How proud are you to be able to say, 'Wow, look at what we've accomplished.'?

It's pretty cool but there's a big difference between a contender and an underdog. In my opinion, it's easy to be the underdog. It's a lot more fun because you're not supposed to do well. If you do well, it is icing on the cake. It's going to be a bit different, that's for sure. We posted a lot of close seconds, thirds and fourths last year, but we didn't win much. Hopefully we can shake that and just take the win.

## You've been using Zipp wheels for four years, what models are you going to be using this year?

When the 1080's came out I rode it around the parking lot, tested it in the wind tunnel and knew it was going to be a great wheel. The new 202's have come a long way. They use to keep those in the trailer only to use on climbing days. Now those wheels are great and can be used for almost everything. They're really fast on the flats and awesome on the climbs. Zipp is great and I don't think there's anyone better as far as the whole line of wheels go. From the flats, to the climbs, to the time trials, they are the best wheels on the market.

## You've been riding the Felt SL since the Tour de France, what are your impressions?

Jim Felt has done an amazing job over there. Compared to where we were this time last year to now, there is an unbelievable difference. Time trial bikes, the aerodynamic road bike [AR] and the regular road bike with the improved stiffness and with the weight taken off, Felt has done an amazing job. It's great to be riding Felt, that's for sure, and they are a bunch of cool guys to deal with too.

## RANDOM BITS OF INFORMATION.

*In the 1999 Tour de France Vande Velde wore the young rider's jersey. Christian rode for Liberty Seguros in 2004 and moved to CSC in 2005.*

*Christian's dad is a member of the United States Cycling Hall of Fame.*



## TWITTERlation

**Do you think your name gave you a tad more cred. in the peloton before you earned it?** Maybe when I was 22 and I wasn't just a Smith or something like that. As of right now I don't think it helps me.

**Do you feel any pressure to be the next big American cyclist?** I don't think of myself as that. I think of myself as the same Christian as I was when I was 12 years old. I just go faster than I did back then.

**How tough is it to compete with the other acronyms at slipstream? JV, DZ, etc.** I'm one up on everyone else. Everyone else has two letters, I have three.

**Red Bull or Red Bull Cola?** Red Bull Cola! That's easy. The guys at Red Bull sent me a care package for Christmas. That's good stuff.

**Tim Johnson wants to know why you keeps your 'cross skills under wraps? He's heard rumors.** My 'cross skills are kept in the Argonne National Laboratory, which is a gated community, so Tim can never get back there and see how fast I really am. When the time is right I will unleash.

**Why didn't you get the Z06 model Corvette?** They did not have the Z06 model in black. I went in and bought it when I was getting an oil change for my other car. It was a pretty random buy. And no, it doesn't reflect my persona too much. I wish I had 450 horsepower under my hood. I think I have almost one on a good day.

**Do you think the competition will be stiffer at this year's Tour de France?** Oh yeah. By a lot with the addition of just one team. But every year you look at people who were in the Tour de France and you always think that the competition is going to be harder. With the addition of Astana it will be a much more competitive Tour.

**Who do you see as your biggest rival at the Tour?** Alberto Contador and Andy Schleck.

**Armstrong is quoted as saying that last year's Tour de France was not that fast. How did it feel to you compared to other years?** I didn't think it was that fast either. It was just different. There wasn't one team that was dominant, riding tempo and flying up the climbs. There were a lot more tactics. We approached the climbs and attacked the daylight out of each other and then stopped and looked at each other, then rode slow and attacked again. A lot of times that is much harder. I would rather ride one hard solid tempo and either blow up or keep on going and attacking and then slow. That was the worst way to go up a climb. So that makes it a bit slower. It gives it a different dynamic. Will it ever be like that again? Maybe not. But that is how it was in 2008. [R]

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Check out: <http://twitter.com/ChristianVDV>

### VANDE VELDE'S TEAMS.

- 98-03 USPS
- 04 Liberty Seguros
- 05-07 CSC
- 08- Garmin-Slipstream

