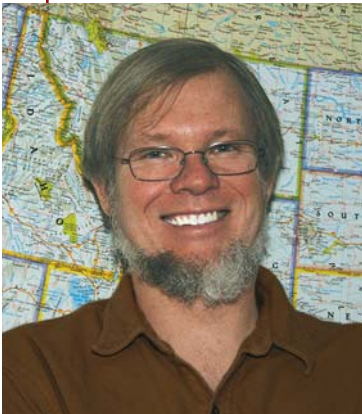


## EDITOR'S LETTER

# Help the Next Generation Win the Race



I don't watch much television. Mostly, it's a waste of time; plus, my couch hurts my back. The main reason I even have cable is to get high-speed Internet access.

Except for 21 nights in July. Then I sit on the couch, back pain be damned, to watch the Tour de France. (The Tour ended three days before I began to write this, and I'm just about able to stand up straight again.)

In July, I make evening social engagements only on the Tour's two rest days. This year, the Tour began on July 5, so I did get to see Fourth of July fireworks. Invite me to a cookout, and I'll come — as long as I can be home by eight, when the coverage of the day's race begins.

Yeah, I know, bicycle racing. Two hundred guys in colorful tights pedaling around France — boring. But then, I don't "get" NASCAR, either.

Surprisingly, though, the two sports have a lot in common. First, we fans all secretly watch for the crashes. (If you think cycling isn't a tough sport, try overshooting a turn at 50 mph while riding down the Alpe d'Huez. Tumble 50 feet down a rocky slope. Crawl back up the rocks, staunch your bleeding while waiting for a replacement bike, then race another 400 miles over the next three days.) Second, absent the crashes, both are dull as dirt unless you know what's going on. Third, even though in each case only one person gets the big trophy, they're team sports.

Neither Lance Armstrong nor Dale Earnhardt

reached the top alone. Both had people behind the scenes working for them, as well as other racers whose job it was not to win, but to protect the guy with the big name. Armstrong generally rode with about eight other world-class cyclists who set him up to win.

Usually, these folks don't get the limelight, so the general public may not be aware they even exist. George Hincapie, for instance, was a steadfast teammate for Armstrong. Of the nearly 150 Tour stages the two rode together, Hincapie won exactly one. Every cycling fan, though, knows his name.

But perhaps more important than their teammates, it's a safe bet that somewhere along the line somebody older helped Armstrong and Earnhardt. It might have been by providing advice or inspiration or a break. There's not a leader in any field who did it alone.

And therein lies my point: We owe a debt to the next generation. Call it improving your karma, call it paying back, call it being a decent human being.

Take a look around: Give that kid who's been bugging you a job, or invest some time in that promising young carpenter on your crew. Sure, he or she might take what you teach and go out on his or her own. So what? That's just the natural order. Odds are there's an old carpenter who remembers you doing the same thing. ❖

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andy Engel".

Andy Engel  
Editor

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