

Tri-State Velo

2002 News Archive

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May 2002

Steve Lehman

The Flight From Hell

Steve Lehman--Team Vice President and Junior Team Manager

Somewhere in between Philadelphia, USA and Majorca, Spain

5/8/02

Each March for the past four years a number of Tri-State Velo teammates and I have gone to Palma de Majorca, Spain for ten days of early season training at the Stephen Roche Camp. This year Tracy Emore, John Capaldo, Rick Hofman, Ron Ruggiero and I decided to add two extra days and use a flight out of Philadelphia to make our "commute" as hassle-free as possible. Our trip over would turn out to be anything but.

Upon arrival at the Philadelphia Airport at 5:00pm on Thursday, March 21 we were informed that our flight was delayed one and a half hours and would depart at 9:30 instead of 8:00pm, as was originally scheduled. This would present no major problem as our connecting flight in Madrid would still be better than an hour after our arrival.

We started to become concerned when 9:30 came and went and we still weren't boarding. Finally, we boarded at 10:30 but after sitting there for nearly an hour the captain informed us that the backup radio was inoperable and we would need to switch planes. We eventually took off in the replacement aircraft at sometime after 12:00am and would miss our connecting flight to Majorca. We were assured that new connection plans would be made and they would have us off to Majorca on the next flight.

Rosa, the airline representative in Madrid gave us tickets on the next available flight with Spanair to Majorca. When we checked in for boarding passes, however, the Spanair ticketing

representative informed us that the flight was oversold and we were issued stand-by passes. We were bumped at the gate.

Back to Rosa. She apologized and said we could go through Barcelona, but would have to take our chances with standby-by tickets there, or the airline would put us up in a local hotel overnight and we would have seats on the 10:00am flight with Iberia Airlines, guaranteed. We asked her about the status of our luggage and she said she would try to find it that evening, but was sure it was still in Madrid. She assured us that unaccompanied luggage would have been pulled from a flight.

We dutifully showed up at the Iberia desk the next morning at 8:00am and were told the flight was oversold, we had no seats and would be given stand-by passes once again. We stood by and got no seats. I believe we were all okay and understandable when we thought we would miss one day at our final destination, because we understand s###t happens. . .BUT TWO DAYS! THAT"S ANOTHER STORY!

Now we had to find the airline's booth in the vast Madrid Airport and inform Rosa that our "guaranteed" connection was not guaranteed. At this point I asked that an airline "advocate" accompany us to the next ticketing desk to assist us in acquiring boarding passes and I was told that was impossible. We were now reduced to being those poor individuals you see in airport terminals who sit on the floor waiting for news of any flight in wrinkled, dirty clothing and a blank stare in their eyes. And according to Rosa, she was unable to track our baggage yet, but thought it may, somehow, already be in Majorca. At any rate, if not, they would get it to us, guaranteed.

The next "solution" was to break up our group into more easily placed individuals. Hey, whatever works. Rick Hofman and I would be routed through the island of Ibeza on Air Europa and on to Majorca by 4:00pm. These tickets were guaranteed once again. Tracy, Ron and John were routed through Barcelona on two different flights, arriving on Majorca at 8:30 and 10:00pm. Rick and I felt bad that we would arrive five hours before them, but at least it looked as if our problem would be solved.

Rick and I arrived at the Air Europa desk and were told that we did not have seats, the flight was oversold and we would have to be given stand-by passes. We joined the other 20 poor souls in our predicament and waited for all the ticketed passengers to board. When all were on the plane the gatekeeper asked Rick and I for our passes. Hotdog! She picked us first! We gave the passes to her, she looked at us, rolled her eyes, handed them back to us and flagged the next two people through. I guess we were numb at this point, as we just turned and headed for the airline "help" desk again.

As we approached the desk and for the first time really started to complain, the attendant stopped us mid-complaint and said he would personally find us a flight and get the boarding passes for us.

We finally boarded the 6:05pm Iberia flight to Barcelona and arrived there in time to see our friends boarding the final leg of their journey.

At 10:30pm we were on our way to Majorca, arriving there at approximately 11:00 pm. Miraculously, our bags had been sent through on the Spanair flight the day before and were waiting for us at Spanair storage in Palma when we arrived. Rick and I arrived at the hotel shortly after 12:00am, Sunday, March 24.

The planned "hassle-free" trip that should have taken about fifteen hours from check in at Philly to check in at our hotel in Majorca, had become a 49 hour odyssey. On the positive side, Marga and Stephen Roche waited at this late hour to greet us. It was great to be back in Spain, despite the harrowing journey.

Just Another Day In Majorca

April 2002

Steve Lehman

Steve Lehman--Team Vice President and Junior Team Manager

Majorca, Spain
2002

Sunday, 31 March 2002 - Circuit du Col de Soller - 125 kilometers

This is always the hardest day. Today's hearty souls attacking this awesome ride were TSV's Tracy "Norma Jean" Emore, (just two months this side of a broken leg), Mike Budjnoski, Rick Hofman, John Capaldo, Ron Ruggiero, and yours truly. Also on the ride were Paul (a friend of Mike's who rode as a professional with the 1970's Raleigh Euro-Pro team), Kim Gaylord (in final preparation for the Tour of Sardinia Stage Race*), Terry Gaylord (Kim's brother-in-law), Primo (a former teammate of Felice Gimondi, and like Cher, he needs no last name), Bruno (another strong Italian with no last name). Today's ride started under bright sun with the temperature at about 13 degrees Celsius or upper 50's Fahrenheit. Though it warmed to the mid 60's, knee warmers, arm warmers and a wind vest were needed for the start and the cool descents.

We began the ride heading toward the Port of Palma and the road was shared with rush hour traffic. We were riding in an urban area but never felt threatened by the motorists. They seemed to understand and appreciate what we were doing. I mean this is heaven. A little over an hour into the ride we were approaching the Col de Soller. This 25 switchback climb gains 470 meters in elevation (1527 feet for the metrically challenged) in nine, seemingly never ending, kilometers. I put down a pretty good tempo on the first 20 switchbacks of this average 5.5% gradient climb with Terry Gaylord firmly attached to my wheel. As anticipated though, Terry attacked at this point and I was only able to stay with him for a short time. He weighs 132 pounds to my 190+ and gravity was not my friend on this side of the mountain. In the last kilometer, however, I was able to bring him back to

within 100 meters. Our group reorganized at the top of this spectacular, sunny climb. This vantage point gave us a breathtaking view of much of the island. After a short reprieve we plunged down the other side on the scary, 50mph+, shady and wet, but fantastic descent into Soller.

We had a very enjoyable coffee break at an outside cafe' on the beach of the beautiful, natural harbor of the Puerto de Soller. The climb out of Soller in the direction of Banyalbufar was probably the toughest of the day. In about 15 kilometers we gained over 650 meters(2100ft) in elevation. It also seemed as if the climb would never end and attacking it with skinny, little Terry didn't help. He's the kind of climber I love to hate. . .50 years old, small but tough as nails and no matter what level of distress he may be experiencing, he won't give up. In fact, it couldn't have been worse is, let's say, Jimmy Fraser were there to torture me. I never felt at an advantage on even the power portions of the climb. I believe he could go with the best pure 50+ climbers in the USA.

On the climb to the Col d'es Tords (4km, 3.5% gradient and a mere 425 ft elevation gain) Terry set tempo ahead of Rick Hofman and me. About halfway up the hill I could no longer hold Rick's wheel. For all my effort today, I had totally destroyed my climbing ability. Rick stuck, however, and went around Terry at the summit. I limped across the summit some minutes back. We regrouped at the top and all attacked the other side. As usual Ron Ruggiero led the way down the fast and dangerous switchbacks and turns of this tricky descent. I threatened him on every curve but couldn't come around. I mean the descents this day were all balls-to-the-wall efforts! Even the Italians who live at the foothills of the Dolomite Mountains, couldn't better Ron and me today.

When we approached the rolling hills heading into Calvia, I figured I would finally get an advantage on Ron. Not this trip. Beyond my own bone-deep fatigue, Ron had exhibited a tenacity such as I had not seen in him before. He suffered just as much as I had all day and yet the closer we "got to the barn" the more vicious his jumps became. Mark my word, he is going to be a definite factor at the races this year. At his hand, or should I say legs, I can't remember suffering as I did that day on the road to Calvia. We both waited there in total exhaustion for the group to reassemble for the last kilometers and the final sprint to Palma Nova.

Terry pushed the pace up the now familiar last hill before the rollout to the sprint. A car passed us just before the crest and Ron, Primo, Rick and I jumped on it. As we entered the final sweeping turn with Palma Nova and the sprint line in sight, this mere motorized vehicle could no longer contain the fury and speed of our effort. We blew past the car on the curve and were in full flight. I came around Rick as we approached the finish and gave Ron a push across the line just to let him know I was there. Rick registered 49.1mph on the sprint. The car finished well off the pace.

Over 2000 meters(6500ft) of climbing, total(almost) exhaustion, and a daredevil, 50mph sprint, this was the best day, yet! Tomorrow we'll have a nice, easy, flat 135km ride on the Circuit du Cabo Blanco. I don't think so. This group never ever does nothin' nice and easy.

Respectfully submitted,
Steve Lehman

*Kim Gaylord went on to finished third among the amateur women at the Tour of Sardinia. . .WAY TO GO, KIM!

JULY RECAP 2002

Dear Teammate and sponsors:

Just a quick note to tell you that the record heat we have been having in the East here has not sapped the strength or spirits of our juniors or pro women's team.

I have attached a full list of results from the recently completed Junior track nationals and congratulations are in order to all of our talented young competitors:

Andy Lakatosh comes home with 4 more National Titles for a career total of 10.

- * 1st in the Men 17-18 Kilo
- * 1st in the Men 17-18 Sprints
- * 1st in the Team Olympic Sprint
- * 1st in the Men 17-18 Kerin

Individual Pursuit Men 17-18:

- * 4th Tucker Brown
- * 10th Andy Tkaczuk

Kerin Men 17-18:

* 4th Tucker Brown
Olympic Sprint Team Men 17-18:

* 7th: Glenn Murray
* Andy Tkaczuk
* Tucker Brown
* Taylor Brown
Points Race Men 17-18:

* 4th Tucker Brown
* 5th Andy Tkaczuk
* 9th Glenn Murray
Scratch Race Junior 17-18:

* 2nd Tucker Brown
* 3rd Andy Tkaczuk
Team Pursuit Men 17-8:

* 2nd Glenn Murray
* Andy Tkaczuk
* Tucker Brown
* Chris Ruhl
Taylor Brown:

* 3rd Scratch Race
* Men 13-14 5th 500m TT
* 2nd Omnium
In the junior women's:

Cindy Lakatosh won all 4 of her races giving her another National Title for Women 13-14 and a career total of 5. But she has the chance at 3 more next week in South Carolina at road nationals.

* 1st in the Women 13-14 Omnium
And check out the women's 15-16 results for our new 1st year rider Laura Kolbe in her first ever track event.

On the pro side of our organization the Amoroso's / Victory / HH Racing Team came off a good showing at Wendy's International and went onto the Superweek series in Wisconsin. Our team won the overall title with Lauren Franges placing first in the overall event behind the incredible support of her teammates. This is the first professional win for our Amoroso's / Victory / HH Racing team and bodes well for the upcoming NYC Cycling

Championships on this coming Sunday. By the way, it will be broadcast live on OLN from 1-4 so set your VCR's.

On the home front in the PA BAR for 2002: TSV has an unassailable points lead in the overall team category:

- * 5 riders in the top ten of the 40+ led by Steve Schneider
- * 5 riders in the top ten of the 50+
- * 3 women in top ten of the Elite women's
- * 4 junior men in the top ten led by Tucker Brown
- * 2 junior women in the top ten
- * 3 women in the top ten of the senior 4's

We continue to excel through the unbelievable efforts of our talented riders, managers, coaches, sponsors and families and friends of Tri-State Velo.

My thanks to you all, continued success and please let's keep safe. Ryan Eiler, Dave Neibauer and Charlie Olmsted are on the mend and will be back racing soon.

Oh, by the way check out Tucker on the podium [USA Cycling Online](#), I love that long sleeve skinsuit.

Ron Ruggiero

UPDATE: JUNE 2002

Dear TSV members, and to all of our wonderful sponsors and friends: I just wanted to get a quick note of thanks to all who made this past weekend such an amazing success.

TSV promoted and ran the First Union Hill Climb, the Lance Armstrong Time Trial and the First Union ABC Bike Challenge. We had record turnout for each event.

We did a team and sponsor promotion at Tandemonium night at the Velodrome on Friday, a successful team dinner at Victory's restaurant on Saturday.

On Sunday the UCI team and the regional team went toe to toe with the world's best in the Liberty Classic and the TSV juniors showed the world what they are made of at the 1st. ever junior PCT Grand Prix.

The results were great...three podiums in front of the worlds media. Lauren Franges retained the under 23 title and Glenn Murray stunned the regions juniors with a win at the PCT Junior Grand Prix. Andy Tkaczuk took third. The only dark spot on the weekend was Ryan Eiler's hard crash in the junior event that resulted in a broken collar bone. He is under Dr. Neal Stansbury's care and will be on the bike again soon.

So, thanks to all of our TSV members who came out to help staff the events this weekend. Special thanks to all of our great sponsors especially Len and Charlie from Amoroso's Baking Co., Bill and Steve from Victory Brewing Co., Gianluca and Conrado from Tri Altir (congratulations to them for their victories with team Navigators at the US Pro and the Housatonic Races), and Mike Tancredi and Neal Stansbury.

Thanks to all the feeders and support people for the race on Sunday and a special thanks to the second hardest working man in bike racing the amazing Mike Tamayo. Last but not least I want to thank our riders who day after day train and race their hearts out in our teams colors.

I am very proud of all of you all and most humble for the way you support your team and organization.

By the way...the picture of Phil, Paul and Bob is from the Housatonic Valley Classic race expo. Wherever you find Victory...you will find them.

Ciao, grazie tutti,
Ron Ruggiero
Pres. Tri-State Velo
Sports Dir. Amoroso's / HH Racing

JULY 2002

What follows is an open letter of thanks to the sponsors of Tri-State Velo. This letter is an expression of our gratitude. We deeply appreciate the support and encouragement you have given Nathan over the last two years.

-Daniel Rouse

Dear Sponsors of Tri-State Velo,

I write to you as the father of Nathan Rouse, a 19-year-old TSV cyclist, who has received your support for the past two years. As a sponsor of Tri-State Velo, you need to know that it has been an honor for Nathan to be able to race against some of the best cyclists in the country. Just this evening we returned from the Tour of Maplewood (NJ) where Nathan placed 4th in the Pro-1-2-3 competing with the likes of Marty Nothstein, Vassilli Davidenko, and Mark Walters. As a Cat 2 rider, Nathan is working his way up the ladder to Cat 1 status. Thanks to your support, he has been able to commit himself to the sport of bicycle racing with effort and real dedication. Last year, as a junior rider, Nathan raced in over 40 road races traveling to at least ten different states. As he moved into his first season of track racing, under the expert guidance of his coach Bob Schuler, he ended the season with four top ten finishes at Junior Nationals in Ft. Lauderdale.

Not only has cycling provided Nathan with a passion in life, it has offered him a challenge to be true to himself and has helped to develop his character as a young man. This opportunity for personal growth has been the most important to us as parents. Last year, he had his share of adversity on the road, more than one crash, a few mechanicals, and a host of other setbacks. He hung in there. Road rash, blown tires, and a bent frame didn't stop him from continuing his commitment to cycling. The fact that he was able to face hardship and then get up and get back on the bike -- on more than one occasion -- is a testament to the fact that competitive cycling is not a walk in the park and that it is a sport that offers ample opportunity for character development.

What has Nathan gained from cycling?

- * passion for something that he cares deeply about
- * determination in defeat
- * humility in winning
- * pride in setting and achieving goals
- * community with those who share a dream

This fall Nathan is headed off to Colorado Springs to attend Colorado College. His hope is that he will be able to continue to train (at high altitudes) over the winter and return for the 2003 season of racing here in Pennsylvania. We look forward to continue seeing him in the red, white and green.

Sincerely,
Daniel Rouse

2002 SEASON

July 2002

Kathy Lakatosh

American Velodrome Challenge

4th of July in Colorado Springs!

Hi! Hope you had a Happy 4th of July - we certainly did. We traveled to Colorado Springs for the holiday so that Andy and Cindy could race in the American Velodrome Challenge on July 4-5 at the 7-Eleven Velodrome. It was very hot there and despite the fact that there weren't any fireworks allowed because of the extreme fire danger, the kids managed to make a few of their own.

Cindy started off the first day by breaking the national record for her age group (Women 13-14) in the 500 meter time trial with a time of 38.58! This lowered the record by almost 2 seconds. Cindy followed up the next morning by breaking the 2K pursuit national record for her age group as well! Her time of 2:52.47 was almost 8 seconds faster than the old time. Two days - two national records - not bad, but Cindy wasn't done yet. In the 200 meter time trial for the sprints, Cindy's time of 12.223 was the 5th fastest of all the women plus it would've qualified her for Jr. Worlds, except for the fact that she's 3 years too young! (Hmmm.....sounds exactly like what Andy did last year!)

Unfortunately, the last session which was scheduled for Friday night was cancelled because of torrential rain. The good news was that Cindy, even though she was the youngest competitor, ended up placing 3rd overall in the

women's sprint omnium - so she was quite happy.(She also placed 6th in the women's endurance omnium.)

Even though Cindy's performance was a tough act to follow, Andy seemed determined to make sure his sister didn't get all the attention. Andy's 200 meter time of 10.8 was the 5th fastest qualifying time for the sprints (and once again beat the Jr. World qualifying time). This was his first time actually racing and doing sprints since breaking his collarbone in May. After riding conservatively (at his parents' request) he still managed to end up 6th overall.

On Friday morning Andy competed in the Kilo. He did a time of 1:06.74 - not only was this a personal best, but it also beat the qualifying time standard in that event for Jr. Worlds so Andy is now qualified for two events (sprints and kilo). It was also the 2nd fastest time overall. Andy also qualified for the keirin semi which ended up being rained out. So, all in all, it was a great trip. We all love Colorado and didn't want to come home. As a matter of fact, Andy didn't. He is staying at the Olympic Training Center for a training camp the next 2 weeks, then he'll fly directly to Indy on 7/21 where we'll meet him for Jr. Nationals. In the meantime, Cindy will be doing her final preparation for Jr. Nationals in T-town as the new holder of 2 national records of her own!

AVC, Colorado Springs (7/4-5/02):

ANDY - 2nd - Kilo (qualified for Jr. Worlds)

3rd - Olympic Sprint

5th - 200m TT (qualified for Jr. Worlds)

6th - Sprints

6th - Men's Sprint Omnium

CINDY - 500m TT (new national record - Women 13-14)

2K Pursuit (new national record - Women 13-14)

200m TT (beat qualifying time for Jr. Worlds)
3rd - Women's Sprint Omnium

Kathy Lakatosh
July 2002

2002 SEASON

June 2002

Andy Lakatosh

My (Brief) Mexican Experience

Well, my trip to Mexico didn't quite go as I planned. For starters, my bike didn't arrive until the day after I did. Regardless, I was ready to go Friday morning when the competition began with the sprints - except for the fact that I had to race on borrowed wheels since the federation equipment had not arrived in time.

I qualified second fastest and everything was going well. I had made it into the semi-finals which would decide who would go on to ride for the gold. In the third and final ride I was starting to pass my opponent when he decided to take me to the rail. I decided to resist and pushed him back down the track, but when I did my borrowed front wheel decided to fall apart. The next thing I knew I was laying at the bottom of the track. I instantly knew that something didn't feel right.

From there they got me in a Mexican ambulance that took me to the hospital where everyone spoke Spanish. They took tons of x-rays and the doctors confirmed that my collarbone was broken. They also said I had a sprained neck so I had to wear a neck brace. They bandaged my nose up too since it got cut when I crashed. At this point I was pretty helpless - and a sorry sight.

I owe many thanks to Martha Dunne and Eric Belz (the other U.S. athletes who were there) and Des Dickie (the national coach) for all their help in keeping me comfortable until the next morning when I left for home. After getting special treatment on the planes and being wheeled around the airports in a wheelchair, I arrived back in Allentown around 10 pm Saturday night. At 10 am Sunday morning I had an appointment with Dr. Stansbury. He says my neck was fine, but I had two choices for the collarbone - either give it 8-10 weeks to heal or have surgery to plate it and be back on the bike in a couple weeks. Well, that was a no brainer.....by 5 pm Sunday afternoon I was in surgery. After my surgery (including the wonderful effects from anesthesia), I was back home by midnight and beginning my recovery.

I actually felt pretty good Monday morning when I woke up, so we spent the day at Somerville watching the races, including the junior race I had hoped to be in. Oh well. Despite the fact that I didn't come home with the gold medal I know I would've won in Mexico and I didn't get to see too much of Mexico City, I'm very lucky.

I'm really grateful that Dr. Stansbury was able to see me and take care of me so quickly, especially on a holiday weekend - many, many thanks. The sling will definitely be a 'nice' touch with my tux for the prom this weekend. So for now I have some time to concentrate on finishing my schoolwork and then I can focus on being back on track in time for my major events this year, Jr. Nationals and Jr. Worlds. I'll keep you posted on my progress. Thanks.

Andy Lakatosh
June 2002

American Velodrome Challenge

May 2002

Kathy Lakatosh

Houston, TX

Andy Lakatosh traveled to Houston, Texas last week to compete in the American Velodrome Challenge at the Alkek Velodrome on May 17-18. Andy's main focus was the sprints. It was an extremely competitive field since all the older national team guys were racing, so Andy was anxious to see how he fared against the 'big guys'. He posted the 4th fastest 200m qualifying time (11.01), which also broke the track record for Men 17-18. (Andy already holds the track record there for Men 15-16 which he broke last year.)

After losing his first heat, he fought hard in the reps and came back to make it into the quarter finals. In the 'best of three' format, Andy lost the first ride but won the second which forced it to a third ride. The third one was a photo finish which he won by 1Z~4", so Andy had made it into the semi finals! When it was over, he ended up placing fourth overall behind Jeff LaBauve, Gideon Massie and Angelo Martorell (all seniors), and gained some valuable experience in the process. At that point he was happy - and very tired.

Because it had rained all day Friday, most of the events were compressed into Saturday, making it a very long day.

Andy teamed up with Eric Bonser and Mike Beers for 3rd place in the Olympic Sprint. He also competed in the keirin and kilo where he ended up 9th and 10th, respectively.

Overall, he was very happy with his results. Now he's home for a day before he leaves for the Olympic Festival in Mexico City. He'll return home again on Memorial Day, but unfortunately not in time to race at Somerville. We'll keep you posted. Thanks.

American Velodrome Challenge, Houston, TX (5/17-18/02)

3rd - Olympic Sprint

4th - Match Sprint*

9th - Keirin

10th - Kilo

*Andy's 200m time (11.01) broke the track record for Men

17-18 Kathy Lakatosh

May 2002

2002 SEASON

April 2002

Andy Lakatosh

2002 Cuba Trip

April 6, 2002

|| Hi to all TSV members, ||

Everyone looks so pale here, geeze. I guess if you just spent a month in San Diego you would feel the same way. ;Well, that's just what I did. From the 28th of February til the 25th of March, I was staying at the Olympic Training Center (OTC) with the U.S. National Track Sprint Team for their annual spring training camp. ;What a nice break the warm weather of San Diego was from cold and windy T-town.;The training was good. I was working with three guys as fast as I am on the track, so it made for some good, hard and fast efforts. The OTC facility was really nice. There were a lot of resident runners (all distances). No Michael Johnson unfortunately, but still some very interesting people. Then there were the kayackers and the archers. The food services were great, all you could eat from 7 in the morning until 8 at night - and everything you can imagine. All your salads and fruits, pasta everyday, along with your standard vegetable, meat, and potato, and of course, who can forget dessert. There was plenty of that to go around too. The track time was really nice, considering that we don't get regular track training here at night until the second week of April. My riding impressed the coach and before I knew it I was filling out my visa to go to Cuba for the international COPA race, which I leave for on the 2nd of April. I'm really excited about it. I'll return home on April 15th. I'm not quite sure

what COPA stands for, but I'm sure I'll find out. That just about sums up my experiences in San Diego. I'm sure I'll have stories to tell about my trip to Cuba too, but for now I must practice my Spanish. Hola, me llamo Andres. Como estas?

Hasta la vista,
[Andy Lakatosh](#)
April 2002

2002 SEASON

April 2002

Andy Lakatosh 2002 Cuba Trip

After racing competitively at the top level of cycling in the nation, it was time to take my racing outside of the country – and what better place could there be to have my first international experience but Cuba! I was excited. I left on April 2nd and met up with the rest of the national team in Miami where we spent the night in a hotel before traveling to Cuba the following day.

Checking in at the Miami airport for our charter flight to Cuba was a long process. Eventually we left and after a very smooth flight we landed in Havana. Upon touchdown, over half of the passengers erupted in cheering and clapping. Later I found out it was because sometimes the plane is half on the runway and half in the grass, not to mention the potholes on the runway that you felt every bump of the way. It was a short walk from the plane to customs. I learned that the number one rule when going through customs is to look, listen, and listen again. If not, the person typically gets upset because they will assume you are hiding something. Then came the metal detectors and some more questions. After

picking up our baggage we went outside to see a fence holding back people watching everyone come off the planes (we later found out that some sort of famous movie star or millionaire was arriving on the same plane as us and that's why all the people were at the airport). We then loaded all of our bike bags on the flat bed of a small truck with railings only a foot and a half tall. Thus it was necessary for three of the other riders and me to sit on top of the bike bags to keep them on the truck. What a ride that was!

The sights on the trip to the velodrome were very unfamiliar ones. For instance, we saw more mopeds in one mile than one could see during a year in the states. No one wore helmets, and the bikers were everywhere on their old, rusty, beat up cruisers. The roads were 3 lanes wide, had no lines on them at all and not many traffic signs, if any. There were potholes 6 feet wide and 3 feet deep – in other words, craters. The drivers are very bold and daring. Everyone thinks they have the right of way, so pedestrians beware. Old Chevys from the 50's and 60's were everywhere, but not like you would expect to see them in the U.S. These were old and beat up - I only saw about 5 nice, perfectly restored ones. That is only the tip of the iceberg of all the interesting stories I can tell about Cuba and its sights...ask me sometime and I'll fill you in on the rest.

The weather was great – sunny and warm, just the way I like it. Training was as it usually is before a race. Short, flat road rides.....not that there are many hills in Cuba. Track training is short, fast and easy in order to conserve energy to throw it all on the line on race day. I kept getting faster and smoother with each day on the track. My standing half laps and my flying 100m times were just as fast as last year at my peak in August, and this was only April! Even though there were both senior and junior events, the coach and I decided that I

would ride and focus only on the senior events since it would be better competition and experience for me. I was anxious for the racing to begin.

On Wednesday (4/10) the COPA started. The sessions ran at 9:00 am and 3:00 pm. I didn't have anything in the morning on Wednesday, but in the afternoon I had the kilo time trial. Everything leading up to the last minute before my heat went perfect, except for the fact that I didn't have aero bars. The person that I was supposed to borrow them from changed his mind, so I had to do my kilo in drop bars. No big deal, I still had an almost p.r. time (1.10.24) which was good enough for 7th in the senior kilo. I was pleased.

Thursday was a big day - in the morning we had the Olympic Sprint qualifying. Considering that I was riding with two pursuiteders, not coming in last was a relief. In the afternoon it was finally my time to show everyone how fast the U.S. grows their sprinters. I was 19th of 24 to go off. It was a very windy day so the wind up was early and the jump was fairly late in order to conserve energy for the strong finish. The wind up went great, the jump felt good, I flew off the banking, drove it through the turn as hard as I could and then pushed it all the way to the line. The headwind down the homestretch was a killer, but it felt as though I still went fast.

As I came around the backstretch I listened for the national team coach, Des Dickie, to tell me my time. When I heard the word 10 out of his mouth, I was more than satisfied. The fact that it was 10.91 and it was a personal record for me at sea level and it was done in April made me ecstatic. That was everything I had worked for all winter. The junior worlds qualifying time of 11.099 was more than beat according to Des' watch. The official time by hand from the Cuban officials was 11.04, which was still faster than the automatic

qualifying time for the Jr. World Team. So, like Des said, "You're going to bloody Melbourne!" That was the best news I've heard in a long time. My 11.04 was still good enough for the third qualifying position, and Des was sure to let all of the other countries' coaches know that I was only 16 and just going on 17. After 3 interesting sprint rides later that afternoon (one of which I lost by 2"), I found myself in the 5th through 8th final. In that race I got to watch first hand as two Cubans clearly demonstrated some team tactics. One took me high coming out of turn two as the other one shot underneath and left me with the back seat. I ended up 7th in the standings, but I certainly learned a lot in the process – plus I still had the keirin to look forward to on the last day.

The final day was supposed to be two sessions like the others, but the officials decided that one long session would be best. My first keirin heat didn't go too well. Des had told all of us to be careful and not to get messed up in a pushing and shoving match with the Cubans because, for them, after this race they had no other important competitions for the year so they were laying it all on the line. We, however, had a whole season ahead of us so we were advised not to take any risks. I decided to assume the safest position in the race, at the back where I could watch everything. When the motor came off with two to go I came over the top and took the lead. I tried my best to pick up the pace so that I would stay far enough in front to make top two, however I was nipped by two riders at the line by less than half a wheel.

In the rep I had to win in order to make the final. Once again I assumed the same position and made the same move, however, this time when I came over the top and took the front, a Cuban overtook me over the top going full bore with no one behind him. In other words, he gave the perfect lead out. We got the bell for one to go and then down the

backstretch I floated up and another Cuban (they were everywhere) tried to shoot the hole underneath. I then pushed him down and made my move past my dying lead out man. By turn four I was 2 bike lengths ahead of everyone else, and safely in the keirin final.

In the final it was four Cubans, one Venezuelan, a Jamaican and me. Of course the Cubans made a train right to the motor. I assumed the same position as before and waited a little longer to make the same move and surprisingly, the Cubans let me do it. Then after the bell, going through turns one and two I was overtaken by one of the Cubans and the Venezuelan, I then hooked anyone else coming over the top and got in behind the Venezuelan and followed him to the line as he passed the Cuban and helped me to pass him too. I was thrilled - I had won a medal in a senior event! Only one catch, when racing in Cuba, you race Cuban rules, and the first rule is Cubans rule. Just as I was getting up on the podium they insisted that I had come in third!!! I told them no way, I was second. They said they had a photo finish, so I said I wanted to see it, but they said no. So I placed second, but left with a third place medal in a senior event - and a story to tell, plus a lot of great memories. Overall, I was pretty happy.

So that's a summary of my trip to Cuba and my first trip out of the country. It is surely one trip I will never forget and I know the next one is going to be even better. I'd like to thank the American Cycling Academy (Gil Hatton, Marty Nothstein, and Jack Simes), Tri-State Velo and all of their sponsors, Harry Havnoonian and the Cycle Sport Staff, Des Dickie and the U.S. National Team, Oakley, Sinclair Imports, Carnac Shoes, Trialtir USA, Limar, Selle Italia, Corima Wheels, Parkland High School, my parents, and all my fellow U.S.

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Andy Lakatosh
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