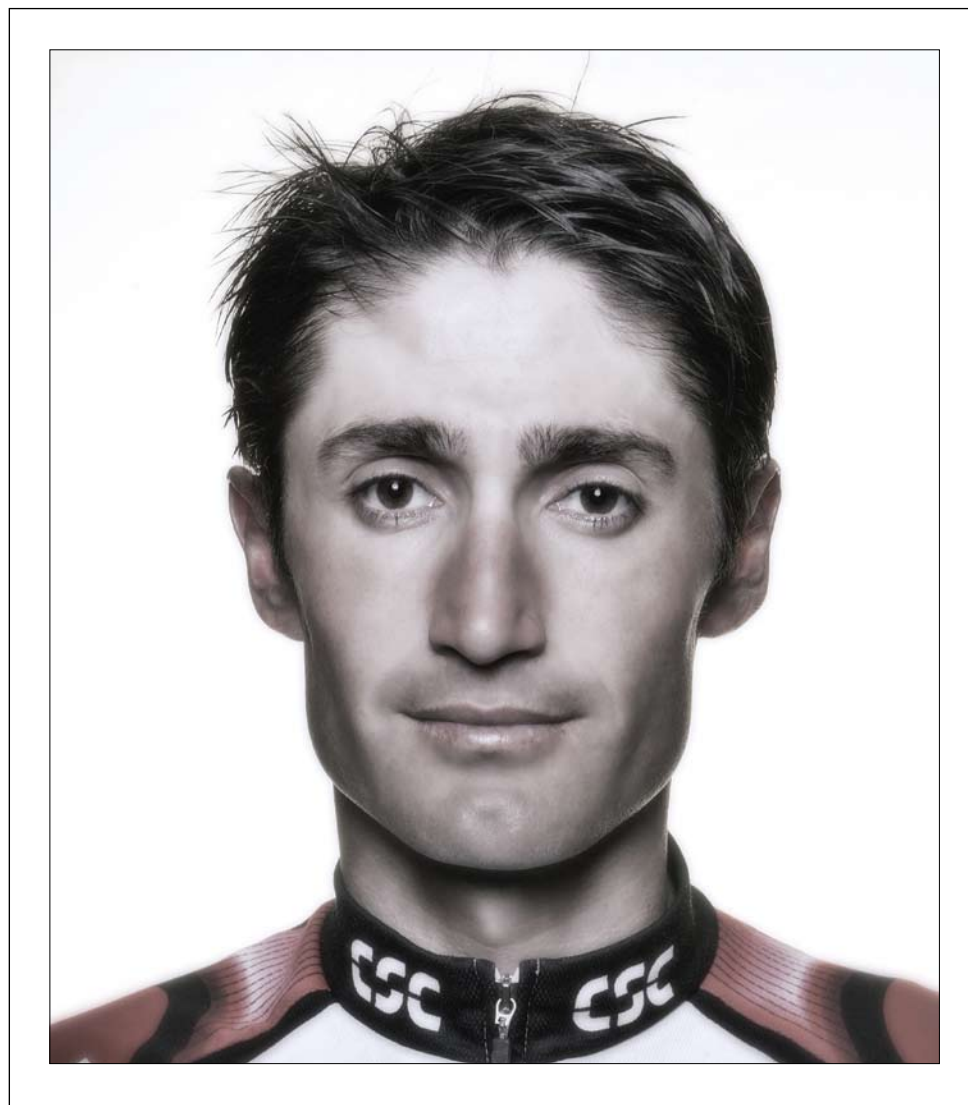


## BOBBY JULICH

Like the game, “Six degrees of Kevin Bacon”, Julich has either raced with or against all of this generation’s greatest cyclists. You can name almost any modern cyclist and Julich has been his teammate or friend. He’s been a teammate to Lance Armstrong, Jonathan Vaughters and Christian Vande Velde, and raced against Greg LeMond! His current teammate includes recent Tour de France winner Carlos Sastre and the Schleck brothers who seem to be not “if they win” the Tour, but more likely “when”. However Julich’s path as a professional cyclist hasn’t been without the hard times. In 1996 he was diagnosed with a heart condition called supraventricular tachycardia which causes the heart to beat much faster than normal. He has also been witness to the doping problem inside the professional peloton. However it was at the Tour de Swiss that Julich knew it was time to call it quits. He hadn’t been picked for the Tour squad or for the Olympic team, so at the team meeting he announced to his team that this season was probably going to be his last. It wasn’t that he was physically unable to do it; he was mentally not able to make those sacrifices anymore to be a professional cyclist. And days before he was to officially announce his retirement to the public, Bobby Julich spoke to *ROAD* and discussed his long career.



**You won the 1989 national junior cyclocross championships. Have you ever raced ‘cross as a professional?** No I think that was the last time I raced cyclocross. I bought a bike and bought the stuff but never had the chance to do it. I love cyclocross and I think it’s fantastic. I was getting ready to make the jump from junior to senior racing and I got a lot of input from people from Colorado Springs and my dad and it seemed like a good thing to do over the winter to build up for the Spring of 1990. I really enjoyed it, but it takes a lot of training and you’re sore and by the time your cuts are healed you rip them up the next weekend. As a pro I stayed away from that and rode my mountain bike instead of doing ‘cross. I think that is something I can do that in the future for fun more than training. Now there is a great calendar of events it would be fun to participate in some events.

**Your early years as a pro included a time on the domestic LA Sheriffs cycling team. Do you have fond memories from those days of riding in the team van?**

That was the best. If I look back to one pivotal point in my career and I’ve had a few in my career. I went from being the hot-shot junior until Armstrong came along, to the national “A” team guy in 1990-92, the disappointment of not making the 1992 Olympic team, turning pro for Mike Neels’ team and lasted for a whole 2 months before January of 1993 when he told me the sponsor fell through and he hadn’t really had it signed. I went through that whole year with nothing and going through my life savings. But 1994 was a big year for me. It was time to grow up. The guys who I had contact with were Steve Hegg, Jeff Pierce, Thomas Craven, Jim Copeland, Malcolm Elliot showed me a different way

# last dance



of life and racing. I was always one of the best with guys my age and here I am all of a sudden a 22-year-old on a team with guys older than me like Jaime Palonetti who was 28 and Malcolm who was 34. I'll be 37 in November and I thought then, "How could he be racing at 34?" I went from talking about girls and cars and music to real life things like washing machines and refrigerators and lawn mowers. The things that you do with your prize money at 22 are a lot different than when you have a family. I remember when Thomas Craven and Jim Copeland would win money over the weekend and they'd say, 'There's my new washing machine!' It was a time for me to grow up and those guys did so much for me. We had a great time. I look back at riding around in the van with 7 guys and you wonder how we all got changed in the van. Now we have these busses that have all the gadgets. It was a cool way of doing it and it makes me appreciate the nice things we have and the progression the sport has made since 1994. Those guys were special and still are. That was definitely the growing-up stage for me. We had a great team

and we worked for each. Until CSC I wasn't on a team that was that close and worked for each other and enjoyed each others success as LA Sherrifs. I have fond memories of that year. It propelled me to be a pro. After Philly the season back then was basically over, there isn't much more to go here and I was wondering what was going to happen. Thomas Craven and Jim Copeland said to me, 'You got to get to Europe. You can't stay here. You're wasting your talent.' That started to make me think about getting to Europe. Then Jim O called me with the Motorola thing and that made it an easy decision.

**Did you regret leaving the States at that point and wish you'd developed more?** I look at it 2 ways: it was the perfect time for me to go. Obviously I didn't dominate the racing like Horner, or Levi or Vaughters, but I always thought I needed to be in Europe. The timing was actually the worse. It was 1995 and it was my first year as a pro (in Europe) and those were the dark days of cycling. There were some weird things going on. I remember one of the

first races I did, I was in the groupetto with Chann McRae, Vaughters, Livingston, Michael Boogerd and Eric Dekker. I think it was the Tour of Pays Basque and we raced together and knew each other as juniors and there we were off the back doing a 6-man team time trial the whole race. And a couple of times near the end of the race we were like, 'What are we doing here. How are these guys riding so fast?' It was obviously a learning process and we all got better and we all had long successful careers. But it was tough going against those guys from Gewiss, Mapei, T-Mobile and especially ONCE. A couple of times I asked myself if I did have a future in this sport. Luckily I stuck to my guns and pulled out a long career out of it. Now when young guys come to the team and they seem so overwhelmed I pull them aside and tell them that we have all gone through this and very few guys have had success immediately. Just stick to it and go to work and watch your health and stay focused and one day the page will turn and you'll be wondering why those guys are being dropped and it is easier now than being too hard.

**What made you want to stick to your guns and not just leave? Like you said that was the black years of cycling.** First of all ignorance was bliss. No one knew what was going on until 1998 when the lid got blown off. You kept saying to yourself that I am good and that guys my age are suffering as well. I don't think I dropped out of a single race that entire year. It was instilled in us not to drop out of a race no matter how far behind you were. I remember that it was often I'd come into the finish area and they were breaking it down and we'd have to squeeze through. It was the whole proverb, "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger." I don't know what it was. It was the desire to be over in Europe and try and race at that level. If it had continued like that for another year I don't think any of us would have still been there. We had a natural progression of getting better and saw what changes in diet and training could do. We were forced to grow up as well. There are good cyclists and good cyclists in Europe. Obviously in the past that gap has narrowed. There isn't such a major difference, but back in the day there was that major difference. For example in Philadelphia it was won by a solo rider or a small group. Now you see that Manayunk Wall is no more than a speed bump because guys are better trained, take better care of themselves, eat better, hydrate and train with power. The hardest year of the race 10 years ago is now a 30 to 40 rider sprint ever year. So the gap has definitely narrowed between being a pro in Europe versus being a pro in America, which is good for the future of cycling here in America.

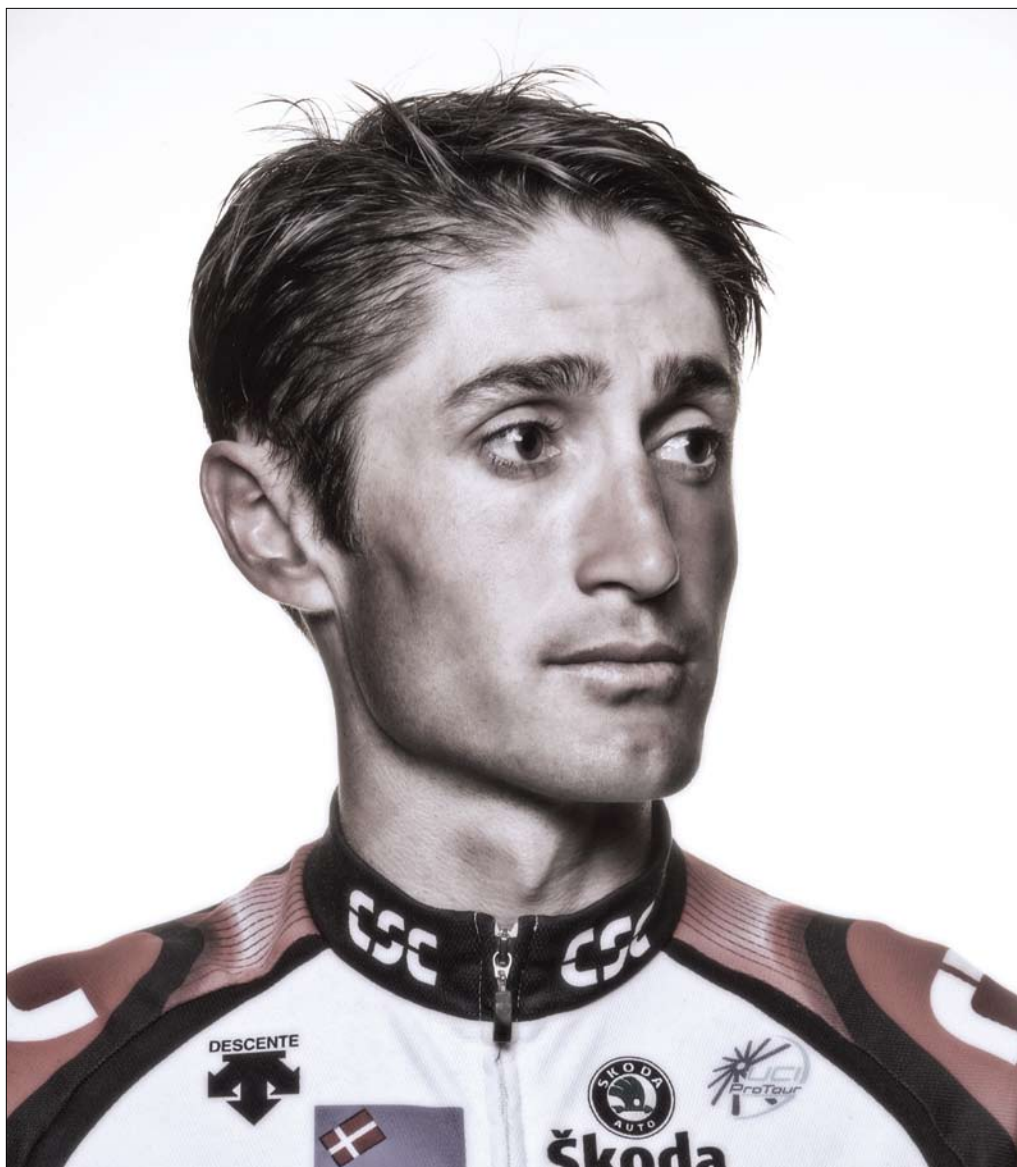
**You were riding for the Telekom squad in the 2002 to 2003 season and it's been said that you contemplated retiring. You moved to the CSC team in 2004. From there you've had some great results. Was it the CSC environment that allowed you to grow or was it more of a personal development?** In 2003 I was basically retired. I did the Vuelta and barely finished. I went to the World Championships in Canada and had a bike problem and dropped out on the second or third lap. I went to a restaurant bar and was watching the race on television with my friends and wife. A guy walked by and did a double take. He asked what I was doing there. I said I didn't want to talk about it and that was the tough period. I basically had no contacts, I had nothing besides that 4 years earlier being on the podium of the Tour to go on. The only person I knew was Bjarne. The only team I was interested in and it was a curiosity thing because I saw how they acted in a race, they seemed like good friends and they supported each other. Ironically when I dropped out of Worlds and

pulled into the tents and was inconsolable. I turn around and there was Bjarne. He asked, 'What happened?' I looked at him and said, 'I'm sorry I can't talk to you right now.' I walked through the partition and escaped out the back. I called him after that but he probably had that in the back of his mind thinking what had gone wrong. I was 32 at the time and I remember watching Bernard Hinault retire on his 32nd birthday and thinking at age 13 that I was going to be a professional cyclist and retire on my 32nd birthday. Ironically when Bjarne called me and basically offered me the smallest contract I've ever ridden for and it was a take it or leave it deal, and on my 32nd birthday, I signed a 1-year deal basically for free. It was a curiosity thing. I wanted to see before I retire if there something better than what I had been on before. I think if I had retired at that time I would have been a bit bitter or insecure I probably wouldn't have continued in the sport as it was a difficult time, but the rest is history. That was 5 years ago. I've been happy with Bjarne and team CSC ever since.

**What is it about riding with Bjarne Riis and team CSC? Was it a perfect storm of the team and you maturing some more?** It really

was. First of all it was Bjarne. He was building a team with the goal of having the best team in the world. I went to the training camp and he talked about life after cycling and I had never heard that come out of the mouths of any director or anyone one else. It had been something I had been searching for. You could be on a team with your best friends, winning races, having fun, and doing it the right way. Just enjoying the ride. Of course I appreciate the structure that Bjarne gave me and the teamwork we had. Most importantly were the riders we had and still have. We all got to know each other and became good friends. There was no pecking order. There was no "A" and "B" team. We were all teammates. It was a great feeling. It's something that I hope that every rider gets to experience. This sport is hard enough and you don't need politics and miscommunication getting in the way of doing our job. It was a pleasure being around guys that I really enjoyed hanging with and being serious and having a lot to prove. In 2004, Carlos Sastre was really the only guy on the team that had constant results. Bjarne took me and Jens off the unemployed list and there was a hodge-podge of guys. He had a young guy named Frank Schleck who we thought had a lot of talent and we'll see how he goes. It was the perfect timing and it gave me 2 of the best years I every had in 2004 and 2005. Obviously the last the 3 years weren't as fruitful as the first 2, but the comradery and teamwork and the spirit and values we had on the team back then are still there and hopefully be thee in the future. That said, back in the day, that blueprint of team comradery and team spirit and goals from us. I think that is a positive thing. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. I think CSC has produced riders that have gone on to other teams and they have said that is how to do it [the CSC way]. You see teams hanging out a lot more than back in the day. You would bolt back to your room back then, but now you actually want to spend time with your guys at the races. I hope every rider gets to find that special team.

**Do you look back at the 1998 Tour de France and wonder what if?** Honestly I am realistic and even when it was happening and if the whole Willy Voet and Festina thing hadn't happened I might have been top-10, maybe out of the top-10. The way things worked out was fantastic but it was definitely difficult because again ignorance was bliss. My roommate was Kevin Livingston and we barely spoke French and didn't understand what was going on. We would go



back to the hotel, close the door turn on the television and watch MTV or go online. We'd wake up the next morning ready to race, not knowing that guys were taken to the police station in the middle of the night and given the full body cavity search. I remember going to the start line and asking someone what was going on. 'You didn't hear? Festina is pulling out and the race is probably finished.' I was in 2nd place at the time and I remember asking him, 'If the race stops, I still get second place?' I wasn't at all worried about what was going on. It was funny, but naïve when I think about that stuff. It was such a whirlwind that catapulted me to a level that I wasn't quite ready for yet. And that was to win the Tour. I obviously didn't have the team or support around me, the material or the knowledge of how to do it. It gave me a little bit of sense of security in that I thought I had to figure out. It was my fourth year as a pro and I was 3rd in the Tour and it is natural that I am going to get better and a chance to win the Tour the next year. But the next year was a major eye opening experience. Being at the top is one thing, but the easiest to fall from as well. I had some injuries and crashed in the time trial that took me out. It was a very sudden rise and a very violent fall from that podium place. I had some good memories but also the 4 of 5 years after that I have memories of being on the crap heap again.

**There doesn't seem to have that hierarchical team structure anymore.** I think that is true, because there are so many good riders now. Back in the day there was 1 team leader and everyone worked for him no matter what condition he was in. Now every rider on a ProTour team can win a race. There isn't that big ego thing anymore.

**Was it tough to watch the Tour on the sidelines?** Of course it was tough not to be there. Once the race started I wouldn't miss the first week of the Tour. It's always crazy. It looks so calm and controlled on television, but when you are there you know it is boxing on the bike as you are trying to keep your leader out of the wind and out of crashes. I don't miss that. What I realized was that it wasn't a good idea that I was there. That crazy descent that the Barloworld guy crashed on and knowing what was on the line there and seeing that descent from the helicopter view and they knew that those guys were going full-gas on the descent; I don't think I breathed 3 times on that descent until I knew my guys crossed the line. It was absolutely ridiculous to put a descent like that in the third week of the Tour knowing that the race would be on. It was crazy. Helmet or not, you crash on that and it would be difficult to recover from it, let alone get back on your bike. I actually had to turn it off for awhile on the Champs Élysées. The champagne toasts, that was tough to watch.

**What are some of your plans? Get behind the wheel of a team car?** It's hard to say. A few guys on the team asked me that, and of course Bjarne and Kim Anderson have been hinting around about that. But I hate driving and I'm not a multi-tasker when I'm trying to pay attention to a bike race. For me that would be very difficult. I'm not ruling that out, but at the same time I am so close to these guys and they're my best friends in cycling. To be on the other side and be sitting at the table with the soigneur and mechanics while they are joking around, that would be hard. At one time or another that would wear off and a couple of years from now that possibility would be greater. Right now I see that as being very difficult unless it was totally the way I want it: not driving, riding shotgun, calling the shots, taking care of stuff. Me driving long distances, and being away from my family longer and getting paid less is not something I would want to do. That is why you have to respect these directors and the sacrifices they make. We're pampered. We're picked up at the airport, taken to the hotel with the keys in the door. All we have to do is plop down our suitcases and just eat, sleep and ride our bikes. These guys have to drive to the races,

drive all day, and when the race is over they may have to drive 600 miles to see their family for a couple of days before they have to do it all over again. That being said, I'm interested in having my own team one day. I have a lot of experience and I love the sport of cycling. I've learned a lot from Bjarne, Kim Anderson, Alan Galopin, Jim Ochowicz. These guys have shaped my career since I was young. I just don't know if I could be the guy behind the wheel. Maybe be the guy behind the guy behind the wheel. Well see. It is exciting. Honestly I was thinking of the same thing last year. I signed for 1 more year last year. When I didn't make the Tour team last year I thought maybe this was the end. Then I was talked into doing another year with Bjarne. Frankie, Jens, Stuey and Fabian had a lot to do with that decision. Those guys are my best friends and it's hard to say good bye. It will never be the same as it was when I had daily contact with them. That's what I'm going to miss, the team comradery and direct friendships. Jens is going to have to find a new roommate and I'm going to be jealous. *R*

