

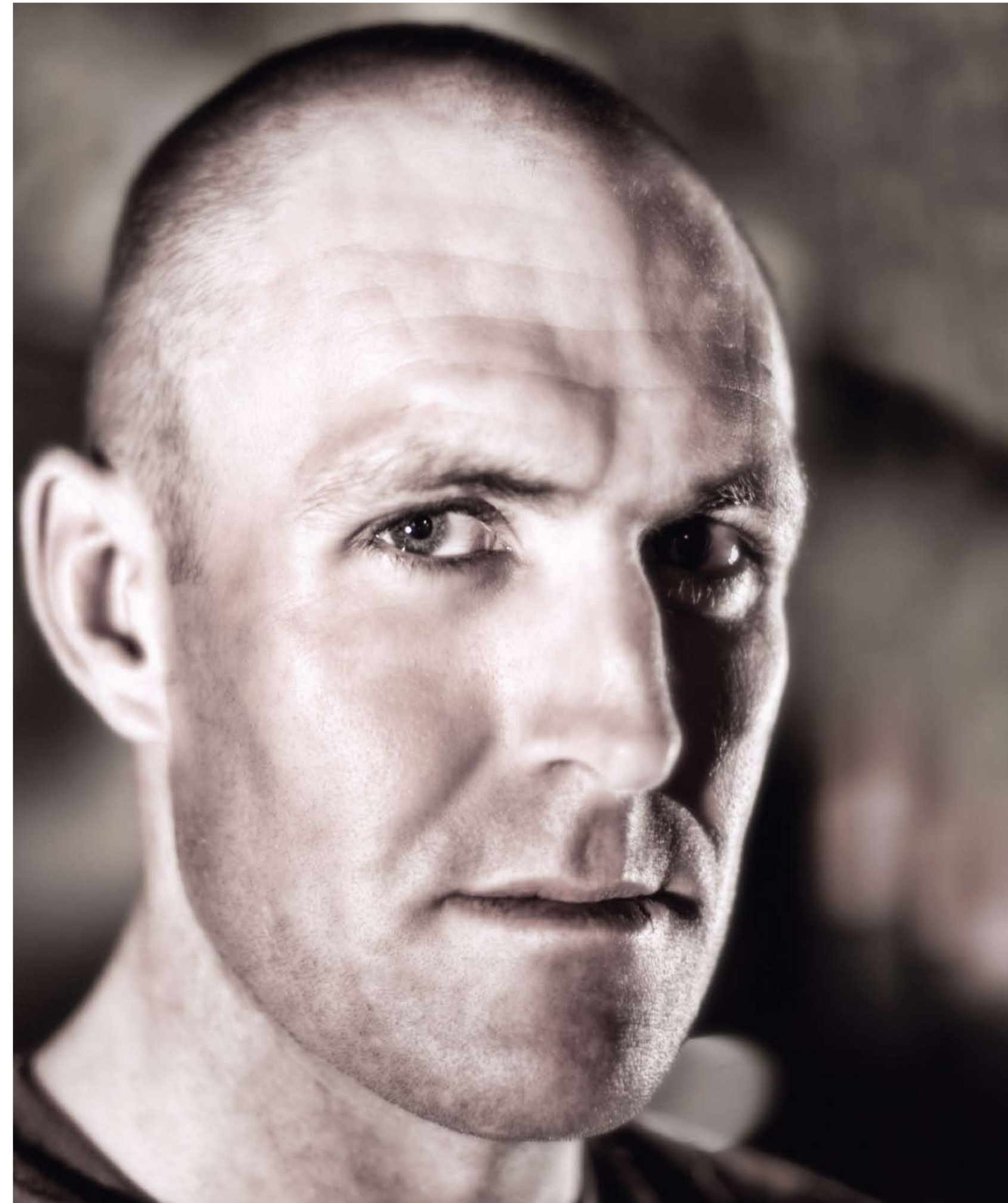
## NATHAN O'NEILL'S

world came crashing down on him last October. While out of competition, O'Neill took an appetite suppressant. He had stopped taking it a week prior to his next event the Tour of Elk Grove thinking it would have cleared his system. This was not the case. He admitted what he had done and is paying the price for his actions.

It's evident that O'Neill has not been sitting on the sofa feeling sorry for himself. Looking lean and with an SRM meter attached to his bike, O'Neill has been pounding the pedals in anticipation of returning to the racing circuit.

off of his *chest*

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**Take us back to the beginning of what happened.** August of last year I did the Tour of Elk Grove and had been training for four weeks before that because there wasn't much racing going on. I had a stomach virus after Nature Valley and I had gotten over it, but gained a couple of kilograms. It was a rebound kind of thing. I took something that I've taken before, an appetite suppressant to curb my food cravings. I got back on track and things were cool. I went to Elk Grove thinking everything was cool. I'd stopped taking it prior to the race and thought everything was fine. I'd taken it seven days prior to the race (to flush it out of his body), which I thought was ample time. Evidently it wasn't. I returned a positive for phentomine. I didn't find out about it until after the Tour of Missouri. I was sitting in my kitchen, eight o'clock in the morning, and I opened my laptop to check my email. There was an email from my federation that said, 'In Confidence.' I read it and it was like being punched in the gut. I couldn't breathe. It was the worse feeling ever. I called my agent and couldn't reach him. I called him every 15 minutes for the next three hours until I reached him. He calmed me down and said we would work through this. We just had to take it one step at a time. We got the impression that my federation was appreciative that we'd been upright and straight with them about everything.

**You didn't suggest that someone else gave it to you or that it was contaminated?** No, not at all! I knew that I took it and why and when. Importantly I knew when I had stopped taking it and it was at least a week before the Tour of Elk Grove.

**And this appetite suppressant is approved?** It is legal to take out of competition. It's banned in competition because it is a nervous system stimulant. But this one is not a very good stimulant because it is a short-acting one. It lasts about six hours on a dose. If you wanted a race kick you won't take this stimulant. For example you could take caffeine and Sudafed and you would get a bigger kick than one of these pills. Bottom line is that it was in my body and the anti-doping agencies saw that it was there, not why it was there or how much is there. All they care about is that it is there and they have a strict zero-tolerance policy to things on the banned list. My barrister in Australia is representing me there and it is being handled by the Australians (federation). We had the "B" sample analyzed and it came back the same. That was the start of this whole process about what we were going to do. Do we fight it, do we let it go? It was taking a while. We were in December and January and we had no new information other than the "A" and "B" sample. I hadn't been charged with anything or a letter saying that I'd been charged with a doping violation. Just a letter saying that I had a positive sample. Until you get the notification that you've been charged, you haven't been charged. I didn't get that until March.

**Who finally charged you?** The Australian anti-doping agency. We didn't deny it and I'm not ashamed that I took it. It was a legal substance. The bottom line is that we decided to let it go through its motions and we took it to CAS (Court of Arbitration of Sport). We waived our rights to a hearing with WADA and went straight to CAS. We went to CAS in June of this year and had it heard. Effectively we had a win in a sense. We had the sentence reduced from 24 months to 15 months, which is where we are now. It gives me the ability to race in October

of this year. Now I'm trying to line things up for 2009 and move forward.

**Weight is always an issue among cyclists, but how much of an issue is it with you?** I think it's an issue with all professionals who take their job seriously. I have a history going back 15 years of an eating disorder. You can say that it was way back when, but it's something that never leaves the building. It's very hard to put it aside and not reference it. It changes you forever and you're not the same person again. Not to

get heavy, but it is a trauma that you never fully recover from. I still have issues about it. It is part of who I am and who I have become.

**When you went to Europe the first time how much did you weigh?** When I went to Europe the first time as an amateur on the national team in 1993 I was 77 kilograms [nearly 170 pounds], which is more than I weigh now. I came back weighing 62 kilograms [nearly 137 pounds at 5'10"]. I went over there with a body mass index of 23 [normal] and returned with 17 [underweight]. It was scary.

**Since your suspension what have you been doing?** I've been trying to pay bills and support my family. It has been really tough. Before my suspension I started a coaching company and a bike fit company. I've been doing some consulting at the A2 wind tunnel and doing time trial testing. I've been training and trying to stay sane and take my frustrations out on the bike.

**Is that what's been keeping you sane, training for your profession even though you aren't racing?** That's the hard thing. Therapeutically it's good to get out on the bike, but it's hard to do. I ask myself, 'What am I doing this for?' It was not until June that I knew if I'd be allowed to come back to the sport. I didn't know if I would be able to come back. Without a goal at the end of the road it was hard to focus without knowing what you were working for.

**But what made you suit up and train everyday?** The desire to stay in touch with what I had done professionally. I didn't want to be the guy who took 12 months to get back into the sport because he let himself go way too long before he took his finger out to train. People told me to keep riding and don't let yourself go too far. Just keep moving and that's what I've been doing. It's been really brutal.

**Racing is called the best type of training. Without doing any racing, how is your form?** I don't think it is bad. In one way it has been good for me because I've never been away from the sport so long without any intensity. I think that is going to hurt when I start that back up again. Ultimately having this break is a huge recharge for my body. Throw that in the mix with the frustrations I have right now and it is a dangerous cocktail! *SR*

