

**THE
WOLFPACK
YEARS**

Geert Vandenbon and Frederik Backelandt

**20 YEARS OF
TOP CYCLING
AND WINNING**

Lannoo



Koen Pelgrim, Klaas Lodewyck, Patrick Lefevere, Tom Steels, Rik Van Slycke



There is no I in TEAM

Many people ask me about the secret of The Wolfpack. What exactly is the success formula and is it reproducible elsewhere? The answer is as complex as it is simple. A good team structure, remaining sharp at all times, an urge to win and getting the right people together at the right times and having them work on a long-term project. My riders, my staff, my personnel: they're my family. For me they have always been that and for them I've always stood on the barricades, in good times and in bad.

Above all there is the mentality and philosophy that every team should have. Those of: 'There's no I in TEAM'. If you're just thinking 'me, me, me', then you've come to the wrong place. Then you don't belong in The Wolfpack.

I see this team as a house with strong foundations. Of course I would love nothing more than to have our house still standing in twenty years' time. Stronger than ever. That will be without me of course. But it would make me very proud if something I've worked on for so long and so hard for would still be there. And that, twenty years later, they will also occasionally think back to the pioneers 'who didn't do it so badly all those many years ago'.

It can go two ways: either the team will not be doing well twenty years from today and they'll say, 'if Patrick knew about this, he'd be turning in his grave', or today's success will still be there in twenty years' time and then they'll no doubt claim that 'Patrick watches us from his little cloud in the sky and sees that it's all OK'. Who can say?

These twenty years have flown by. Yet it's a long time. In such a long time there are always things you regret. Me too. But what I don't regret are the sacrifices I've made for this team, for this project. Cycling in general and The Wolfpack in particular have given me a lot, but have also taken a lot from me. I have had to sacrifice a part of my private life, of my social life.

It's all been worth it.

Patrick Lefevere



The Wolfpack Spirit

United we stand, divided we fall.

All for one and one for all.

The wolf is a member of a family, a unit in which everyone is assigned their role to enable the group to survive, to function, to protect.

We are the Wolfpack. It started as Brian Holm's signature line. In just a few years it has become more than a slogan. For team members, it's a spirit, for the outside world a brand. With an iconic logo.

'The Wolfpack way of life' is, simply put, the philosophy of the house. Anyone who subscribes to the philosophy, strengthens the team spirit and performs is part of the Quick-Step family, and can remain in the pack for years. Anyone who doesn't, leaves. The mental strength to function in the pack requires energy. Every day anew. But the efforts pay off. Each member of the family becomes a better version of themselves. The pack provides energy, companionship and a professional environment in which to become better and make each other better. No team has been more successful in the past twenty years than Team Patrick Lefevere.

The Wolfpack image carries a very strong symbolism. In the team, each individual is important, each individual must know his place and task, each individual is there to make the team stronger. Within the professional core, all riders are equal. Sports-wise, the hierarchy is clear to all those involved. Together for success. Together as one.

Patrick Lefevere: 'I've never underestimated the importance of the riders who are lower down the hierarchy. They influence the toppers, keep them awake and provide dynamics and atmosphere in the group. Each and every one of them are super pros, otherwise you wouldn't make the career they make with us. But most of all they are people. And that reasoning can be read both ways. If they don't feel committed to the team from a human point of view and don't want to contribute to it, then it won't work. Because they are all egos, individualists, otherwise you won't become a racing cyclist. But they are also members of the Wolfpack. The pack comes above everything else.'

Index

 2003: The new boy with lots of experience	8
Interview: Patrick Lefevere	22
 2004: The Olympic Dream	28
Interview: Richard Virenque	44
 2005: Tom Boonen's kingdom	50
Interview: Tom Boonen	68
 2006: Boonen and Bettini, from Qatar to Lombardy	74
Interview: Paolo Bettini	90
 2007: Paolo Bettini second-time world champion	96
Interview: Dirk Nachtergaele	112
 2008: 45 victories and 11 winners	118
Interview: Alessandro Tegnè	130
 2009: Difficult summer after a strong spring	136
Interview: Yvan Vanmol	150
 2010: A season with obstacles	156
Interview: Zdenek Bakala	172
 2011: The toughest of twenty seasons	178
Interview: Brian Holm	196
 2012: Escape from the abyss	202
Interview: Iljo Keisse	218
 2013: Team Lefevere moves solidly into new areas	224
Interview: Frans De Cock	240
 2014: Rainbow jersey again	246
Interview: Mark Cavendish	262
 2015: Yet another 54 wins	268
Interview: Zdenek Stybar	284
 2016: 30 riders, 3 trainees, 19 winners	292
Interview: Wilfried Peeters	308
 2017: Sixteen wins in the Giro, Tour and Vuelta	314
Interview: Tim Declercq	332
 2018: Quick-Step's absolute record year	338
Interview: Niki Terpstra	354
 2019: The Quick-Step train thunders on	360
Interview: Kurt Roose	376
 2020: The bizarre corona year	382
Interview: Fabio Jakobsen	398
 2021: Winning is an attitude. And hard work.	404
Interview: Julian Alaphilippe	420
 2022: Remco writes history	426
Interview: Remco Evenepoel	440



Luca Paolini, Paolo Bettini, Mirko Celestino • Milano-Sanremo 2003



20
03



**THE NEW BOY WITH
LOTS OF EXPERIENCE**



The first Team Lefevere • 2003

From year one, Lefevere does what he does best: enabling cyclists to win



Sven Vanthourenhout • 2003

The honour went to Sven Vanthourenhout for being the first professional rider to have reason to celebrate wearing the Quick-Step logo on his chest. History was made in Zonnebeke, on 25 January 2003. On that day, Sven won the Kasteelcross cyclo-cross ahead of Bart Wellens and Tom Vannoppen. A minor event, perhaps, and the winner looked a bit uneasy. Even so, it was a nice start for Patrick Lefevere and his new pro team, focused, of course, on road racing.

When Servais Knaven won a stage in the Tour of Qatar shortly after and Paolo Bettini then took control of the Tour Méditerranéen, there was, as they say here in Belgium, already a bit more salt in the fries. To everyone's surprise, the first delirium followed on Saturday 1 March. Johan Museeuw – already over 37 years old – soloed in Lokeren to a win in Omloop Het Volk, the opening event of the Belgian cycling season. The Quick-Step formation placed four riders in the first five. Bettini third, Frank Vandenbroucke fourth, Tom Boonen fifth. What a power grab. And yes, Max van Heeswijk came in second.

On 22 March, Paolo Bettini won Milano-Sanremo, two weeks before his 29th birthday. The celebrations raised the roof in the Quick-Step team bus. Paolo flashed onto the Via Roma in World Cup white, beating Mirko Celestino. Teammate Luca Paolini came third and joined the celebrations. A new team and immediately a major force. Amazement gave way to happiness, emotion to exuberant cries. No, Patrick Lefevere's star was not waning.



Paolo Bettini, Patrick Lefevere • Milano-Sanremo 2003



RESIDENCY CASA LENA IN KNOKKE

It was not written in the stars. In the summer of 2002, Patrick Lefevere was at a loss. He was team leader of Domo Farm Frites and had known for some time that the potato company from Oudenhorn near Rotterdam was going to pull the plug after two years. A search for fresh money proved difficult. Domo seemed willing to lend further support, but not wholeheartedly. So Patrick changed tactics. He approached Lotto, the national lottery, to create a top Belgian team after co-sponsor Adecco had announced that it was not continuing its partnership with Lotto.

Domo-Lotto, imagine. Two enemies under one roof. With Lefevere as manager, Marc Sergeant as sports director and Christophe Sercu as business manager. And yet something was gnawing inside of the man from Moorsleden.

The key to a new cycling future fell from the sky. The Opening Weekend of the 2002 Tour took place in and around Luxembourg. In the middle of the night, Lefevere's telephone rang and on the other end of the line he heard the hoarse voice of Frans De Cock, owner of Unilin, the company behind flooring brand Quick-Step. Could Patrick be in Knokke tomorrow at 10 a.m. ... Lefevere didn't ask any questions and didn't hesitate. Luxembourg-Knokke, a good 300 kilometres. A piece of cake in racing circles.

In the Residency Casa Lena, on the seawall of the fashionable resort of Knokke, Frans De Cock told him that Giorgio Squinzi – the boss of Mapei – was tired of the doping escapades of some of his Italian boys. He wanted out. In this way the abyss loomed for Mapei – Quick-Step, of which Lefevere had also been a part in the 1990s. Cycling had proven a strong marketing strategy for Quick-Step. So De Cock needed another solution fast. Could Lefevere set up a team for Quick-Step, but of course with sector competitor Domo?



Patrick Lefevere, Frank Vandenbroucke • 2003

Lefevere turned on his mastermind button and quickly put the figures together: budget, available riders, programme, staff. Great for a good middle-of-the-range outfit. If Frans wanted to raise the bar and build a real top team, extra budget was necessary. The solution was found two floors higher. The young pharmacist-wizard Marc Coucke, then 37, was living there. The Coucke oracle wanted something different... He already had a reputation in the financial and medical world with his Omega Pharma company, and had a permanent place in the top 50 richest Belgians. And now a wider exposure to the general public was being presented to him on a silver platter. Together with his backing, he added Davitamon into the mix, allowing the bar to be set even higher.



Above: Frans De Cock, Johan Museeuw, Luc Maes, Marc Coucke, Patrick Lefevre – Below: Presentation Quick-Step – Davitamon • 2003

FIVE STARS

The Quick-Step – Davitamon embryo turned out to be quite the success. Team Lefevere started out immediately with five top riders: Johan Museeuw, Paolo Bettini, Frank Vandenbroucke, Richard Virenque and Tom Boonen. Testimony to Lefevere's guts, business skill and cocksureness. Still, there was quite a bit of poker playing here. There was Leeuw Museeuw's age. Paolo Bettini was approaching thirty and had already won Liège-Bastogne-Liège twice for Mapei – Quick-Step, but had yet to become the stunner he later turned out to be. Tom Boonen was still a lad and 'chouchou' Virenque had had difficult years of doping, but nonetheless had won the Paris-Tours for Domo Farm Frites (and therefore for Lefevere) in 2002. And it was already clear then that things could go either way with Frank Vandenbroucke. Yet, this team was right for Frans De Cock. Because with those cards on the table, he could open doors for Quick-Step anywhere in Europe.

But in breadth too Quick-Step – Davitamon was strong. In practice, it looked like a merger of the Mapei – Quick-Step and Domo Farm Frites teams, with riders like Davide Bramati, Wilfried Cretskens, Kevin Hulsmans, Servais Knaven, Nick Nuyens, Luca Paolini, Michael Rogers, Bram Tankink, Kurt Van De Wouwer, Jurgen Van Goolen, Sven Vanthourenhout.

Young Boonen's arrival in particular proved a masterstroke. He had had one professional year in the peloton and came from US Postal, where he wanted to get out from Lance Armstrong's shadow. The way 'Tommeke' had given racing lessons to Armstrong on the Tour of Flanders cobblestones in 2002 had left an impression. The American was a three-time Tour winner at the time. The images are burned into our retinas.

The Lefevere project was a natural biotope for Tom Boonen. He would remain faithful to Patrick until the end of his career in 2017. Johan Museeuw too was impressed by the young man from Kempen. Johan had won his third Paris-Roubaix in 2002. Boonen had come in third and Museeuw had promptly proclaimed him his successor.



Peter Van Petegem, Frank Vandenbroucke • Tour of Flanders 2003



VANDENBROUCKE NO

Johan Museeuw opened the season with a win in the Omloop Het Volk, Nick Nuyens took the Putte-Kapellen Nationale Sluitingsprijs on 14 October. What was achieved between March and October was more than beautiful.

The 2003 Tour of Flanders seemed to be a copy of the 1999 edition, in which Frank Vandenbroucke, to his great disappointment, had to recognize that Peter Van Petegem was the superior and smarter rider. It was a grey season for Frank, deep in the pack. In September he still rode the Vuelta, but gave up. There was just one bouquet that year for him... his win on 7 August in the Kortrijk Koerse criterium. Another chance would never come for the Golden Boy from Ploegsteert.



Frank Vandenbroucke, Peter Van Petegem, Stuart O'Grady • Tour of Flanders 2003

Quick-Step – Davitamon left its mark on the Tour of Belgium at the end of May. Tom Boonen won the third stage and Aussie Michael Rogers was the overall winner. Bingo. Michael Rogers then continued to cash in on his top form, taking the overall victory in the Tour of Germany and the Route du Sud... not coincidentally each time after a time trial victory.

Time trials, and even better, team time trials: these were and still are the team's forte. Quick-Step elevated the team time trial to a new cycling discipline, later winning four of just seven Team Time Trial World Championships.

Back to the 2003 results. In June, the textile man or woman had a lot of work; Paolo Bettini became Italian Road Champion for the first time, Laszlo Bodrogi performed the same trick in Hungary. This resulted in two tricolour jerseys: red-white-green for Hungary and ... green-white-red for Italy.

Above: Around the table: Kurt Van De Wouwer, Wilfried Peeters, Servais Knaven, Paolo Bettini, Richard Virenque, Serge Parsani, Luca Paolini. Behind the table: Marc Coucke, Patrick Lefevere
• Tour de France 2003

Below: Servais Knaven • Tour de France 2003





TWO STAGE WINS IN THE TOUR AND THE POLKA DOTS

In 2003, the 100th anniversary of the Tour de France was celebrated with a route that led past historical sites and that for the first time in many years did not go beyond the borders of the French Republic. It was the ninetieth edition because the Tour was not contested for several years during the First and Second World Wars. The seventh stage to Morzine was won by Richard Virenque, who promptly took both the yellow and the polka dot jerseys. He would not relinquish the mountain jersey. The leader's jersey changed hands after the eighth stage and went to Lance Armstrong. Servais Knaven won the seventeenth stage into Bordeaux.

The hunger was still not satisfied. Our Italian Champion Paolo Bettini won two more World Cup events: on Sunday 3 August the HEW Cyc classics in Hamburg, on Saturday 9 August the Clásica San Sebastián in Spain's Basque Country. Hats off. There's a neat anecdote associated with that victory in the Basque Country. On the climb of the Jaizkibel, Bettini let teammates Virenque and Sinkewitz take the lead to keep things together. After the descent he dropped to Lefevere's team car and asked:



Above: Richard Virenque • Tour de France 2003 – Below: Servais Knaven • Tour de France 2003



Paolo Bettini • Clásica San Sebastian 2003

“How do you want me to win? Solo or in the sprint?” Talk about self-confidence! It was one long ribbon. Basso in the wheel, Di Luca 2 seconds behind and the rest following one by one. It became one of the “Cricket’s” most beautiful seasons and a harbinger of things to come.

On Thursday 14 August Johan Museeuw won the third stage of the Tour of Denmark solo and on Sunday 28 September Luca Paolini beat three companions in the Gran Premio Bruno Beghelli.

And then came another big candle on the cake: on 9 October, Michael Rogers became World Time Trial Champion in Hamilton, Canada. For years he had been the best in that discipline. On 12 October, Paolo Bettini lost the sprint for second place in the World Championships

road race to Valverde and Van Petegem, coming in fourth. Spaniard Igor Astarloa captured the rainbow jersey with a lead of 5 seconds. Two days later, Nick Nuyens crowned the Quick-Step – Davitamon season in Putte-Kapellen.

In its first year, Quick-Step – Davitamon clocked up 21 UCI victories, including one Monument, one world title, two national jerseys, two Tour stages and the polka dot jersey for dessert. A promising start to the adventure.

Wins 2003

25.01.2003 BEL
Zonnebeke, Cylco-cross
Sven Vanthourenhout

04.02.2003 QTR
5th stage Tour of Qatar
Servais Knaven

16.02.2003 FRA
**Final ranking
Tour Méditerranéen**
Paolo Bettini

16.02.2003
Final ranking World Cup, Cylco-cross , U23
Sven Vanthourenhout

01.03.2003 BEL
Omloop Het Nieuwsblad
Johan Museeuw

22.03.2003 ITA
Milano - Sanremo
Paolo Bettini

16.05.2003 FRA
1st stage Tour de Picardie
Aurélien Clerc

23.05.2003 BEL
3rd stage Tour of Belgium
Tom Boonen

25.05.2003 BEL
Final ranking Tour of Belgium
Michael Rogers

08.06.2003 GER
6e etappe Deutschland Tour
Michael Rogers

09.06.2003 GER
Final ranking Deutschland Tour
Michael Rogers

23.06.2003 FRA
3rd stage Route du Sud
Michael Rogers

24.06.2003 FRA
Final ranking Route du Sud
Michael Rogers

26.06.2003 HUN
Championship on the road, Ind. Ride, Elite
Laszlo Bodrogi

29.06.2003 ITA
Dutch Championships on the road, Elite
Paolo Bettini

09.07.2003 AUT
1st stage Uniqa Classic
Pedro Horrillo

12.07.2003 FRA
7th stage Tour de France
Richard Virenque

24.07.2003 FRA
17th stage Tour de France
Servais Knaven

27.07.2003 FRA
Mountain classification Tour de France
Richard Virenque

30.07.2003 FRA
Camors
Richard Virenque

30.07.2003 NED
Chaam, Criterium
Servais Knaven

01.08.2003 NED
Heerlen
Servais Knaven

03.08.2003 GER
Hew Cycclassics
Paolo Bettini

06.08.2003 BEL
Antwerp, Dernycriterium
Johan Museeuw

08.08.2003 NED
Maarheeze
Servais Knaven

09.08.2003 ESP
Donostia/San Sebastián
Paolo Bettini

14.08.2003 DEN
3rd stage Danmark Rundt
Johan Museeuw

16.09.2003 BEL
GP Briek Schotte
Wilfried Cretskens

28.09.2003 ITA
Gran Premio Bruno Beghelli
Luca Paolini

09.10.2003
World Championships, On the road, Ind. ride
Michael Rogers

14.10.2003 BEL
Putte-Kapellen
Nick Nuyens

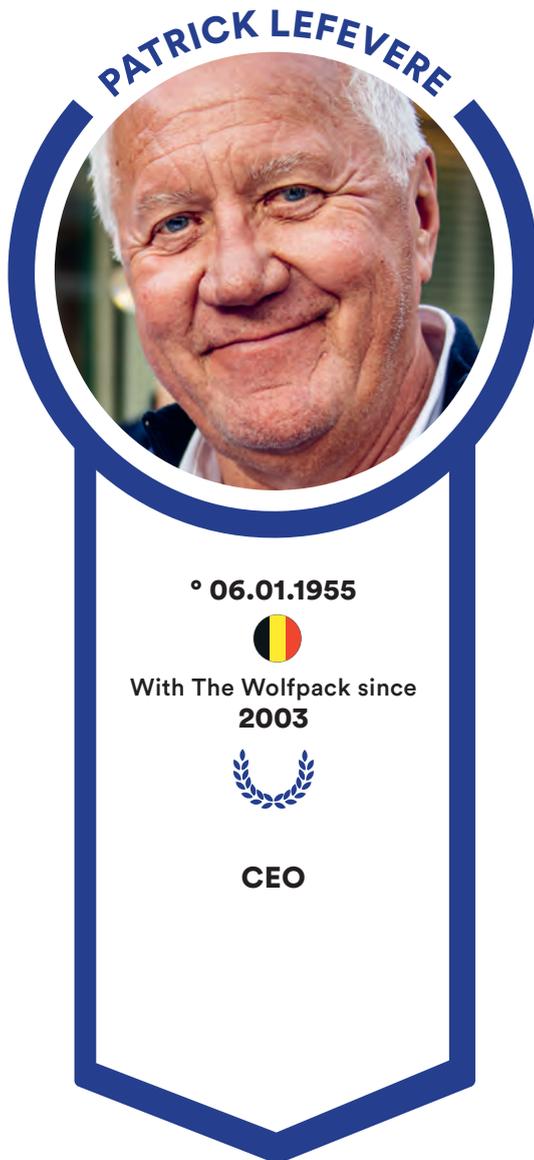
18.10.2003
World Cup, On the road, Elite
Paolo Bettini

29.12.2003 BEL
Veldegem, Cylco-cross
Sven Vanthourenhout

31.12.2003
UCI Road Ranking
Paolo Bettini



“ The will to win has always been enough performance enhancer for me.



He’s arguably the most successful team manager in cycling history. Patrick Lefevere: rider, sports director, manager, sponsor money-raiser... But above all, the architect of The Wolfpack. Addicted to winning and always keen to take the lead.

When did The Wolfpack story begin?

“At the end of 2002, with a phone call from Frans De Cock. He was then a co-sponsor with the Italian Mapei – Quick-Step team and called to inform me that Mapei had stopped its cycling sponsorship. That’s when the ball started rolling. Before I knew it, Quick-Step – Davitamon in 2003 was the relaunch of what used to be Mapei, in combination with the core of Domo Farm Frites. The creation of that new team, which would eventually become The Wolfpack, was of course preceded by choices. Important choices. I’d learned a lot from Walter Godefroot, who always reminded me of the importance of the structure of a good team. That structure is often more important than the riders. You don’t build a house on sand, but on strong foundations. This applies equally to a cycling team. People come and go, but your house has to last.”

What’s this team’s philosophy?

“Very simple: if you’re just thinking ‘me, me, me’, you’re on the wrong team. I actually started applying that from 1993, when I was the sports director of Museeuw, Bomans, Peeters, Ballerini and Cipollini. Then you have

to ensure that you create a context in which those men really want to go through fire for each other.”

All the testimonials in this book show that 2012 was the key moment in the team’s history.

“That’s true. We came out of a low point: things were not turning out the way they ought. And then, at the best moment imaginable, Zdenek Bakala came knocking. The capital increase he provided gave us the necessary breathing space. I was able to buy Tony Martin: his UCI points lifted us out of the relegation zone in which our team had ended up. But new and skilled personnel were also added: I am thinking of Rolf Aldag, which meant, for example, more attention than ever to the choice of equipment. Drastic choices had to be made and we all made those decisions.”

Is it correct to say that you, Zdenek Bakala and Tom Boonen have been the key figures in the twenty-year history of The Wolfpack?

“Yes. Although of course a lot of people have contributed to the team’s success. Also a lot of people behind the scenes, who are less in the spotlight.”

“ Every house stands on strong foundations. A cycling team is just the same.

Sounds like a trivial question, but it's super important: what are you doing it for?

“Winning. For me, winning and the drive to win are the best reason of all to continue what we're doing. I couldn't bear any more the lousy period we experienced in 2010-2011.”

What are the most enjoyable things you have experienced as a team manager?

“Those magic moments. Jakobsen's return to racing, Cavendish's comeback that no one thought possible, winning the Tour of Flanders, Alaphilippe extending his world title in Flanders, the many young people we train and allow to win stages, the process we are going through with the emerging Remco Evenepoel ...”





Can you pick a single most beautiful moment?

“The seventh stage in the 2003 Tour. The Alpine ride to Morzine. Richard Virenque attacked and won the stage, taking both the polka dot and the yellow jersey. And that after an incredible ride that no one had thought possible. It was also partly played behind the scenes, where I telephoned Johan Bruyneel and convinced him that it wouldn't be so bad if we took the yellow jersey.”

Other unforgettable moments?

“The victories in the classics, of course. There were so many. Kasper Asgreen's win in the Tour of Flanders, where he beat a Mathieu van der Poel in top form. Or Philippe Gilbert's cobblestone classics. All those world titles, because I am crazy for that jersey. Remco's first big tour, which was a historic moment for the team. Emo-

tionally, the first-stage win of Fabio Jakobsen in the 2021 Vuelta à España is high on my list. That was the year after his crash in Poland. People didn't see that boy coming. I remember the phone call from a Yvan Vanmol in tears after Fabio's crash in Poland. “Patrick, he won't make it through to tomorrow.” Fortunately, things turned out differently. Of course, there are also guys who have been through the same thing but didn't make it through. They are no longer spoken of. It could have happened to us too. When you see Fabio race again and even win a Tour stage, it makes you happy.”

The same goes for Remco Evenepoel...

“He may have come back from even further down after his fall in the 2020 Tour of Lombardy. I remember the moment of the fall, when I was watching the race with his parents and

girlfriend. I then had thirty seconds to decide how I would act if things really went wrong. I was amazed by the resilience that Remco and Fabio have shown. I take my hat off to them for fighting to get back to the level where they are now. It touches me, yes. Look, I think of them as family, as my children. I see those boys more often than my own children. So, of course...”

There seems to be a pattern among the riders who have ridden for your team. Once they leave the stable, they do less well. And others beg to come to The Wolfpack. How does this happen?

“I think that's because they still find and experience that job satisfaction here, despite the fact that it's all very professional. Society is tough, but I can say that we are human after all. A rider who rides with us or a staff member



Patrick Lefevere en Julian Alaphilippe



Pieter Serry, Ricardo Scheidecker, Dirk Clarysse, Kurt Van Roosbroeck, Patrick Lefevere

who works for us, that's ninety percent discipline and ten percent personal. They're all humans, they're not robots. I wouldn't want to work with robots, by the way."

The bad luck moments were there, but twenty years of The Wolfpack is above a series of wins. What is the secret? Can it be copied?

"You certainly can't attribute it to 'luck'. With the team we've won the Tour of Flanders eight times. Can you call eight times 'chance'? We never took our success for granted and that may be our big secret. Once you start taking it for granted, that's when it becomes dangerous. The day you think 'we've cracked it', things go wrong. I've always been afraid of falling asleep. Success should never blind you, should never make you stand still. Because standing still is to move backwards. If

you look to the left, the competition will pass you on the right before you realize it. You know, I still can't stand it when riders are laughing on the bus when they've been beaten. For me staying sharp is important. I never look at the races we've won, but always at the races we shouldn't have lost. If we don't do that anymore, we're done for."

“ I consider my riders as family, as my children. I see those boys more often than my own children.



Philippe Gilbert, Patrick Lefevere

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Photography:

Wout Beel: p. 4, 23, 72-73, 130-131, 134-135, 150-151, 154-155, 196, 218-223, 240, 242-243, 262-267, 284-285, 308, 311 (below), 318-319, 332-337, 376-385, 388-391, 393-394, 398, 400-403, 405, 406-409, 411-415, 418, 420-432, 434-435, 438-447

Sigfrid Eggers: p. 24-27, 152, 329, 340, 343 (below), 346-347, 348, 349 (below), 350-351, 362, 364, 368, 370, 371 (above)

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Matej Slavik / Economia: p. 172-173

Graphic design (style and cover): Wim Esteban De Dobbeleer @ Bataia.cc

Typesetting: KaaTigo BVBA

If you have observations or questions, please contact our editorial office: redactielifestyle@lannoo.com

© Geert Vandenbon, Frederik Backelandt, Uitgeverij Lannoo nv, Tielt, 2023

D/2023/45/145 – NUR 480, 489 – ISBN 978 94 014 8651 4

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