

# Katheryn Curi '96 Rides to a National Championship

By Emily Harrison Weir

## SPROCKET SCIENCE



**The odds were against Katheryn Curi '96 as she rolled into the elite women's national road race in Park City, Utah, this June. A competing team was**

favoured to win the national championship, riders would pedal uphill at altitudes (7,200 feet) that could take anyone's breath away, there were fifty-some other riders bent on nabbing the prestigious title, and she'd been plagued by injuries—including a twice-broken collarbone—for the past year.

But when Curi wants something, she tends to get it. "MHC taught me that if you work hard and you stay focused, what you want comes to you," she says. "MHC instilled in me this 'Go get 'em, girl' attitude."

So when Curi saw her chance to break out of the pack at the start of the first punishing hill, she attacked. Just as everyone's leg muscles were making the tough transition between riding on the flat and climbing mode, Curi kicked into higher gear. She was only fourteen miles into the seventy-eight-mile course, so pushing hard then was a big, if calculated, risk. If she peaked too soon, she'd be worn out long before the finish.

But Curi's long hours of training and strong hill-climbing skills paid off, as

did her bet that none of her competitors would want to tire themselves out at that point in the race in order to catch her. "I banked on the idea that everyone would say, 'I'm not going to chase her; you chase her.' Well, I'm not going to chase her ..."

Like cycling icon Lance Armstrong, Curi tries to ride the course for an important race before the competition begins. Because she knew the Park City course from "preriding" it, Curi also knew she was likely to win if she hit the two-kilometers-to-go mark at least a minute ahead of her chasers. She did just that and began smiling. "At the one-kilometer-to-go point, I knew I was going to win. And at 200 meters to go, I wanted to get off my bike and run across the line," she recalls. It was a while before Curi could do anything except pump the air with her fists and repeat, "Oh, my God!"

This biggest win in Curi's four-year-old professional cycling career brought her prestige, exposure, and an automatic berth in September's world

championships in Madrid [Note: Curi finished sixty-sixth among the 131 elite racers in that competition.]. As national champion, Curi will wear the coveted stars and stripes jersey in every road race for the next year.

Of course being a professional athlete isn't all finish-line glory. She puts in "lots of long miles" on her bike from November through February. As a major race approaches, her time and distance on the bike decrease, but she works out more intensely. Then—just before a big race—Curi rests, so her body gets the benefit of her previous hard work. "When the key event happens, your muscles are like, 'Oh yeah, we've done all that hard work before; we're ready to go.'"

### TEAM SPIRIT

Curi races with the nine-woman Webcor-sponsored team, based in California, and says the team aspect is what most attracts her to bike racing. "We're all working to get one teammate to the finish line first, and usually it doesn't matter which person it is in any particular race," she explains. Dynamics shift a bit in high-profile races such as nationals, but "you'd never race against a team-

Casey B. Gibson

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mate. Because we're friends off the bike, when we're on the bike we rely on and trust each other," she says.

Having a team that works well together is crucial in elite racing, Curi points out, because competitors are almost evenly matched in terms of physical ability. "When looking at such a small difference [in ability], team tactics and being a smart bike racer will put you over someone who might be of equal strength," she explains. "In bike racing, the strongest person doesn't always win."

And even the top competitors can't push their hardest for every race. Curi's trainer and coach Laura Charameda "peaks her"—builds her to her strongest level of ability—for only two or three races a year. Which races those are depends both on Curi's individual goals and the team's joint goals.

"I love the team aspect of road racing," she says. "At MHC I was a rower and loved working with others toward a common goal." Curi started competing as a mountain bike racer—a much more individual kind of competition—but switched to team-centered road racing in 2002. She says there's nothing like the feeling of "crossing the finish line knowing that, without my teammates, I couldn't have won; or that by sacrificing myself, a teammate won."

Curi races hard for seven or eight months a year, then gives her body a break by riding less intensely through the fall and winter. She works as a customer-service representative at the women's athletic clothing company Title 9 Sports during the off-season. "I like having the balance in my life, not just being a bike racer.

But biking seems destined to be part of her life "as long as I continue to meet my goals and continue to have fun with it. The day I stop having fun is the day I get out."

The thirty-one-year-old plans to continue professional racing at least through the 2008 summer Olympics in Beijing. Making the Olympic team is her ultimate goal; it seems like a long shot now, but a year ago she thought aiming for national championship might be shooting for the moon. "When I look at pictures [of the national championship] and tell the story, I still get goose bumps," she said in late August. "I know when I'm standing on the start line at the world championships, I'll be thinking, 'This is what I wanted at the beginning of the year, and I got it!'" Clearly, this cyclist is on a roll. □