



SIGNIFICANT

*Words Felix Lowe
Photographs Offside/L'Équipe*



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He ain't heavy: Felix Lowe on the benefits of having a brother in the sport and cycling's stand-out siblings through time



BROTHER



“We remember always the image of Andy waiting for Fränk. You can’t always be looking for your brother when you want to win a race.” I’m talking to Cofidis manager Cédric Vasseur about siblings in cycling and it’s not long before the subject inevitably turns to the Schlecks.

In a decade riding on the same team, the brothers from Luxembourg were virtually inseparable. They followed a similar race programme, shared the same website and rode, it seems, as if tied at the hip – prompting some fans to refer to them, rather cruelly, as a single entity named Frändy.

The younger Schleck swats this familiar criticism away like a fly. Instead, when we speak, the de facto 2010 Tour winner describes his “great privilege” riding alongside an older brother throughout his career. “I wouldn’t have gone as far as I did without Frankie,” Andy vouches.

Standing either side of Cadel Evans in Paris in 2011, the Schlecks are the only brothers to grace the same Tour de France podium. “That was something unique in the history of cycling,” Schleck says with pride. “I don’t think it will be done again quickly.”

Dismissing Vasseur’s notion that the brothers held each other back, Schleck says it was a conscious decision to stick together. “It was more important than being leaders on different teams. Maybe we would have won more races and earned more money – but it was the right decision for us.”

My reasons for talking to Vasseur are simple: he, too, knows a thing or two about siblings in cycling. The Frenchman’s father, Alain, and uncle, Sylvain, rode together for the Bic team of Luis Ocaña in the ’70s. And Vasseur himself fell out with his former manager Roger Legeay when trying to get his own brother, Loïc, to join Crédit Agricole in 1999.

Now manager at Cofidis, Vasseur’s squad this season includes the Italian brothers Elia and Attilio Viviani and Spaniards Jesús and José Herrada.

When the younger Herrada, Jesús, won stage six of the Vuelta a España last season, he dedicated the victory to his older brother who, 24 hours earlier, was reduced to tears after narrowly missing out on the race’s first summit finish.

“This is exactly the situation where one brother can give to a brother leader the eye of the tiger,” says Vasseur about the dynamic between los hermanos Herrada, describing José as “a kind of brain for his younger brother”. Since joining together from Movistar in 2018, their “fruitful association” has guided Jesús to two days in red and a maiden stage win in successive editions of La Vuelta.

“I’m really sure that what happened to José helped Jesús win the stage,” Vasseur says of the turn of events last August. “He thought about it a lot in the breakaway. I think he wanted to avenge the Herrada honour because we all thought José would win and it didn’t happen.”

In addition to the Herradas and Vivianis, today’s WorldTour boasts seven more sets of brothers, including the Sagans (Peter and Juraj), the Yates twins (Simon and Adam) and the Izagirres (Ion and Gorka), while the likes of Nairo Quintana (Dayer), Vincenzo Nibali (Antonio), Oliver Naesen (Lawrence) and Esteban Chaves (Brayan) all have younger brothers in the sport.

In the women’s peloton, sisters Hannah and Alice Barnes compete against Belgians Kelly, Jessy, Demmy and Lenny Druyts, while Annette Edmondson won the opening stage of the 2018 Tour Down Under days after her brother, Mitchelton-Scott’s Alex, became Australia’s national champion.

The sport may no longer be the working-class institution that it was, but its familial structure lives on – and having a sibling certainly seems worth it.

Chewing the fraternal fat with Schleck, I ask him to guess the percentage of Tour winners who also had a brother in the sport. He hesitates. “I believe it was a lot more

PÉLISSIER

Eldest Henri won the Tour in 1923 while Francis was a triple national champion. When they retired, Charles, a dandy who started the craze for white socks, became the best sprinter of his day, winning eight stages in 1930 – a record matched only by Eddy Merckx

than many people think,” he says. “Let’s say... four or five per cent?”

My calculations put the figure at exactly 33.3 per cent. Schleck laughs. “Really? Wow.” That a third of Tour champions share this common ground is all the more remarkable given that seven-time ‘winner’ Lance Armstrong was an only child, while of the four fabled five-time winners, only Miguel Induráin had a cycling brother.

“I remember that time-trial where Induráin slowed down to keep his brother within the time gap,” says Schleck, referring to the Lac de Madine test in the 1993 Tour where Miguel and Prudencio top-and-tailed the standings. “He played with his own GC to keep his brother in the race – it’s amazing to see there was something Induráin valued stronger than his yellow jersey.”

It’s not entirely true – Big Mig’s puncture that day was no ruse, even if it allowed Prudencio to make the time cut despite finishing a whopping 17 min 48 seconds down over 59 kilometres. Although physically similar, the Induráins were poles apart. As Gérard Rué, their French team-mate at Banesto, once said: “They’re both decent, quiet, sympathetic people, alike in every way. Except, of course, on the bike.”

Despite their contrasting ability in the saddle, ‘Pruden’ played an invaluable role in Induráin’s career. Rumours of him signing autographs for his brother may have been fanciful, but during two Tours and three Giri, the duo formed what Induráin’s biographer Alasdair Fotheringham describes as a “team within a team” where Pruden’s support off the bike far outweighed his input as a decent domestique.

The role of lesser talented siblings is often overlooked. Take the example of the champion of champions. If Fausto Coppi was born to ride, then his younger brother Serse slumped out of the womb onto the top tube and was left clinging to the seatpost for dear life. In 1949, the journalist Dino Buzzati described the “pitiable” Serse as “an ironic imitation” of his championissimo brother.

When Serse eventually won something – a controversial tie in Paris-Roubaix that same year, largely thanks

DELOOR

Gustaaf won the inaugural Vuelta in 1935 with the help of his older brother, Alfons. The Belgian duo returned a year later and took the first of only two fraternal one-twos in Grand Tour history with Gustaaf winning a second crown

to Fausto’s remonstrations – it was described as “the biggest joy” of his illustrious brother’s career. Photos from the velodrome that day show a proud, beaming Fausto clasping an awkward, goofy figure clearly unused to the limelight.

Perhaps Fausto’s secret lay with Serse, Buzzati suggested. As a loyal gregario and soulmate, he was Fausto’s “lucky charm – the magic lamp without which Aladdin would

have remained a beggar”. Deprived of this talisman, Buzzati claimed Fausto would lose some of his lustre. Two years later, this was cruelly put to the test when Serse died after a fall. Despite threatening to quit, Coppi continued racing, but a large part of him went with his brother.

With 80 per cent of humans having at least one sibling, it only follows that many pro cyclists have grown up alongside a significant other sharing the same physical attributes required to succeed.

Sibling relationships act as a natural laboratory for children to learn about the world, a testing ground for interactions outside the home and, theoretically, within the pro peloton. If being a sibling fosters both teamwork and competition, this is in essence what cycling is all about. Perhaps more than most sports, cycling is dictated by physical effort, hardship and months away from home – areas where the motivation and support derived from the presence of a ready-made training partner could aid perseverance, performance and progress.

In his book *Outliers*, the Canadian thinker Malcolm Gladwell explains that rather than rising from nothing, successful people rely inordinately on parentage and patronage. *Outliers*, he says, are invariably beneficiaries of “hidden advantages, extraordinary opportunities and cultural legacies”. Could having a fellow cyclist sibling be one of those utterly arbitrary advantages?

Professor Alison Pike, a specialist in child and family psychology at the University of Sussex, thinks so. She refers to the 10,000 hours concept which Gladwell

“They’re both decent, quiet, sympathetic people, alike in every way. Except, of course, on the bike.” Prudencio Induráin scrapes inside the time cut, 1993





champions: “It’s hard to get so much practice when you’re at home unless there’s support around you to get it. Having a sibling who is also interested is going to stack the deck in your favour.”

The notorious sibling trait of seeking familial recognition may, in turn, also explain why there are so many dynasties in cycling – from the Danguillaumes in France (with their 1,800 victories over three generations) to the Swinnertons in the UK. The prolific Bernadette, Margaret, Catherine and Frances between them won multiple track and road titles, while brothers Mark, Bernard and Paul all raced at a high level.

Can sibling science tell us anything reliable about the relationship between birth order and success? Received opinion dictates that older siblings are more likely to succeed, yet recent studies suggest that elite athletes tend to be later-born children, who are supposedly more athletic and greater risk-takers than their conservative elders.

Picture the flamboyant triple world champion Peter Sagan bunny-hopping across a roundabout to avoid a pile-up en route to victory, all while Juraj trundles home in the gruppetto, and this certainly rings true. But it’s also an oversimplification.

Sagan has always ridden on the same pro team as his older, less distinguished brother and speaks of the “special bond” he shares with Juraj. “It is important to know you aren’t alone and you have someone you can trust by your side, especially in the early years of your professional career,” he says.

If Sagan is so successful, he has not forgotten the key role Juraj played in introducing him to the sport in the first place. For his part, Juraj – 13 months Peter’s senior – cites the lifeline Peter gave him in 2010 by writing him into his renegotiated contract with Liquigas. Things have worked out: while Sagan Senior hasn’t exactly pulled up trees en route to three national road race titles, his peerless domestique duties in Qatar helped Sagan Junior to the second of his three world titles in 2016.

But it’s doubtful whether something as capricious as the order in which we left the womb has any real bearing. Coppi and Induráin were four years older than their brothers, while Andy Schleck was born five years after his mentor and “idol” Fränk. (Incidentally, their older brother, Steve, is a politician.)

The pressures of emerging from the shadow of a sibling have shaped many a career. For years, the younger of the pugnacious Pélissiers, Charles, was a figure of ridicule. Writing in *L’Auto* in 1925, Henri

Decoin explained how he dined out on the exploits of his older brothers: “Henri and Francis are peacocks with beautiful feathers. Now and then Charles pinches a couple and glues them on his back, parading like a jay during races.”

Perhaps this spurred him on. Within four years – and before his record eight stage wins in the 1930 Tour – Charles had been named the most popular cyclist in France... by *L’Auto*.

Another Frenchman, Guy Lapébie, the younger brother of 1937 Tour winner Roger, told French TV in 2010 of the pressure he put on himself “to honour the name of my brother. It stopped me living life. I didn’t want to let him down. But I also wanted to make a name for myself – a first name.”

It’s a topic I raise with François Simon – the youngest of four brothers who animated French cycling over two decades. The eldest, Pascal, famously held onto the mail-lot jaune for a week in 1983 before succumbing to a broken shoulder.

Middle brothers Régis and Jérôme both won stages on the Tour, leaving François big boots to fill.

“Having brothers who were also professional cyclists actually took the pressure off me a little and was quite reassuring,” he says. “It helped me learn things faster.”

Although François was the only Simon not to win a Tour stage – finishing runner-up on three agonising occasions – he enjoyed a stint in yellow in 2001 and became national champion. “I have no regrets,” he says. “Sure, I would have liked to have won a stage – but for myself, not just to match my brothers. You must remember that I never rode in a Tour with my brothers. We each had our own level; we weren’t fighting battles in the same arena. There was no rivalry.”

The subject of competitiveness is an intriguing one.

Professor Steve Peters, the Chimp Paradox psychiatrist formerly involved with British Cycling and Team Ineos, argues that sibling rivalry can be positive because it pushes athletes to be better and teaches them to handle conflict, cooperate and manage frustration and aggression.

That may be, but it’s seldom put to the test in cycling, where siblings tend to form the kind of “team within a team” epitomised by the Induráins. Only occasionally, as is the case with Frenchmen Romain and Brice Feillu (a sprinter and climber respectively), do siblings operate in different spheres.

Sprinters Damien and Jean-Patrick Nazon rode separately in the late 1990s, the former at least twice

RODRÍGUEZ

Emilio and Manolo finished first and second in the 1950 Vuelta, five years after elder brother Delio won the first post-War Vuelta (a fourth brother, Pastor, finished 15th). In the 1947 Vuelta a Galicia, the entire podium was made up by the Rodríguez clan

pping the latter in family one-twos. Vasseur also mentions the friction between Sylvain and Sébastien Chavanel, who “were not close” and only overlapped on the same team for two years.

Closer to home, Alice Barnes was beaten by her older sister Hannah in the British national championships in 2016. “If anyone was going to come sprinting round me, I’d rather it be my sister,” says Alice. With equal diplomacy, Hannah adds: “It was really cool to share the podium with her. It won’t be the last time we’ll be racing against each other to get that jersey.”

The friendly rivalry continued in 2018 when Hannah became national TT champion after beating Alice by 17 seconds, while Alice took both road and TT titles in 2019. Their total lack of confrontation reminds me of an earlier assertion by François Simon: “I don’t think brothers have what it takes to really fight each other to have success. Look at the Schlecks – it made no sense for them to ride against each other.”

Despite growing up to be competitive, Schleck tells me he and Fränk were never rivals on the bike. In training they had a “gentlemen’s agreement not to break each other”, while in races they ate from the same musette (so to speak). “We were both going into a war and trying to beat the enemy. We were team-mates – there were never circumstances when we were opponents.”

When push came to shove, Andy’s superior ability decided the hierarchy – as reflected in his 2010 Tour victory, ironically in a year when Fränk crashed out early on the cobbles. Could it be that Andy performed better because of his brother’s absence?

“Many journalists ask me this question,” he says. “That year I was the strongest in the Tour, but I was at a disadvantage when I lost Fränk.” The infamous ‘Chaingate’ incident was exacerbated by Fränk’s loss (“I could have had a good spare bike from him”) and it would take Alberto Contador’s retrospective ban to hand Schleck his solitary Tour title.

“Together we could have been two to fight Contador and beat him on the road, not with red tape,” Schleck rues.

There are, of course, two riders at the peak of their powers, identical in age and, arguably, ability who, on paper at least, should be big rivals. But, like most sets of brothers these days, the Yates twins ride for the same team. Simon and Adam, the first brothers to have each won the Tour white jersey, may yet test Schleck’s

claim that it will be a long time before brothers stand together on the podium in Paris.

Weeks before Simon and Adam win respective stages in Paris-Nice and Tirreno-Adriatico on the same weekend in 2018, I attend a Mitchelton-Scott training camp in Spain and ask them if there’s any rivalry between them.

“No, no, really not,” says Simon.

“No, no, not really,” says Adam.

Hmm. I inwardly recall Prudencio’s prosaic explanation of that Induráin sandwich of a time-trial in 1993 – “I’m a normal rider and Miguel’s a great champion” – translated with poetic panache by *Le Parisien* as: “He’s an eagle, I’m simply a sparrow.”

It’s a shame my transcription cannot be as flowery. But for all their lack of killer soundbites, the twins nevertheless communicate effectively how they found their own separate way in the sport – with Adam coming through the French

amateur scene while Simon focused on the track within the British Cycling Academy.

They may have joined the same pro team and they may both be whippet climbers with a penchant for uphill attacks, but the Yates boys are not the Schlecks Mark II. “We grew up on different systems and a lot of the time our race programmes are different. It’s not like we need to race with each other or depend on each other,” says Adam.

At the time of the interview, both brothers had ridden five Grand Tours, finishing in the top-ten twice. I ask if one would be slightly envious of the other, were he to win a Grand Tour first? “Nah, I’d be pleased for him,” says Adam. “Why wouldn’t I? He’s my brother.”

Eight months later, Adam supports Simon as he recovers from his Giro implosion to open his Grand Tour account with victory in La Vuelta – 83 years after Belgium’s Gustaaf Deloor won the inaugural edition with the help of his older brother, Alfons.

Since Simon’s win, the brothers have only ridden one major stage race together – last year’s Tour – with Mitchelton-Scott favouring a tactic of keeping them apart. Can the twins envisage a time when they ride for different teams? “If, further down the line, we need to take different paths then we will. But we’re both happy here,” says Simon. “We won’t be rivals – at least, for now.”

This assertion is hardly surprising: his red jersey aside, Simon’s brace at the Tour means he has seven

BOBET

Jean ditched academia to support Louison, the emotionally brittle brother five years his senior who became the first man to win three successive Tours (1953–55)

MOSER

Aldo, Diego and Francesco all wore the maglia rosa, with youngest of the quartet, Francesco, winning the Giro in 1984. All three were Filotex team-mates in 1973, with oldest brother Enzo as directeur sportif

Not Aldo or Diego, but Francesco Moser, smashing it on his beloved Paris-Roubaix cobbles, 1986





Grand Tour stage wins to his name, with Adam yet to break his duck. If they did not before, fans today really do know Simon from Adam.

Sibling science is clearly rooted

in theory over fact. For every dominant older force like Induráin or Coppi, there's a mentor like Fränk Schleck bringing out the best in a younger, better talent like Andy; for every Gösta Pettersson, the Swedish 1971 Giro winner and eldest of four world champion team time-trialling brothers, there's a Francesco Moser, himself the youngest of four pro cyclists brothers, but the only one to win La Corsa Rosa.

The very state of having a sibling, while no guarantee of success, clearly offers the right blend of motivation, teamwork, competition and support. Indeed, in his book *The Sibling Effect*, Jeffrey Kluger argues that siblings share an intimacy and familiarity that can't possibly be available in any other relationships. "To have siblings and not make the most of it is squandering one of the greatest interpersonal resources you'll ever have."

Not everyone can handle the pressures – or harness the advantages – of having a sibling in the sport as well as the Schlecks, Sagans or Yateses. For every rider who may have achieved success due to their sibling relationship, there are likely to be others who failed because of that same relationship. In other words, it's not always a case of Swinnerton by name, win-a-ton by nature.

Cofidis manager Cédric Vasseur can clearly see the benefits of having both Vivianis and Herradas at Cofidis. Attilio, he says, would be the first to give Elia a wheel on the Passo del Turchino in Milan-Sanremo, while their "winning formula" has seen Jésus and José sign two-year extensions this winter.

"But we will not sign brothers for the sake of it," he says, stressing that Attilio – who won his second race as a stagiaire for Cofidis last autumn – was no make-weight in the deal to snap up the WorldTour's fastest sprinter from Deceuninck-Quick Step. He cites the "bad experience" with Rayane Bouhanni, who proved a distraction for his elder brother and did not race for

PETTERSSON

Sture and Erik supported Gösta in his 1971 Giro victory. Tomas joined his elder brothers in the Swedish 100km TTT squad, which won three consecutive world titles. Separated by six-and-a-half years, the quartet were silver medallists in the 1968 Olympics

the last 18 months of his contract. "I honestly think that having Rayane in the team was a disadvantage for Nacer because he was not even able to train with his brother."

If he had to choose between a brother who was at the same level as another rider on the team, Vasseur would always opt for the brother. "There's always one who is stronger and the strongest always improves the other, who often would not be as good without their brother. But the

less strong brother also makes the stronger one even stronger ... But they have to perform, otherwise it's bad for morale. Like in business, you can't take on someone just because they are a friend or a brother. They need the ability or it's a waste of energy and creates a bad atmosphere."

The potential pitfalls run deeper. For all the advantages gleaned from riding alongside his brother, Schleck tells me of the "double fear" that infiltrated his career since witnessing Fränk plunge into a ravine in the 2008 Tour de Suisse. "I was a lot more scared of my brother crashing than myself," he admits.

The image of Andy looking over his shoulder for Fränk became a long-standing joke for fans. And many, Vasseur included, still reckon the Schlecks' closeness held each other back. But here, Andy is stoic: "It was the right decision for us because the memories we shared – of being together on the podium in Paris, fighting for one goal together with your brother and soulmate. For me, it was worth more than having a bigger salary elsewhere or a few more victories on my palmarès."

Fränk's role, like that of Serse for Fausto, Pruden for Miguel or Juraj for Peter, was clearly vital for Andy. Tellingly, when I ask Sagan what it would mean if his older brother one day bucked the trend and won a major race, his answer mirrors Coppi's reaction to Serse's unlikely Roubaix win: "It will certainly be one of my happiest moments in cycling." 

Felix Lowe and his two brothers have zero Tours between them



#arundelonboard



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