

# University student makes career of spinning wheels

By Pat Malach  
Emerald Editor

As a professional cyclist, Karl Maxon has competed in some of the world's toughest races, including the Tour of Spain and Giro d'Italia. He has raced with and against the best cyclists in the world.

Even so, some of the stiffest competition the 32-year-old University senior has faced may be in his business school classes.

"People are like sharks in these classes," he said. "You should see 'em. They're so competitive."

But if Maxon attacks his studies with the same veracity he uses on race courses, he should have nothing to worry about.

"It's that new challenge," he said. "I just love it. I'm eatin' it alive."

Maxon has had little problem taking on challenges in his cycling career, which began in 1981 after he developed a foot injury from long-distance running. He began riding his bike as a means to continue training.

"They stuck me on a bike to rehabilitate me, to keep me going," he said. "I found that I could still keep progressing physically without getting an injury in my calf or whatever."

Maxon met with immediate success his first year of racing with the Eugene Cycling Club and decided it was time to move on.

"I was so green — really naive," he said. "After the first year of cycling in '81, silly me, I had a lot of race results from the Northwest so I sent off letters to all these big teams."

One of those letters went to Mike Neel, whose credentials now include managing the 7-Eleven and Spago teams. At the time, Neel didn't have a spot on his own team, but one of his riders had backed out on a deal to ride for a French amateur team.

"He says, 'Well can you go?' And I'm like, 'uh, uh, uh, yeah,'" Maxon said.

That was in 1982. In 1983 Greg Lemond took second in the World Championship Road Race, but there were not many Americans racing the European scene.

"It was pretty wild," Maxon said. "I didn't know anything, and France is like the bastion of cycling tradition. It was like snicker, snicker. It was kind of like 'show me what you can do,' and then 'show me again and again.'"

In 1984 Maxon signed with the Italian pro team Linea MD Italia.

While racing in Europe, he competed in the Tours of Spain and Italy and rode most of the major one-day classics. Maxon said one classic he never rode in, or even wanted to ride in, was the Paris-Roubaix, also called the "Hell of the North." Paris-Roubaix is a nearly 200-mile Belgian spring classic famous for its mud and bone-jarring cobblestones.

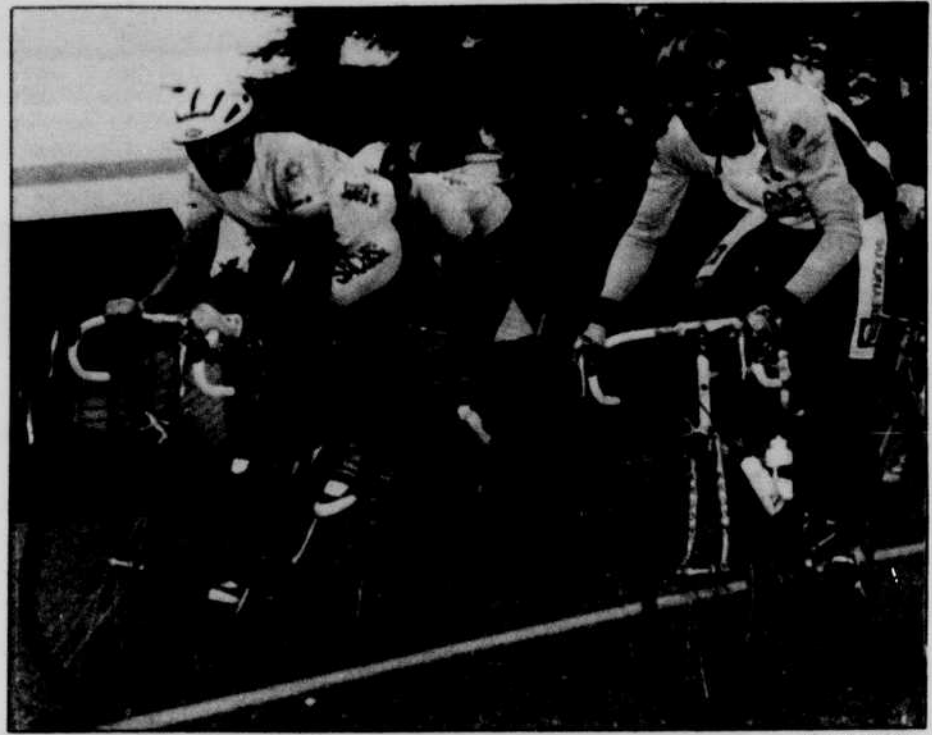
"Only two guys from our team got sent to that," Maxon said. "We were just saying 'no, no.' Just the Belgians wanted to go, so we said, 'Go up there. Go die. Have fun.'"

Maxon said he had about 10 top-10 finishes and several top-30 finishes racing as a pro in Europe.

In 1986, while riding with the U.S. team Ten-Speed Drive, Maxon won the National Championship in the 40-kilometer individual time trial and was a member of the team time trial National Championship squad.

Maxon signed with the French pro team Fagor in 1987, but he returned to Ten-Speed Drive in 1988 and rode his way to an impressive seventh-place finish at the CoreStates U.S. Pro Championships in Philadelphia, finishing ahead of notable U.S. racers such as Andy Hampsten.

Riding for the Subaru/Montgomery team in 1989, Maxon competed in the Tour de Trump, where he watched a



Karl Maxon (left) is flanked by Yvon Waddel of team Evian as he climbs a hill during a stage of the 1991 Gaston Grand Prix/Tour of White Rock in Quebec City, Quebec.

"doughboy" Greg Lemond get dropped from the field almost every day of the race. Just two months later, Lemond had dropped the extra weight along with all his competitors on his way to winning his second Tour de France.

Maxon currently rides for team Sachs/Fila-(QRBC) and has cut the number of races he competes in from about 100 to 15 a year so he can concentrate on getting a degree in accounting.

Maxon says the larger teams with big budgets have taken the fun out of the U.S. cycling circuit.

"The racing has gotten a lot slower in a lot of ways," he said. "It's gotten a lot more negative where it's just reactive rather than pro-active. That's why I end-

ed up going back to school. It's gotten boring.

"Someone will kind of halfway roll off the front," he said, "and then you get 10 guys putting their brakes on in the corner. You can't fight your way to the front through 20 guys. It's hard to fight that with a smaller team."

So now Maxon has made it a priority to fight his way to the front of his classes.

"I'm just here to learn and have a good time while I'm learning," he said. "It's really, really neat to put in your time, and you study hard and everything, and you get results. It's so cool. You finish your term and you move on."

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