

Leisure elite among the elite cyclists

By CHRISTINA DUNMYER Daily American Sports Writer
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Beth Leisure finds herself in very unique situation. The Saint James, Md., resident is the only female team director for a men's professional cycling team in the Tour de 'Toona. As impressive as that is to those involved with the sport, Leisure is one of only a handful of women across the world in that position.

"I heard there are some in Europe for elite men's teams and one provincial team in Canada but I am really in a groundbreaking role."

"I'm just doing what I love," the former USA National Cycling 2006 Masters stage winner at Jennerstown said. "It's not easy. Most people who are drawn to this sport have a special mindset, and an intense love of the sport to do this."

Leisure is the guest director for Team Calyon of Montreal, Canada. Calyon is an international bank based in France.

"I was so happy they contacted me for this race because I love the Tour de 'Toona," she said. "I assisted for them in the US Pro Week which is held in Philadelphia. When they heard I wasn't bringing my elite amateur team here, they called me."

"They are a new team and are doing well to just be in the races and somewhat active. It's a privilege to race against this field, considering the level of talent here."

Leisure worked with a South American team in May. "They complimented me after that and said I had a similar philosophy with the interaction of riders."

That interaction includes a lot of multitasking. "It's like high speed rolling chess," Leisure laughed. "I'm calling strategy to riders, listening to transmissions from officials, analyzing that and providing information. I sometimes even feed the riders out of the car. I also offer mechanical support along with motivational support."

Leisure took up cycling 15 years ago to manage the stress of a trauma and believes that is what makes her a great director.

"You have to have certain sensitivities as a director. The trauma I suffered helps me understand all of the emotions that are used in this sport. I am able to then use that element of understanding, motivationally."

A degree in international relations doesn't hurt either. "That is what this sport is," she said. "I have a business background, so I know how to work with sponsors and do marketing as well. I like juggling and managing a lot of things at once. My mom jokes that I just like telling people what to do."

After the tour concludes on Sunday, Leisure will return to her elite amateur team in western Maryland. She said they will travel to North Carolina for criteriums and on to elite nationals.

She will also continue to serve as guest director for the various men's teams who seek her expertise.
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Team Calyon director, Beth Leisure, talks with two riders after Stage 5 of the International Tour de 'Toona in Martinsburg Friday.

(Staff photo by Bob Leverknight)