

## Talansky Faces Tour Expectations

Written by Bonnie D. Ford  
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The photographs taken immediately after the finish of the Criterium du Dauphine in the French Alps don't betray whether Andrew Talansky is agonized

or ecstatic. His face is reddened and contorted in a way that could be a grimace or a joyous release. Age-line spokes, etched by sun and wind into a 25-year-old face that is both youthful and weather-beaten, radiate out from eyes squeezed shut.

**When he opened them again, everything was different.**

Talansky had just won the most celebrated tune-up race for the Tour de France in the most unexpected fashion possible, joining a breakaway in the final stage and riding away from two men who will be favored when the big show starts in Leeds, England, on Saturday.

The upset, overlaid on last year's 10th place Tour finish, officially puts Talansky in the podium mix and makes it far less likely that he'll be allowed to escape up the road again.

His winning move was early and aggressive -- a hair-trigger decision to bridge up to a group that included his teammate Ryder Hesjedal. It potentially jeopardized the third pace slot he was

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holding and defied cycling's usual last-day credo of better safe than sorry.

Talansky knew that defending Tour champion Chris Froome had been hampered by a crash two days before. He also knew that Spain's Alberto Contador, who was leading the race, might be loath to expend energy chasing him until it was too late.

**It was a bold but calculated risk.**

As he accelerated into unknown territory, Talansky had a conscious memory of the occasions where hesitation had cost him a chance to win.

"I have a laundry list of those in my head," he said. "It was actually that kind of theme that led to me ending up off the front of Dauphine. I've made this mistake before. I did something to fix it."

Rex Features/AP Images Talansky, center, finished ahead of Alberto Contador of Spain, left, and Jurgen Van Den Broeck of Belgium in the Criterium du Dauphine.

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Talansky's season-by-season learning gradient has been steep the past few years -- a pitch almost as abrupt as those he'll tackle in the Alps and Pyrenees later this month as Garmin-Sharp's team leader for the tour. He was a surfer and a runner who began racing a bike at a relatively late 17. The base miles in his legs were logged on dead flat roads at sea level where he grew up in Key Biscayne, Florida.

But his powerful mix of diligence and desire was evident early on. As a youngster, he ran charity races with his father, Alan, who induced friends and neighbors to pledge a few cents a mile on his son. Then Andrew wouldn't quit. "It would embarrass me," Alan said, "because they'd have to give him way more than they promised."

Talansky drove teachers crazy because he'd master a lesson and promptly start instructing the kids around him. He'd press any debate relentlessly, the way he would later push his body, always intent on having the last word. "Cut me a break, I'm not having a good time here," his father would say when Talansky kept chewing on a topic, as if it were a rawhide bone to be destroyed.

Tenacity proved essential when Talansky started clawing his way up to the pro ranks. Initially ignored by USA Cycling, he carved his own line. A collegiate road championship his first year (2008) at the cycling haven of Lees-McRae College in North Carolina prompted him to abandon his journalism major and sign with an Italian team, Amore & Vita.

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Dilapidated team housing and generally dysfunctional working conditions offended his strong sense of order, and drove him home from Europe and into a temporary state of doubt.

That bumpy passage propelled him into two key relationships that endure to this day. The first is with the former Kate Fox, a massage therapist whom he met in the summer of 2009 at a race in northern California and married last year.

"At that time Kate knew nothing about bike racing, and people riding around in circles in Lycra was not high on her list of things to pay attention to," Talansky said. Something clicked in, however, and by that winter she had quit her job, rented out her house and joined Talansky on his nomad's journey. The couple split their time between the Napa Valley and Girona, Spain, where she has thrown herself into the uber-soigneur life of a cycling spouse.

"Every result I get on the bike is truly, in the full sense of the word, ours," Talansky said. "She's been there from the very beginning, when I was driving around to races in my car hoping to get my entry fee back. I absolutely couldn't do this without her. She puts as much into my training as I do. More than a lot of people can imagine, so much of her effort goes into making sure life is good over here. It makes my life very simple, which is great."

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Talansky also met fellow rider Jesse Moore, now his personal coach, during the same interlude. At the 2009 Tour of the Gila in New Mexico, Moore saw Talansky's raw talent and cerebral nature, and noticed his lack of intimidation alongside elite domestic and a sprinkling of top-shelf international riders, including Levi Leipheimer and seven-time

Tour de France winner Lance Armstrong in his comeback season before his doping history was exposed. The following year, as Talansky's roommate and teammate on California Giant/Specialized, Moore helped him to a sixth-place overall finish, which in turn led Garmin manager Jonathan Vaughters to offer him a contract. At the team's pre-tour news conference this week, Talansky told reporters he had renewed for two more years.

Talansky's physiological gains have been steady and proportional to the considerable workload he puts in, Moore said, and the results have followed: seventh at the 2012 Vuelta a Espana, second and a stage win at Paris-Nice in the spring of 2013 and top 10 at the Tour de France last summer.

Talansky's impassive face under a helmet and close-shorn blond hair have become a familiar sight tucked into the lead group on a climb or in a time trial tuck, where he was a U-23 national champion -- both necessary specialties for a grand tour contender.

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### **Refining his psyche is a work in progress.**

Talansky is prone to the occasional publicly blown gasket, as was the case at last year's USA Pro Challenge in Colorado, where announcers mistakenly called him the winner of the time trial. When Talansky learned he'd been beaten by fellow young American Tejay van Garderen of BMC Racing, he left the Garmin bus and launched a verbal broadside on the nearest target, which happened to be the people outside the adjacent BMC bus.

Vaughters reminded his aspiring Grand Tour winner that he will need more friends than enemies in the peloton to get to that level. "He just has to put that determination and explosiveness into the pedals," Vaughters said. "For the most part, he's done a good job of getting to a more mature and refined point. He can work on that, but you can't get a person who doesn't have passion to have passion."

Talansky finished 10th in the 2013 Tour de France, putting his name among the possible contenders in this year's Tour.

Talansky recognizes that meltdown and others for what they are -- imprudent, impolitic and a waste of energy in a sport where energy conservation is crucial.

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"There have been times when that drive and that occasional anger have served me well and other times when it's made me look a little foolish and I haven't come out on the winning end from it," he said. "That was a good lesson for me, Colorado. It's not an acceptable thing, it's not a great thing, it's not good for me, it's not good for the team, it's not good for anybody if I get really upset in any kind of public setting."

Moore has set about trying to harness Talansky's loose electrons in training, which involves, in essence, doing reps to build emotional control as well as physical strength and endurance. "There are times I've chosen particular routes or things for him to do that I knew would create anxiety and frustration, to try and create a bomb-proof mentality," Moore said.

Interestingly and counterintuitively enough, for all Talansky's inborn assertiveness, both Moore and Vaughters said he had to be nudged to trust his read of a race and take more risks on the road like he did in the Dauphine. The pecking order in cycling can foster caution and too much respect, but it was time.

Vaughters returned the favor by deciding last November that he would put his chips on Talansky in the tour with no other secondary goals. The final roster omitted veteran David Millar in favor of young domestiques and climbers who will serve Talansky, and 2011 Paris-Roubaix winner Johan Vansummeren of Belgium, who will be charged with escorting him over some of those same cobblestones in the potentially perilous Stage 5 of the tour.

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Talansky's tour debut last year, when he was laboring with fewer expectations and their accompanying stress, couldn't have gone much better. His eyes will be sprung wide open, knowing what to expect. But he'll aim for that moment when he can close them again, in relief, having fulfilled a vision that used to be his alone.

### Talansky on doping

Andrew Talansky is articulate and opinionated -- "You're never going to wonder what he's thinking," his father observed -- and has spoken and written at length about his views on doping in the sport. Yet like other riders who have emerged in the past couple of seasons, he's treading his way through a sporting landscape that is still full of mines.

Inside and outside the peloton, the polemic rages on about who has and hasn't paid the price for past transgressions, who has and hasn't fully confessed and whether cycling has achieved a turning point prematurely declared so many times before. It is an awkward transitional period with an indefinite horizon.

Talansky ascended on a team that included three important witnesses in the Lance Armstrong investigation -- Christian Vande Velde, David Zabriskie and Tom Danielson -- and he calls another, Levi Leipheimer a close friend and mentor.



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"I can't tell you, if you put me on U.S. Postal in 1999 trying to make the Tour team, what I would do," Talansky said. "I'm an extremely ambitious person. I can't tell you in that moment, if I had had to make a choice that they did, if I would have packed up my bags and gone home or done what they did. I can't tell you.

"Thanks to those guys, I never have to make that decision. That's my overriding reason for supporting those guys and for being friends with them."

**Photo Courtesy: Andrew Talansky, LMC Athletics**