



*Frankie Andreu: Cyclist, Director, Coach, and So Much More*  
By: Jamie Naragon, Publicist - Inferno Racing

In October, nine-time Tour de France rider Frankie Andreu announced that he would be Director Sportif of the Ohio-based KENDA Pro Cycling p/b GEARGRINDER (KPC) team. It therefore became important to get to know this important addition to the UCI Continental (Pro) team. Recently, I interviewed Andreu to get a better understanding of his love for cycling, his professional cycling career, what he's been up to since retiring from professional racing, and his plans for Kenda's flag ship road program.

**Jamie Naragon (JN): Growing up, how was the cycling atmosphere of Michigan?**

Frankie Andreu (FA): I was lucky that I grew up within a huge cycling environment here with the Wolverine Cycling Club, led by Mike Walden. This club produced many National and World champions that all came from this area. It was, and still is an outstanding club.

**JN: How did you get interested in cycling?**

FA: My father used to ride a good amount, but he never raced. I started to want to ride with him, so he would take me out on the bike. Eventually, he asked if I wanted to try racing, and I decided to try it. Of course, I loved it, despite not doing very well at it during my early years.

**JN: When did you realize you wanted to become a professional cyclist? What inspired that decision?**

FA: I raced as an amateur for many years, all over the country (U.S.). I started at ten years old and raced my first nationals event in 1976. I just loved racing, and at that time I knew nothing about European cycling or the Tour de France. I never really thought about turning pro, until the offer came to me in 1984 with 7-Eleven to race on their amateur team. Once that happened, I saw what professional cycling was about and I became interested in racing as a professional.

**JN: You started your career as a track cyclist, winning the individual pursuit in the 1984 Junior National Track Cycling Championships and the Madison in the 1985 National Track Cycling Championships. These successes gave you a position with the U.S. Olympic team in Seoul, South Korea, in 1988. Describe what that experience was like.**

FA: Growing up, I had always dreamed of being a part of the Olympics. I worked very hard to win the Olympic track trials points race to get my spot on the Olympic team. The experience was fabulous. It was incredible to see all the famous names from different sports, actually eating in the same cafeteria. Racing-wise, I was in a bit over my head. I was young, competing against the best in the world, and I finished 8<sup>th</sup>. It was a learning experience, and it showed that there was a lot improvement needed to be one of the best in the world.

**JN: What prompted your move from track to road cycling?**

FA: The biggest push came from the 7-Eleven team. I had done many road races with them and was doing okay, but the main factor was that the track division of the program they had was shutting down. They were only going to have a road program, so in a way, I really had no choice if I wanted to stay on the team. My first race in Europe as a professional, with 7-Eleven, was the Tour of Holland. I suffered . . . a lot. Luckily, 7-Eleven and Motorola were very patient in developing young riders such as myself.

**JN: You had the opportunity to ride in all three grand tours with an emphasis on the Tour. Why did you ride the Tour more than the Giro and the Vuelta? How do the three compare to each other?**

FA: My first Grand Tour was the Giro (d'Italia). Again, I was in way over my head, barely hanging on each day. Gianni Bugno had the pink leader's jersey from the very first day through the very last day. I don't think I saw Bugno once in that race, because I was never at the front. After that, the focus for the team was always the Tour de France. Plus, *everyone* wants to ride the Tour de France. It's the race with the most pressure, the best riders, and it gets *everyone's* attention. I loved the atmosphere, the racing, and being a part of the biggest bike race in the world.

**JN: What was it like to be the only American to finish the 1994 and 1996 Tours de France?**

FA: It's kind of weird to think I was the only American to finish those Tours when you see how many Americans are now racing in Europe. It just sort of happened. I was lucky enough, and strong enough to finish, but it really wasn't important to be the only American to finish. I was trying my best to work hard for my leaders, and at times get a result for myself.

**JN: You were active in the post-Lemond years when it seemed American interest in cycling was ebbing. Did you ever get discouraged by the apparent low level of popularity for the sport in America?**

FA: No not at all. I loved racing my bike and it didn't matter if it was popular here in the U.S. I just wanted to compete at the top level and try to win bike races. I knew my limits, so I knew I was never going to win any Grand Tours. I just worked hard to help my teammates and help the team win.

**JN: In 1996, you finished 4<sup>th</sup> in the Olympic Road Race in Atlanta, Georgia. How did this Olympic experience compare with your previous exposure to the Olympics, especially considering the race was on US soil?**

FA: There was more pressure racing on home soil for sure. Mainly, it was internal pressure, because by this time I knew I could ride and compete with the others on the start line. I was older and stronger than in my first Olympics, so the expectations were there to ride a good race. I was very happy with my 4<sup>th</sup> place, but of course a medal would have been even better!

**JN: Having competed in classics, world cup events, the Olympics, the grand tours, and various US and World championships, what do you consider to be your most significant racing results?**

FA: I'm happy that I finished all the Tours de France that I started. I won (races) sometimes, but mostly I am proud that I made a big difference in helping others win races. I knew my role on the team, and by being a team player I kept my place on the team.

**JN: Most of your cycling career was spent riding with various American teams (and the French Cofidis team in 1997). How did your experiences with these teams shape you?**

FA: I was lucky to be on American teams with great riders that showed me how to become a good professional. Andy Hampsten, Steve Bauer, Sean Yates, Phil Anderson, were all experienced professionals that shared their advice freely. They taught me how to eat correctly, how to train, when to move up at the right time during the classics, how to survive a three week Tour. If I had to learn this on my own, I probably wouldn't have made it very long in Europe. This is why I have the utmost respect for any rider that went over there on their own before the American teams were around. That must have been crazy-hard for them!

**JN: What was your favorite race to ride? Why? What is your favorite race to commentate on? Why?**

FA: I loved the classics. These were my favorite to race, and they are my favorite to watch. The cobbles are tortuous and watching the riders suffer, battle and crash kind of puts me back in the

moment, making me remember what it was like. It's an entirely different type of race than anything on the planet, and something always happens that takes away the win, or gives someone the win.

**JN: Since you retired in 2001, you have served as a race director for various groups. How did you become involved in KENDA Pro Cycling p/b GEARGRINDER (KPC) specifically? What aspects of this position do you most and least enjoy?**

FA: I had been talking with Chad Thompson, founder of the 6 year old program, for a couple years about his team and trying to take it to the next level. Chad is very organized, very motivated, and loves the sport as much as I do. This passion really attracted me to his organization, and I missed being a part of a team trying to win races. I get as much enjoyment directing a group of riders to a win as I did when winning myself. This year we have a great group of riders with some incredible talent. I know we will have a good team in the road races as well as the criteriums. It's a well rounded team so I'm looking forward to the 2010 season altogether.

**JN: What are some of your immediate and long-term goals for KPC?**

FA: For starters, it's important we come out swinging. We have to show our strength early on to prove that we are a team to reckon with. Our first goal is the Tour of Taiwan in March (2010). After that we will focus on doing well at the U.S. stage races and UCI events. If the riders ride to their potential we will look towards the Tour of California. We have some strong climbers, and some fast riders, so with every race we enter, I will expect a good result. Long term I would like to continue to grow this team with Chad to be able to have enough riders to run double program at times, and venture a little more outside of the U.S. racing scene.

**JN: Describe your role as you see it within KPC.**

FA: My job is to help select the race events we will compete in, select riders, and organize everything to make us a winning team. The riders we have are professionals, so they know they must be fit and healthy to race. It's my job to organize a game plan, to get the most from their strengths, and tactically make no any mistakes, giving them the best chances of winning. During the year we will have performance reviews and make adjustments to allow the team to work cohesively and continue winning.

**JN: What do you have planned for training camp?**

FA: Training camp will be time for the riders to get all of their equipment, discuss the race calendar, and get familiar with one another. It will be a hard camp riding-wise because the racing season will be just around the corner. This will probably be the only time where the entire team

will be together in one location, so it's important we work out wrinkles in the system before everyone starts travelling and racing.

**JN: What impact does your family have on your cycling career?**

FA: My family is extremely important to me, and I try to balance the travel with the time spent at home. I'm lucky that they support me, my job choice and my passion, and they understand that during the summer I have to travel and work a lot. My kids are old enough now where it would be nice to take them to a race once in awhile, so they can see what dad does and how much fun the races can be. They love doing the kid's races, so getting them to agree to come to a bike race is usually not too difficult.

**JN: You seem to keep pretty occupied through various facets within the cycling industry. What hobbies do you have in your spare time?**

FA: Riding is my hobby. I still like to ride, and when I get a chance, I go out with my friends and have sporadic hammer sessions. I also am a hockey coach for my son's team, and part-time baseball coach for my kid's school team.

With such a consummate and well-rounded professional added to the KENDA Pro Cycling p/b GEARGRINDER ranks, this will certainly prove to be an exciting year! Be sure to check Frankie's website ([www.frankieandreu.com](http://www.frankieandreu.com)), in addition to the team's website ([www.kendapro cycling.com](http://www.kendapro cycling.com)) regularly for more updates!