

TRANSFER OF POWER

THE 2012 SEASON BELONGS TO THE SUPER TEAMS

Everything you thought you knew about pro cycling is wrong.

Okay, maybe that's an exaggeration. But for anyone who spent 2011 living in a cave — or wasn't closely following the off-season transfers of both riders and sponsors — the landscape of the pro peloton has changed so dramatically that it can be hard to fathom.

Gone is the HTC-Highroad team that won hundreds of races from 2008 through 2011. The American team's riders have found new homes across the peloton, most notably world champion Mark Cavendish and his lead-out man Bernie Eisel at Team Sky.

But for every door that closes, a new one opens, and in 2012, that door belongs to the upstart Aussie team GreenEdge, which landed Matt Goss from HTC and poached several young Australian stars from Garmin.

And Johan Bruyneel's squad, which was home to both Lance Armstrong and Alberto Contador in 2009 as Team Astana before RadioShack came on board, has merged with the former Leopard-Trek team of Andy and Fränk Schleck, uniting the Luxembourg brothers with Chris Horner and Andreas Klöden.

That merger prompted the exit of American Levi Leipheimer to Omega Pharma-Quick Step, the Belgian classics team of Tom Boonen and Sylvain Chavanel, which has taken the title sponsor from the former Lotto team of Philippe Gilbert, who has now joined Tour champion Cadel Evans at BMC Racing.

Also new to BMC Racing is 2010 world champ Thor Hushovd, from Garmin, and American GC rider Tejay van Garderen, from HTC, while HTC mates Tony Martin and the Velits brothers join Leipheimer at Omega Pharma, giving the Belgian squad a whole new dimension for stage racing.

Already in 2012 Leipheimer has won a stage race in Argentina, beating Saxo Bank's Alberto Contador, who was subsequently suspended through July for a doping infraction dating back over 18 months, making Andy Schleck the 2010 Tour champion and Contador a spectator until the Vuelta a España.

Got all that? Good. Now, either go back to your cave, or start paying attention!

2011 WORLDTOUR RANKING

1. OMEGA PHARMA-LOTTO

2. TEAM SKY

3. LEOPARD-TREK

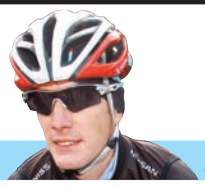
4. HTC-HIGHROAD

5. BMC RACING

6. GARMIN-CERVÉLO

10. RADIOSHACK

16. QUICK STEP



PINOTTI · VAN GARDEREN

HUSHOVD



2012 VELO PRE-SEASON RANKING

1. BMC RACING

2. RADIOSHACK-NISSAN

3. TEAM SKY

4. OMEGA PHARMA-QUICK STEP

5. LOTTO-BELISOL

6. GARMIN-BARRACUDA

9. GREENEDGE

10. RABOBANK

ROULSTON

CANCELLARA

BUSCHÉ · HORNER · KING · KLÖDEN · POPOVYCH · ZUBELDIA

GRAHAM WATSON (8); TIM DE WAELE (2); JOHN PIERCE/PHOTOSPORT INTERNATIONAL; COURTESY RADIOSHACK-NISSAN-TREK