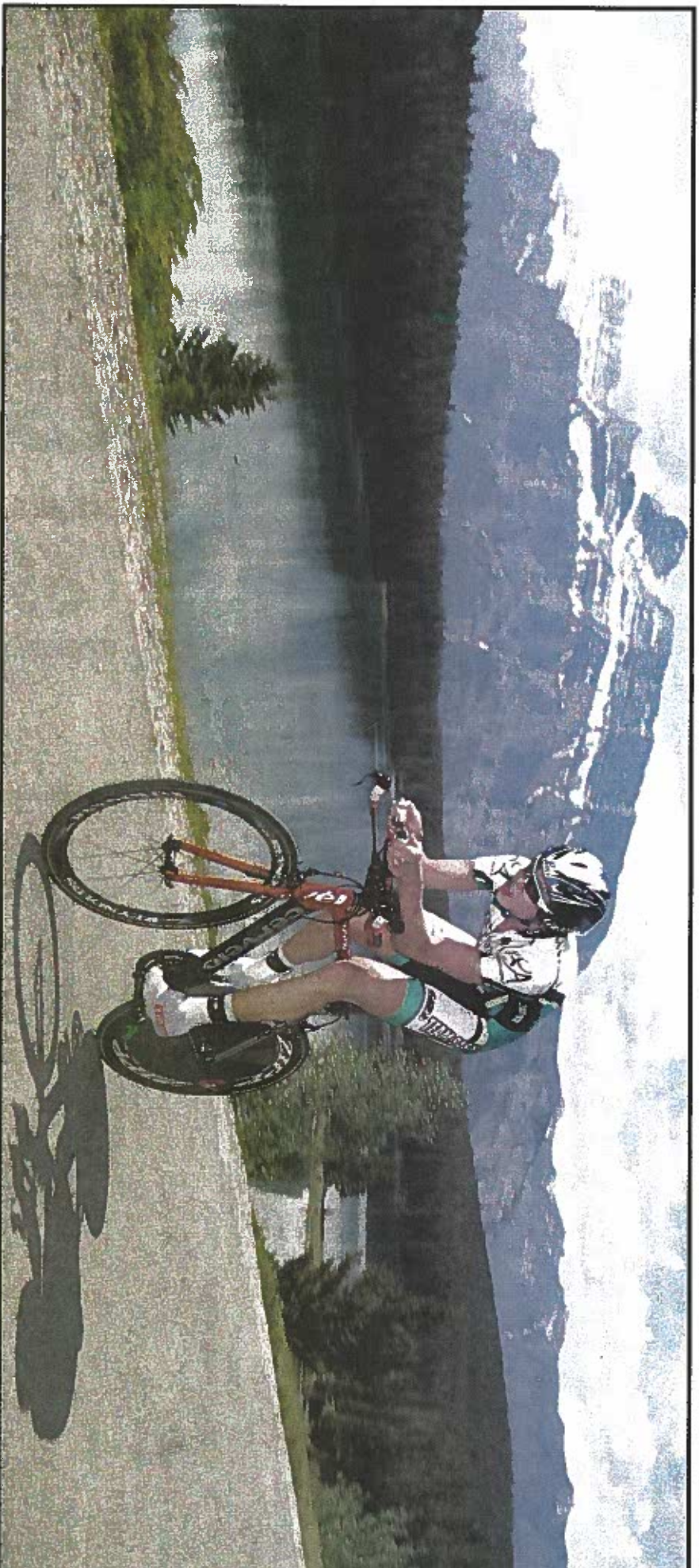


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Cyclist Brad Clifford competes in the Banff Bike Fest in 2009.

- Submitted

Clifford takes cycling to another level

By Jessica Rawluk

Herald Staff

Former Dauphinite Brad Clifford has earned a spot on the H&R Block professional cycling team.

The 20-year-old started his foray into athletics at a young age playing minor hockey and taking part in the Kids of Steel triathlon program.

"I was involved in triathlon and the cycling community from a very young age, probably around 10. I would always do local stuff. I would ride with the group that we had in Dauphin and it just kind of escalated from there," Clifford said.

While cycling started out as fun for Clifford, it was while attending Mackenzie Middle School he discovered a more competitive side to the sport.

"Originally, the former middle school gym teacher Bill Davidson was also a friend of my mom's and was big into triathlon. And he basically helped me and encouraged me, along with my mother, to pursue triathlon.

"I guess he saw a potential in there and I became a triathlete when I was 10 or 12 years old."

Growing up in a farming community, Clifford said biking was not the first thing he thought he would be doing as a job.

"I think everyone dreamed of being a hockey player. That was my dream when I was younger, but obviously

my talent and my abilities were in endurance sports."

During his time as a triathlete, Clifford entered a number of races across Manitoba, but noticed there was a bigger talent on the bikes, than in the running or swimming portion.

So he decided to make the switch from a triathlete to a full-board cyclist.

"It was later in life toward the end of my hockey career I realized that this was a passion of mine and something I enjoyed."

Clifford moved to Regina to focus on his cycling.

The move proved to be beneficial as he was signed to the H&R Block team in November 2010.

Before being signed, Clifford was with the Edmonton Road and Track Club (ERTC) team for the past couple of seasons. His results were starting to get better and he was attending bigger races.

"I was racing the pro tour in North America and I guess my name got mentioned somewhere, or my results showed somewhere out of the national team for Tour Trinidad and Tobago this fall. And as soon as I returned from there, I got a call from Mark Ernsting, who is the manager of H&R Block, and he asked me if I'd be interested in riding for them. And obviously I took the offer," he said.

The team, based out of Montreal, is comprised

of members from across Canada.

Clifford explained with cycling, unlike other sports, getting drafted for a team has more to do with final times than actually seeing a cyclist during a race.

"I've dedicated my entire life to this sport and it is no secret that it takes a lot of hours and a lot of time to commit to the sport to be competitive. There's days where we are out on the road for five, six, seven hours plus in the winter we're in the weight room four or five days a week. So it does become a full-time job."

- Brad Clifford

"It's not like hockey or football where they have people come watch the games, because it is a race. People don't show up to a race just to see a skill set, because we're gone by you in five seconds."

Word of mouth seems to be the best way coaches learn about new talent when it comes to getting additions for teams.

"Whoever sees you, or you get a good result and someone from another team knows you or sees you and likes what they see, they will find your contact information."

Cycling requires constant training, which Clifford says is done out on the road.

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As long as there is a paved road, Clifford said

"That is the beauty of cycling, that it is not in a venue or arena. The whole world is our stadium and that is our training ground."

- Brad Clifford

he can train on it.

Clifford has invested a lot into the kind of bikes he rides.

"My bikes are worth much more than the car I drive," he laughed.

He explained the bikes are very scientific and the mechanics involved have to be very precise.

"The bikes we ride are made out of carbon fiber. They are extremely light, extremely stiff and aerodynamic. The wheels themselves are a couple of thousand dollars a piece."

While he admits cycling takes up a lot of his time, it also takes a toll on his body and it is important to be constantly training to keep in

shape and ride ready.

"This is what I do for a career and my body is my workplace. And the gym and on the road and the bike is my office."

Clifford has taken part in a variety of different tracks when it comes to racing. From cycling through town, to blocking off certain portions of a street and doing laps.

"Road racing, they close the roads and the fans line up on the side of the roads. They come out of their houses, for example, in Europe. If we are going up a mountain they camp on the side of the road. And those are the fans."

The races themselves are also varied from shorter timed trials of 40- to 50 kilometres where it is just the cyclists against the clock, to road races which can be anywhere between 120-to-150 kilometres.

"If it's a one-day classic, it can be anywhere between 200 and 250 kilometres."

There are also tours which are more than a week long, which combine everything.

With those kinds of races, Clifford said it is important to stay within yourself and try not to let the distance psych you out.

"We have to suffer," he laughed.

"You have to learn to turn your brain off some times and tell your body to shut up and do what it's told and just go along with the race."

Clifford is enjoying his time on the new team

and with his new teammates and is currently training in Tucson, Arizona, for the winter.

"It's for training camps and the start of the North American pro tour starts in Tucson and Los Angeles."

He said there are a series of races in early 2011 he is required to take part in.

"Basically those are selection races for the bigger tours in Europe and then South America and over in Australia, as well as in North America."

He feels fortunate to be able to travel the world, doing something he loves.

"I've been very fortunate and very lucky to be able to travel the world and do a sport that I love. I can't complain about that," he said.

Though he has been cycling for most of his life, Clifford is constantly learning about the sport and is continually building on what he has already accomplished.

"As you get older you steadily get better and mentally you gain experience through the racing," he said.

He credits his start in Dauphin and laughs when people ask him about his start.

"It's cool to come from Dauphin, a small town and it just shows that anything is possible. Any kid growing up in an area where cycling isn't the most popular, it still can be done."