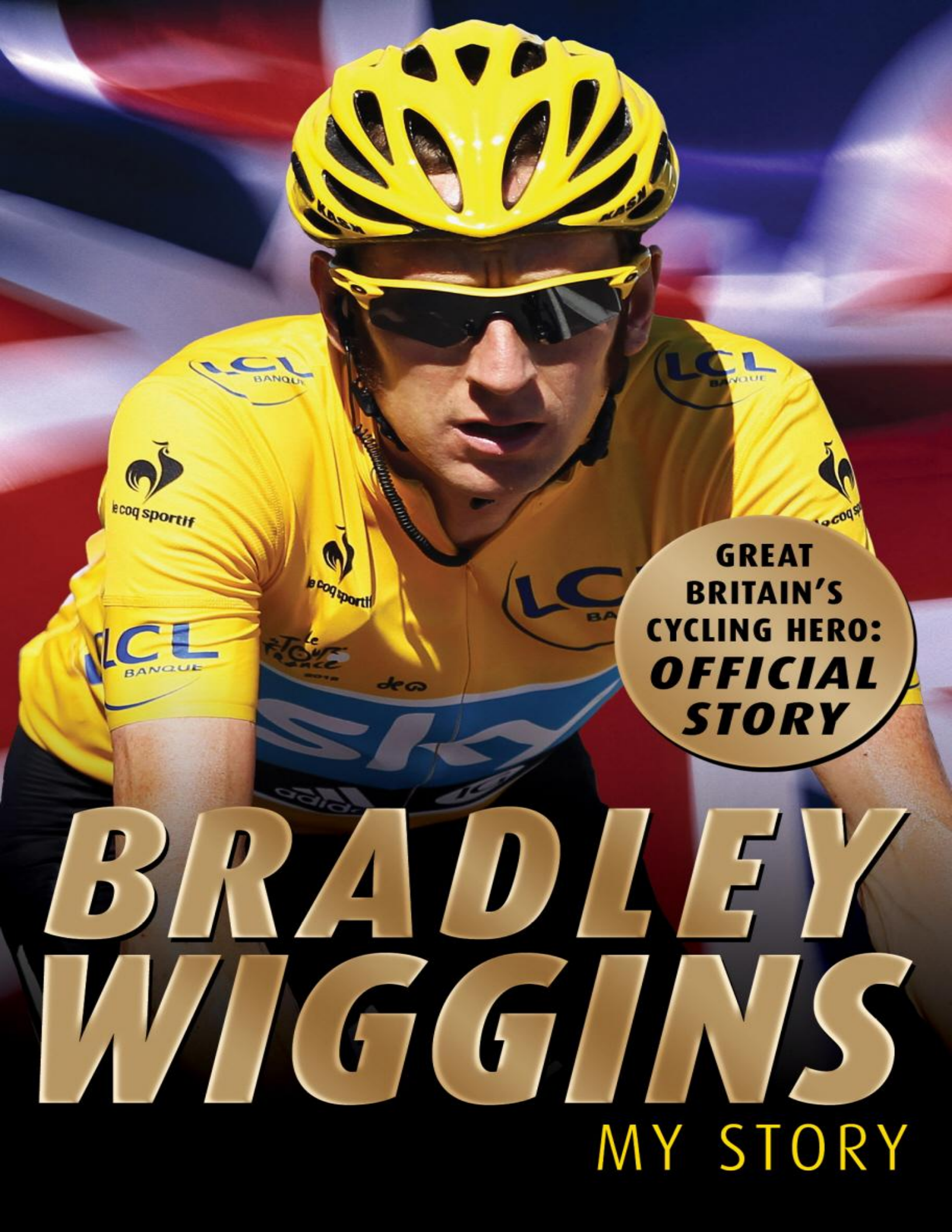
GREAT BRITAIN'S CYCLING HERO: OFFICIAL STORY
BRADLEY WIGGINS
MY STORY

CONTENTS

About the Book

We’re getting into those last kilometres and I’m thinking of my childhood, when I started dreaming about the Tour, how I started cycling when I was twelve. I’m about to win the Tour de France, and I’m thinking of everything I’ve gone through to be at this point now . . .

In 2012, Bradley Wiggins became the first ever British cyclist to win the Tour de France. Ten days later he became Britain’s most decorated Olympian.

Follow ‘Wiggo’ on his remarkable journey from childhood to cycling champion, national hero and knighthood.

Contains useful facts, maps, diagrams and full-colour photographs

BRADLEY WIGGINS

WITH WILLIAM FOTHERINGHAM

MY STORY

RHCP DIGITAL

FOR CATH, BEN, ISABELLA, MUM, NAN, GEORGE AND RYAN

FOREWORD

by Robert Millar

Former professional cyclist, and winner of the 'King of the Mountains' competition in the 1984 Tour de France

My first Tour de France was a muddle of feelings and emotions, but I did have one moment of clarity. I was hot, I was tired and my lower limbs felt as if someone had filled them with lead. I wasn't even certain where I was – all I knew was that it was a village somewhere in south-central France and there were about 60km to the finish that day. My main focus for the last hour had been a mosquito bite that had developed angrily on my heel, just where shoe and foot met. It was driving me crazy and I couldn't work out if it actually hurt more than my legs.

It was a typical French village where you could sense nothing much ever happened, but because the Tour de France was passing through they were having a typical French village fête day to celebrate our arrival. The whole village had turned out to greet us and they were enjoying themselves just like the mosquito had. I felt annoyed.

And then, on the right-hand side, just as we left the houses and headed back into the trees, I noticed an old woman sitting on a chair outside her door. Dressed all in black, she must have been eighty if she was a day but she had a youthful twinkle in her eye and the world's biggest smile. I realized she was beaming with pride that we had come to her village. I knew then it was my duty not to disappoint her: I had to do my best, to be as good a Tour rider as I could be.

There’s always a touch of theatre about each Tour de France; it may be a sporting competition but more often than not there’s human drama each day. To be part of the show you already have to be good – very good. And to play one of the main roles you need every ounce of your talent, every last drop of your passion.

Over the following pages Bradley Wiggins takes you through the trials and tribulations, through the tears and the training that have seen him transformed from mere contender to be a Tour de France champion.

What it took to be as good as he could be.

Robert Millar, November 2012

PROLOGUE

SATURDAY 21 JULY 2012
TOUR DE FRANCE

It is the last hour before the final **time trial**[1] of the **Tour de France**, and I am within reach of my open road. In every race, that's what I'm looking for: that sense of having clear space in front of me. That's when I feel truly in control. That open road can be the moment in a summit finish in the mountains where my last teammate peels off the group and it's all down to me; it can be the point where the strongmen in a stage race emerge and the fighting for position stops; or the moment when I have to come out of the jostling pack, and ramp the pace up so that my teammate Mark Cavendish can nail a finish sprint. That's where the physical side takes over and all I have to do is turn the taps on full.

The routine for today is the same one I've built and perfected over fifteen years, and it is all timed to the second.

It counts back from the warm-up. In my head the warm-up – so essential for any athlete – is when my race starts: the moment when I leave the bus and get on the **turbo trainer** at *precisely* the right second.

The warm-up starts *exactly* half an hour before I go down the ramp to the start; so if my start time is three minutes past three, I'll get on the trainer at two thirty-three on the dot.

I like to get to the bus early, soak up the atmosphere, chat with the mechanics, make sure everything's OK with

the bikes, and go through everything I need to know with my trainer.

We also:

- get taped up by the physios using **kinesio tape**; it's like putting on your armour before going into battle!
- do a bit of stretching in the back of the bus
- get the numbers on the suit and get changed
- smear on the chammy cream (anti-chafing)
- Then leave the suit unzipped and put a vest on.

Every now and then little demons appear in my head. Something in my mind says:

What if you puncture?

What if the chain snaps?

What if I lose two minutes?

Silly little things like that. I try to put these worries to bed, but it's a constant background noise. I've stopped thinking rationally.

Thirty minutes to warm-up

I start listening to my playlist. It's a dance-music mix that a former teammate did for me a couple of years ago. I always start listening to it at exactly the same time; any earlier and I begin getting into the zone too soon.

Twenty minutes to warm-up

Shoes on.

Ten minutes to warm-up

Lace shoes up.

Zero hour – warm-up

Out of the bus and onto the turbo. Screens tick over the minutes in front of the turbo trainers, where the team staff set up fans to cool us down and bottles of energy drinks. There are also clocks – the first thing the staff do, as soon as they arrive at the start area in the morning, is to sync all the clocks with the start clock on the ramp. There's no point in timing your warm-up using your watch. It might be five minutes fast, in which case you'd arrive at the start with eight minutes to go instead of three and be sitting around for too long; worst of all, if your watch is slow, you'd get there late.

My warm-up takes exactly twenty minutes. I've done it for fifteen years, the same ramping up in power. I push myself up to **threshold** and then I'm totally in my own world.

I am in the zone.

As I turn the pedals on the turbo trainer, people pass by but I see no one. Most of the time my eyes are closed. I'm going through the ride in my head: sitting on the start ramp, flying down off it. I'm constantly sensing what it's going to feel like, imagining lying on the time-trial handlebars, or **skis**, as we call them.

In my head it's feeling strong, flowing, everything's working. It's easy, I'm floating along, I'm gliding, it's feeling great.

Ten minutes to start

Off the turbo.

Into the bus.

Go to the loo.

Overshoes on, gloves on.

Wipe down.

Sit down for a couple of minutes.

Calm down.

Six minutes to start
My trainer comes in. ‘Let’s go.’

Clip on visor.

Go down towards the cordoned-off area around the ramp.

Find a chair straight away and keep going through the start process in my head.

Try to get away from the photographers’ flashbulbs.

Vincenzo Nibali, who is third overall, is just starting . . .

Three minutes to start
My teammate Chris Froome – second overall – comes down the ramp and I go up the steps. I’m looking at him in the distance and the car following him, and as they get further and further out of sight my mind gets really positive, really aggressive: I’m coming after you, I’ll be seeing that soon – that kind of feeling.

Chris is my teammate but there are no teammates in time trialling: it’s you against the clock and you against everybody else. In this race, on this specific day, Chris is like the rest of them – and he is my closest competitor.

And I am going after him.

One minute to start
Clip into the pedals.

Go to the starter.

I want to nail it.

Five seconds
Throw the body back on the bike; push back onto the guy holding the saddle as if my back wheel is locked into a start gate on the track.

Three
Deep breath in. Fill the lungs.

Two
Deep breath out.

One
Breathe in, deep as I can.

Winning the Tour de France is one good ride away . . .

[1] For bold words, see glossary.

BRADLEY WIGGINS

PROFILE

BORN 28 April 1980, Ghent, Belgium

STAR SIGN Taurus

FATHER Gary Wiggins, professional cyclist; Australian

MOTHER Linda, school secretary; English

LIVED London, from 1982. Now lives in Lancashire

FAMILY Married to Catherine; they have two children

NICKNAME Wiggo

HEIGHT 1.90m (6ft 3in)

WEIGHT 69kg (150lb; 10.9st), though closer to 78kg in his track days

CURRENT BIKE A Pinarello Graal (Sky Team)

FROM HERNE HILL TO TRACK SUCCESS

MY CAREER BEGAN in **track cycling**. As a twelve-year-old, I used to race at south London's Herne Hill Velodrome, and I was chosen to represent Camden in the London Youth Games as a teenager.

I followed cycling with a passion. And although I was a track cyclist, I always knew somehow that – for me – the greatest race in the world would always be the Tour de France. I've always been into it, since I was a teenager watching videos of the race rather than doing my homework.

At thirteen, with my mum, I went to Paris and watched the riders coming up the Champs-Élysées on the final stage of the race. We'd come over from London for the weekend, gone up the Eiffel Tower on the Saturday, then come to see the Tour on the Sunday.

It was my first sight of the Tour. I'm standing on the railings just before the kilometre-to-go kite on the entrance to the square, with my mother and my brother, watching them all go past. It's 25 July 1993; I remember spotting Miguel Indurain in the **yellow jersey**, Gianni Bugno in the rainbow jersey of world champion.

I was hooked, but I never imagined that nineteen years later I'd be coming down there in the same position!

Cycling wasn't my only love. I've always been gripped by music and a song will always take me back to when I first

heard it. The one I remember as being the first to really amaze me was *Don't Stop* by the Stone Roses. I was only eleven, but I really started getting into their music. And then I saw The Smiths on *Top of the Pops 2*, when I was round my nan's one day. It wasn't the music that got me: it was the image of the guitarist – he looked so cool!

I guess my favourite all-time bands are probably The Jam, Oasis, Ocean Colour Scene, The Who and Small Faces. Oh, and I really love Paul Weller's music . . .

Brad has over a dozen guitars!

I first met Shane Sutton – one of the key men behind my success nowadays – when I was still a schoolboy. At the 1996 national track championships, aged sixteen, I had finished third in the junior points race, and after I'd come down off the podium, he was crouched there and chatting away, telling me how he had raced with my dad, Gary Wiggins, in Australia. I don't think they got on very well, though – Shane was a tough little nut and so was my dad, so they never saw eye to eye.

I also met Sean Yates – now the ***directeur sportif*** at Sky – way back as a teenager. In 1997, at fifteen, I made the trip to the British Cycling Federation dinner during the off-season, to be presented with the trophy for the juvenile points race. It was Sean who was handing out the prizes – many years later I still had the photo of us together at the dinner, and just before the Tour de France of 2012, I made a point of sending Sean that picture and I said to him, 'I bet

you never thought that kid would become a contender one day!’

SEAN YATES

Having the fastest time at the sixth stage in 1994, Sean Yates is one of only four people from the UK to have ever worn the yellow jersey in the Tour de France (the others were Tom Simpson, Chris Boardman and David Millar). In 1988, Yates set a new Tour de France record speed at the Wasquehal time trial. In 2010, Yates became manager of Team Sky and worked closely with Bradley Wiggins up to his Tour de France victory in 2012.

Sean and I share a lot of history. He was one of my heroes as a kid – and at the Tour of Flanders in 1996, when I was just fourteen, I went up to him at the start and asked him for his autograph. Back then, Robert Millar, Chris Boardman and Sean Yates were the Brits in the professional **peloton**, and for various reasons Sean was the fans’ choice. He wasn’t a big winner, although he won a lot of decent races and wore the yellow jersey for a day in the Tour in 1994, but within the cycling world we loved Sean – he was someone who came from our world of club cycling and winter runs.

Sean’s last season as a full-on professional was 1996, but he made a comeback in 1998 to ride the Tour of Britain for the Linda McCartney team – sponsored by the

vegetarian food company owned by the late wife of the former Beatle.

I was the junior world pursuit champion by then and was racing at Herne Hill in the **team pursuit**. The teams were a mix of young riders and stars of the past and I was in Sean's team. I remember he said to me afterwards, 'I was really struggling to hold your wheel.' He was lovely. He wasn't behaving like a lot of old pros when you're that age, who seem to be trying to put you down a bit: 'Don't get too big for your boots, this means nothing in the juniors, you've still got to break through.' He was really praising me: 'You're going to be really good one day.' And I was thinking, 'This is Sean Yates telling me this.' I remember it really sinking in: Sean Yates said to me I'm going to be really good one day!

At the end of 1998 after I won the Junior World's, he asked me if I would like to join McCartney for '99. I said no, I'd love to, thanks, but I was going to stay with British Cycling. By 2000 McCartney had grown, and I heard that Sean wanted to ask me to join, but he didn't because he knew I was on the Olympic squad and wanted to ride the team pursuit in Sydney. After the Olympics that summer, where I got a bronze medal in the team pursuit, he rang me at my mum's.

'Right: do you want to go pro with us next year? We can pay you thirty-five grand.' And that was that.

I signed; then, at the age of twenty-one, I loaded my Fiesta up and drove to their base in Toulouse. I had to drive down there with only one wing mirror because someone had smashed the other one off when it was parked in London, but it didn't matter because the front passenger seat was full of stuff anyway!

Sadly, it all came unstuck – the expected sponsorship hadn't come through, and the team was dead in the water. Luckily, the GB squad took me back, and in 2002 Shane Sutton came on board at British Cycling to help us with the

Madison – the two-man relay race in which I'd got close to a medal at the Sydney Olympics. We were always struggling to qualify teams for the World Track Championships in that event, so I saw more of him as we trained.

Early six-day cycle races were exhausting for the riders – spectators loved them, but riders frequently fell and 'their faces became hideous with the tortures that rack them' (*New York Times*, in 1897). Laws were passed in New York, USA, that ruled that no competitor could race for more than twelve hours. The promoter at Madison Square Gardens then designed a race in which each rider got a partner – the Madison – so he could keep his stadium open 24 hours a day!

After the Commonwealth Games that year Cath – now my wife – and I really got together properly. We'd met years before when we were both on the junior track squad, but now I went to live with her in Manchester, where she was at university and still riding the track. Cath understands the cycling world totally – her family have been in the sport for fifty years, and her father works at British Cycling.

I spent 2002 mostly racing with the French team Française des Jeux, while Cath was at university all day. That winter, I rode some of the German Six-Day races, on the tracks at Dortmund and Munich, and Shane came with me as my mechanic. We had a massive laugh (plus a few sessions sinking beers). I was only twenty-two, and didn't

really understand yet how much you needed to work to get to the very top – what hard training is, and how much of a lifestyle change is involved. Much less drinking, for a start!

When Simon Jones, my coach since 1998, left British Cycling in early 2007, Shane was brought in to oversee the team pursuit squad. He had been working with British Cycling already, but not on the endurance squad of which I was a part; he was quite heavily involved with the team **sprinters**, like Chris Hoy.

Shane's first words were, 'You've got to start getting some enjoyment back into this programme.' He asked me to lead the group. And then he said, 'We need to start loving our athletes a bit more.'

'What do you mean?'

'What do you need?'

He bought me a phone and a SIM card, and said, 'See this? This is the backbone. If you ever need anything, just ring me.'

He made me feel like a million dollars. And he was true to his word too. If I did need something, Shane would be the first person I would call.

Two golds at the Olympics

2007 and 2008 were very successful years for me on the track, culminating in two golds at the Olympic Games in Beijing – and a world record as part of the 4,000m Team Pursuit squad.

After the 2008 Olympics in Beijing – a terrific Olympics for the Great Britain team, who topped the cycling medal table with fourteen cycling medals in total: eight gold, four silver and two bronze – I made the momentous decision to focus on road racing.

My only goal for the previous four years had been to win at the Olympics – and now I had two gold medals. With that

in the bag, by the end of 2008, I'd had enough of track racing and now I wanted to compete hard on the road . . .

TRACK CYCLING

Races are held in **velodromes**, on tracks built specially for cycling. A new velodrome was built in London for the 2012 Olympics.

- There are two main categories of races: sprints, and endurance races. Most sprinters don't compete in endurance races, and vice versa.
- Sprint races usually only cover about 8–10 laps of the track. They can be individual races, team, time trial or keirin (where riders follow a pacer on a moped or similar for a number of laps, and then sprint for the finish).
- Endurance races are held over longer distances – as many as 200 laps for some races! These were Brad's endurance events: individual pursuit, team pursuit and the Madison (a team event where riders take turns to ride stages of the race).
- The bikes can be a key factor in success or failure; they are specially made to be light and as aerodynamic as possible. Different styles of handlebars can be used for different events.
- Team GB won nine medals in track cycling at the 2012 Olympics in London – seven gold, one silver and one bronze.
