

# DE MAAR WINNING THE RABOBANK MIND GAME

Why a Dutch youngster is the brains within the Dutch team.

» That Rabobank's **Marc de Maar** is not your average pro cyclist is apparent as soon as his mobile phone rings and, in lieu of the usual mailbox greeting, you get a few bars of Jimmy Hendrix. Or when he finally picks up and tells the flu-ridden journalist on the other end that he sounds like a character off cult British comedy *The Young Ones*.

For most of his 23 years, De Maar has been proud to be an individual. He started cycling late, at the age of 15, and success came quickly and easily. Cycling was a game – just one he happened to be good at. He won 12 races in two seasons with Rabobank's under-23s and graduated with honours to the senior team at the start of 2006. In his first major race, Het Volk, he finished 15th.

De Maar looked to the manor born, but the reality was different. His team-mates were taken aback by his dilettante approach and he was astonished they could be so single-minded. To compound matters, De Maar's parents, both psychiatrists, had recently divorced. By the time he finished the 2006 Giro in 125th place, his morale had nosedived along with his form. His directeurs sportifs were alarmed.

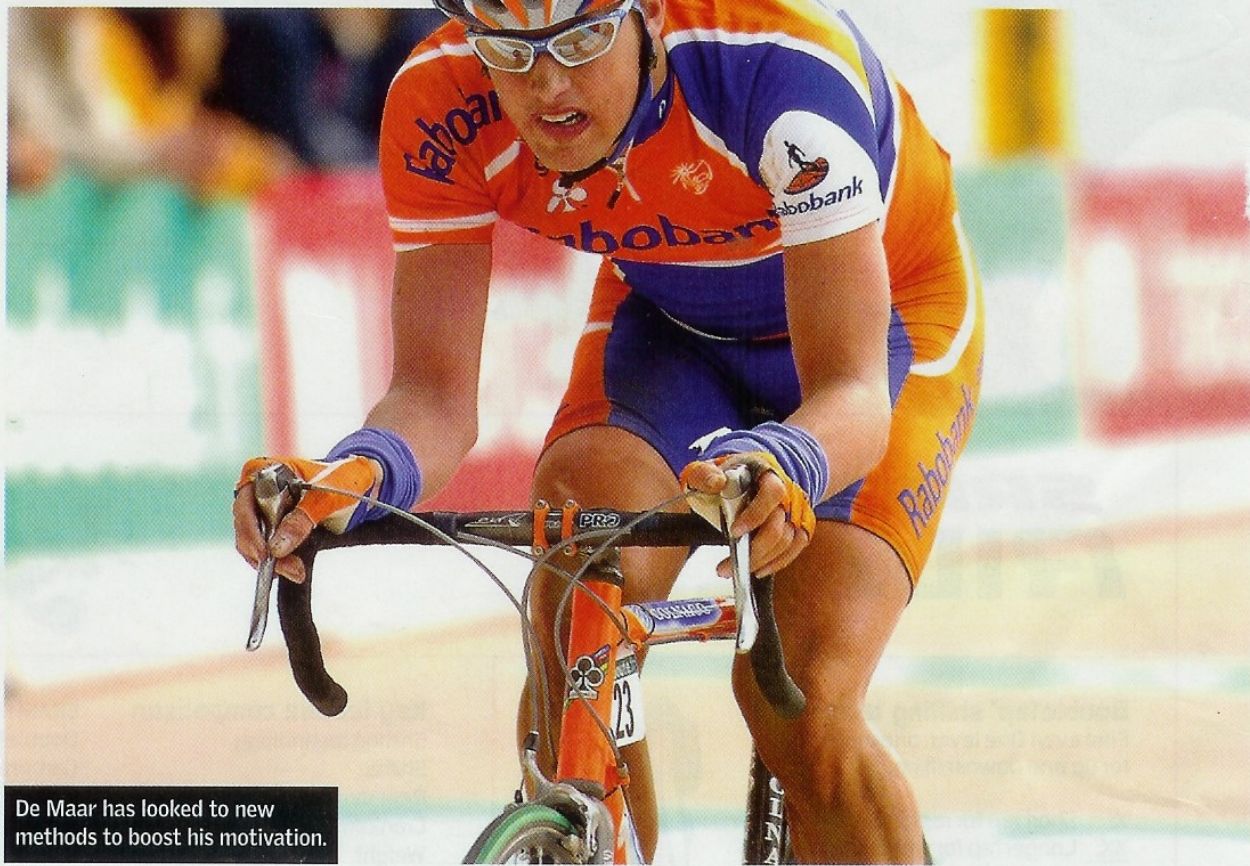
"I had always dreamt of being a professional cyclist, but at that stage it didn't seem like much of a dream," De Maar recalls. "I was sitting in the *gruppetto* at the Giro every day and no one there seemed to be enjoying themselves much. I've always thought that cycling is just part of my life, not all of it, but now I decided to start asking myself why I wanted a pro career. I also started thinking about how I communicate with team-mates and my team managers; instead of getting

annoyed if they didn't think the same way as me, I asked myself what I could do differently."

De Maar found some answers in a pioneering diagnostic system known as "brain typing". Developed by Jonathan P Niednagel and now widely practised in conventional and sports psychology, the theory posits that there are 16 basic human brain types and 16 corresponding ways of thinking and moving. Using the technique, De Maar says that he "found out why I do a lot of the things I do, in life and sport". He also established that, in terms of brain-typing he was a ENTF – "an Extroverted Intuitive Thinking Feeling type" or "a bit like Neil from *The Young Ones!*".

The Dutchman has also started using an emWave stress sensor – a portable device which measures stress levels. "Sometimes I'll put it on for 20 minutes before I go to bed and just try to bring my stress levels down by listening to music," he says. "It really helps with visualisation techniques, which is another thing I'm interested in. Sometimes, when I go training, I try to imagine a helicopter above my head, a peloton chasing me and the crowd at the side of the road. It's a good way to motivate myself."

De Maar may worry that "people reading this will think I'm a bag of issues," but the truth is that his confidence and his old sense of enjoyment have trickled back. If the lingering effects of a nasty intestinal virus will keep him out of the cobbled Classics, he's hopeful for the remainder of the 2007 season and for his chances of a new contract with Rabobank at the end of the season. "I don't know what my ultimate goal in cycling is yet – I'm still figuring that out – but I just happy to feel free again."



Tim de Waele x3

De Maar has looked to new methods to boost his motivation.