



*Interview with Patrick Lefevere (CEO),
Koen Pelgrim (Head Coach) and
Dr. Toon Cruyt (Head of Medical) from
Cycling Team Deceuninck – Quick-Step.*



Portable Performance, Perfect for the Peloton

There's no doubt that professional cycling is an endurance sport like no other. Races, such as the infamous Tour de France, cover unimaginable distances and torturous terrains that stretch these elite athletes to their mental and physical limits. For the 28 riders of Belgium's celebrated Deceuninck – Quick-Step World Tour Cycling Team, this is a way of life. Since the team's inception in 2003 they have racked up an incredible 700 UCI victories, including 19 Monuments, 4 World Road Championships, 6 World ITT Championships, 4 World TTT Championships, 2 World Cups and an Olympic Title.

The Wolfpack, as they are affectionately known, takes its nickname from a race report written by Sports Director Brian Holm who concluded "we are the wolfpack and we don't take prisoners." But more than just an inside joke, Team CEO Patrick Lefevere believes that the name describes their 'family' well:

"We race together, win together and live together – and nobody is ever left behind. The team is stronger than the single individuals." This extends to the support network around The Wolfpack who attend to their performance, health and wellbeing all year round, as well as in the peloton.



THE WOLFPACK

“The team is stronger than the single individuals.”

*Patrick Lefevere, CEO
Deceuninck – Quick-Step.*

Head Coach, Koen Pelgrim and Head of Medical, Dr. Toon Cruyt, lead this team of professionals who play a critical role in the Deceuninck – Quick-Step’s success. “I’m responsible for designing training programs for our riders and follow up their performance, both in training and racing,” explains Koen. “It involves a variety of things like decision making and planning of team training camps and collaborating with my colleagues on the race programs of our riders.” Dr. Cruyt’s priority is the physical health of the riders and he regularly deals with the inevitable injuries that occur in such a gruelling elite sport. Some are fairly straightforward (such as abrasions, saddle sores and muscle strain), but there are also more serious injuries, like fractures and concussions, that might put a rider out of action long-term if not treated swiftly.

Together, they manage the needs of the riders through a demanding and strenuous race calendar. “Cycling on a professional level is always seeking the limits and every day the riders take big risks,” says Dr. Cruyt. “When a cyclist is seriously injured during a race, it has a big impact on the whole team. In such moments we are confronted with the

fact that cycling is a dangerous sport.” However, he has been attending to the injuries of cycling teams for over twenty years, rising to the challenges of being a ‘medic on the move’ and now has the support of an extended team through a partnership with Canon Medical Systems Europe. This gives Dr. Cruyt and his fellow medical professionals full access to the most up-to-date diagnostic imaging equipment.

A handheld tool for medics on the move

The whole team shares an appreciation of the enormous role that technology now plays in addressing the unique scenarios that team cycling regularly presents. When following the riders and administering on-the-spot treatment, doctors can encounter the sort of unconventional and unusual locations that make hospital visits difficult. In the event of an accident, pro cyclists will often have a quick check-up with the race doctor (who follows the peloton) and then resume cycling to finish the stage, rather than lose their place in the race. Afterwards, Dr. Cruyt and his team make a more detailed examination, using tools like Canon Medical’s Viamo sv7 portable

ultrasound scanner, which is around the size of a tablet computer and can be used to give an immediate diagnosis on muscle injuries, detecting tears and the presence of fluid. “It has significantly evolved the way we look after the team,” says Dr. Cruyt. “For example, in case of localised muscle pain, with ultrasound you can make a differential diagnosis of hematoma or muscle strain or muscle tear. In case of hematoma you can let the rider start the next day, in case of a muscle tear we stop him. Being able to use the scanner in a quick and efficient manner, at the point of care, wherever we are, can make a huge difference to a rider’s recovery.”

The timeframes within which the stages take place means that as well as being on the road and in remote locations, Deceuninck – Quick-Step are also against the clock. By the time the cyclists have completed a stage and have returned to their hotel, it’s late and the following morning starts early, so it’s an incredibly narrow window of opportunity in which to find and access the nearest ultrasound facilities. Dr. Cruyt gives the example of a rider who crashed and suffered a swollen elbow, which was x-rayed in hospital,



but showed nothing untoward. Yet, the next day the rider could not bend his elbow. “With Canon Medical’s Viamo sv7 we can check if there is a traumatic bursitis or if there is an intra-articular bleeding which can be an indication for further imaging of the elbow,” he explains. “Most of the injuries in cycling are multiple injuries and it’s often only one or two days later that some painful sites become manifest.

At this point the ultrasound is the number one way to reassure the cyclist that it won’t do any harm to race a few days with pain, and that it will only get better.”

Diagnosis, recovery and long-term planning

Knowledge is most definitely power in performance sport and having a tool which can provide the team medics with immediate insight allows them to effectively and accurately manage the capabilities of the riders as they work through the season. For example, Dr. Cruyt treated a rider who had arrived at the 2020 Paris-Nice race earlier this year having crashed at a race the previous weekend. He had a large and painful hematoma on his left hip but was still insistent on going ahead

with the race. The portable ultrasound meant that they could examine him immediately and, to his relief, they discovered no muscle injury, “He could start Paris-Nice with the guarantee that his efforts were not going to aggravate his injury and that time would heal his discomfort.”

Recovery times are understandably variable, but Dr. Cruyt describes professional cyclists as “very tough”. Common abrasions and contusions mean that they will usually continue as normal unless they have other symptoms. A broken collarbone may require osteosynthesis (having the bones fixed with plates, screws or wires) and see the rider back on the rollers after three days, cycling after a week and racing in around three weeks.



Koen Pelgrim, Head Coach Deceuninck – Quick-Step.



“The Viamo has significantly evolved the way we look after the team,” With Canon Medical’s ultrasound scanner we can make a huge difference to a rider’s recovery.”

Dr. Toon Cruyt, Head of Medical, Deceuninck – Quick-Step.

More serious fractures (femur, vertebrae and the like) can have a recovery period of up to six months. However, preparations and objectives for the team are put in place well in advance and early diagnoses support riders to make a smooth transition back into the training and racing schedule. Even this year, with the challenges brought forth by Covid-19, Koen Pelgrim feels prepared and optimistic.

“The main objectives remain pretty much the same as in a normal year, with the highlights being the grand tours and the classics,” he explains. We prepare with a training camp and

then the further preparation depending on the race. For the Tour de France for example, riders will do a big block of racing at the altitude camp to be 90-95% ready, followed by a few preparation races early August to fine tune.”

Beyond the normal scope of medical partnerships, Canon Medical have also been able to provide Deceuninck – Quick-Step with a Canon EOS 90D camera and Canon EF 70-200mm and EF 50mm f/1.4 USM lenses to support their content creation throughout the season. Fans will be treated to creative and beautifully captured images and

videos from wherever The Wolfpack are. It’s an additional dimension to the relationship made possible by belonging to a global family with exceptional imaging technology at its very heart.

The team are in superb hands, who have access to the very best tools available to elite athletes. For team CEO Patrick Lefevere this, along with the confidence and drive to succeed are a winning combination. “The biggest challenge of the team is to reinvent ourselves every year, to keep things fresh and keep everyone motivated to be the best that they can be.” //



© Deceuninck - Quick-Step Cycling Team.



THE WOLFPACK

Watch out for The Wolfpack on Twitter ([@deceuninck_qst](https://twitter.com/deceuninck_qst)) and keep up with the latest team news on their website: www.deceuninck-quickstep.com