

Outdoor Canada  
Character: Eric Wohlberg  
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Eric Wohlberg has gone from pursuing yellow perch and ruffed grouse in Ontario to chasing other cyclists and medals in the fiercely competitive world of international bicycle road racing.

And although the 37-year-old native of Levack now hangs his helmet in the California coastal city of Sunnyvale when he's not competing around the world, his thoughts are never far from the outdoor haunts of his boyhood in south-central Ontario.

"I've had some great experiences with hunting and fishing," Wohlberg says in an early morning telephone interview before leaving on a grueling seven-hour, 200-kilometre training ride through the Santa Cruz Mountains in Silicon Valley.

"It's just great to get out there."

These days, *out there* usually entails marathon training rides or races against the world's best cyclists rather than visiting the woods and waters he so loves.

It's been 10 years since he hunted – it's no coincidence that he started racing full-time in 1991 – and two years since he fished – an ice fishing outing on a Christmas trip home to visit his family in Ontario. As a member of Canada's national cycling team who rides for the U.S.-based Saturn Cycling Team 10 months a year, Wohlberg finds it difficult to fit hunting and fishing into his hectic schedule.

Wohlberg was introduced to the outdoors while growing up in Levack, near Sudbury. His geologist father used to take him fishing for northern pike and yellow perch in nearby lakes.

In autumn, they hunted logging roads for ruffed and spruce grouse, and in winter they snowmobiled and ice-fished.

Every summer, Wohlberg, his parents, brother and sister would haul their tent trailer – canoe strapped on top -- on an annual pilgrimage to visit relatives in North Battleford, Saskatchewan. They camped, fished and canoed all the way there and back.

At 17, Wohlberg spent a summer participating in Ontario's junior ranger program, working in fish hatcheries, maintaining portage trails and planting trees. He later earned a Bachelor of Science degree in forestry from Lakeside University, and worked in the northern Ontario bush in summer 1991.

But the natural athlete found himself tugged into a different, adrenaline-packed direction.

After learning to ski on a backyard hill in Levack, Wohlberg became an accomplished alpine skier with national team aspirations. When economic realities torpedoed that dream, he turned to his second athletic passion: bicycle road racing.

Wohlberg, who started competing as an amateur in 1987, was racing full-time by 1991. A member of Canada's national team since 1992, he's competed in two Olympic

Games, winning gold medals at the Pan Am and Commonwealth Games, and collecting six Canadian championships along the way.

He's the oldest member of the Saturn Cycling Team, which he joined in 2001. On his titanium-framed nine-speed, Wohlberg is a formidable force, pushing his 173 centimetre, 67 kilogram body to the limit whether racing or training. His impressive abdominal "six pack" is the result of 800 sit-ups a day.

Wohlberg sees some parallels between succeeding in bicycle racing and being successful hunting and fishing.

"You need the right equipment and the right mindset and you must be prepared," he says.

"The only thing that's going to be handed to you on a platter is your ass if you're not prepared."

END