

**Team Swift Europe Report**  
**Team USA - Nieuweligen Trip 2017, Camp A**

**Lucianno Lamperti**

Racing Age 15, Category 2

7 <sup>th</sup> Place	Kermesse Betkom
9 <sup>th</sup> Place	Kermesse Kortessem
4 <sup>th</sup> Place	Kermesse Kerniel
1 <sup>st</sup> Place	Kermesse Velm
1 <sup>st</sup> Place	Kermesse Roeselare
7 <sup>th</sup> Place	Kermesse Geel-Steelen

**Day 1**

Coming off of a successful Nationals and 2017 season, I was very excited for this opportunity, provided by USA Cycling and Joe Holmes, to race in Europe for the first time. My first day consisted mostly of travel. I arrived at the house in Sittard as the sun was about to set over the Dutch skyline. The other junior racers and I took care in setting up our Team USA-issued bikes before going for a little spin. The six of us hit it off and I knew from the gun that this was going to be a rewarding experience for all of us. We came back and enjoyed our delicious salad and rice dinner. From now on, we would eat at 6:30 every night. After dinner we had a short briefing about the details of racing and training. It took a couple more hours to get to bed because of the time change, but before I knew it, my eyes closed and I fell asleep.

**Day 2**

Day 2 was relatively uneventful in terms of riding. I made breakfast before the team headed out for a small ride. It felt nice to shake out the legs as we rode across the Dutch-German border. The jet lag was barely getting to me! We then rode into town to the coffee shop and a local bike shop. I would see these places and people more during my time in Europe, and they were very friendly. When we arrived back at the house, we watched the finish of the Tour de France. Later, our Coach Joe took us indoor rock climbing (not necessarily for upper-body strengthening but rather for fun). Dinner here is different – instead of eating at the house, we have a chef, Rik, who will arrive by lorry to cook our meals and we go over to a different house to eat. We had an early dinner before heading off to bed.

**Day 3**

Today was our first taste at the racing scene here. After a nice breakfast, we rode to spin the legs; there was a local training race that we would be participating in later. We came back and played some Monopoly to escape any riding stress and get to know each other some more. We had lunch and went to explore the town. We walked through a few Dutch buildings and through the skinny streets, talking to a few super nice people. Once we finished in town, we returned to the house. We kitted up and rode to the Tom Dumoulin Park, named after the recent winner of the Giro d'Italia, where our practice criterium was held. The course was technical and fun, with several sharp corners and different road surfaces, including a steep, cobbled climb. We pinned our numbers and rolled around as warm-up. The race started with a 20-minute neutral followed by 70 minutes of racing. We were racing with a Eurasian Regional U23 team among other strong riders. I felt the rush of racing again, and after riding up front with my teammates while we tried to get in some moves, I stayed aggressive and got in a 4-man break for the last 45 minutes. It was a close sprint coming into the finish and I came in 3rd. I had a lot of fun while testing my legs in Europe and couldn't wait to race again.

#### Day 4

As I woke up, I already felt the heaviness in my legs from a long and hard training race the day before. Thankfully, it was only a recovery ride today. When we got back, I showered and took a 45-minute power nap, which was definitely a necessity. Then we decided to cruise around town on the old, beat-up "townies" and grab lunch. We chanced upon a small restaurant and sat around an aged, wooden table. I ordered a delicious ham sandwich and enjoyed the good company. We hung around a little at the house, watched the Tour de France while playing Monopoly, and watched a movie before dinner. After a hearty dinner, we went to the bed, exhausted. Overall, it was a very fun and relaxing day!

#### Day 5

It was pre-race day, so the race was on everyone's minds as we ate breakfast and got ready to ride. We went for about an hour and a half with a few sprints to open up the legs. My usual pre-race ride consists of pyramids, which Coach Laura incorporates into every warm-up and openers, and today was no exception. When we came back, we washed our bikes in a specific order that the junior coordinator, Billy Innes, taught us (and it only takes 4.5 minutes!). We enjoyed some lunch while finishing up the bikes. Once everybody was done with lunch we loaded the van so we could take any stress off of race day. Doing the most we can in advance, including packing bags, eating and hydrating, and working on my bike, allows us to focus on the race and prepare ourselves

mentally. At this point, there was really not much we could physically do to prepare. The six of us and Coach Joe talked some tactics and we discussed the general race format of Kermesses, which turned out to be much different than racing in the states, as you'll see when reading tomorrow's report!

#### Day 6 – Kermesse Betkom (7<sup>th</sup>)

Our first race day in Europe. Everybody was really excited to see what racing in Europe was all about. We weren't sure what to expect other than what Coach Joe had explained, although we knew we were ready. We raced a little later in the day so we didn't have to get up too early. We drove about 1 hour to the kermesse while jamming out to radio music and our own versions of "pump-up music". Upon arrival, we strolled into a sports bar for inscription. I looked around and took in the large crowds around us. Kermesses are a big deal in Europe and are an integral part of the community, which was a really eye-opening realization, that back home I didn't see much of. We received our numbers and went back to the van to unload our bikes and pin all of our numbers on. We rolled from the van about 30 minutes before our start, but did not know the course whatsoever. So we just rode around a little before lining up and ended up at the back for the start.

Suddenly, almost without warning, the other riders started sprinting off the line. The race was on. Everyone sprinted really hard for about 500 meters and then slowed way down. I used this lull in the pace to move up and ride near the front. The first lap I wanted to see the course and how the other riders moved about the pack and which guys were marked. After all, almost everyone was European and likely had raced each other for years prior. The course was flat with one small shallow roller, making it very fast. The finish, however, was about 300 meters out of a slippery cobblestone chicane, making it a technical and tactical finish. Once I knew the course I wanted to test how strong the field was and lure some guys to deplete their energy to help out my teammates. I naturally started to attack a little bit. The other riders were immediately on my wheel so I decided to cover some moves and just ride near the front. I found myself in some breaks but none of them stuck. With 3 laps to go I started to attack again. Everybody was a little more worn down. I kept countering my own move, keeping all the pressure off of the rest of Team USA. I looked back and there were gaps in the single file field. So I kept attacking and attacking.

The field had about 30 guys now but all 6 of us were in the split. The pace stayed high throughout the last lap. I had myself in position going into the last corner. I came out of it fourth and opened up my sprint. I was in the saddle spinning as fast as I could as riders came past me. In our age group we can only have 52-16 as our top gear!! I ended up 7<sup>th</sup> and was really happy with how I did considering it was my first Kermesse, but I looked to improve. I later found out

my teammate Aidan had crashed in the last corner and was on his way to the hospital. After picking up his bike, we all rushed to the hospital to find out he had broken his clavicle. It was a really unfortunate incident that could've happened to anyone. It was a real bummer that he was out for the rest of the summer, but we were glad that he was released that night. At least he could help us out for a bit during tomorrow's race!

### Day 7 – Kermesse Kortesse (9<sup>th</sup>)

We woke up and talked about both yesterday's and today's Kermesses over breakfast. We were all really excited to go racing again but sad to be one man short. The drive was a little longer this time so we left earlier than yesterday. When we got to the race we went to inscription. It was in a bar. Seems like a familiar scene. They had the tour de France on the TV. We all were surprised, as you would never see that in the US. Sadly, now was not the time to watch, so instead we went back to the van and got our stuff ready. We rolled from the van again 30 minutes before our start. Warm up wasn't a huge deal in Europe so we rolled around for a bit while throwing in a couple short jumps.

The race started fast so we didn't move up right away. After a lap or so, we raced up to the front. I realized it was slower and easier up here. In Kermesses, there was no such thing as sitting on the back since it was so technical and if you were at the back, you were literally slamming on your brakes into corners and sprinting hard out of them. While at the front, four of us attacked a little but were mainly covering moves and conserving our energy. This was one of the shorter Kermesses we would be doing on this trip, so we knew we needed to get the break going sooner. About halfway through my teammate Logan (McClain) attacked. He got up the road solo with about a 40-second gap. He stayed away for almost 2 laps before getting caught. Right when he came back I attacked. I was in a group of three but we got caught shortly after establishing a gap. In another display of great team tactics, Max (Ritzow) and Matthew (Riccitello) attacked with two other riders. They quickly had a small gap that stayed for a lap. With two to go, the field slowed down and their gap opened. Soon, they were out of sight and everyone knew it was going to



stick with one lap to go. I rode in the field and prepared for the sprint. With 1k to go, David (Heath) attacked but was quickly brought back. The sprint started and I was in the saddle, spinning yet again. I'm sure the video footage shows that every single racer was spun out at >150 rpms. I ended up fifth in the field sprint putting me in 9<sup>th</sup>, while Matthew and Max held on for third and fourth, respectively! It was a fun day of racing and we working well together. I am looking forward to the next weeks of the trip.

## Day 8

Monday was "glass cranks" day as Joe our coach called it. Meaning we rode to the coffee shop pretending we had glass cranks. Our objective: to get passed by cruisers and tourists. Everyone was happy to have a rest day after our first weekend of racing. We rode to the classic Coffee Mundo in the town square. We bathed in the sun and sat while sipping our coffee and watching tourists take pictures and ride by. An hour later, we were taking the "townies" out for grocery and clothes shopping in town. We stopped at the "Jumbo" supermarket for some breakfast foods and stocked up on bread. Before we knew it, dinner was ready. Later that night, we played some ping-pong and headed to bed.

## Day 9

Taco Tuesday was all we could think about! We rode for 2 hours around 10 while throwing in some playful attacks and then working on rotating fast and smooth in a paceline. Back at the house, we played poker and a couple card games to pass the time before dinner. We had been waiting all day for taco Tuesday, and eventually the thought of tacos had my mouth watering. Rik the chef was great at making Mexican food and every Tuesday he whipped up an awesome special. After an amazing dinner, we went back to the house and hung out for a little bit, watched TV, and played some more cards. It was soon time for bed and we all looked forward to our long ride tomorrow.

## Day 10

I woke up, ate a big breakfast, and got ready to ride. We had a solid 3-hour ride today out at the Amstel Gold Race course. It was super cool to ride on the same hallowed grounds and steep hills that the pro peloton had raced on in April and legends have been racing on since the 1960s. We raced hard up some of the steeper, longer climbs and hammered especially hard on the flats. It was really cool to see the old Worlds course after watching it on television and now we got to ride it. After ridding the course a few times we headed back to Sittard to refuel and wash our bikes. By the time we had finished it was close to dinner time. We had an hour or so to chill so we played some ping pong in the under 23 house and hung out with some of the older riders, who talked with us a bunch

about our experiences thus far. After a hefty dinner, we had our meeting with Coach Joe about the upcoming races and workouts before heading to bed.

## Day 11

Today was another pretty easy day and a nice day to go into town. After our spin, we ventured to SOHO, a wonderful place for lunch with great (albeit not-so America) burgers and salads. On Thursdays in town, they host a farmers' market with fish, fruit, vegetables and clothes. We locked up the bikes and walked around to check it out and see if they had anything interesting. I bought some fresh fruit and avocado and then we went back to the house for... housecleaning. For an hour, we swept, did dishes, and organized rooms. The busy work was nice and I used it to take my mind off of racing and used the opportunity to do the laundry while having a small snack to hold until dinner. Dinner came and we went over and ate. Afterwards, I helped Rik do the dishes, which took a little while, while the others went back until I was finished. Then we all got in vans and drove to an ice cream place in Germany. I wasn't expecting much when Coach Joe told us "This is some of the best ice cream you'll ever have," but he was spot on. By the time we got back, it was late so I took a shower and went to bed.

## Day 12

We were back to another pre race day with the same schedule. On the docket was 1.5 hours with openers and a little bit of lead out practice. When we had our team meeting were we talked about tomorrow's kermesse. The Kerniel Kermesse was a renowned race in Belgium. It has 2 infamous climbs: the first is a steep 200 meter sprint while the second is the finishing climb that's 1k long at about 5%. We were really excited and looking forward to this one. With the climbs and some crosswinds in the flats, we figured it might be a great course for a break. We washed our bikes and rested. Everybody used the Normatec recovery systems for almost an hour, in that time we were all lying on the ground and on couches. Soon, we were in bed and ready for the race.

## Day 13 –Kermesse Kerniel (4<sup>th</sup>)

Another race day! We woke up relatively late because we raced later in the afternoon. After breakfast we filled the ice chest with our bottles, loaded all the bikes in the van, and packed our bags with sandwiches for the road. We drove about an hour and a half into Belgium. At inscription, it was much busier than the previous week because they had bumper cars and other carnival rides in addition to the race. It wasn't a boring event for spectators: there were carnival booths and foods trucks, so a community could spend a whole day there AND watch some bike races. It was a unique and fun model. We got our numbers and

headed back to the van. We put on our kits and unloaded our bikes and went through the routine: spin around 30 minutes before the start. We were able to preview about half a lap and then went to the start.

It started pretty fast, as Kermesses do. The downhill section of the course was really spun out because we had 52x16 — even easier gearing than in the U.S. to 52x14. Our race was just 9 laps in length, and on the first few laps up the climbs I was attacking to see how the field responded on the climbs. Eventually, a 2-man break went up the road and I settled in the field. They came back and Team USA kept the pace high on the climbs, slimming the field down. With 2 to go, we took the front and railed over the top of the climbs and pacelined like we had in practice. With one lap to go, it was all together, but the field was now way smaller. We rolled easy down the descent. Suddenly in the crosswind before the first climb, Logan attacked with 3 other guys. They got a small gap and kept it going for the remaining 3k. On the final climb nobody attacked, and I was the first to jump at 200 meters. It was a long sprint since it was an uphill drag, but I almost caught the group in front. I ended up winning the field sprint for fourth. We were ecstatic about the result since we played our cards beautifully after a tough day of racing. After the finish we went back to the house to ready ourselves for the next kermesse.

#### Day 14 – Kermesse Velm (1<sup>st</sup>)

We were really excited for another race day. We left a little earlier than usual and drove 2 hours. As we approached the course, it started pouring. It was going to be cold, wet race! We decided to get our numbers and skip the warm up in the cold rain. So we unloaded the van and threw in our jackets just in time to roll to the line for the start. It was slippery and cold, as anticipated. The five of us moved up to the front of the race within a few minutes, despite the narrow one-lane road. I rode up to Matthew and we started talking and all the sudden we hit cobbles. I was shocked. I was sliding everywhere. I was near the front and saw a corner coming. The field slowed way down but I had too much speed. My rear wheel slid for a solid three seconds, but fortunately I kept it upright. I never realized how slippery cobbles were. After what seemed like forever, we were off of the cobbles, and luckily that was the





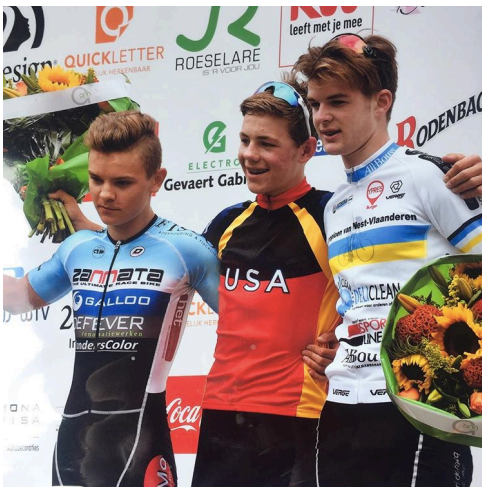
only cobble section. We were taking all the corners really slowly but we would sprint really hard out of every one. Our field was miniscule after the first two laps with the rain and wind. There was a small climb to the finish with a huge crosswind section over the top. With 2 to go I attacked with Matthew in the crosswind and 2 other guys came with us. The rest of the field was in the gutter. We were able to get a good gap and kept it consistent. With 1 to go, we knew it was going to stick. With about 1k to the finish Matthew attacked. If he was caught, it would set me up for the win, if not then he would hold it until the finish. They caught him at about 500 meters but he kept the pace high. I jumped at 200 meters and was able to hold it until the line. I was very happy to win my first kermesse and we displayed some great teamwork despite tough conditions. Coach Joe was ecstatic about our win in the hard race.

## Day 15

We had glass cranks and needed to recover well since we were racing again the next day. When we came back we washed (it was much needed after yesterday's muddy race) and packed the bikes. Once the van was packed, we ate lunch and kept our legs up and recovering. I packed my bag before going to bed since we would be staying the night in a hotel in Belgium the next night.

## Day 16 – Kermesse Roeselare (1<sup>st</sup>)

We woke up early and drove about 2.5 hours to the race in Belgium. We started the routine at inscription and went back to van to get ready to race. Our warm-up was on the course. It was a 2k course and we were racing 20 laps. It was tight with two tricky turns and one cobble corner. It was our first real "criterium" since the Tom Dumoulin practice crit. We started near front and raced in the front for the first few laps. A kid attacked with David from my team on his wheel. They had about 30 seconds up the road. 5 laps in, we saw just David up the road by himself: the other guy had dropped him. I attacked to try to bridge but



everyone was on my wheel. Then Max attacked and everyone went. The rest of us kept attacking but couldn't get away. No one else would work; they seemed content to have the Americans chasing. So we went to the front. I pulled for about 3 laps as hard as I could and then Max pulled for a lap. We went like that for a while and brought him within 5 seconds. Max then finished it off, but we had wasted a lot of energy pulling it back. We had 8 laps to go. We kept the race all together. Unfortunately, with one to go, we were too spread out. I looked around and



saw none of my teammates in the top 5. I figured I would get into position. I knew I wanted to be 2nd or 3rd out of the last corner. I came out 3rd and jumped hard. I was able to get a little gap to the line and raised my hands in victory. It was amazing to get a win with so many people watching and with my team having worked so hard. After podium we changed and then watched Chris Froome and the pros race the same course. It was an awesome spectacle. We ate dinner outside while watching them race the whole time before heading back to the Belgian hotel. It was a super fun day.

## Day 17

I awoke not in my Sittard home but in a decent Belgian hotel. We had a good plan for the day in Belgium. We were going to eat breakfast and then ride all of the most renowned cobbles and climbs of Flanders. This was extremely humbling. Just riding the cobbles was tough but to race on them in terrible weather and hundreds of others would be crazy. It had been a dream of mine to ride cobbles. That is, until I actually rode them. I was jerked around on the bike, just praying that my wheels stayed straight. We ended our 4-hour ride with a climb and cobble section.



Then we came back to the van changed and went to the cycling museum. We discovered awesome cycling memorabilia, including old team cars, wool jerseys and retro bikes. I even found the classic Bianchi, Team Swift's bike sponsor! Although we couldn't decipher the Flemish language to glean information from the captions, we still had a great time. We arrived back at the house in Sittard at nighttime. We quickly unloaded and cleaned the van out before dinner. I was grateful to be back in a familiar bed after some tiring days on the bike.

## Day 18

Today we did another 4 hour ride into Germany. Despite the flat ride, it was by no means easy. The wind was blustery and we were riding hard to keep moving. It was super fun while we attacked each other into gnarly crosswinds. I came back made lunch and then took a nap. Then we went into town to hang out, stopping by Coffee Mundo and walking around the town. When we came back it was time for dinner. Coach Joe then took us for post-dinner ice cream to cap off a great day.

## Day 19

Glass Cranks!! Everyone was happy to have a recovery day after 3 hard days. We took advantage of the easy riding to explore some new roads and fool around which is exactly what we needed. We came back and went to town for lunch and spent basically the rest of the day exploring more of Sittard and trying (sometimes unsuccessfully) to communicate with our limited Dutch. When we got back to the house, we had an intense ping pong tournament before a pasta dinner and movie.

## Day 20

Today we did about 2 hours of moderate riding. Our last race was on Sunday, so we would do our openers tomorrow. We rode to a different area and stayed in the Netherlands. It was cool to ride somewhere different after riding into Germany where it all looked the same: the roads, the trees, and the farms seemed identical. The Netherlands was more forest and neat towns. When we got back we went into town for one last time since we would not go on our busy pre-race. We hung out and went to different stores and shops, where I bought a souvenir to bring home to my parents (besides the flowers I'd won from the previous two kermesses). When we got back to the house, we stretched out and played some cards. Just two more days of the trip remained, and they were going to be stressful; filled with travel and racing.

## Day 21

Today we had to prep for our last race here in Europe. We went on a 2-hour ride with openers. When we came back we washed the bikes, filled bottles, and loaded up the van. It was then hours of packing up the house and getting ready to fly home after the race tomorrow. After we had most of our stuff done we made lunch and relaxed. Everybody wanted to race well and leave on a good note. I was really excited to be racing again but sad it was my last since I'd enjoyed my experience here. I packed some of my stuff in my suitcase with an early departure Monday morning. I went to dinner then went to bed early.



## Day 22 – Kermesse Geel-Steelen (7<sup>th</sup>)

Our last day here was going to be phenomenal. We drove about an hour to a rainy kermesse. After our routine, we started and quickly went to the front while trying not to crash. There were a lot of breaks but everything was coming back. I spent a lot of time in the first half on the attack and at the front. Then I settled in and rode in the field. With 2 laps to go, a break of 6 opened up a gap. And 3 of our guys were in it! The field let it roll and Team USA was happy with our odds. They opened up a big gap and we knew they were going to stay away to the finish. I rode wheels into the sprint and jumped at 300 meters. It was a long sprint but I was happy to win the field sprint for 7<sup>th</sup>. And then I heard my teammate Lucas won our last kermesse and I was ecstatic. There was no better way to end the trip with a team win and four in the top 10. We had a great last race. My teammates had been great these past three weeks and we had grown close. With juniors at our age, it's super important to have a support system, besides parents and coaches, to talk and bond with. Having other peers who I know going into the future will help my development and encourage me to keep racing. I'll keep in touch with them for many years!

We then headed back to the house. We cleaned the van and disassembled our bikes. I finished packing all of my stuff. I was really sad to leave but had an amazing trip. I hope to go back and have another great experience. I can't thank everyone who has helped get me here enough: my parents, Coach Laura, Team Swift and sponsors, my teammates, Billy Innes, and of course Coach Joe Holmes for making it awesome. It was an experience I will never forget!

-Luke Lamperti

