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**SAUNDERS SEES “UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY” TO INSPIRE  
Tour de Georgia’s Only African-American Rider Finds Job Rewarding**

COLUMBUS, GEORGIA (April 25, 2003) – African-Americans have a long history in the sport of cycling, with successes, mainly in track cycling, dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Marshall “Major” Taylor won the 1899 World Championship title in Montreal, and apart from being arguably the fastest bicycle rider of his era, was also the first internationally acclaimed African-American sports star.

Almost 100 years later, the colorful Nelson Vails won a gold medal in the Sprint event at the 1984 Olympic Games, in Los Angeles, and went on to appear in several Hollywood films.

Road cycling is enjoying a boom time in the U.S.A, buoyed by Lance Armstrong’s success in the Tour de France.

Yet only three African-Americans are among the 300+ corps of professional road cyclists, and only one of these, Erik Saunders, 28, of the Ofoto / Lombardi Sports Cycling Team, is competing in the Dodge Tour de Georgia, which concludes Sunday with a 88-mile circuit race in Atlanta.

Saunders, a native of Richmond, VA and current resident of Twenty Nine Palms, CA, understands what his presence in the race means to African-Americans interested in the sport, and sees himself as something of a role model:

“It’s a way in for people who wouldn’t otherwise get into the sport. That feels good. You have a unique opportunity to identify with people.”

Describing the attention he has received thus far, he added:

“People come up to me and talk to me after the race. For them it’s something special to see men in a bike race. It’s better than the random ‘good job’ because you know that people are really interested.”

Despite the attention, Saunders does not feel burdened by his torch-bearing role. He said:

“You don’t think about it everyday. It’s not a big deal until people identify with you through that.”

Saunders gets elated when African Americans among the spectators see him and start cheering.

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Formerly America’s premier amateur cycling team, **Ofoto/Lombardi** is in its second season as a professional team. The team contains a current National Champion, four ex-National Champions, and a current US National Team Member. National and racial diversity are key elements of the team’s make-up, with an Irish, a Swiss, and a Canadian amongst the American contingent, which contains two of the three African-American professional road cyclists in the world. [www.lombardisports.com/bike/bike\\_TEAM.html](http://www.lombardisports.com/bike/bike_TEAM.html)



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