

Weir refuses to come in from cold

DAVID Weir, the Glasgow student who is riding the entire route of the Tour de France, is so far achieving his objective – riding solo, he remains ahead of the peloton. But it was touch and go last week when he hit the Alps and the world-renowned mountain range hit back with a vengeance.

It wasn't so much the mountains as the weather. Unlike the riders of Le Tour, who had blazing sunshine and scorching heat when they reached the Alps on Saturday, Weir had snow. Yes, snow. In his highly readable daily blog, he said: "Normally when it snows, stages are cancelled. I was determined to carry on, though. The Tour de France is about pushing yourself to your limits, and what kind of man would I be if I gave up at the first challenge?"

For the descent, he accepted his thick skiing jacket from the support car, driven by his father and brother. "But it was no use. All the clothes I had on were soaked through," Weir added. "My fingers were bearing the brunt of the wind-chill on the 40mph descent, my fingers and toes ached with the cold, and it wasn't long before the pain faded into complete numbness. Fairly soon I couldn't feel the brakes and my fingers were beginning to slip off them.

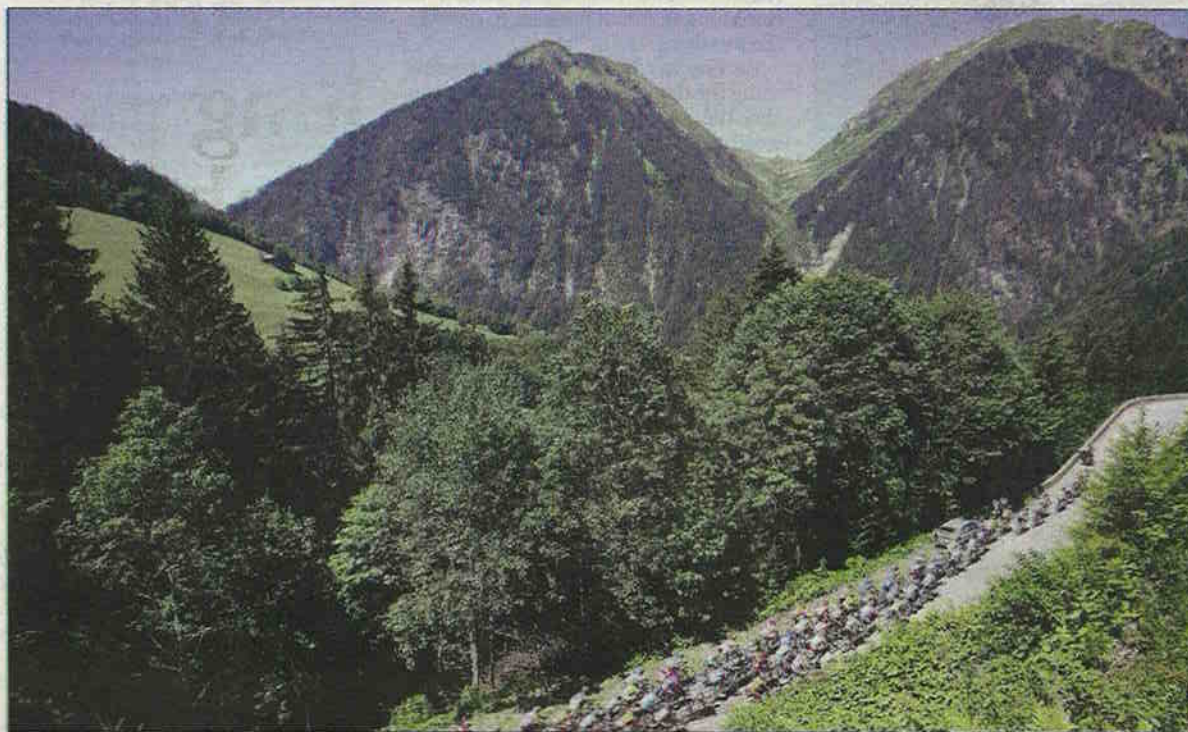
"There is a fine line between bravery and stupidity," he continued, "and the guys I aspire to be like would often confess to gamble more than is sensible ... I was finished, my body exhausted."

Some 1,500 metres up the next mountain, the monster Cormet de Roselend, where the snow began at around 600 metres, he conceded defeat. "I was beaten. And disgusted with myself. [My dad and brother] begged me to get into the car, but I was reluctant. If I got in, I knew I wouldn't be back on my bike.

"As my dad continued to beg me to get into the car, my brother did the only thing he could, got out and hugged me to shield me from the cold. And, as he did, I cried. I told him it was too hard and that I couldn't go on."

He was wrong. Weir returned next day to the same spot on the Roselend, finished the stage, and carried on, missing his planned rest day.

Today, the racers of the Tour will have the day off, while Weir ploughs on, five days ahead of the pack, and en route now to the Pyrenees. Last night,



The peloton race in the sunshine yesterday, but the Alps presented a different challenge for Weir

Picture: Reuters



in Castres, he said he was still "pretty confident" he would make it to Paris. Some days he rides in the company of a 20-strong team from the Royal Engineers, attempting the same challenge, but otherwise he is alone. This is worth remembering.

While the riders of Le Tour will spend around 90 per cent of the 2,300 miles sheltering in a large pack, Weir rides into the wind alone and unassisted. And there are other dangers: on one stage he was hassled by some "French neds" on scooters.

● To follow his progress visit: www.dave-weir.bebo.com

Anderson jogs off

IT'S goodbye Scottish Athletics, hello European Athletics for Kirsty Anderson this week. The communications officer who has contributed much enthusiasm over the past 12 months to the successful jogscotland initiative is off to join the European Athletics Federation in Lausanne. It promises to be a culture shock for Anderson, who will go from organising supermarket sweeps in the Co-op to working at all the major championships in Europe.

South African guidance

THE new Scottish Tennis Academy has made its second significant signing. Adding an exotic flavour to the joint partnership between the national governing body and Merchiston and St George's schools in Edinburgh, the academy coach is a 29-year-old South African, Marcel de Coudray.

De Coudray has worked on a part-time basis with Nikolay Davydenko and some other top players, but more recently he has been employed at the South African National Training Centre in Pretoria. He will arrive on 1 August with his wife Monika.

So far seven boys and five girls have signed up for the academy, which will begin with the new school term. Jonny O'Mara, at 12 arguably Britain's best young prospect, is described as "key" to the project. An interested observer will be Judy Murray, in her new role as talent and performance manager for the LTA in Scotland.

● Ian Wood returns next week.

Right wing



DOING A DOMENECH

Excuse of the week

URUGUAY coach Oscar Tabarez was understandably unhappy referee Oscar Ruiz had not acted on Brazil goalkeeper Doni moving off his line before the final spot-kick and approaching penalty-takers during Tuesday's Copa America semi-final shoot-out defeat by Brazil.

But his place on the moral high ground was somewhat undermined elsewhere. Tabarez said: "They built two new dressing rooms at the stadium and both were given to Brazil. They sent us to the old one."

QUOTES OF THE WEEK

"I don't know how to play that type of golf and I would probably go over there and shoot two high numbers and make a fool of myself."

- Woody Austin qualified for the Open, but decided not to travel to Carnoustie.

"As far as I'm concerned, I've signed a contract with them and I still plan to honour that. I haven't chased up any of [the dispute]. I will have to see what the situation is. Basically, straight after the World Cup I'll head over to Edinburgh."

- Stephen Larkham

CULT HERO



Brian Barnes

■ THE Scot claimed nine titles on the European Tour between 1972 and 1981. He had three top-ten finishes at the Open, and beat Jack Nicklaus twice in one day in the 1975 Ryder Cup. Senior British Open champion in 1995 before arthritis forced him to retire in 2000. Won the 1981 Haig Whisky Tournament Players Championship at Dalmahoy after a course record of 62, going off to celebrate then beating Brian Waites in a play-off having downed 14 pints, six during the round.