

## Antoine's Belgium Racing Experience – Week 3

This is my final week in Belgium, the whole trip has gone by so fast. I have been staying at a place called Cycling House in Belgium which is an apartment made for cyclists with a work station and bike racks. Next door to us was the UnoX Norwegian Pro Continental Team's service course. We got to know the mechanic very well and he was kind enough to help us fix our bikes when we needed too. He gave us some team bidons which is pretty nice.



Izegem was quite a small town not far from the border into France. Riding there was great as there are many nice towns to ride to, the farm roads are the nicest place to go riding as it is so quiet and you will not run into any cars.



Most days we would ride into a town called Kortjik for coffee. It was only 12kms away so it was the perfect recovery ride. The coffee there was good but expensive, food in Belgium is much more expensive than other parts of Europe.



I had two races on my last week, the first one was Opwijk. This was on a fast technical course with some tight corners. It had a slight uphill in it but nothing steep, there were some rough sections on the course that you needed to watch out for. The pace was high from the gun, I tried attacking a couple times but nothing would stick as the teams would just shut it down. I sat in the middle of the bunch for most of the race then moving up the front to try and bridge to the break that had gone. We were chasing hard but a group of 14 had slipped of the front and put a minute into the main bunch. With 2 laps to go me and my other friend from the camp attacked, we took 2 riders with us but they were not doing any work. As we hit the slight uphill section one of them attacked but we were straight onto their wheel. We let him take us to the finish and then went pass him on the line for 18<sup>th</sup>. Not the best result, but the race was a hard one with the Irish National champion taking the win. Belgium has really helped my riding with moving up the bunch, pushing other riders and cornering.



My final race was in Veldegem. The course was not very technical with some windy open sections which made the race hard. A break went 3 laps into the race, which had the winner of the previous race. I missed the break and was working on the front to bring it back but not many people were working. People would attack instead of working then we would catch them and the bunch would sit up. It was constantly like this giving the break-away even more time. There were 10 up the road with two away in the lead. They ended up putting 4minutes into us. A small group slipped away from our bunch which we caught in the last lap. I finished mid bunch in 28<sup>th</sup>, it's not what I was looking for in my last race but it has given me a lot more experience.



Racing in Belgium has given me a lot more confidence riding in large bunches around tight corners and pushing around other riders. This has been an experience to remember and I cannot wait to come back next year hopefully to live. I would like to thanks RBCC and my Dad for making this trip possible.