

Over two decades of riding experience in different disciplines. Four World Championship titles. Six World Cup titles. So far Brian Lopes has gathered more World cup victories than any other mountainbiker. He was recently admitted into the mountainbike 'Hall of Fame'. This year he has also won some downhill endurance races. With his 37 years Brian has achieved more than any of us could ever even imagine. So who is the man behind this superlative ?

B.S.N: Hello Brian. What is the first thing we should know about you ?

Brian Lopes: My name is Brian Lopes, I was born on the 6th. September 1971 in California. I've been married to Paula for the past eight years. I live in Laguna Beach, I have a dog, brown hair and blue eyes.

B.S.N: Your biggest achievement – also outside of Mountainbiking ?

Brian Lopes: It's pretty hard to pinpoint one single experience. I'm generally very happy with how everything has turned out.

B.S.N: From a different angle then: what is your biggest goal in life ?

Brian Lopes: To have fun.

B.S.N: That sounds like a bit of a phrase – could you be a little more specific.

Brian Lopes: I generally don't lead an exuberant lifestyle. My material possessions are defined by my current income but I am lucky enough to have the financial ability to be able to treat myself now and again, which I really enjoy. However those things aren't as important to me as having fun in life and being able to spend time with my friends.

B.S.N: Where do you keep all your trophies and medals ? Have you got a trophy room ?

Brian Lopes: The house I live in now is pretty small, but it's really close to the beach, so I don't have much space for trophies and medals. One or two trophies are about but the rest are stored away in boxes. My old house had a big office with lots of space for all those things. Back then I definitely had a lot of trophies, medals and jerseys on the walls.

B.S.N: Back to you. You're Californian through and through. Where have you lived in California so far ?

Brian Lopes: I was born in Belflower. When I was five we moved to Orange County. I moved out with 19 but still lived near to my parents. At about 25 I moved to Laguna Beach.

B.S.N: So you probably started racing in Orange County ?

Brian Lopes: No. My first race was in 1975, so before we moved to Orange County.

B.S.N: How can we imagine your first contact with bike racing ? Did you enter a BMX club and started to train there ?

Brian Lopes: There was no club or anything like that. One day my dad simply took me to a race track because he saw how much I enjoyed riding my bike. I didn't know anything about bicycle racing. I just rode and had fun.

B.S.N: But then you did end up BMX racing. Was it hard to compete at all those races while you were still at school ? What kind of education do you have ?

Brian Lopes: I went through the normal U.S education system. In the United States you first have to finish primary school and High School. Then at 17 or 18 you come to a point where you have to decide which further path you would like to take. I decided to go to college. On average you get your Associate Degree after two years of studying at college. After four you get your Bachelor Degree and after six your Masters and so on. It took me four years just to finish my Associate Degree though, because back then I was already professionally riding at BMX races. Nearly every Friday we'd leave for the races and wouldn't get back until Monday. Consequently I was a bit of a part time student, because I was always at the races. Then when I started with Mountainbike racing, my trips took longer and longer. The BMX races were only in the States. The Mountainbike races took me to Europe and further afield. The trips took two, three, four weeks. I just didn't have time for college, so I stuck with the Associate Degree.

B.S.N: And you still manage everything by yourself ? Or do you have an Art manager who accompanies you, takes care of organizing your trips and looks after your sponsors ?

Brian Lopes: No, I do all that by myself. My wife has been helping me with some of the organization over the past few years, but mostly I still manage everything myself. I keep my sponsors up to date, put in orders for any equipment I may need, organize my trips by myself and so on. I feel that for a sponsored rider it is really important to keep a really good relationship with his sponsors going.

B.S.N: But that's also a question of personality.

Brian Lopes: Yes. Of course it is. But I really enjoy managing everything myself. At Volvo-Cannondale and at Team GT we obviously had a team manager who'd deal with everything, but as I said I just do my best to have the best possible relationship with my sponsors. I've been with Bell, Odi and Oakley for ages now.

B.S.N: Speaking of Oakley, you are one of the few people who holds the secret of Oakley H.Q in California. One speaks of there being a secret party location deep inside the complex, to which only a few select people have access to.

Brian Lopes: How do you know about that ? It's true though, the 'Engine Room' does exist. I could take you to Oakley and let you roam around there for a day and you'd never find the spot. It's a really cool spot. You could compare it to an Irish pub. The guys there brew their own beer and stuff. There are only two keys to that room so you need to know one of the guys really really well to be able to gain access to it.

B.S.N: But back to you. You seem to be a very down to earth and independent person. Word on the street is that you're pretty clever with the finances too.

Brian Lopes: As I already said – I don't lead an exuberant lifestyle. I really try and keep everything together. When you race everything can be over tomorrow. One bad crash and you're done for. I'm lucky, because my career has been going for a couple of years now so I've had enough opportunities to sensibly invest my earnings. You need to be smart for that and my investments turned out good too. I earned some money before my biking career took off. As a twelve year old I did a TV commercial for Mc Donalds then I did a second one for them and then I did a couple more for some other companies. All in all I did about eight commercials back then and I never used up all my savings.

B.S.N: Why is that ? Did your parents teach you to be thrifty with your savings ?

Brian Lopes: That's just the way I am. I can't really give you a definite reason. My parents were never especially rich. They still live in the same house that we lived in when I was five. My dad's an electrician and works just the way I would if I were him. He works really hard for five or six months of the year and then takes a couple of months off. He tries to enjoy the good things in life and travels around as much as he can. He always tells me that there isn't going to be anything left for me when he passes away. He will have used up all his savings by then.

B.S.N: Your high status in Mountainbiking gives you the opportunity to leave your mark on the sport. Have you got any plans for this ? Could you imagine playing an active role in promoting young talent.

Brian Lopes: Yes I've thought about that quite often. One of the reasons for my success is that I always put every ounce of energy I have into what I am doing. I think I have a very good work ethic. When I do something I do it as best as I possibly can. So far though nothing has sprung up in that field. But if there's the right kids in the right team with the right support – who knows. Maybe not right now or in the next couple of years but I could principally imagine doing something like that.

B.S.N: You already have a protégé – Cedric Garcia. What's your relationship towards him like ?

Brian Lopes: A protégé ? I'm not that much older than Cedric. He just turned thirty. We met at Volvo-Cannondale and back then he was still really young. We became friends and now we're pretty close. He has a good personality. Everbody likes him.

B.S.N: Do you think you're a role model ?

Brian Lopes: For some people I think I may be a role model. I somehow try and behave like a good role model. I know I'm not perfect, but then nobody is. Everyone has their own opinion on how to get things done. I'm sure a lot of people think 'what an asshole' because I sometimes say things that they don't want to hear.

B.S.N: Some people say you can be quite blunt at times. Can you understand that ?

Brian Lopes: I'm generally an honest person. If you ask me what I think of something I'll give you my honest opinion. Otherwise you needn't have bothered asking me. Some people can't deal with that kind of honesty. If someone asks me what I think of that racetrack or if one of my sponsors asks me what I think of their new product they'll get an honest answer back. The answer may include a lot of criticism. If you ask any of my friends what kind of a guy I am, they'll say I'm a 'straight shooter'. I've recently been holding myself back a little, but in general I always voice my honest opinion. Just to give you an example. Say you and I were competing in a 100 metre sprint – and say I leave you far behind after the first 50 metres. Now I'm not the kind of guy who'll slow down and roll over the finishing line, just to make you feel less useless. Instead I'll give it all I've got until the very last metre, just to show you what you have to aspire towards to beat me. I think that's a lot more honest and better.

B.S.N: In an old interview you once said that you can't handle Europe. What is it about Europe that you dislike ?

Brian Lopes: I really used to hate the races in Europe. The weather was usually awful, I couldn't speak the language, didn't know the food. In the U.S a lot of things are a lot easier for me because I grew up there. Hans Rey helped me a lot though. He taught me not to be so fussy and to just accept the differences that exist. Meanwhile I don't have any problems anymore and usually really enjoy myself.

B.S.N: Then I would think that you have a bit of a patriotic streak in you.

Brian Lopes: In a way I think that most people are a little proud of where they come from. I don't have a flag flying in my front yard or wear U.S.A shirts or anything like that. Everywhere there's things that one can really love and then there's things that aren't so great. Nowhere is completely perfect. Everywhere you go you find that there's advantages and disadvantages to that place.

B.S.N: Back to the riding. Your riding has an unbelievable amount of Flow to it. How would you define your style of riding ?

Brian Lopes: Smooth and calculated. I don't take any unnecessary risks and quite often prefer to watch the other guys do the risky stuff, before I decide if I'm going to take the same risks as them. Because if no one takes that risk neither do I.

B.S.N: That you're prepared to take risks became obvious in 2005 at the world cup in Schladming. You were the only rider to jump the final four stepdowns as a pair of doubles. Back then the crowd went absolutely bananas. For you there must be a couple more memorable experiences like that. Which race left the biggest impression on you ?

Brian Lopes: That has to be the world championships in Vail in 2001. That was my first world title. I should have been flying to Colorado, but the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York made that impossible, so I drove to Vail and only just made it to the race on time. Back then I was standing in the final with Cedric and he came second. It was amazing winning the world title in my home country.

B.S.N: Generally speaking an athlete only lives off his success in a secondary manner, namely through better contracts with his sponsors. You've already commented on the issue of prize money, especially in regards to the Norba series.

Brian Lopes: I just believe that prize money is a necessity to the sport. I mean, professional racing is a job that deserves to be paid. After all we live from and for the racing. However for me the lack of prize money wasn't the only reason for boycotting the Norba series. The racetracks and the media attention were very poor.

B.S.N: Since we're touching the issue of race courses – what do you think of the designs of the current 4 cross courses ?

Brian Lopes: Now that has its own story. You don't know what went on in the creation of a course. You don't know what liberties and aids the designer had to construct the course, but I generally think that there should be a set of guidelines. For example the world cup course in Australia was extremely flat. That didn't really have a lot to do with mountainbiking. A 4cross course should be more Downhill than BMX. It should have a certain gradient. Interesting tracks with a lot of obstacles are good for the sport and keep the crowds from getting bored.

B.S.N: 4Cross can be quite rough and sometimes two or three riders collide on the course. Do you take an on-course scuffle with you when you leave the racetrack ?

Brian Lopes: That depends on the situation, whether anything was done on purpose, or if a collision was a simple mishap. But I generally don't lose too much thought about something like that. I will greet and shake hands with any of competitor who'll do the same to me. That doesn't have to mean that I'd go for a beer and party with him though.

B.S.N: At the moment you're shifting your focus away from 4cross and more towards endurance downhill racing and the likes. What is your goal with this change of focus ?

Brian Lopes: I don't have any specific goal. Ultimately I'd rather just stay at home. If I race I'd like to take part in races where your riding doesn't have to be as completely immaculate as in 4cross, where all it takes is a minute mistake to end the race for you. It's a lot nicer to have 20, 30 or even 40 minutes in a race where you can prove something to yourself and if the need arises you have more of an opportunity to correct any mistakes you may make during the race. I like these long downhill events – like the Megavalanche series.

B.S.N: But there must be a reason for you competing in these events. Is it the prize money ?

Brian Lopes: No, honestly, I just really enjoy riding those types of races. I've already won a couple of races where the prize money was just a few hundred dollars. For me these types of races are the races of the future. The fact that my new bike sponsor Ibis bikes has the perfect bike for this type of riding is another reason. In fact I think that the market for this kind of bike with 130 – 140 miles of travel is the most important market. Most people buy this type of bike these days. Not many people go out and buy a specific dirt bike or world cup downhill rig. I think this segment will become even more important in the future.

B.S.N: What do you think will be important for the future development of Mountainbiking ? What do you think keeps Mountainbiking alive and kicking ?

Brian Lopes: Trails ! The most important thing is that there are trails that can be ridden, new trails that are being developed and opened so that there's the possibility to ride in undiscovered areas. That's the only way that people are going to keep on buying mountainbikes and mountainbikes will be able to evolve. Without trails the sport will die.

B.S.N: Speaking of the future, where do you see yourself in say 20 or 30 years ?

Brian Lopes: Hopefully still in my bike saddle. I think I might be riding even more than I am riding now, simply because I'll have more time on my hands. Apart from that I really don't have a clue. I don't like planning that far ahead. Back when I was 25 I had the idea that I'd stop racing when I'd turn 30. I've just turned 37 and I'm still riding at the top of the league.

B.S.N: And now for the final question: How should Brian Lopes be remembered ?

Brian Lopes: I'd like to be remembered as an honest and genuine person. Obviously also as one of the fastest racers of all times. I'm sure I've left my mark on the world of Mountainbiking and will now and again pop up in some statistics thanks to all the things I've achieved so far.