



Game inventor Bruno Cathala and the yellow jersey

The best gift from two hobbies

An interview for reich-der-spiele.de by Michael Weber

Full German version:

<https://www.reich-der-spiele.de/specials/bruno-cathala-gelbes-trikot>

Bruno Cathala is a successful game designer. His games include Kingdomino, the Game of the Year. In his private life, he has a time-consuming hobby: cycling. As a Frenchman, he naturally loves the Tour de France and likes to retrace individual stages - including Alpe d'Huez. With his game Velonimo, he has also invented a bicycle racing game. How did he make it to the Tour de France with this card game? We asked him.

Bruno, you are an enthusiastic cyclist. What fascinates you about this hobby?

Since I was a child, I've always been a cyclist. For years it has more been a side activity, because I was deeply involved in Rugby. I've been playing rugby for 20 years, from 15 to 35 years old. I will be 60 this year, so, too old and too injured to be able to play rugby, so, cycling became the last sport I still be able to practice.

What I like in this sport is that it creates for me a „feel good“ mood which is very addictive to me. During a bike run, The first hour, it's always a little hard, and it's a mental fight not to stop or to shorten the scheduled trip. Then the second hour, I feel better, all becomes to be more easy, with a good rythm. And when arrives the third hour, where dopamine is at his top. I feel just ... Euphoric! It's the time to be focused on what I do, mainly during downhills, to avoid any problems) ;-)

The other thing what is nice, is that, for me, it's never „wasting time“. During these bike trips, I'm thinking a lot. And it's always a way to solve problems, or to have new ideas for the games I'm working on.

How much time do you invest in cycling? I've heard that you also go on long tours? Are you alone or do you ride in groups?

Well ... You can follow me on strava. Last year, it was:

- 172 trips
- 8.010 km
- 107.000 m D+
- 380 hours

Today (2023 mid September); since beginning of year it's:

- 123 trips
- 5.850 km
- 75.000 m D+
- 287 hours

As game designer, it's easy to me to arrange my agenda to be able to ride at anytime, when the weather allows it, even during winter. It's not the case of my friends, who have „real“ jobs ;-). So, most of these trips have been made solo.

What were your longest rides? Do you also climb up mountains?

This year my longest trip was Tour of the Lemman Lake with two friends: 174 km, 6 hours, with 750 m D+.

I'm living in french Alps, between Geneva and Chamonix. Close to my home, there are a lot of famous climbs, used by Tour de France - Col des Aravis, Col de la Colombière, col de Joux-plane, Col de la Ramaz, for examples. So, yes, I like to climb these paths. But I'm slow. My body morphology is more adapted to going fast in plains!

You must ride a real racing machine. Can you tell us what kind of equipment you prefer?

I've got three bikes, all from brand „Specialized“.

- An Aethos: A road bike, carbon, very light (little less than 7 kgs). I've chosen a specific gear ratio to allow not to suffer too much when climbing here in the mountains (for specialists; I have 43-30 front and 10-36 rear). This bike is the perfect compromise between comfort and performance.
- An Diverge STR: it's a gravel bike, also very comfortable, which allows me to ride in small offroad paths, but staying fast on roads. I love to have trips alternating road and off-roads moments.
- A Turbo Levo: it's a mountain bike, with electrical assistance. Here, in the french Alps, when you go for pure mountain bike, it's really, really hard. And today, being quite 60, electrical assistance allows me to still practice, without taking any health risk with my heart.

Did you ever think of turning your hobby into a profession and joining a team? Maybe you would have made it to the Tour de France?

Sure I would have loved to be good enough to become a professional rider. When I was a child, after each Tour de France stage, I was riding my bike around the village, the fastest as possible, imagining me wearing the yellow jersey.

As a teenager, I also belonged to a very amateur biking team. But frankly speaking, my performances have never been sufficient to allow me to imagine that I could have a chance to transform this hobby into something else. My rugby skills were much better ;-)

The Tour de France is the biggest cycling race in the world. What is the attraction for you personally? Why is the Tour so important?

For me the Tour de France is ...

- French summer tradition
- an annual rendezvous
- the memory of nice moments with my father when I was young. I enjoyed watching the mountain stages, during Eddy Merckx's reign

I cannot imagine missing this rendezvous.

Which stage or at least which country part do you really like at most? Is there a classical stage like Paris-Roubaix or Alpe d'Huez or something like this?

Sure I love Paris-Roubaix, but also Belgian classics like Tour des Flandres. And during the Tour de France, Alpe d'Huez is not my favorite. I prefer when they have to climb Joux-Plane.

With your card game Velonimo from 2022, you made it to the Tour at the end. Please tell us how it came about that you were able to turn this card game into an official Tour de France version.

In 2020, during Covid, Stratosphere studio contacted me to know if I would be interested to design a game, being very simple, based on cycling, because he had some good contacts with the organisation, who owns the Tour de France rights.

Stratosphere knew that I still created games „on command“, and that I was a fan of Tour de France. So it sounded logical for them to ask me.

Sure I was excited by the proposal, but I had absolutely no idea what to do. But ... During the night, I think that my head was working during my sleep and I woke up with the idea of Velonimo. The prototype has been made in one hour, we playtested the same day and the rules never changed. A kind of small miracle.

So, I proposed my prototype to Stratosphere, who immediately shared my enthusiasm for this small card game but ... It was Covid time ... Tour de France was not far to be cancelled. At the end it was postponed to September. And the project to make this card game was cancelled by TdF organisation.

I convinced Stratosphere that the game was good enough to join the game market, even without any official license. And that's what we did. And we had the chance to be really successful: Today, more than 100.000 Velonimo have been sold around the world. And it still goes on. Not bad ;-)

Then, Stratosphere never gave up the negotiations with TdF organisation. Being patient was the good choice. And this year we had this incredible opportunity to make an official version for Tour de France. For me it was just ... A dream becoming real!

What has been the biggest difficulties to do a licensed version for the Tour de France?

The biggest difficulty has not been for me, but for my publisher to convince the Tour de France organisation!

At the end: Has this version been a success?

I've not the sales numbers yet. But I know that it has been good.

For us, this opportunity was a good way to give more visibility to the basic Velonimo. This smallest Tour de France dedicated version was a good way to reach a public that never goes in game shops, and give them the taste to go further.

Is this version important to you because it allows you to combine your hobby and game development?

For me it has been a gift. Cycling and games are two passions. Combining them is priceless.

Which other cycling games have you already played out and which do you have really enjoyed?

The only one I really enjoyed, and played a lot is Flamme Rouge. It's fast, simple, and so clever. When you love cycling, you recognise a lot of things that gives you an immersive experience. You can feel being in the heart of a cycling race. And if you don't like bike races, the game system is easy and clever enough to give you a pure and nice game experience.