



**Rabobank**

## The rich history of Dutch cycling

*“Furthering the sport of cycling together.”*  
*The Dutch version of this text was the main message of a huge billboard featuring Young Dutch cycling stars Robert Gesink and Lars Boom on Rabobank’s new headquarter in Utrecht. The towers were decorated to celebrate the arrival of the second stage of the Giro d’Italia in Utrecht. It showed once again how close the links are between Rabobank and cycling. This Special Report is another example of this association. By delving into a huge number of results from bicycle races we have charted the development of Dutch road cycling since 1970. The rich cycling history of the Netherland serves as an ideal starting point to promote the further development of this beautiful sport.*

**Image 1: Giro billboard Rabobank**



### Quantifying performance in cycling

The question is, how can one measure the performance of professional cyclists over the years? The obvious starting point would be to look at the number of victories. How many (important) races were won by Dutchmen? To answer this question we first made a selection of the 31 most important races since 1970. Our selection from varied international calendar is based on prestige, course characteristics and distribution among countries. Next we divided the races into five categories. We distinguish between three

groups of stage races (S1-S3) and two groups of one-day races, the five monuments of cycling and the world championship road race under C1, and the other classics under C2. Then we created a database with the honour rolls of all 31 races to get a clear overview of all the winners.

**Table 1: The selection of 31 Races**

	Race name		Race name
S1	Tour de France	C2	Amstel Gold Race
S2	Giro d’Italia		Clásica San Sebastian
	Vuelta a España		La Flèche Wallonne
S3	Dauphiné Libéré	E3 Prijis Vlaanderen	
	Paris-Nice	Gent - Wevelgem	
	Tour of Benelux	Giro dell’Emilia	
	Tour of the Basque Country	GP Ouest France-Plouay	
	Tour de Romandie	Grand Prix des Nations	
	Tour of Switzerland	Championship of Zurich	
	Tirreno Adriatico	Olympic Time Trial	
C1	Giro di Lombardia	Omloop het Nieuwsblad	
	Liège-Bastogne-Liège	Olympic Road Race	
	Milan - Sanremo	Paris-Tours	
	Paris-Roubaix	Vattenfall Cyclassics	
	Tour of Flanders	WC Time Trial	
	WC Road Race		

### The winner takes all

There is one Dutchman – classic specialist Jan Raas- in the illustrious company of the ten most victorious riders (see table 2). Table 2 also shows once again how exceptionally talented Eddy Merckx was. Having secured 51 victories, he stands out on his own. For four of our five race categories, the record number of victories by a single rider can be found in table 2. With seven S1 victories Lance Armstrong is also one of the all-time greats. Four riders in the top 10 have won at least one race in all categories. This accomplishment is equalled by four more riders, two of which are Dutch: Jan Janssen and Joop Zoetemelk.

Image 2 shows how many victories were won by Dutch cyclists since 1970. Out of a total of 108 Dutch victories, 78 were won in the golden period between 1974 and 1988. Of the 78 victories in that period no fewer than 45 can be attributed to the ‘great 4’: Jan

Raas (18), Joop Zoetemelk (13), Gerrie Kneteman (8) and Hennie Kuiper (6).

**Table 2: Top 10 of all time**

Winner	S1	S2	S3	C1	C2	Tot
Eddy Merckx	5	6	6	22	12	51
Bernard Hinault	5	5	4	6	9	29
Jacques Anquetil	5	3	8	1	10	27
Seán Kelly		1	12	9	4	26
Roger De Vlaeminck			7	11	6	24
Fausto Coppi	2	5		10	6	23
Rik Van Looy			2	10	10	22
Gino Bartali	2	3	4	7	4	20
Jan Raas			1	5	12	18
Tony Rominger		4	9	2	3	18

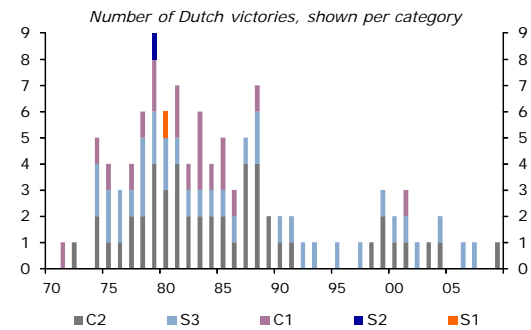
Source: Wikipedia, Rabobank

Unfortunately, no grand tours have been won since and only Servais Knaben managed to add a C1 victory to the Dutch track record with his Paris-Roubaix win in 2001. Apart from feeling the loss of several exceptionally talented riders, the slump since 1979 can also be explained by the growth of international competition. Where during the Seventies, prizes were distributed over an average of 5.8 countries each year, there were 9.6 in the mix during the Eighties and the numbers vying for top spot kept rising steadily to 9.8 during the Nineties and up to 10.6 during the previous decade. In a supplemental analysis we will take a closer look at the internationalisation of cycling and its effects on the position of the Netherlands.

Actually, the situation is not quite as bad as the last two decades' meagre results would suggest. While the winners tell us a substantial part of the story, they definitely do not give the whole picture. The bulk of the top races are won by a small elite of super-talented riders. Sometimes it's just a matter of sheer luck to have one of those gifted riders born within the boundaries of your country. Where would, for instance, Swiss cycling be without the incredible Fabian Cancellara? The true balance of power at the top of the league remains murky if only the number of victories are taken into account.

For starters, this method ignores all stage victories whereas the Netherlands have been far from invisible in that field over the last two decades.

**Image 2: Graphing Dutch successes**



Source: Wikipedia, Rabobank

**The Rabobank point system**

By including the results of the riders finishing shortly behind the winner, the picture of the cycling power of different nations in a specific season becomes far clearer. This can be done by awarding points to the first 15 to 20 riders to reach the finish line in all 31 races. This is not a new idea, by the way – as far back as March 1984 Sean Kelly was the first leader in the precursor to the UCI ranking. In this ranking, individual achievements from the previous twelve months were compared by means of awarding points to race results. The UCI ranking met its Waterloo with the founding of the Pro-Tour in 2005. In the Pro-Tour ranking UCI has been publishing since then, many prestigious races no longer feature. Sadly, this meant that the ranking published by UCI has lost its completeness and objectivity.

The Rabobank point system setup closely resembles that of the former UCI ranking. Table 3 roughly shows how points are awarded. A win in a C1 race leads to points for the top 20 in the results list: 500 for the winner and gradually less for those who finished behind him. In stage races points are also awarded for stage wins.

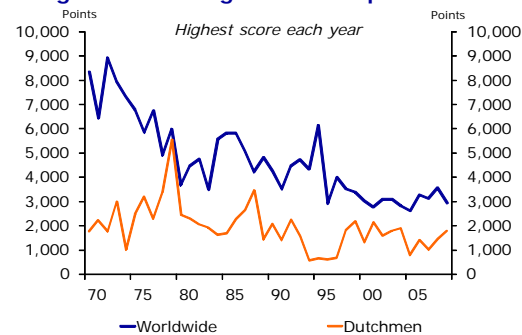
In addition, points can be earned by riders wearing the leader's jersey and by leading or winning the points and king of the mountain classifications.

**Table 3: Rabobank points ranking**

Points ranking	S1	S2	S3	C1	C2
Winner's points	1000	825	400	500	350
Points given to highest:	20	20	15	20	15
Stage victory	125	105	60		
Points given to highest:	5	5	3		

As mentioned before, this is not a new method. A new feature is that Rabobank, in cooperation with Infostrada Sports, has made a consistent calculation of this point system for the last 40 years. This allows us to compare performances in different time periods. Table 4 gives an overview of the highest scores in the last four decades. The second and third columns show the names and scores of the best performing rider in a given year. The list of front runners each year is the true champions' hall of fame. Apparently, this point system succeeds in identifying the biggest names in cycling. The continued decline of the top scores each year also reflects an increase in competition (image 3). This is probably a combined effect of internationalisation and the fact that riders increasingly specialise in certain race types. With an almost exclusive focus on the Tour de France Lance Armstrong is a good example of this approach.

**Image 3: Declining trend in top scores**



Source: Infostrada Sports, Rabobank

**Table 4: Highest scores**

Yr.	Nr.1 World	Points	Nr. 1 NL.	Points	Yr.
'70	Merckx	8336	Janssen	1755	13
'71	Merckx	6445	Zoetemelk	2215	6
'72	Merckx	8933	Zoetemelk	1755	11
'73	Merckx	7964	Zoetemelk	3000	5
'74	Merckx	7335	Zoetemelk	1010	24
'75	Merckx	6780	Zoetemelk	2460	8
'76	Maertens	5855	Zoetemelk	3195	4
'77	Maertens	6741	Raas	2285	6
'78	Hinault	4888	Zoetemelk	3375	3
'79	Hinault	5980	Zoetemelk	5541	2
'80	Hinault	3663	Kuiper	2445	6
'81	Hinault	4455	Kuiper	2295	4
'82	Hinault	4740	Raas	2055	8
'83	Saronni	3482	Raas	1920	8
'84	Kelly	5550	van der Velde	1630	10
'85	Kelly	5819	van der Poel	1695	9
'86	Kelly	5816	van der Poel	2265	3
'87	Roche	5071	van Vliet	2645	3
'88	Kelly	4224	Rooks	3450	2
'89	Fignon	4802	Rooks	1425	9
'90	Bugno	4246	Breukink	2075	4
'91	Chiappucci	3513	Maassen	1405	14
'92	Induráin	4457	Nijdam	2234	4
'93	Rominger	4716	Breukink	1553	14
'94	Rominger	4314	Breukink	569	57
'95	Jalabert	6130	Nijdam	660	42
'96	Olano	2918	Blijlevens	618	56
'97	Jalabert	3998	van Bon	672	40
'98	Bartoli	3510	Boogerd	1805	6
'99	Jalabert	3368	Boogerd	2185	5
'00	Casagrande	3034	E. Dekker	1330	16
'01	Armstrong	2755	E. Dekker	2140	5
'02	Armstrong	3100	Boogerd	1585	10
'03	Petacchi	3081	Boogerd	1775	10
'04	Bettini	2800	E. Dekker	1900	10
'05	Boonen	2609	Boogerd	790	39
'06	Valverde	3277	Boogerd	1400	17
'07	Di Luca	3123	T. Dekker	1020	24
'08	Contador	3562	Gesink	1444	14
'09	Contador	2945	Gesink	1772	10

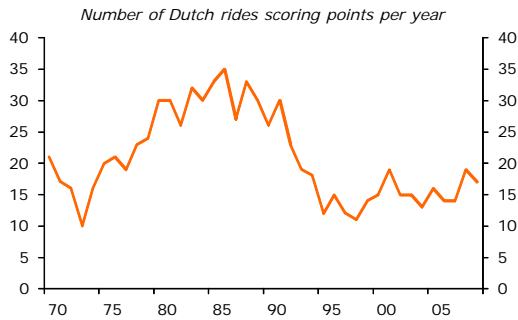
Source: Infostrada Sports, Rabobank

Table 4 shows that the top spot of the yearly Rabobank ranking was never occupied by a Dutchman. The achievements of the best Dutch cyclist each year is shown in columns 4 and 5. The last column shows which position this score netted them in the world rankings in the particular year. Joop Zoetemelk (1979) and Steven Rooks (1988) made it to second spot and thereby ranked highest on this international rostrum. On 26 occasions, a Dutch rider reached the top 10. In addition, on eight occasions more than one Dutch rider ended in the top 10. The last time this happened was in 2001 when Erik Dekker reached fifth place and Michael Boogerd finished ninth.

### There is strength in numbers

Up until now our analysis was restricted to the top of the food chain. However, ultimately the cycling strength of a country is determined by the amount of riders that are able to compete for the prizes in the premier league of cycling as we defined it. In the Dutch case the development of this indicator also tells a tale of ups and downs (image 4).

**Image 4: The necessity of a broad base**



Source: Infostrada Sports, Rabobank

However, the peak period in participation occurred considerably later than the peak in performances we saw earlier. Apparently there were several generations of competitive riders after the successes of the Seventies. On the one hand, these later riders were unlucky to encounter a marked increase in international competition. On the other hand, the earlier Dutch successes also sparked great interest in sponsors, meaning that in the period between 1986 and 1994 there were three strong<sup>1</sup> Dutch teams present in the bunch almost every year. Without a doubt this gave more Dutch riders the opportunity to take part in the big races. Conversely, the declining results in the early Nineties caused Dutch sponsors to abandon the sport one by one; only one major Dutch professional team was active between 2000 and 2008.

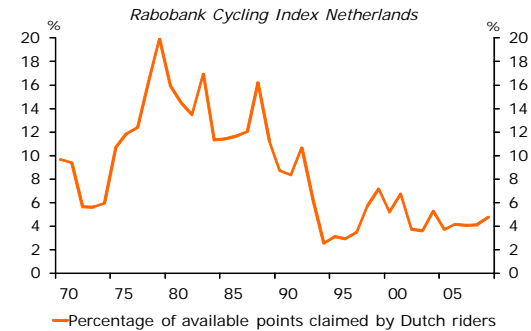
### The Rabobank Cycling Index

In the end the big question is what share of

<sup>1</sup> We defined 'strong' as winning more than 1000 Dutch points per racing season.

the available points was snapped up by Dutch riders (image 5). This gives the purest view of the strength of Dutch cycling. This is illustrated by the fact that even in the years without big victories, the Netherlands managed to secure a share of the pie.

**Image 5: The statistics of cycling history**



Source: Infostrada Sports, Rabobank

After the slump in the middle of the '90's and the subsequent recovery, the level has now stabilised around the 4% mark. Because of the increased international competition, that is in itself quite an achievement. And it certainly provides a solid foundation to build on.

### What does history tell us?

*This Special Report charts the Netherlands' rich cycling history. Especially in the late Seventies and early Eighties the Netherlands brought home a considerable share of the available points. Unfortunately this heyday period was quickly followed by a steep decline.*

*Fortunately, the rapidly declining trend has been halted in the mid-Nineties and there are signs of recovery, despite the ever increasing competition. Considering the great amount of talent the Netherlands has managed to bring into play during the last few years and the realistic hope that there will be a few super-talented riders among them, we can look to the future with confidence!*

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