



WOUT BEEL  
MATTHIAS M.R. DECLERCQ  
ELISE VANHECKE



THE  
**WOLFPACK**



**IS BACK**

**Lannoo**

# PRE FACE

2020. What a cycling year. It was a uniquely emotional and challenging year in every respect. It was a year that brought out the fighting spirit, solidarity, and iron strength in The Wolfpack. A year of setbacks, successes, and celebrations. We got off to a good start, with wins in both our home territory and on the other side of the world. The team grabbed the lead in stages and tours in Australia, New Zealand and Argentina, in Valencia, Burgos and Algarve, and closer to home in Kuurne and Roeselare. The cycling year started strongly, the classics beckoned.

Then the bombshell dropped. COVID-19. I made the guys do an about-face en route to the Strade Bianche, and head back to their homes. It wasn't an easy decision to make, and the lockdown that followed was just as hard. Nobody had seen this coming and nobody had ever experienced anything like it before. But the team never lost faith. Life is full of challenges, and each experience makes us stronger.

Before the restart after the lockdown, we headed to the Dolomites. It felt like the first day of school, exciting and intimidating. Doubts about the future continued to haunt us, but we remained optimistic. **The cyclists, the staff, our partners – everyone showed an unflinching drive to succeed.** Although all of us had to sacrifice a great deal of our freedom, everyone shouldered their responsibility to achieve a common goal. Cycling must go on!

By the start of the 'new' season, The Wolfpack was stronger than ever and raring to go. And then the second bombshell dropped, in Poland. A horrific crash that would turn out to be symbolic of a year full of bad luck. At moments like this, you need a close-knit group, a group like The Wolfpack. We paid a high price with all these setbacks, but they also gave us strength, and we continued to fight.

The team spirit at Deceuninck – Quick-Step and the resilience of cycling in general has shown that together we can survive any crisis, including the COVID crisis. It has also been a rough year for cycling fans, who enjoy gathering together by the side of the road to get close to the cyclists. But respecting the strict rules turned out to be the only solution this year. It allowed for an exceptional cycling year in sporting terms as well.

With this book, we conclude a period that was unique and hopefully will remain so. I sincerely hope that the cycling experience in 2021 will be different. Back to the way things were — above all with spectators— because that's what really fuels our sport. That fuel also includes you, dear reader. I hope you enjoy what you see and read in this book so that after a year of watching from a distance, you'll find yourselves closer to The Wolfpack than ever.

*The Wolfpack is back.  
But we were never really gone.*

**Patrick Lefevere**

# HUNT

**wolf**, *n.* \ 'wulf \

**1** any of several large predatory canids (genus *Canis*) that live and hunt in packs, and resemble the related dogs. **2** wolf, *v.* to devour voraciously, *to eat like a wolf* (fig.)

**pack**, *n.* \ 'pak \

**1** a group of domesticated animals trained to hunt or run together; a group of often predatory animals of the same kind // a wolf *pack*

You're seeing them for the first time. And it's fantastic. For months, you haven't been able to see them, not on the road, not on TV – just in photos and online posts. It's not that they're shy, or hiding in the twilight, but it gets dark early in December and the sky, the ground, everything is gray. Riders don't exist in winter. Later, when the leaves begin to come out on the trees, the people will shout "*They're here!*", as if the peloton were bringing with them the light and warmth everyone was longing for. They'll feel that moment when we shake the darkness from our coats and the swift passage of shiny bikes sweeps us all out of the house: go out and have a look, go ahead, the sun is shining.

*They're here.* In Sanremo, they say '*Stanno arrivando!*'. In Italy the sound of the helicopter following the race also drives the spectator's desire to see the peloton, the child will squeeze Dad's hand harder in excitement as the riders flash by, the wind will whip through our hair, and we'll put winter away in the attic, like an old coat.

Spring starts very early in 2020: on January 10th. From that moment on, light falls once more on those we haven't seen for a whole winter.

On the 29th floor of the Suitopía, the Sol y Mar Hotel in Calpe, Spain, the entire Deceuninck – Quick-Step team walks into the sky bar. The pack is ready and marches in a column, like a brass band marching into a village. *We're seen as a unit*, Van Dale writes. Bob Jungels' hair shines in the sunlight, Remco is wearing shorts, and the snow has melted in Zdenek Stybar's eyes. Everyone's here: the riders, the team leaders, the management, the mechanics. It's a celebration of hunger and thirst – *a hard rain's gonna fall*, we all sing together – and above all, it's an initiation into the passionate craving and deep desire that will galvanize the team to meet all of the challenges that are to come.

They're here.

Seventy-eight journalists and photographers from over twelve countries are ready to take a look at the team. Not only have journalists come from Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Ireland, but also from the Czech Republic, Denmark, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain, Greece, the UK, and the US. They're all here because this team always comes out on top, and everyone knows Remco.

The era of rice pudding and plastic flowers is long gone and what lives on is in the hands of the child and the smell of sauerkraut. “Young people are the future,” says Patrick Lefevere into the camera. Calpe’s iconic, barren rock glimmers in the background. “It’s a challenge to be the first to discover them.”

Some new pups have joined the pack. They’re given a PowerPoint presentation at the start of the season, together with the other team members. Some of them will be joining later, like farmer’s son Mauri Vansevenant. The pups’ names take us to unfamiliar worlds. Shane Archbold is new on the team. He’s got a mullet haircut and comes from Timaru, a New Zealand port city. Timaru must be as far from Kwaremont as you can get — once you’re past the harbor, you’re practically already on your way back. Andrea Bagioli grew up in the foothills of the Italian Alps, and Ian Garrison comes from Decatur in the U.S. state of Georgia. João Almeida was raised in the Portuguese Caldas da Rainha, and Jannik Steimle in Welheim an der Teck. Jan De Wilde already knew it then: we came from nowhere, and had nowhere to go.

The roots of Deceuninck – Quick-Step run deep in the swampy pastures of West-Flanders, but Ricardo Scheidecker, now technical & development director, is Portuguese. Vasilis Anastopoulos is a trainer, as is Frank Alaphilippe. Yankee Germano is the team’s masseur, José Ibaruren Taus is the doctor, and Alexandru Hovco manages social media & online content. Behind the smokescreen that is the race course, where Yves has a flat and Serry is ready to ride, cogs from across the globe connect and set in motion everything we see on television, or from the side of the road.

Go, man, go.

“And in that unique world,” Wout Beel says, “I truly didn’t know a soul.” He laughs timidly. Wout lives in Moorslede, a tiny West-Flanders town. He’s a photographer but couldn’t even name three riders at the start of his job as a team portraitist. “Cycling was completely new to me,” he says. “The fastest one wins the race. At least that’s what I used to think.” He snaps some photos of a training as the riders pass. “Perhaps that lack of insight was actually an advantage: I was seeing everything for the first time.” He was also new to the riders, the staff, and the drivers.

*Uh, hello.*

“Deceuninck – Quick-Step really is a wolfpack. It’s not easy to gain access to that family, but everyone gets a chance to prove themselves and earn their place. Once you’re part of it, you see how strong the pack is, how everything is connected, and how smoothly and solidly the machine runs.”

In Calpe, all eyes are on Remco and Julian. The flash pops endlessly. Once the final question has been asked and the lens has been put away, photos and videos start to circulate around the world, and the team gets ready for an unforgettable season. No one in Calpe knows where Wuhan is, how deep a ravine is, or if there are crowd barriers in Poland, and no one yet suspects that the rainbow jersey will soon be won on the racetrack where Ayrton Senna crashed. In Calpe, the lights are dimmed, the curtain is raised, and desire fuels the hunger to win.

Ready?

Set.

Go.

The heat is on from the very first race of the season. In the Tour Down Under, Sam Bennett wins the first stage and his name starts making the rounds for the first time. He beats Jasper Philipsen, Elia Viviani, and Caleb Ewan in the sprint. The Belgian-born Irishman is new to the team. “I’d be lying if I said I didn’t feel the pressure, coming to

Deceuninck – Quick-Step, to get that first win,” he says afterwards. Bennett works his way into the pack. A week later, the boy who was seen as the “pup” of the team last year does something many had hoped for, but not everyone had expected. In the third stage of Argentina’s Vuelta a San Juan, a 15.5-kilometer time trial from Ullum to Punta Negra, Remco Evenepoel rides so fast that he beats Filippo Ganna, the future world time trial champion, by more than half a minute. This is the first domino that falls, after which it sets off another, and once everyone wakes up in Flanders, on the other side of the world, they know that spring is starting early this year. The fields are still wet, the nights long and dark – but hope is growing in Argentina’s arid dust.

In South America and Oceania, besides Stybar’s win in San Juan, the team also wins the Race Torquay – Bennett, again – and the Cadel Evans Great Ocean Road Race – Devenyns against Sivakov. Evenepoel will soon need more space in his suitcase for all his jerseys. In the Volta a la Comunitat Valenciana, Fabio Jakobsen beats Groenewegen and wins the final stage. He also wins in the Volta ao Algarve. Remco’s the one to ignite the fire. The wolffling wins again and again: in Portugal at the Alto da Fóia against Schachmann and Martin, in the time trial against Dennis and Küng, and he comes home with a bag full of jerseys at last – the final winner. Meanwhile, Rémi Cavagna wins in the Ardèche, but in the Flemish opening weekend, photographer Wout faces a problem.

Wout is in the car with technical director Ricardo, and they’re stuck on the ring road around Kortrijk, not far from Kuurne. Kasper Asgreen seems to be on his way to victory just a stone’s throw away. Kuurne-Brussel-Kuurne is an important race for the team and Wout knows that. He wants to witness the win, capture it, *now’s the time to prove yourself*. He jumps out of the car, grabs his camera, and starts a long, anonymous sprint, far from the public eye.

“Ladies and gentlemen, the race is back,” the sports anchor will say on television in the evening. “The race is back.” And: “Our Flemish racing heart is beating strong. Yesterday, Deceuninck – Quick-Step had to accept second place in the Omloop Het Nieuwsblad, and they seemed to want to rectify this today.”

At thirty kilometers from the finish in Kuurne, Kasper Asgreen accelerates. He nears the leading group. Two riders still manage to follow. One falls behind at seventeen kilometers from the finish, the other at eleven, and when Asgreen – by himself in the lead – smells victory at two kilometers from the finish, the peloton has only thirteen seconds. “This is going to be a close call,” the commentator says. Wout Beel feels the same, as he runs for his life on the ring road around Kuurne. The camera bouncing frantically against his raincoat. Just under two kilometers for Asgreen. Another three hundred meters for Wout. “They’re not going to make it,” is heard from the TV. Asgreen rises up on his pedals. The peloton starts the sprint in the background. Wout is sweating like a racehorse and hears through the speakers: “Will it be Asgreen?! Will it be Asgreen?!” The Dane is at his limit. Wout is too. The commentator: “Okay, he’s going to make it now, he’s done it! Unbelievable!”

Asgreen throws his arms up in the air. Wout squeezes through the team staff. He sees Asgreen’s arms, he’s riding straight toward him, panting. Lampaert, Stybar, and Jungels gather around the winner. Loud cheering can be heard from the team cars. Ricardo is still stuck on the ring road. The sponsors, standing a bit further away, clap and smile. The mechanics are proud. The masseurs will soon have the winner’s legs under their hands. The CEO is standing in front of the camera. And Wout Beel pushes his way through the riders. He’s there. He’s won. He captures the image. No one has seen his sprint, but they don’t have to. He’s part of The Wolfpack.



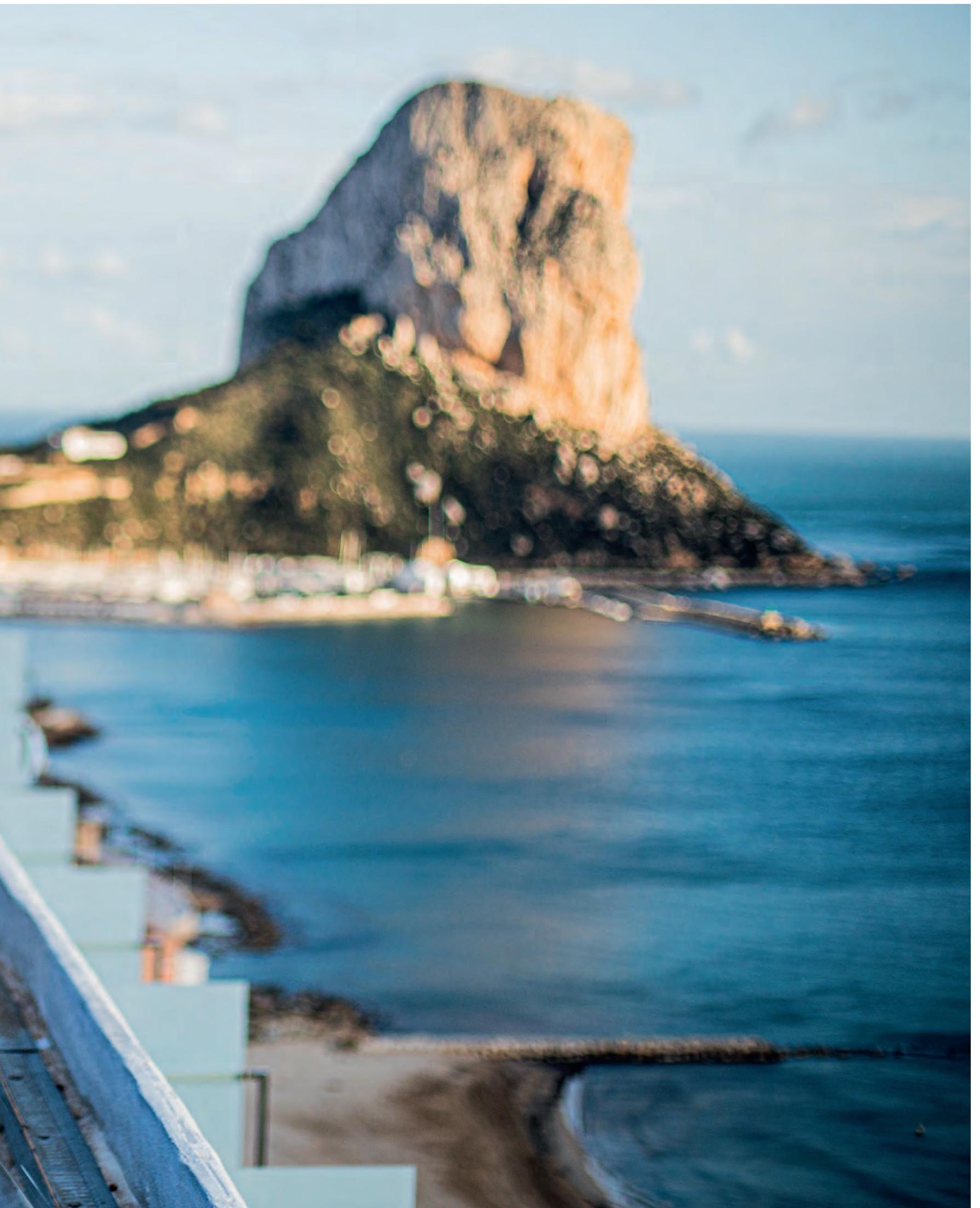
## CALPE, JANUARY 2020

The jerseys are freshly ironed and the wolves are looking sharp! The team presentation and the start of a new season always have something magical. The team numbers 28 riders, including 11 new faces. Journalists besiege the team with questions and Remco Evenepoel is getting a lot of attention. The young wolf feels strong and has only one goal this season: Make The Wolfpack shine. In the background, Calpe's iconic rock gleams in the sun.











**CALPE, JANUARY 2020**

The last night. The volume is turned up and the atmosphere is fantastic. Julian Alaphilippe, logistics manager Julie Verrept, sports director Davide Bramati, newcomer Davide Ballerini, everyone is part of the team. The Wolfpack's tight-knit family is once again complete.





Andrea Bagioli  
**CALPE,**  
**JANUARY 2020**









