

# **BLOOD SWEAT + GEARS**

**A film by  
Nick Davis**

**93 minutes, color, 2009**



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## **SYNOPSIS**

In response to the doping scandals that tarnished the reputation of professional cycling, former racing cyclist Jonathan "JV" Vaughters formed Slipstream, a team whose members agree to compete without the aid of any performance-enhancing drugs. Documentary filmmaker Nick Davis chronicles the dramatic story of "the clean team" throughout 2008, a year in which the team leader was superstar David Millar -- making a comeback after a doping scandal sidelined his career -- and sees Slipstream win their first invitation to the Tour de France.

## **DIRECTOR BIO**

Nick Davis is a baseball fan who never went near a cycling race until making this film. An acclaimed filmmaker and writer, his first film was *Jack: The Last Kennedy Film*, an Emmy-Award winning two-hour biography he produced and directed for CBS. He also wrote and directed the independent feature film *1999*, a dark comedy starring Jennifer Garner, Dan Futterman, Amanda Peet, Buck Henry, and Steven Wright. His first novel, *Boone* (written with Brooks Hansen), was named a notable book of the year by the New York Times. In 2001, he founded Nick Davis Productions for the purpose of making smart entertainment. The company has produced over fifty hours of programming since then, including *Rebuilding Ground Zero*, *New York at the Movies*, *Stories of the Innocence Project*, and the upcoming *World Without*. He lives in New York City with his wife and two brilliant daughters.

## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

Why? Why do they do it? Why do they punish their bodies, sacrifice all normal form of human relationships, and sign up, again, and again, to suffer, to feel, even when they're going good, nothing but unrelenting pain?

These were the questions I wanted to ask in the film. I'm not here to say we got any answers, but after following Team Slipstream for over a year and shooting over 400 hours of footage on their remarkable journey to remake the sport of cycling and reclaim it from the murky world of doping, I am more amazed than ever by what they do. The guys, of course, are great -- when you make a film like this, the guys become 'characters,' but I hope that in the film we see that they're just people -- human and flawed and deeply passionate about their mission: committed to cleaning up their sport but never preachy about it, always funny and smart and, even at their lowest moments, honest.

Ultimately of course I hope the film works for cycling fans as well as those who, like me when we began, couldn't tell a *soigneur* from a *peleton*. My hope was to give viewers a reminder of what people can do when they work for something greater than themselves.

-Nick Davis

**From the Sundance Channel Blog:**



Blood, Sweat + Gears - Q & A with David Millar  
June 29th, 2009 by Sundance Channel



BLOOD, SWEAT + GEARS on Sundance Channel now!

In response to the doping scandals that tarnished the reputation of professional cycling, former racing cyclist Jonathan “JV” Vaughters formed Slipstream, a team whose members agree to compete without the aid of any performance-enhancing drugs. Documentary filmmaker Nick Davis chronicles the dramatic story of “the clean team” throughout 2008, a year in which the team leader was superstar David Millar — making a comeback after a doping scandal sidelined his career — and sees Slipstream win their first invitation to the Tour de France. Check out the film in June and July on Sundance Channel and read our short Q & A with David Millar below!

**Sundancechannel.com:** Do you ever second guess your decision to race clean?

**David Millar:** No, never, it is hard for me to express how emphatic I am in that response.

**Sundancechannel.com:** Why are you involved in professional cycling?

**David Millar:** It’s a love thing.

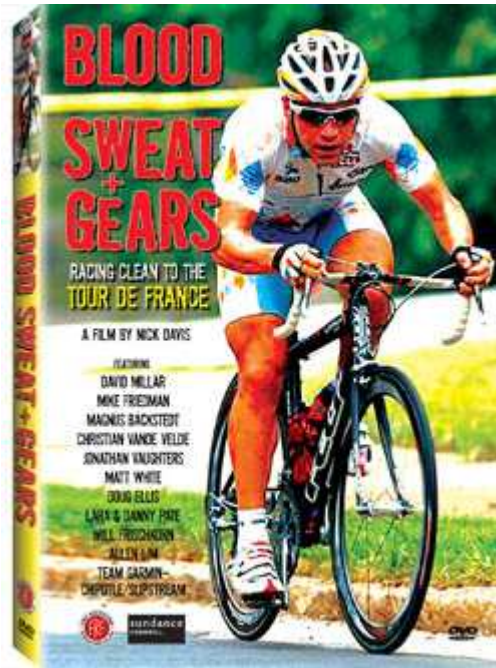
**Sundancechannel.com:** What are the team members from the film up to now?

**David Millar:** Training, racing, eating, sleeping. A lot of us that you see in the movie – myself, Christian, Danny and Julian – are gearing up for our second Tour as a team.



## Blood Sweat + Gears

Tue, 09/01/2009 - 11:08am by Andy



The documentary Blood Sweat + Gears is a fascinating record of Team Garmin/Slipstream's 2008 season, in which the upstart team raced the early season to earn a Tour de France invite, and then surprised with Christian Vande Velde's 4th place finish. The film had a brief run on the Sundance Channel, and the DVD is to be released soon. Our friend Marc Mauceri of First Run Features secured the rights, and hooked me up with director Nick Davis for an interview.

**Andy Shen:** I loved the movie, it's one of the greatest cycling movies I've seen. A casual fan can get it, but it doesn't talk down to the serious fan, it was amazing.

**Nick Davis:** That's great to hear. That's exactly what we wanted to do. I went into this not knowing anything about cycling, and I wanted to

make sure that people who did know a lot didn't feel like it was beneath them. So that's great to hear, thank you.

**AS:** How'd you decide to make a movie about the Garmin team?

**ND:** About five years ago I was approached by OLN about working on a cycling thing, so I researched another team, Jittery Joe's, and got really into the sport. I never knew anything about cycling before then, and that whet my appetite for it. That project didn't work out, but from then on I was interested, and I love baseball, and I thought, "Hmm, they're as interesting as baseball players", which, for me is high praise.

Then I read an article in the paper about what Slipstream was trying to do, and I thought that was the coolest thing. I'm a friend of Doug Ellis', so I called him up and told him that somebody should be filming this, and he said, "Ok, go ahead". I approached the Sundance Channel, and they were very interested, but for a long time it was supposed to be a TV series, a six part series. They kept giving us money to film little bits of the story, but at a certain point they stopped giving us money, and I went and got money on my own, and was

able to convince them to give us money again and make it into a feature length. They agreed, and that was it.

**AS:** How did you pick out your protagonists, Backstedt, Vande Velde, Pate, Friedman, Millar? Did you select them, or did it evolve?

**ND:** It emerged. Going into the year we knew that David Millar was a great story, so we definitely wanted to follow him. And from the moment we started following them, September 2007, it seemed that Friedman had a really interesting story. So Friedman and Millar were the two that we set out to follow. And then Magnus was just so captivating, and what happened to him at Qatar (broken collarbone) was so tragic, it set the scene for a great comeback or not at Paris Roubaix and the Tour, so we followed him a lot.

Christian was a surprise. In talking to Doug and JV before the year began, they would mention him, but I didn't get the sense that he was going to be nearly the character that he emerged to be. He really surprised us as filmmakers, and we liked the way he snuck up on us as a character and we thought it would be fun in the film too if he snuck up on us.

**AS:** He definitely becomes more prominent in the second part.

**ND:** Yeah.

**AS:** Let's talk about them individually. It's interesting you say you started focusing on Backstedt because you were hoping for a comeback story, because it ended up being the story of his retirement.

**ND:** Yeah, it was. He didn't announce his retirement until we finished editing the film, which was very interesting, but every step of the way, we followed him at three events, and each one was



just a disappointment for him as a cyclist. And in the editing room, we thought, "God this is just so repetitive, so dreary!" He crashes at Qatar, his wheels fall off at Paris Roubaix, and then he doesn't make the time cut in the Tour. We were having trouble getting the film down to the length we wanted, and my editor said, "Let's just cut Magnus, just cut him out of the Tour." And at that point he hadn't retired, and it was an issue, but obviously I'm really glad we didn't do that.

It is, it's about getting old, as Doug says early in the film, he's an older athlete at the end of his career, and Magnus said, "I haven't decided when I'm going to hang them up, I'll know when it's time." And by the end of the film it definitely feels like it's the right call.

**AS:** And that incredible moment when his daughter talks to him after Paris Roubaix, and you can see him choking back tears, that was really touching.

**ND:** Yeah, I felt really badly for him. You're supposed to be objective in all this, but you end up really liking these guys and you want them to do well for the film. Of course, as a filmmaker, it's just as good that he loses all the time. Like you said, it's the story of his deciding to retire.



**AS:** Next guy, Friedman, I guess the arc was all about him trying to get into the Olympics, but in a way he did everything wrong, but you still get the happy ending.

**ND:** Yes, and that was a narrative challenge for us, because we covered him a lot and we never saw him do well. There were races earlier in the year that he did well at, but I don't blame the viewer if they say at the end, "How in the world does this guy get into the Olympics?" Like Magnus, he had nothing but disappointment. I think the way he got in was because he had such a great year the year before, and I think everybody likes the guy.

**AS:** There was a moment with him that told the Garmin story, maybe, even better than David Millar, who's the poster boy for reformed dopers. That whole story of Friedman getting an embolism, and being so angry that people would think he got it because he doped, I think that really let the viewers understand how important this Garmin team is to the racers.

**ND:** You mean having a team that's devoted to being clean?

**AS:** Yeah, the fact that Friedman was able to, with JV's backing, maintain his reputation, and let the world know he wasn't a cheater.

**ND:** Yeah, that's good to hear, I hope the world knows he isn't a cheater. I felt like that story was just so angering. How can you prove that you're clean? It's hard.

**AS:** Yeah, how would you like it if no matter what you did people assumed you were a liar and a cheater? That's the starting assumption about you no matter what you do.

**ND:** Yeah, it's really unfair, and I think that's the condition the whole sport finds itself in. Just today, I read, maybe in The Onion, that one of the good things about Contador is nobody takes his doping allegations as seriously as Armstrong's doping allegations. It's the whole sport, everybody who does it is under suspicion, and it's not fair. I think Garmin, and they're not the only ones now, teams are realizing that we have to be very clear about being clean, or the sport's not going to make it.

**AS:** That one snippet really brought it home, what it's like to not have your reputation in your hands.

**ND:** That was the last thing we put in the film.

**AS:** Danny Pate, that's some storyline. How did you feel when you realized you were stumbling on a divorce? Did you think you shouldn't be there? How'd you handle that?

**ND:** We were really grateful that the team and its people opened themselves up to us as they did. And I think Danny and Lara trusted us, we weren't going to do anything untoward, and I don't think we did. We just show, in three little snippets, how difficult it is for these guys to maintain a semblance of a normal relationship. I think when we found out that they separated, it was very sad, because we'd grown to like them, even the editors, who never met the people, would only see the footage, had really grown to like them. At that point we said we had to be really careful, we didn't want to go for anything cheap, we wanted to show this as fully as we can in the limited amount of screen time that we had.



**AS:** It was a nice piece of balance when you had her talking about how they're great guys, but they're essentially pretty narcissistic by necessity.

**ND:** I think it's really great that she sees that and she says it. She's not just saying, "Oh, this selfish jerk". If you're going to be a cyclist at this level, you HAVE to be so focused that you can't have the kind of relationship that an intelligent woman would want. It's pretty sad. One regret I had is that Danny had an incredible stage in the 2008 Tour, but we just weren't able to work it in. He finished third in this one stage, I was hoping you could see, "Ok, that's what it was for". He sacrificed his marriage, but (laughs) he almost won a stage at the Tour de France! I'm not saying it's equivalent, but it's a pretty interesting dynamic.

**AS:** Maybe as a filmmaker this is a big coup, but there was that one quick little flash where she was talking about her career aspirations, and he smirked and she caught him. It was as if you could see the breakup was coming. It was an incredible thing to catch.

**ND:** Yeah...yeah...it's painful. We've all been there. He wasn't really...it just wasn't going to work, and I think it couldn't work. He didn't accept that she wanted to be a news anchor, she didn't accept that he HAD to be doing this. If she'd been able to accept it...but whatever.

**AS:** As a documentary filmmaker, when you can tell the story of a marriage in a split second, is that a big thrill for you?

**ND:** We were lucky that they trusted us enough to be themselves in that interview, and look, it's agonizing footage, but you have to use it. I don't know that it was thrilling...

**AS:** I don't want to imply that you're happy about their misfortunes...

**ND:** Yeah, when I first saw that it was like, "Oh my God!" That was actually in the first interview we ever did with them, at that point they were still very much together. And I just thought, "We'll sit on this, I'm not sure what we're going to do with this."

**AS:** Another quick little moment, when JV was asking Vande Velde to do some press, "Do you want to do it?"

And Vande Velde first says, "No." Pause. "Alright, I'll do it." And that's him in a nutshell, the good boy scout. It was great quick little portrait of him.

**ND:** Thank you. I feel the same way, I just love that moment. Everything you need to know about him is in that moment. He didn't want to do it, but he'll do it, but he doesn't want to do it. He wants to be the leader, but he doesn't want to be the leader, he doesn't think he's good enough, it's all there. All his struggles over confidence and being THE GUY. I've come to really admire and root for him hugely.

**AS:** Of course, David Millar was always going to be an important part of the film, but you ended up with another twist, with him struggling to become the support rider.

**ND:** He's so articulate and sensitive, and it was his team, and the big question with him was how does it feel like when you have to ride support? People who don't know anything about cycling, they've learned a little of this at this Tour de France with Lance and Astana and what's Lance going to do? But to not know the sport, what, this guy's going to have to ride support? It seems unthinkable. What's so great is that Millar, as JV said, it took him a day or two, but he really embraced it. It gave him a real reason.

There's something so, and I'm not a religious guy, but there's something so religious about the sport, the suffering you have to endure, and the sacrifice that they all go through whether they're riding for themselves or the team. The sacrifice that Millar made in last year's Tour was really incredible, really thought provoking.

**AS:** He does make a great protagonist, 'cause he's so articulate. When he describes the day Ryder Hejesdal had to give up his chances for Vande Velde, that was a real emotional moment.

**ND:** And he talked about it in terms of Ryder's conscience, not only would he not be very popular around here, but he wouldn't have been able to live with himself. I think that's really interesting.

**AS:** Garmin's very transparent with the press, I think because there's a history of doping happening behind closed hotel doors, riders scurrying to hide the paraphernalia when someone knocks on the door. What was your access to the team like? Was it really open door?

**ND:** Totally. It was really whatever we wanted. Sometimes after a race the guys would need down time, go shower, but it was like, "We need Magnus tonight because he missed the cut, get him." Whatever we wanted, there was almost no...I can't think of a single time we were denied something that we wanted. It was incredible.



**AS:** Yeah, after Vande Velde's bad day, you had a camera right in his face on the bus. That's really something. It must be hard to get in someone's face like that, at a moment like that.



**ND:** We had a cinematographer on the Tour that they were really familiar with. We had spoken with the team, and they said, "If you go with Nigel Dick, we'll let Nigel on the bus." Well, we're going with Nigel! You want them comfortable enough so that you can be sitting there and get those moments, like Christian on the bus, or even the drug thing. There was that drug scandal at the Tour, and they're joking about the other teams, that's really fun.

**AS:** Did their attitudes change over the course of they year? Did they get tired of it?

**ND:** They TOTALLY got tired of it. If you watch all the way through, after the credits, we had this little thing where Allen Lim turns to camera, "We've been with cameras all FUCKING year, turn it off." We were traveling from one stage to the next, he didn't mean 'get out of my face, I'm tired of being on'. There was some of that, but it was 'can we just talk? I just want to have a normal conversation'. They did get tired of it, but they really gave us access whenever we wanted it.

And what they didn't do was say, "I'm going to go have a conversation with Christian that's going to be really interesting". They didn't help us, they just didn't hurt us. And sometimes something would start to happen, and "My God, they're talking about the time trial tomorrow, let's go film this! They're actually discussing strategy."

**AS:** Will the DVD have extra footage?

**ND:** The DVD's going to have the behind the scenes thing from the Tour, it's going to have a piece about Millar, and the usual assorted goodies, as much as we can shove on there. We shot 400 hours of footage over the course of the year, we'd like to show people as much as we can.

**AS:** Well, once again, congratulations. It's a wonderful wonderful movie.

**ND:** Well, thanks, it was one of the really fun ones I've ever done. It was a treat. I'm totally hooked on the sport as a fan.

**AS:** One last question that Dan wanted me to ask you. Any special lighting or camera tricks to shoot Vaughters' sideburns?

**ND:** I don't know what to say about those sideburns. That's his thing, you know? No tricks, they stand on their own.

From *Insider.com*:

## Blood Sweat + Gears Premieres on Sundance

Whether you're a diehard cycling fan, new to the sport or just want to learn more about it, we have a can't-miss film for you to watch. Documenting Team Garmin-Slipstream's 2008 debut in France at cycling's biggest event, Nick Davis Productions' movie, "Blood, Sweat + Gears," will premiere on the Sundance Channel on Monday, June 29th at 10:30pm ET and will show throughout the month of July.

Starring David Millar, Christian Vande Velde, Jonathan Vaughters, Magnus Backstedt, Mike Friedman and the rest of the argyle armada, the documentary features behind-the-scenes footage of a team racing for all the right reasons. From the scenic European landscapes to the punishing pace of the peloton, Davis captured it all.

I follow a few of the Garmin Cyclists on Twitter... so I can't wait to see this documentary! Can you tell the Tour de France is just around the corner?

Source: **Blood Sweat + Gears Permiers on Sundance**

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