



Two cyclists in the Great War: François Faber and Émile Frio

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The beginning of the 20th century was marked by the emergence of numerous sports such as motoring, aviation and cycling. In this emerging discipline, two champions, François Faber and Émile Frio, embody the many amateur and professional cyclists involved during the conflict.

Two cyclists in the Great War

In March 1917, interviewed by the newspaper "La vie au grand air", about the influence of the war on the life of cyclists at the front, Lucien Petit-Breton concluded his remarks with this premonitory sentence: "Alas! When the velodromes resume, how many of us will have disappeared who were the glory of our sport? If my research has allowed me to count 77 champion road or track cyclists who died for France, we must not forget the thousands of anonymous riders who also made the sacrifice of their lives. Concerning the Tour de France, more than 50 riders of all nationalities, having finished the Grande Boucle, were killed in the turmoil of 14-18. Among them, Lucien Petit-Breton winner in 1907-1908, François Faber in 1909 and Octave Lapize in 1910.

François FABER

Nicknamed the Giant of Colombes, he was born on January 26, 1887 in Aulnay-sur-Iton in the Eure region. His father was from Luxembourg and his mother was born near Sarreguemines in Lorraine. In 1891, the family moved to Colombes. At the age of 13,

François left school for the world of work and, after various jobs, found himself a docker on the banks of the Seine in Courbevoie. It was while reading about the exploits of the Tour de France riders that he got the idea to take up cycling. He bought a bicycle and one month later, on July 4, 1906, he was at the start of the Tour. He was 19 years old. If he did not finish, he became aware of his possibilities and insisted. Thanks to his extraordinary physical and mental qualities, he quickly became a professional cyclist. Broad-shouldered, measuring 1m78, he emanates a quiet strength. Prodigious his energy with generosity, he quickly asserted himself as one of the best of his time and won many victories including the Tour de France (1909) and 19 stages over all his participations, the Tour of Lombardy (1908), Paris-Brussels (1909), Paris-Tours (1909-1910), Bordeaux-Paris (1911), Paris-Roubaix (1913).

On January 25, 1909, out of filial love, he opted for the nationality of his father. At the declaration of war, being Luxembourgish, he could not be mobilized, but he declared: "France made my fortune, it is normal that I defend it" and at the beginning of the conflict, he joined the Foreign Legion. At the front, in the heart of the fighting, his conduct was exemplary and his altruism reassured his fellow soldiers. On May 9, 1915, during the battle of the White Works, Corporal Faber was killed at Mont-Saint-Eloi in the Pas-de-Calais, at the age of 28. His body will never be found, the battlefield remains his burial place.

Émile FRIOL

Émile Friol was born on March 9, 1881 in Lyon. This exceptionally powerful track sprinter began competing in cycling at the age of 19. But he often came close to victory because he lacked experience and the violence of his explosive start frequently caused his chain to jump. Hyper nervous, he needs reassuring conditions so that he can express all the dimension of his exceptional talent. The world of sport being a big family, it is the German champion Henri Mayer who takes him under his wing and gives him many judicious advices. The lessons paid off because, in 1904, Emile won the first of his five French championship titles. Winner of 32 Grand Prix, he was world champion in 1907 and 1910, thus opening the highest international level to French track cycling.

Incorporated at the beginning of the conflict in the 20th Train Squadron, he was assigned to the front in July 1915 as a motorcyclist. On November 16, 1916, 2nd Class Emile Friol was killed at the age of 35, while on duty. He is buried in grave 444 of the Saint-Pierre national necropolis in Amiens.

Tribute

These two champions, who died for France, deserve our deep respect and remain exceptional examples for all. In order not to forget them, it is our duty to transmit their

memories.

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