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Sarah Hammer gets a sponsor -- and, no, it's not nails



It is hard for track cyclists to become famous in the United States. Though the Home Depot velodrome draws a few thousand passionate fans when the World Cup circuit comes to Carson, the names of winners usually don't leave the building.

The U.S. Olympic track cycling team, however, has two potential stars heading into the Beijing Games -- teenage sensation Taylor Phinney and Murrieta's [Sarah Hammer](#), who are both favored to win medals.

Hammer even won a corporate endorsement earlier today.

It's for a high-purity nitrogen product called [PurigeN98](#). This is not a new form of blood doping. The stuff goes into the bike's tires. And, as far as cycling experts know, Hammer is the first competitor to use nitrogen-inflated tires. Hammer says the product helps her keep better control of the bike. (The company's advertising slogan: "PurigeN98...everything else is just hot air.")

According to a company spokesman, nitrogen molecules are more stable than oxygen so the gas doesn't leak out as quickly from tires. That makes it easier for cyclists to maintain proper tire pressure.

And it violates no cycling rules either.

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Swimmers, track stars and gymnasts are lining up deals with big Olympic sponsors like Coca-Cola and Visa, but track cyclists will take what they can get. And who doesn't need nitrogen?

-- Diane Pucin

Photo: Sarah Hammer racing at the Home Depot Center in Carson on Oct. 6. Credit: Lori Shepler / Los Angeles Times