Boulevard

PAOLO BIANCHINI: FROM CHAMPION CYCLIST TO WINNING WINEMAKER How turning down a pro cycling contract put Paolo Bianchini on the path to becoming one of Italy's top winemakers with Ciacci Piccolomini. Paolo Bianchini's sliding doors moment came as a young man when he had an offer to become a professional cyclist with the Tuscan team Furzi Mobilificio Piancastagnaio. He said no, finished his studies and ended up taking an entirely different path. "I don't know if it was a good or bad thing. Perhaps I let an opportunity slip through my fingers. But also, maybe I discovered something else in my work," he says. Several decades later, those who have tasted his company's award-winning wine would certainly agree. An adolescent obsessed with bike racing and Franco Bitossi, he moved with his family from the northern Italian region of Brescia to the

and winning three Italian amateur titles in age categories. After the countess died in 1984, she bequeathed the Brunello estate to Giuseppe, who started planting vines in earnest; in particular, their 12-hectare Pianrosso vineyard has become renowned. Their Ciacci Piccolomini d'Aragona wines have gone on to win numerous national and international accolades. Struck down by illness, Giuseppe died in 2004 and could not see all the fruit of his labours. The Ciacci Piccolomini d'Aragona estate is close to the strade bianche and barely a grape's throw away from the finish of a memorable, grimy 2010 Giro stage. Indeed, there are a lot of similarities between the life of a cyclist and a viticulturist. "Cycling demands perseverance, so much creativity," Paolo says. "It's a sport you do on a team level, but you need to have a fundamental individuality and an enormous