

Lance Armstrong: When They Say it's not About the Money . . .

I first became suspicious that Lance Armstrong might be a doper back in 2004 when I learned of a book published in France making those claims (1). I then heard that Armstrong sued the publisher for libel and knew that no translation of the book had been published in the U.S. But I then forgot about the matter. What I did not know was that Armstrong unleashed a shotgun blast of litigation at virtually everyone involved with *L.A. Confidential: Les Secrets de Lance Armstrong* including the sources, authors, publisher, a magazine that ran an excerpt, and the *Sunday Times* of London (1). Armstrong announced the suit on June 15, 2004, and then quietly dropped it in 2005, withdrawing his claims before a trial could begin.

"In France, we say it had l'effet d'annonce," the attorney who defended the book's publisher and authors reported. "He makes the announcement, but when the emotion goes away, no one realizes that he didn't go to court." The end result was that Armstrong's message was heard; his army of lawyers effectively scared away American publishers from translating the French-language book.

Last year I became convinced that Armstrong was a doper following the publication of an article by one of *Bicycling* magazine's senior editors and his long-time friend, Bill Strickland. In the

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article, Strickland concluded that Armstrong had doped (2). This time Armstrong did not sue for libel, and we all know now what happened next (3). It turns out that Armstrong not only doped repeatedly through all seven of his Tour de France wins, but was a lead organizer and conspirator for a system that made sure virtually every top rider on his team, and by necessity other teams as well, doped. The evidence gathered by the United States Anti-Doping Agency (4) is considered so overwhelming by the International Cycling Union (better known by its initials in French, UCI) that even though they were considered by some in the early days to have condoned the practice of doping, they decided to not appeal the matter further to arbitration.

By now, we all know the outcome—they formally stripped Armstrong of his Tour titles. Furthermore, since virtually every other rider who appeared on the podium with Armstrong

for those seven years has either admitted or been implicated in doping, they left the titles vacant.

So what does all of this mean? Armstrong, as a youngster, was considered to be an outstanding prospect for the pro cycling circuit. He was so outstanding in fact that Nike, which recently dropped him because of his deceptions, signed him on in 1996. He didn't win his first Tour until 1999. I'm sure Nike knew that Armstrong had (and likely still has) a very rare metabolic engine. He can churn out the wattage at a rate few others can match (5). Clearly, in a clean sport, Armstrong could, most likely, have won as many titles as he did doping which is what makes the story so sad.

Armstrong had a choice. He could dope or he could go the UCI and demand that they take action to stop it, which they have apparently done for the last two races. Why then did he make the choice he did? I guess we'll never know, unless he decides to stop denying the undeniable and write that tell-all book (now there's a best-seller for you). I imagine the book would try to blame everything on the UCI and the culture it condoned and note, as some of his defenders are already doing, that in a sport in which virtually everyone doped he was still the champion for seven years.

Was it for the glory and fame? I'm sure, in part. Was it to promote and expand his Livestrong Foundation, which has undeniably benefited many cancer victims and survivors? I'm sure, in part. Or was it about the money? Through all of this, it has been conservatively estimated that

Armstrong's personal wealth amounts to around \$125 million (6) (or less, now that he has to return some). Or, perhaps, Armstrong simply saw the big bucks ahead and decided to stay the course in a "dirty" sport instead of challenging the system? One has to wonder.

Although, of course, a very different situation, I find myself making a comparison of Lance Armstrong to Joe Paterno. He was a great football coach and mentor of the young men in his charge for so many years but, very sadly, enabled and participated in the cover-up of Jerry Sandusky's actions (7). While we will never know in this case because of Paterno's death, surely one of his motivations was to (most ill-advisedly) try to protect Penn State from the scandal and thus protect the huge amount of money that his football program brought to the university. In both these cases, we may very well be able to utter the words, "When they say it's not about the money . . ."

Go well,
Dr. Steve Jonas

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