

The New York Times**Health****CYCLING; Armstrong Is Engulfed by a Frenzy Over Salve**

By SAMUEL ABT
Published: July 22, 1999

Lance Armstrong continued to make news on two fronts today: he protected his commanding lead in the Tour de France with only four more race days to go and he found himself ensnarled in still more charges and countercharges about drugs, with cycling's governing body and Armstrong both stating that he has been using a skin cream, with authorization, to treat saddle sores.

The cream contains corticosteroids, which are anti-inflammatory and pain-killing drugs that are banned unless prescribed by doctors for health reasons. Armstrong's use of the cream is apparently why legal trace amounts of the substance had shown up in his urine tests early in the race.

Countering accusations in a French newspaper that he has used an illegal drug, Armstrong acknowledged today that he had treated a rash with the cream but that "it has absolutely nothing to do with performance" and that "this is not a doping story."

The governing body of the sport agreed, saying in a statement that "minimal traces" of a cortisone substance that were found in a test of the American "did not constitute doping."

In a televised news conference after today's stage, a bitter Armstrong described himself as "persecuted" and a victim of "vulture journalism." He singled out Le Monde, which has devoted two long articles to Armstrong and drug tests he took in the race's first two days, July 3 and 4.

Discussing the results, the newspaper said that they showed "traces" that "do not show quantity but do show that he used a banned medication." It identified the product as a glucocorticoid, which it described as "steroid hormones secreted naturally."

Armstrong did not identify the salve he used. "They say stress causes cancer," said Armstrong, who had testicular cancer two and a half years ago and underwent three months of chemotherapy. "So if you want to avoid cancer, don't come to the Tour de France and wear the yellow jersey" of the overall leader. "It's too much stress."

The rider, who, after another strong performance in the Pyrenees today, seems certain to win the Tour de France when it finishes Sunday in Paris, seemed strained and weary as he spoke. Part of that was because of the long stage over four mountains that he had completed, consolidating his lead, half an hour before.

"I made a mistake in taking something I didn't consider to be a drug," he said, referring to what he called "a topical cream" for a skin rash. "When I think of taking something, I think of pills, inhalers, injections," he said. "I didn't consider skin cream 'taking something.'"

Defending him, the International Cycling Union said today that he had used the salve Cemalyt "to treat a skin allergy" and had presented a medical prescription to justify its use.

"After discussion with French authorities," the organization said, "we declare with the greatest firmness that this was a use authorized by the rules and does not therefore constitute doping."

At his news conference, Armstrong was pressed by a reporter from Le Monde, an authoritative and respected daily newspaper. Its reporters have been refused interviews by officials of the United States Postal Service, Armstrong's team, with the explanation that the paper's goals were not the team's.

Le Monde's reporter asked why the race leader denied this week that he had presented a medical certificate to justify the use of a banned substance. "Are you calling me a liar or a dooper?" Armstrong asked in his only flash of anger. He then said that he had made a mistake in making the earlier denial.

In response to another question about the speculation that has surrounded his domination of the bicycle race after his treatment for the cancer that spread to his lungs and brain, Armstrong said that he was tired of questions about "How is that possible?"

"You have to believe in yourself," the 27-year-old Texan said. "You have to fight. You have to hold the line."

Speculation about his comeback, especially in the French news medias, began shortly after he won the race's short prologue on July 3 and increased after he crushed his opponents in a long time trial, or race against the clock, on July 11. He followed that performance with another victory on July 13, this time on the first of two stages in the Alps, and has held the yellow jersey ever since.

With a lead of more than six minutes, Armstrong is virtually assured of victory, barring illness or injury, and would become the second American, after the three-time winner, Greg LeMond, to win the world's greatest bicycle race. Yet, speculation about Armstrong's stirring comeback has turned into what he describes as "innuendo."

"It's bad for the sport, for the Tour and for me," he said today. "I understand why there are more journalists here this year than ever before," he said, referring to the fact that about 950 reporters are accredited, about 200 more than the normal contingent. Some are particularly interested in the drug scandals that nearly destroyed the last Tour.

"I can understand their interest," Armstrong said, noting last year's scandal that resulted in the ouster of the Festina team on charges of systematic use of illegal performance-enhancing drugs. But, he said, reporters should be "a little more respectful."

After his news conference, he appeared on a television program devoted to the Tour and was asked briefly about the charges and his defense. "I'll sleep better tonight," he said.

[Home](#) | [Times topics](#) | [Member Center](#) | [Copyright 2012](#)

[The New York Times Company](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Index by Keyword](#)