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Report: Lance Armstrong, doctor met

Associated Press

ROME -- Lance Armstrong and a banned Italian physician have met repeatedly in Europe since severing formal ties in 2004, including as recently as last year before Armstrong's final Tour de France, a high-ranking Italian law enforcement official told The Associated Press on Friday.

Michele Ferrari was cleared in 2006 of criminal charges accusing him of distributing doping products to athletes, but he remains barred for life by the Italian Cycling Federation.

Italian authorities suspect Ferrari of continuing to work with 20 to 30 top-level cyclists despite his ban, including Armstrong, and are actively pursuing that line of investigation, the law enforcement official said. Padua prosecutor Benedetto Roberti ordered raids Thursday across Italy involving cyclists believed to have ties to Ferrari. Italian riders who work with the doctor risk bans of three to six months.

The law enforcement official, who is not authorized to speak publicly because the inquiry is still under way, said that Armstrong met with Ferrari frequently over the past several years, usually in St. Moritz, Switzerland, or Monte Carlo, Monaco.

Ferrari had worked with the seven-time Tour winner for several years before their 2004 split.

Reached at his home by the AP on Friday, Ferrari was asked when he last saw Armstrong.

"I really don't know. When, last year? Look, right now I don't remember," he said, "but I haven't had a professional relationship with Mr. Armstrong for a long time."

Armstrong has always denied doping. He retired from cycling for the second time earlier this year.

"Lance has not had a professional relationship with Ferrari since 2004, but he remains friends with the doctor's family and sees them every once in a while. Lance last saw Dr. Ferrari about a year ago," Armstrong lawyer Mark Fabiani said in an email.

Recent meetings between Armstrong and Ferrari could provide evidence for a United States federal probe into doping in cycling. Armstrong is by far the highest-profile athlete under scrutiny in that case, which is before a grand jury in Los Angeles.

Without identifying its source, Sports Illustrated said in January that when Italian authorities

raided the home of Armstrong teammate Yaroslav Popovych last November in Italy, they found texts and emails linking the RadioShack team with Ferrari as recently as 2009.

In November, European and American agents met at Interpol headquarters in Lyon, France, to share information on all the investigations.

"Government sources are leaking inaccurate rumors to create the false impression that this taxpayer money-wasting fishing expedition actually has a purpose," Fabiani said.

The cyclists raided Thursday in Sicily and northern Italy include Michele Scarponi -- a title contender for this year's Giro d'Italia -- and Lampre teammate Leonardo Bertagnolli, as well as five current and past Russian riders with the Katusha team.

No arrests were made.

One of the Russians, Aleksander Kolobnev, won the bronze medal at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, getting bumped up from fourth after Italy's Davide Rebellin was stripped of silver.

The Lampre and Katusha teams confirmed that police inspected the riders' biological passports and confiscated anti-inflammatories, powdered milk and energy bars.

Ferrari refused to comment on the raids.

"I have a lot of things to say, but I'll say them when the moment is right," he said. "At the moment I don't have anything to say."

More raids are likely, the Italian law enforcement official said.

"We were looking to make a few connections and we found some of what we were looking for. But it's not finished yet," the official said. "It's all related to [Ferrari]."
