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TO THE AFFIDAVIT OF BETSY ANDREU

Saddled with suspicion;Cycling;Tour de France;Interview;Lance Armstrong

Source:

Sunday Times

Issue Date:

Sunday July 08,
2001

Byline:

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Story Text:

Cyclist Lance Armstrong is the overwhelming favourite to win his third Tour de France. At the American's invitation, David Walsh went to see him to discuss one subject - doping

He earns \$8m a year. Endorsements run to another \$5m. He once held a press conference in New York and the billionaire Donald Trump turned up to hear him speak. Nowadays, he charges twice as much as former president Bill Clinton for speaking engagements and when not recounting history, he is creating it. Lance Armstrong is his name. He is the world's best cyclist.

Yesterday, he launched his bike from a ramp in Dunkirk and set out on the Tour de France. He is favourite to win for the third consecutive time and become only the fifth cyclist to do so. It is not solely success that draws us to Armstrong but also what his achievements symbolise. Less than five years ago he was stricken with testicular cancer that spread to his lungs and brain.

Surgeons suggested he might not live but they didn't know their patient. Armstrong has been to hell and back. First to good health, then to the famed yellow jersey. His spirit and good drugs enabled him to make the first part of the journey. But for two years there has been endless speculation about Armstrong, his remarkable recovery and his relationship with drugs, not just those taken to kill the cancer but also those taken by cyclists to help them compete.

Doping is a way of life in professional cycling. It is as old as the sport itself. Police raids on the 1998 Tour de France and on this year's Tour of Italy exposed the enormity of the deception that is widespread. In this game, Mr Clean competes against the majority and against the odds. Can a clean rider beat those on drugs?

The search for an answer began in Indianapolis six months ago. It is a Sunday afternoon and the Starbucks cafe is almost empty. Greg Strock, five months before

graduating from medical school, tells of his short career as an elite cyclist. He was 17-going-on-18; the coaching staff at USA Cycling told him that not since the great Greg LeMond had anybody performed better in physiological tests. But it ended before it began. Strock claims he was told injections were necessary. Within a year, he became ill and though he would return to competition, he never regained his former strength.

Ten years have passed. The memory angers him. It takes time, he says, to appreciate fully what has happened. Strock is suing USA Cycling and his former coach, Rene Wenzel. Erich Kaiter, his teammate on the US junior team in 1990, corroborates Strock's story of systematic doping. He, too, is suing USA Cycling. In the national programme, Strock and Kaiter were one year behind Armstrong.

From a coffee shop in Indianapolis to a San Francisco restaurant where Dr Prentice Steffen tells his story. He had been team doctor with the US Postal team in 1996; the year before Armstrong joined. Towards the end of that season, US Postal informed Steffen they would no longer need him. Steffen believes it was because he refused to help with any kind of drugs.

From a doctor in San Francisco to a former professional on another continent. This is a man who rode with Armstrong for four years at Motorola. The team, Armstrong believes, was "white as snow". That is not what his one-time teammate says. This rider tells of a decision by certain members of the Motorola squad to use the blood-boosting drug erythropoietin (EPO) during the 1995 season: "The contract with our main sponsor was up for renewal and we needed results. It was as simple as that."

Nothing is so simple for the carabinieri of the Florence-based NAS team who enforce Italy's food and drug laws. Here in the basement of their old police quarters in the city, the cardboard boxes are stacked 10-feet high, each packed with files seized from doctors alleged to have been doping their athlete-patients. The files seized from Michele Ferrari, one of the doctors being investigated, show that Kevin Livingston was one of those treated by Ferrari. During the Tour de France of 1999 and 2000, Livingston was Armstrong's most able equipier, a man he described as his closest friend. Ferrari also kept an Armstrong file, one that indicated a role in the rider's training. Asked whether he had ever visited Ferrari, Armstrong replied: "Perhaps."

From one doping investigation in Italy to another in Paris where Hugues Huet, a journalist with the state-run television organisation France 3, tells of how, during last year's Tour de France, he tailed an unmarked US Postal car and eventually filmed the driver and his companion disposing of five plastic bags in a bin many miles from their team hotel. The rubbish contained 160 syringe wrappers, bloodied compresses and discarded packaging that indicated use of the blood-boosting product, Actovegin. That led to a nine-month French investigation into the US Postal team, which will conclude later this month. So many questions.

Then, out of the blue the phone rang. It was Armstrong. He had heard things, he wanted to talk. Any time, any place. The interview was arranged for two days later at Hotel La Fauvelaie, near the village of St Sylvain d'Anjou in eastern France.

EIGHT years have passed since our last meeting. Back then, Armstrong was an ambitious 21-year-old setting out on his first Tour de France. The years have changed him. His body is harder now, the eyes more wary. There is a sense that come-what-may, he will overcome. He stretches out his hand, matter-of-factly. He is aware of your suspicions; he wants to restate his case.

"Do you mind," he says, "if Bill sits in?" (Bill is Bill Stapleton, his agent and lawyer.) "I would prefer it to be one-to-one, but your choice."

"Yeah, I'd like Bill present."

"I have come to discuss one subject: doping."

"Okay," he says.

The first part of the interview is a gentle journey through his career. In late 1992, he joined Motorola and the professional peloton.

You must have been aware by then that doping was part of the culture?

"I don't know the answer to that because Motorola was white as snow and I was there all the way through to 1996."

What of the Fleche Wallonne classic in 1994 when three members of the same Italian team Gewiss-Ballon broke away and finished first, second and third? He had been strong that day but couldn't live with the Italians. It was unusual for three riders from the same team to break clear in a classic and suspicions were aroused when, a few days later, the Gewiss team doctor, one Michele Ferrari, claimed EPO "was no more harmful than five litres of orange juice". Was Armstrong surprised by Ferrari's approval of EPO? He says he doesn't remember his reaction. Surely he wondered what EPO was? "EPO wasn't an issue for us. Jim Ochowitz (Motorola team manager) ran a clean programme."

Armstrong's recovery from cancer came at a time when the sickness in his sport was, at last, properly diagnosed. On his way to the 1998 Tour de France, Willy Voet, a soigneur with the Festina team, was stopped by French customs officials. His car contained 234 doses of EPO and a cargo of other banned substances. Armstrong says he was astonished: "It was unbelievable, the contents of the car."

When he returned to competition in 1998, it was with US Postal. Armstrong says Postal's programme was clean. He insists he won the Tour de France in 1999 and 2000 without doping. Others may have doped; he can't speak for them. Other teams may have used drugs; the authorities must police them. Armstrong speaks for himself. He has won without drugs. He is, and always has been, clean.

WE NOW move on to discuss specific incidents in more detail. Armstrong rode for the US amateur cycling team in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Chris Carmichael

was then a US coach and he soon became Armstrong's coach. Twelve years later, Carmichael remains the rider's coach. "He is my main advisor, I talk to him all the time." Carmichael has been implicated in the case taken by Strock against USA Cycling. In his formal submission, Strock describes being taken by his coach, Rene Wenzel, to see another US coach during a race at Spokane in Washington in 1990. Strock tells how this second coach gave him an injection, but does not name him. In a formal answer to the Strock suit, Wenzel recalls the same Spokane encounter and says the other coach was Carmichael.

Asked why he did not name the coach at Spokane, Strock says he is not in a position to answer that question, and not in a position to say why he can't. It is believed Carmichael has agreed an out-of-court settlement with Strock's attorney. Carmichael says he cannot recollect the incident in Spokane and declined to comment when asked if he had settled out of court.

Armstrong knows of the case and understands the implications. Has your coach Chris Carmichael made any settlement with Greg Strock?

"Ask Greg or Chris," says Armstrong.

Didn't Chris explain whether he did or didn't?

"No."

Didn't you ask him?

"As far as I am concerned, it was a case between Greg and his coach, Rene Wenzel."

What if Carmichael had made a settlement, would that not be a shock?

"Would I be shocked? I haven't even thought about it."

It wouldn't look good, would it?

"Does it look good that Greg Strock just takes the money? Let's flip it around. Is this about money or is this about principle?" We talk about the professional teams for whom Armstrong has ridden, Motorola and US Postal. He insists neither doped: "There are programmes in this sport and there are athletes that are clean."

A former professional rider who was a contemporary of Armstrong's at Motorola from 1992 to 1996 tells a different story. Now retired from the sport, this former professional agreed to speak on the basis that his name would not be used. Should it become necessary, though, he will come forward and stand up for his account of the Motorola years.

"The team results in 1994 were not impressive and '95 started off the same. We had access to the same training as other teams, the same equipment; we ate the same

food, slept the same number of hours but, in races, we were not as competitive. The picture was becoming clear for the upcoming Tour de France: we were going to have to give in and join the EPO race.

"Lance was a key spokesperson when EPO was the topic. From the riders' point of view, we felt the mounting pressure not only from within the team but also from what was being said and written about us as a team. No one starts out wanting to dope but you become a victim of the sport." As well as believing Motorola was clean, Armstrong says he has proof that US Postal runs a clean programme. He points to the team's three weeks of drug-free urine at last year's Tour de France. To the suggestion that the Tour's tests find only detectable drugs, he replies that there will always be "cynics and sceptics and zealots".

We talk about Prentice Steffen, team doctor for US Postal in 1996, the year before Armstrong joined the team. Steffen had been with the team since 1993, when it was Subaru-Montgomery, and continued as team doctor in the first year of US Postal's involvement. With Postal's backing came the ambition to compete against Europe's best. In 1996 they entered the Tour of Switzerland.

"We were wiped out," said Steffen. "Two of my riders approached me saying they wanted to 'talk about the medical programme'. It was said that as a team, we weren't able to get to where we wanted to go with what I was doing for them. I said, 'Well, right now I am doing everything I can.' They might have come back with 'more could be done' and I said, 'Yeah, I understand, but I am not going to be involved in that'."

Steffen is sure he was being asked to help two riders to dope. After that informal discussion, relations cooled between the doctor and his riders. Four months later, a message was left on Steffen's voicemail saying the team no longer needed him.

In November 1996, Steffen received a letter from firm Keesal, Young and Logan, attorneys for the US Postal team. The letter said his suspicions about his departure were incorrect but he would be held responsible for his comments if he made them public. Until now, Steffen has not spoken out in public. Armstrong says he is surprised by the doctor's story. But is it not a serious accusation against the team? "If it's so serious and so sincere, I would think I would have heard that (before now)."

OUR conversation turns to Kevin Livingston, Armstrong's first lieutenant and close friend on the US Postal team during the Tour de France victories. Livingston has been listed as one of 60 riders treated by Ferrari, the Italian doctor awaiting trial on doping charges.

Ferrari is accused of treating riders with EPO, the drug that increases the blood's oxygen-carrying red cells and enhances the rider's endurance. For most humans, red cells account for 43% or 44% of the total blood volume, a measure known as the haematocrit level. To counter the abuse of EPO, the authorities now ban riders whose haematocrit exceeds 50%. The Sunday Times has seen pages from Livingston's file at Ferrari's office. The readings for his blood parameters are unusual. In December 1997 Livingston's haematocrit is recorded at 41.2%. Seven

months later, a few days before the start of the 1998 Tour de France, Livingston's haematocrit is 49.9%. Such a variation in a seven-month period is uncommon.

Did you know Kevin was linked with the doping investigation?

"Yes."

Did you talk with him about it?

"No."

Never?

"No. You keep coming up with all these side stories. I can only comment on Lance Armstrong. I don't speak for others."

This was your best friend?

"But I don't meddle in their business."

So we speak of Lance Armstrong and Michele Ferrari. Did you ever visit Dr Ferrari?

"I did know Michele Ferrari."

How did you get to know him?

"When you go to races, you see people. I know every team's doctor. It's a small community."

Did you ever visit Ferrari?

"Have I been tested by him, gone there and consulted on certain things? Perhaps."

Sources close to the investigation of Ferrari are more precise about Armstrong's relationship with the doctor. They tell of a series of visits by the rider to Ferrari's practice at Ferrara in northern Italy: two days in March 1999, three days in May 2000, two days in August 2000, one day in September 2000 and three days in late April/early May of this year. While he was in Ferrara, Armstrong stayed at the five-star Hotel Duchessa Isabella and at the four-star Hotel Annunziata.

Is Ferrari a good trainer?

"Regardless of what goes on," he replies, "these guys that are under a lot of pressure, guys like Conconi, Cecchini, Ferrari; these Italian guys, they are fantastic minds, great trainers. They know about physiology."

Francesco Conconi and Ferrari have been investigated on doping charges and the prosecuting judges have recommended that both be sent for trial. The case against

Luigi Cecchini was dropped.

WE speak about the French investigation into the US Postal team. On last year's Tour de France two staff members of the US Postal team were followed by journalists from the TV station, France 3. They were seen to carry rubbish bags from the team hotel and put them in an unmarked car. The journalists followed.

The chase lasted for five days. Thirty miles from Morzine, the US Postal employees dumped the bags in a bin by the side of the road. Tipped off about the discovery of the blood-boosting drug Actovegin in the medical waste, French police opened an investigation.

Seven months later, the inquiry has not been completed. Armstrong says that analyses of blood and urine samples provided by the team to the investigation are clean. The judge leading the inquiry, Sophie-Helene Chateau, says such a conclusion is premature.

Who were the team members who dumped that rubbish?

"One was a team doctor, the other was our chiropractor."

Names?

"That's not important."

US Postal said it carried Actovegin to treat riders' abrasions and to treat a staff member who suffers from diabetes. Who was the staff member?

"That is medical privacy," says Armstrong.

For more than an hour and a half, we traded punches. At times he was generous and charming; at others confrontational. Wearied by my scepticism, he reached for the put-down: "There will always be sceptics, cynics and zealots." But he knows it is not that simple. He knows, too, that for the next three weeks on the Tour de France, the questions will follow him.

Not having the answers won't bother him. What matters is that his urine and his blood are clear.

Those who expect him to falter, either on the murderous road to Alpe d'Huez or under the weight of public scepticism, may be in for a long, long wait.

Paradise lost on tour - Cycling - Tour de France.

By **David Walsh**.

2130 words

29 July 2001

The Sunday Times

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English

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As the Tour de France heads towards a finish in Paris today, a cloud of suspicion refuses to be blown away.

It is midday on Wednesday in a cyber bar not far from the Place Royale in the centre of the Pyrenean city of Pau. Nicolas Fouillout washes and cleans glasses and waits for his young clientele to come to have a beer, surf the internet and play computer games.

Two hours earlier, the Tour de France had left town. Down the Boulevard des Pyrenees, the departing ribbon of noise and colour had passed. A man in a white chef's jacket raced from a restaurant and made music with a saucepan and wooden spoon. Riders saluted his enthusiasm; a young woman held her baby and then waved the infant's left hand. Au revoir.

Towards the back of the peloton, Lance Armstrong chatted with the German rider Jens Voigt. The mountain passes have been crossed, the challengers seen off, and from here to Paris it would be a cruise to Armstrong's third consecutive Tour de France. For a man who knows what it is like to wake up after brain surgery to remove cancerous lesions, this should have been a different kind of paradise. But for the past three weeks, and for many years before, the Tour has been Paradise Lost. What we see today is a stranger to the race of our youth. They ride the mountains as they once rode the flat; the speed and the stamina are a vision of the future we dare not imagine. The epic has become the enigma.

Armstrong's difficult moments have been explaining his six-year working relationship with Michele Ferrari, a doctor who has long been suspected of doping. On Monday last week Armstrong defended his right to work with Ferrari, said he found him "an honest man", "a clean man", and insisted he had "never seen anything that would lead me to think otherwise". Two days later, Filippo Simeoni's story was published by the Italian edition of GQ magazine.

Simeoni, a middle-of-the-road Italian rider, worked with Ferrari from October 1996 to July 1997 and kept diaries that were seized by the carabinieri investigating Ferrari. Unable to refute the evidence of his diaries, Simeoni collaborated with the police. He claimed that Ferrari encouraged him to use the powerful blood-boosting drug erythropoietin (EPO) and testosterone and helped him to get around drug controls by advising him on masking drugs. According to Simeoni, Ferrari never spoke about the potential side-effects of performance-enhancing drugs.

Asked about Simeoni's testimony, Armstrong said it was an old story. The statement to the police had been made two years before, but until GQ's story few except the rider himself and the carabinieri knew it existed. The fact that it was evidence against Ferrari changed nothing for Armstrong: he would not be reconsidering his relationship with the doctor.

So while he dominates in the mountains and destroys his rivals, Armstrong cannot obliterate the doubts. Even within the race, where solidarity is normally sacred, there have been murmurings. Rudy Pevenage, team director of the rival Telekom squad, says: "I am somewhat surprised by Armstrong. When others gasp for air with open mouths, he rides with a closed mouth, as if there is nothing to it."

Pevenage's star rider, Jan Ullrich, will finish second to Armstrong when the Tour ends this afternoon. The German has been gracious in defeat and generous to his conqueror. But then neither he nor his teammates can dare to accuse any rival. During last month's police raid on the Giro d'Italia, many products were found in the rooms of the Telekom riders. Various drugs, medical equipment and syringes full of a white substance were taken for analysis.

Seven Telekom riders, including Ullrich, were placed under investigation. Among the products seized from Ullrich's room were theophylline, otobacid, sultanol, ephynal and bonalin. He insisted on his innocence. The substances were, he said, approved asthma treatments.

THE USE of therapeutic corticoids, performance-enhancing but permitted in the treatment of certain conditions, has reached epidemic proportions. After one Pyrenean stage last weekend, seven of the eight obligatory urine tests sent to

the French anti-doping laboratory contained banned products. Not one could be declared positive because in each case the rider had permission to use the drug.

Michel Boyon, president of France's anti-doping council (CPLD), believes there is widespread abuse. "I am worried by it," he says. "We have a high percentage of riders using corticoids. Salbutamol and the anti-asthmatic substances are the most common. At the CPLD, we believe that in 95% of the cases where corticoids are permitted, there is an alternative treatment."

Since the scandal of Willy Voet's arrest, the expulsion of the Festina team and the sustained scandal of the 1998 Tour, some things have changed. The sport is now more scrutinised, riders are tested more regularly, but it would be wrong to believe that the culture of doping has disappeared.

In their raid on the Tour of Italy, the carabinieri seized a wide range of doping products. Large quantities of insulin were discovered, many riders had testosterone patches and many teams still carried mobile laboratories that could be used to ensure riders do not fail the obligatory drug tests.

In the cyber bar, still Nicolas Fouillout waits. We talk about the Tour. A few people from the social services office across the road come to watch the race in his bar, but it has never interested him. He has heard of Lance Armstrong? "He's the guy that was very sick, cancer," he says. "Yeah, I like him. Maybe some racers still dope, I don't care about that. He's a tough guy."

THE Hotel Roncevaux is on Rue Louis Barthou, and in the early afternoon, checking to see whether television coverage of the day's stage has begun, you hit upon a re-run of the 1989 stage to Alpe d'Huez. There is no suspense because this is a story well remembered, but still you sit there, unable to move.

The Dutch rider Theunisse has broken away. Behind him the Colombian Rondon and the Spaniard Delgado chase furiously, in their slipstreams the yellow jersey of Greg LeMond and his principal rival, Laurent Fignon. They race with their mouths open, sucking whatever oxygen there is on the upper slopes of the Alpe.

About three miles from the top, Fignon attacks. LeMond tries but cannot follow. Soon Delgado counter-attacks and the exhausted LeMond is left behind. It isn't the ebb and flow of the chase that keeps you sitting on a hotel bed 12 years on, but the inhumanity of the suffering. Delgado's head bobs wearily, Fignon's shoulders lurch from right to left, LeMond's legs can barely turn the pedals.

It would be wrong to portray the Tours of yesterday as paragons of fair play. Theunisse, who won that stage to Alpe d'Huez, would test positive for testosterone on three separate occasions. A year before, Delgado had used the masking drug probenidol in the Tour de France. Still, the 1989 climb of Alpe d'Huez appeared different from Armstrong's tour de force on the same mountain in this year's race.

Even 12 years ago, the race seemed more human, more engaging. Antoine Vayer, once an ethical but unappreciated trainer with the disgraced Festina team, believes the great change came with the introduction of EPO in the early 1990s.

"I did lots of testing with the Festina riders," he says. "Before EPO, we used to say a VO₂ max (the measure of an athlete's ability to process oxygen) of 85 was damn good, but all that changed. When I tested the riders in December 1997, the average VO₂ max might have been 72 or 73. But when I tested them later, at a time when riders were using EPO, the guys who were doping recorded a VO₂ max that was 25-30% greater. That's totally unnatural. Christophe Moreau, who won the prologue to this year's race, had a VO₂ max of 70, and three months later it was more than 92. Crazy.

"It was scary, too. As you turn up the power, the VO₂ test gets harder and the production of lactate should act as a brake. It should have made them slow down. But with EPO, this didn't happen; they felt no pain in their legs and the lactate acted as a fuel that made them go faster. I looked at what they were doing and thought, 'We're not dealing with human beings any more!'"

The tests designed to catch those who cheat have never been good enough. Voet's admission that he helped more than 500 riders to dope but did not have one positive test tells all that we need to know about the efficacy of the controls. And those who believe cycling is lifting itself out of the hell of blood-boosting drugs will find it hard to reconcile that belief with the fact that this year's Tour will be the third-fastest in history. The four fastest have been won by Armstrong (1999), Pantani (1998), Armstrong (2001) and Armstrong (2000).

The irony for the racers is that the ever-rising speeds do not excite the fans. Rather, they distance them. In the French newspaper *L'beration* on Thursday, the philosopher and cycling fan Robert Redeker wrote of the gulf that now exists between the race and the racers: "The athletic type represented by Lance Armstrong, unlike Fausto Coppi or Jean Robic, is coming closer to Lara Croft, the virtually fabricated cyber heroine. Cycling is becoming a video game, the one-time 'prisoners of the road' have become virtual human beings, an expression that could be applied to Indurain,

Virenque, Ullrich and Armstrong. Gino Bartali, Robic, Coppi, Louis Bobet have been substituted by Robocop on wheels, someone with whom no fan can relate or identify."

LeMond, the three-time winner of the Tour, now watches from afar and admits to not knowing how to react: "When Lance won the prologue to the 1999 Tour, I was close to tears. He had come back from cancer, in the middle of my career I had to come back from being accidentally shot (while on a hunting trip in 1987) - it felt like we had a lot in common.

"But when I heard he was working with Michele Ferrari, I was devastated. One American journalist wrote that the only reason you visit Ferrari is to tell him to get the hell out of your sport. I agree with that. In the light of Lance's relationship with Ferrari, I just don't want to comment on this year's Tour.

"In a general sense, if Lance is clean, it is the greatest comeback in the history of sport. If he isn't, it would be the greatest fraud."

In the performance-enhancing game there is no shortage of fraud. Last Tuesday morning Torben Rask Laursen and Ole Steen left the Tour for a day and travelled an hour south to the Spanish city of Girona. Rask Laursen is a journalist with Ekstra Bladet in Denmark, Steen a photographer. They randomly selected four pharmacies and asked if they could buy four prescription drugs, all performance-enhancing and including EPO. In each they were told it would be possible. At the fourth, in the western suburb of Sangregori, they purchased six ampoules of 0.5 millilitres of Eprex, a brand of EPO, for #60. They were not asked for a prescription and were not quizzed on why they wanted to buy them.

SERGE LANSAMAN is the night manager at the Hotel Roncevaux. It has been a long night, but he has slept a little and as a three-times-a-week swimmer, the long hours don't hurt him. He was 18 when LeMond won his first Tour, beating Bernard Hinault, and he thought it was the best performance he had ever seen.

Lansaman watches the Tour now, but doesn't believe what he is seeing. "The improvement over the past 10 years has been too much," he says. "Doping is a big problem, as it is in my sport, swimming. It is not normal to go as fast as they now go. I still watch, but it's not the same. Armstrong is a champion because of how he recovered from cancer, but LeMond is my favourite cyclist."

I ask Lansaman how best to describe him. "Typical French guy," he says.

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Document st00000020010730dx7t0015e

theguardian

Drugs issue refuses to go away due to winner's Ferrari links

The tarnished image is difficult to shake off, writes William Fotheringham

The Guardian, Sunday 29 July 2001 21.11 EDT

In a neat twist in the tail of this year's Tour, the organisers placed yesterday's final intermediate sprint of the race at Chatenay-Malabry, the little town in the south-west suburbs of Paris where France's anti-doping laboratory developed the test for the banned blood booster erythropoietin (EPO) and where urine samples taken during the Tour are tested.

It was a small reminder that the EPO test is being used for the first time in the Tour this year, and by happy coincidence the International Cycling Union revealed yesterday that of the 122 of the 170 drug samples taken on the Tour tested there so far, only one - from Txema Del Olmo - had been positive. They concluded: "We think that the problem of EPO no longer influences cycling at the highest level."

Though progress in combating EPO is undeniable, the signals from the Tour remain mixed three years after the Festina drugs scandal blew the sport apart. On Saturday, French campaigners against doping in all sports held a conference only 50 yards from the start in Orleans, where the French "Association for Fighting Doping" is based. You would not have known it if you were a spectator enjoying the show as the riders signed on.

The campaigners, who included grass-roots groups, the former Festina trainer Antoine Vayer and the former Tour stage winner Gilles Delion, and who had ridden on their bikes from Friday's finish 100 miles to the south, clearly felt marginalised. Indeed Vayer went so far as say they were "treated like the devil".

The rumblings about Lance Armstrong's work with the controversial Italian trainer Michele Ferrari continued yesterday, when Greg LeMond, a triple winner of the Tour, summed up the feelings of many on this Tour in saying: "When Lance won the prologue to the 1999 Tour I was close to tears, but when I heard he was working with Michele Ferrari I was devastated. In the light of Lance's relationship with Ferrari, I just don't want to comment on this year's Tour. This is not sour grapes. I'm disappointed in Lance, that's all it is."

Even the Tour organiser Jean-Marie Leblanc concedes the name of Ferrari is a dubious one. "I am not happy the two names are mixed, but as long as there is no decision in court we have to wait," he said. Leblanc feels the Tour is cleaner this year, but says "the questioning of Armstrong lacks dignity, as the presumption of innocence is fundamental. For Armstrong it is the presumption of guilt. The world is turned upside down."

Armstrong himself says of the relationship with Ferrari: "Is it questionable? Perhaps." But he adds, referring to himself in the third person: "Has Lance Armstrong ever tested positive? No. Has Lance Armstrong been tested? A lot."

Vayer, who has watched the Festina riders dope themselves in the past with undetectable products, and has attacked Armstrong before, spoke of why the Tour organisers have kept at a distance from the campaigners. "They are afraid of us," he said. "They think we are about polemic."

Squaring the circle of Armstrong, who shouts his clean-ness from the rooftops, and Ferrari, who is to go on trial on drugs charges, has proved impossible for many, for all the Texan's protestations. Their work is about altitude training and low-oxygen chambers and diet, but surely there are other specialists in these areas who are not facing charges of recommending banned, and possibly dangerous, hormones?

Not so, says the man who manages Armstrong's training, Chris Carmichael. "It's about putting together the best people with the best athlete, searching high and low."

Armstrong's agent and lawyer Bill Stapleton describes Ferrari as a brilliant scientist with an awful public reputation who has made very, very irresponsible comments. With complete confidence, he concludes: "I'm not worried, because he [Armstrong] will never, ever test positive."

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The New York Times

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July 30, 2001

TOUR DE FRANCE: That's 3 and Counting For Lance Armstrong

By Samuel Abt

PARIS— After notifying his rivals that he has never felt as strong as he does now and that he expects to feel even more powerful next year, Lance Armstrong cruised into Paris on Sunday as the winner of his third consecutive Tour de France.

"He's the best, no?" asked Eddy Merckx, the great Belgian racer who dominated the sport three decades ago

and now is a confidant of Armstrong's. "Nobody can beat him. He can win six, seven Tours de France, he can win as many Tours as he wants."

Since Merckx himself won five — the record, equaled by three others — his evaluation is trustworthy.

"This is a good time to be Lance Armstrong," the Texan agreed. "I believe I'm entering my best years. For a 29 or 30 year old, it's logical to believe that for a three-week race like the Tour, those are my best years."

Armstrong turns 30 on Sept. 18.

"We have the template of how to prepare for this race and we won't change it," he added.

He also said at a news conference Saturday that this 88th Tour had been more "fun" for him than his two preceding victories. He did not define "fun" and nobody asked him. His four victories in daily stages — two climbing in the Alps and Pyrenees, one on an uphill time trial and one on a rolling one — and his domination of the 188 other riders who started the bicycle race spoke for themselves.

The leader of the U.S. Postal Service team finished the 3,454-kilometer (2,144-mile) slog 6 minutes, 44 seconds ahead of the second-placed Jan Ullrich, the German leader of Telekom, who was also second last year, and 9:05 ahead of Joseba Beloki, a Spaniard with ONCE, who was third last year, as well.

As the man in the yellow jersey of overall leadership, Armstrong respected tradition and did not contest the finish on the hot and sunny Champs-Elysees.

The 20th and last daily stage was won by Jan Svorada, a Czech with Lampre, in a mass sprint finish after a 160.5-kilometer tour of the suburbs from Corbeil-Essonnes in the south to Paris and 10 laps of the broad avenue at its heart. He was timed in 3 hours, 57 minutes, 28 seconds, a speed of 40.5 kilometers an hour even though the riders, as always, chatted and clowned early as they neared the capital.

Second was Erik Zabel, a German with Telekom. Stuart O'Grady, an Australian with Credit Agricole, was third. Because Zabel also won two intermediate sprints as O'Grady finished second and third, the German made up his two-point deficit in the battle for the green points jersey and took it home for the sixth successive year. He had 252 points, the Australian 244 as he finished second in that race-within-the-race for the third time.

The white jersey with red polka dots of the top-rated climber was won by Laurent Jalabert, a Frenchman with CSC. Oscar Sevilla, a Spaniard with Kelme, was the best rider under 25. Last among the 144 finishers was Jimmy Casper, a Frenchman with La Francaise des Jeux, who was eighth in the sprint Sunday.

The victory was worth 2.2 million French francs (\$285,000) to Armstrong, who will give the prize to his team. His total time was 86 hours, 17 minutes, 28 seconds, or an average of 40 kilometers an hour. That made it the third-fastest Tour, behind his victory in 1999 and Marco Pantani's in 1998, since the race began in 1903. The fourth-fastest was run last year.

Those speeds have generated considerable suspicion that bicycle riders, and Armstrong in particular because of his superiority, are using illegal performance-enhancing drugs. Their systematic use was uncovered in the Festina Affair in the 1998 Tour, when an entire team was expelled and police raids on riders' hotels sparked the withdrawal of dozens of competitors in protest.

The suspicions refuse to go away despite official rejections of continued doping. Last week, for example, Jean-Marie Leblanc, the director of the race, said that this Tour had been contested "properly and with respect for the rules." He pointed to the huge crowds that watched many stages as proof that the public trusted bicycle racing again.

In a communiqué Sunday, the International Cycling Union, which governs the sport, noted that only one Tour rider was found guilty in tests for EPO, the oxygen-bearing substance that has been a scourge for several years, and concluded that "the problem of EPO no longer influences high-level bicycle racing."

Yet reporters — "snakes with arms," as Armstrong referred to them in an interview last week — have continued to bombard him with questions about his ability to climb mountains with such apparent ease, rarely gulping for breath, always able to burst away from rivals.

The British and French press in particular often wonders aloud how he could have won three Tours after chemotherapy treatment in 1996 for testicular cancer that spread to his brain and lungs.

His admission two weeks ago that since 1995 he has been consulting Dr. Michele Ferrari, an Italian who has been charged with supplying banned drugs to riders and who has defended the use of EPO, has not helped Armstrong. Nor has his unequivocal defense of their relationship.

David Walsh, an award-winning Irish journalist for the Sunday Times of London, reported Sunday that Greg LeMond, the first American winner of three Tours, said: "When Lance won the prologue to the 1999 Tour," his first one after the diagnosis of cancer, "I was in tears. When I heard he was working with Michele Ferrari, I was devastated.

"If Lance is clean, it is the greatest comeback in the history of sports. If he isn't, it would be the greatest fraud."

LeMond, who won in 1986, 1989 and 1990, amplified his comments by telephone Sunday from his boat near his home in Minnesota, calling Dr. Ferrari "one of the most notorious names in all of sports history" and charging that he has spread "a disease in the sport."

"This is not sour grapes, nothing like that," LeMond continued. "I'm disappointed in Lance, that's all it is. The use of drugs in bicycle racing sickens me. It takes away everybody's athletic achievements in the past," added LeMond, known for his aversion to doping.

The two Americans are level with Philippe Thys, a Belgian who won the Tour in 1913, 1914 and 1920, and Louison Bobet, a Frenchman who won in 1953, 1954 and 1955, as three-time winners. Merckx, Jacques Anquetil, Bernard Hinault and Miguel Indurain share the peak of five victories.

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