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Recent News

- January 2005
- February 2005
- March 2005
- April 2005
- May 2005
- June 2005
- July 2005
- August 2005
- September 2005
- October 2005
- November 2005
- December 2005
- 2004 & earlier

Latest Cycling News for August 24, 2005

Edited by Jeff Jones

EPO test under scrutiny

Latest Armstrong case makes big waves

By Jeff Jones

The stunning news reported by *L'Equipe* yesterday that Lance Armstrong allegedly used EPO during the 1999 Tour de France has sparked a huge debate in the cycling world. Using research data obtained from the French Laboratoire national de dépistage du dopage de Châtenay-Malabry (LNDD), *L'Equipe* journalists pieced together evidence over several months that linked six "positive" EPO samples to Lance Armstrong, before publishing it in Tuesday's edition of the widely read French paper. If the results are correct, then the ramifications for Armstrong could be great, even though he officially retired from the sport after winning his seventh Tour last month.

It's an unprecedented case in cycling, and quite possibly in any sport: that an athlete has been accused of doping on the basis of scientific research results. Usually, the subjects of a study are kept anonymous - and indeed they were by the lab - although the news did manage to leak. When the urinary EPO test was first developed by the LNDD in 2000, urine samples from the infamous 1998 Tour de France were used, as it was believed they were likely to contain EPO. The LNDD published its work in Volume 405 of *Nature* and reported that 14 of the 102 samples tested gave a clear indication that there was exogenous recombinant EPO present, while another 14 were suspiciously high. But no names were given, of course.

The motivation behind the current investigation, which used left over samples from the 1999 Tour, was to improve the EPO test. The test has recently come under fire after Belgian triathlete Rutger Beke, who tested positive late last year, proved that he could give a "positive" result without using EPO at all. But it's understood that that wasn't the sole reason for re-examining the test. It was more to provide a uniform qualitative, rather than quantitative standard for the test.

The director of the LNDD, Jacques De Ceaurriz, maintains that the results of the latest study are unequivocal: there is no doubt in his mind that the EPO test will work on samples that have been frozen for six years at -20 degrees celsius. Thus, according to his results, Armstrong and up to six others were positive for EPO in 1999. De Ceaurriz also admits that it was a purely experimental study, and as there is no possibility for Armstrong to ask for a B test, then neither he, or any of the other six "positives", should be sanctioned under normal sporting rules.

A possible sanction will be left up to WADA and the UCI, but neither body seems particularly interested in pursuing the case, which would involve a legal battle that would dwarf the Tyler Hamilton case. WADA, for one, claims that it didn't exist in 1999, thus has no jurisdiction in the matter. UCI president Hein Verbruggen is taking a "wait and see" approach on the current case, but appears to want to leave it in the hands of the French. Could there be another French judicial case in the offing? It's also noteworthy that in the past, the UCI has received donations from Armstrong to aid in the purchase of anti-doping testing equipment.



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On the other hand, there is a divided opinion among anti-doping experts about the LNDD's latest results, especially as they come from samples that were almost six years old. "Can one be certain that in samples deep-frozen for years, there were no biological changes, no aging processes that could falsify the result?" said German National Anti-Doping Agency chief Dr. Roland Augustin to *sid*. "That has not been sufficiently determined scientifically."

However, Wilhelm Schänzer, head of the IOC doping lab in Cologne, supports the findings of the LNDD. "Urine samples can be kept in storage temperatures of between -20 and -40 degrees for years," he said. "The results are scientifically valid for me. If Mr. Ceaurriz says they are positive, then you can be assured that it's right."

There are similarly opposing opinions among other top scientists worldwide, and while the Armstrong camp remains fairly quiet on this matter beyond a short statement of denial, the debate looks set to heat up.

## Team transfer news roundup

### - Domina, T-Mobile make big changes, and Simoni for Quick.Step

By Tim Maloney, European Editor

With the official UCI date for team transfers coming next week on September 1, there is a lot of action happening already. Although the deal isn't signed yet, Domina Vacanze team boss Gianluigi Stanga has been negotiating with Erik Zabel to come to his team in 2006 and bring along a major sponsor. Stanga recently visited Bremen, the headquarters of German dairy products giant Nordmilch, who will likely come along with Zabel and his current T-Mobile teammate Jan Schaffrath. Nordmilch is already a co-sponsor of Team Wiesenhof under their Mirlam milk and cheese brand.

So Zabel will join Ale-Jet Petacchi at the Domina Vacanze-Mirlam squad in '06, and the Italian super-sprinter can count on the support of Marco Velo, Alberto Ongarato, Fabio Sacchi and possibly Stefano Zanini for his leadout train. Look for other changes at the Italian squad in '06, as Stanga has already advised a dozen riders, including recent Coppa Bernocchi winner Paolo Valoti, that their contracts won't be renewed for 2006. This may clear the way for other German riders from Team Wiesenhof, which is set to fold at the end of 2005, to join Zabel.

Although Erik Zabel and Alexandre Vinokourov will head elsewhere in '06, T-Mobile have inked agreements with Ukrainian powerhouse Serguei Gonchar and Italian Eddy Mazzoleni likely to play key support roles for Jan Ullrich along with Giuseppe "Turbo" Guerini, who has signed a one year contract extension for 2006. Gonchar was talking to Lampre about coming on board to support Cunego in '06, while Mazzoleni had previously agreed to stay with Lampre next season to support Damiano Cunego, but the temptingly rich offers from the German formation convinced both the Ukrainian and Italian otherwise.

T-Mobile have already signed deals with emerging talents Patrik Sinkewitz and World TT champ Michael Rogers, both from Quick.Step while old pro Rolf Aldag and Ullrich's key support rider Tobias Steinhauser will retire at year's end, but both will continue to work within the T-Mobile team structure. Other riders who are reportedly close to signing with T-Mobile are Spanish rider Koldo Gil (Liberty Seguros), Fassa Bortolo's Kim Kirchen, Phonak's Tadej Valjavec and 2003 World Champion Igor Astarloa.

### Simoni heads north

Although Quick.Step will lose Rogers and Sinkewitz, it looks certain now that 34 year old Italian Gilberto Simoni will leave Lampre to ride for the Belgian team in 2006. Quick.Step wants Simoni as leader for the Giro d'Italia, where he's on the podium six times in the last seven years, including two wins (2001-2003). Simoni will have riders like Spanish champ Juanma Garate (Saunier Duval) as support, while Quick.Step has added Dutch sprinter

the team's rooki  
Down Under, Ch  
Sutton.

### MTB - Champb BMX Series #1



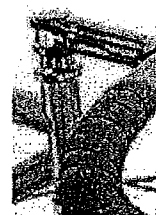
The racing was  
only thing keepi  
spectators' eyes  
at Round 1 of th  
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### Ben Kersten's Tassie diary



Ben wraps up h  
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### On test: Reyno Ouzo Pro Anat carbon road handlebar



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Reynolds' produ  
have an unfair  
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