

Questions about a Champion

"If a misdeed arises in the search for truth, it is better to exhume it rather than conceal the truth."

Saint Jerome.

"When I wake up in the morning, I can look in the mirror and say: yes, I'm clean. It's up to you to prove that I am guilty."

Lance Armstrong,

Libération, July 24, 2001.

"To deal with it, the teams must be clear on ethics. Someone crosses the line? He doesn't have the right to a second chance!"

Lance Armstrong,

L'Équipe, April 28, 2004.

Between the World Road Champion encountered in a Norwegian night club, who sipped a beer, talked candidly, laughed easily and never let the conversation falter, and the cyclist with a stern, closed face, who fended off the July crowd, protected by a bodyguard or behind the smoked glass of the team bus, ten years had passed.

July 1993. In the garden of an old-fashioned hotel near Grenoble, I interviewed Armstrong for three hours. It was the first professional season for this easygoing, slightly cowboyish, and very ambitious Texan. I left with a twenty-five-page interview, the chapter of a future book¹ I was writing about the Tour de France. I also took with me a real admiration for this young man, whom I thought had a promising future in cycling. Eight years later, in the spring of 2001, another interview. But the Tour of 1998 had changed things. Scandals and revelations were running rampant in cycling. Would my admiration stand the test?

In August 1993, it was a happy, carefree, eloquent Armstrong, whom Pierre Ballester, met the evening after he won the World Championship in Oslo. Three reporters found the glowing and slightly tipsy Armstrong in a discotheque around midnight. That Sunday the winner of the rainbow jersey was not quite 22 years old. And he was grinning from ear to ear. For more than an hour, he spoke very openly in a round table discussion, while the sound system blasted the latest hits. Nothing was taboo that evening. He talked a lot. You could see that he enjoyed talking. He could have gone on until dawn if his friends hadn't called him back to reality. In four hours he had to be at the airport. The next day he had to ride in the Critérium of Châteaulin.

April 1996. I asked Lance Armstrong to make a judgment about what he had been before his performances in the Flèche wallonne (first) and in Liège-

Bastogne-Liège (second). Armstrong called himself a "jerk." He was taken at his word and his declaration would be the title of the interview.² During our next meeting, he was not angry at us, he just shrugged his shoulders: "OK, OK, it's true, that's what I told you."

Austin, seven months later. We found him with slow movements, a cap pulled down tight over his bald head. It was no longer the bountiful rain of a Scandinavian summer, but the meager sun of a Texan November. Lance Armstrong was no longer a professional cyclist but a cancer patient. His answering machine and that of his lawyer, Bill Stapleton, were bombarded with countless requests for interviews. He only answered two of them: one from Samuel Abt, a journalist for *The New York Times* and *Herald Tribune*, and one from Pierre Ballester of *L'Equipe*. One American and one Frenchman. Lance Armstrong was waiting for us on his doorstep. An arm of the Colorado River stretched out behind his white, Mediterranean-style villa located in a posh residential area, beyond the hill that overlooks the Texan capital. We were far from the two cramped rooms where a somewhat embarrassed Armstrong met with us three years earlier.

Here, we were invited into the kitchen. Lance Armstrong made a vegetable juice in a mixer. He asked for news from Europe. The conversation was discreet. The other interview, the one that would be printed, was about to begin. We thought he would prefer a three-way interview to save time. But no. He wanted to talk to us one after the other. "Samuel Abt first, and you later."

The interview started. I had nothing to do so I wandered about the house, looked at the paintings, caressed the five bikes hung in the garage, glanced at the speedometer of the black Porsche, taking in the details of the champion's new life. I arrived in a hallway that led to a bedroom when someone came up behind me.

"Are you looking for something?"

"Something? No, nothing special. I didn't want to disturb your interview with Sam so I'm walking around, that's all. A newspaper article needs an atmosphere, as you well know."

"But there's nothing in my bedroom."

"Nothing? What do you mean nothing?"

"If you think you're going to find a bag of dope..."

"A bag of... ? What are you talking about? Excuse me, but I don't understand..."

Lance Armstrong cut it short and smiled. Disconcerted I did the same. The episode was closed. The champion then gave himself over to the interview with an incredible sensitivity, talked about his face to face encounter with death and spoke of love and joy as few individuals are capable of doing with a journalist. Eight years later, this writer has not forgotten that poignant testimony. Nor the strange occurrence that accompanied it.

A yellow jersey in a crowd is like a lighthouse in the Irish Sea. It was near 5 P.M., and Lance was in front of a camera belonging to Channel Four, a British television station. The fourteenth stage of the 1999 Tour de France had just been

completed in Saint-Gaudens with the victory of the Russian Dmitri Konyshev. A day of rest was planned for the following day, and the American champion answered Paul Sherwen's questions near his team's bus. Lance Armstrong had been wearing yellow for a week. He had easily dominated the Tour in the prologue of the Puy-du-Fou stage, the time trial of Metz, and the crossing of the Alps. The media were taken by surprise and resorted to a great many ambiguous headlines. Leaving the press room, I couldn't miss the crowd that was forming. I made my way through it and arrived just behind the yellow jersey. As though equipped with a sixth sense, Lance Armstrong turned around, took me by the arm, brought me alongside him, and said:

"You know, this journalist isn't professional."

That was it. Then Lance Armstrong divided the crowd to get back to his bus, and I stood there dumbfounded, before getting a hold of myself.

"Hey, Lance, you can't leave me like this! What's this about?"

Armstrong barely turned around and his answer was lost in the hubbub.

That evening, my cell phone rang.

"It's Lance."

"Lance? Um... Hello. Um... listen, I don't understand your reaction. You... you have to stop with your double meanings. You treat me with contempt, these insinuations, all this... It's not normal."

"Hey! Lance, I'm not responsible for what the French press writes, only for what I write. Did something happen...?"

"Your newspaper is not fair to me. It's unacceptable."

"Well... I think it would be best to discuss it. You are giving a press conference at 4 P.M. tomorrow, aren't you? Then, come see us before, OK?"

"Why would I..."

"Listen, you're not going to be able to explain yourself in one of these conferences translated into several languages where you're asked your favorite dish and the name you'll give to your next cat."

"Yeah... But you are going to get my message through, OK? Good, let's say 3 P.M. at my hotel."

"That's fine for me. Thank you and see..."

He had already hung up.

The next day, accompanied by a newspaper photographer, I arrived at the appointment fifteen minutes early. Mark Gorski, the team's manager, was there to receive us.

"Lance is in his room on the first floor. He's waiting for you."

The Armstrong we found in his room was rather livid. This hotel in Saint-Gaudens was a modest one, and he raved about the conditions of the cyclists' accommodations. The room, which he occupied alone, was in fact basic. A large bed, a bedside table, a chair. Not even a place to receive his visitors. Though he knew the photographer, his presence not quite suit Lance. But he let it slide.

The photographer understood and made himself discreet in a corner of the room.

Lance Armstrong stretched out on the bedspread.

"Good, is your dictaphone working?"

"Yes, yes."

"Good, well, here's what I have to say..."

What followed was a brief monologue about the treatment he was subject to in the press. Not enough to fill half a page. I stepped in, reviewed the latest hot news, and moved on to the yes/no game:

"Lance, allow me to ask you some direct questions, questions that everyone's asking themselves, the public, the journalists. Nothing like it to put an end to speculations, OK?"

Lance Armstrong, at first surprised, nodded, while making the photographer understand that he must stop bombarding him with shots.

"Do you have recourse to any medical certificates?"

"None."

"None at all? Not for corticosteroid or EPO?"

"Nothing."

"Did you ever use this type of product to cure your cancer?"

"No, never."

"Are you following any more treatments to stop any possible resurgence of your cancer?"

"No, absolutely nothing. I just have to consult my oncologist, Dr. Einhorn, once every four months."

The interview lasted forty-five minutes. When we parted in the hallway, the handshake was not as firm and direct as the previous ones. I ventured a pacifying phrase.

"Well, I hope that this interview will serve to dissipate the misunderstanding."

"It all depends on what you're going to write about it."

"I'll write what you said to me, Lance."

The "question-answer" interview appeared the next day, July 20. That day, it wasn't Lance Armstrong who complained to me about it, but Jean-Marie Leblanc, the Tour's sponsor, fuming against what he considered a "police investigation."

Everything had been set up. Seated in the center of the forum, Lance Armstrong was ready to answer the barrage of questions. We were in San Luis Obispo, two hours north of Los Angeles by car. It was January 2000. The US Postal Team had its winter quarters in a California hotel complex. That day the weather in the region was unusually gloomy.

Some thirty international journalists were gathered in a conference room of the hotel, a half dozen cameras were pointed at the American. Dan Osipow, who handled public relations for the American team, acted as master of ceremonies. The reporters fired questions. I chose deliberately to remain standing, leaning against a wall. Lance Armstrong noticed me, of course, because he saw everything, but he didn't let on. More than six months had passed since the frank interview appeared in *L'Équipe*. Lance Armstrong had never reacted to it. After a quarter of an hour, Dan Osipow informed the press: "Last two questions!" The last one came. Lance Armstrong gave me a barely noticeable look. The "last" question was asked by a German journalist. Mass was over.

Armstrong headed back to his room. A cohort of journalists accompanied him, and I lagging behind. We passed through hallways, one after another, then floors, as the procession diminished little by little. Finally, only the American champion, very near the door to his room, and I, always at a respectable distance, remained. Without turning around, the Texan said sharply:

"Well, what do you want?"

"Not this."

"What do you mean 'not this'?"

"Not this quarter hour devoted to the press. Some people traveled six thousand miles to see you, and I'm one of them."

"I know. I saw your name on the list."

"As interesting as your press conference was, you can understand that my newspaper and I want to spend a little more time with you."

Lance Armstrong turned around. He was playing with the room key in his hands, pretending to think about it. He cracked a little smile.

"If I didn't want you to come, you wouldn't have been allowed. How much time do you want?"

"Three quarters of an hour would be good. Tomorrow, does that work for you?"

"Tomorrow... OK for tomorrow. A half hour."

"Thanks, Lance."

The next day, the interview took place in one of the hotel salons, in the midst of all the activity. Thirty minutes, not one minute more. Answers that were shorter, more conventional. Armstrong refused to let John Wilcockson, editor-in-chief of an American monthly, *Velo News*, be present, for "a story that John knows about". Sorry about that, John.

The thread has been broken.

A good number of those who have had interactions with Lance Armstrong throughout the years no doubt find themselves in this situation. Sympathy, naturalness; admiration, modesty; candor, embarrassment. Then a conviction is handed down. In other words, from hot to lukewarm to cold. A dilemma between respect for the unique cyclist and the uneasiness that he provokes.

Since his first victory in the 1999 Tour, Lance Armstrong has never been able to get rid of an insulating doubt that shadows him. Suspicion is the strongest pain, and it hasn't experienced any remission. Medical miracle, dubious oncologists, mystery of a positive control that is short-lived, dispute with the French justice system, physiologically inexplicable performances, known lies, dissimulated truths, a diabolical sports entourage, and all this in a sport that is constantly eroded by current events... Whatever the angle of attack, a problem and a question inevitably come up.

Everything started with a telephone call in August 2000 made from one journalist to another, from David Walsh to Pierre Ballester. And a mutual feeling that the uneasiness was too strong. For us to refuse to make an inquiry would be an insult to our profession. Our mutual investigation lasted nearly three years. Three

years, during which doors opened easier than expected. As if the desire to contribute was strong, consciences too shaken. Because the people who talked to us had the feeling that the laudatory articles accompanying the career of Lance Armstrong eclipse, deliberately or not, a part of the truth, and that Armstrong's inflexible position on doping was an affront to this truth. But actually talking to us was always trying. For some a torture, for others a relief. It required months of reflection, hesitation, anguish. Most provided information off the record, which, though remaining confidential, contributed to the understanding of the individual.

Maybe you ask yourself why Armstrong, rather than someone else. He is not the only controversial champion. There are many answers, but one of them is the deciding factor: if you can't believe in the history of a high-level sports figure who survived cancer and has become a hope for all those who suffer from it, in what can you believe? Since the 1998 Tour, when cycling hit rock bottom, Lance Armstrong has become its moral guarantee, practically its last chance. For quite a few years, he has even been a self-proclaimed herald in the fight against doping, distributing penalty flags and merit points. And well beyond cycling, Armstrong has become a symbol and icon. Didn't George W. Bush, a Texan like him, ask Armstrong to accompany him in the presidential plane, Air Force One, to participate in the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games in Salt Lake City in January 2002? The same George Bush who sounded the alarm, in a rather unexpected way, on January 21, 2004 in Washington, during his annual State of the Union Address by exhorting the American sports community to ban all doping products? "To help children make right choices, they need good examples But unfortunately, some in professional sports are not setting much of an example.... The use of performance-enhancing drugs like steroids ... is dangerous, and it sends the wrong message -- that there are shortcuts to accomplishment, and that performance is more important than character."

The stakes of this book go beyond Lance Armstrong or the Tour de France. This is why this inquiry is stripped of animosity toward him and will not touch upon his private life, his divorce or his children. It does not dwell on his income or sponsors. Because the essential lies elsewhere: are sports still a playing field or a field for experimentation? Does a high-level sports figure have the right to compete without having to come up against cases of doping? Who is concerned with these sports personalities who die in the springtime of their lives? Who is concerned about the future of sports and the dream that it perpetuates generation after generation? Has ethics become an obsolete word? In any case, this book is dedicated to all those who play the game, the real game, in spite of everything, and to those who fight so that they can continue to do so.

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Indiana Hospital

It's the beginning of the year 2001. During a conversation with Greg LeMond, triple winner of the Tour de France and two-time World Road Champion, he evoked the journey of Lance Armstrong. LeMond wants to believe in the success of his fellow countryman in the 1999 and 2000 editions of the Grande Boucle, as well as in his resurrection and the improvement of his performances after cancer. But he reckons that the explanation put forth by his compatriot, the loss of some 20 lbs., cannot physiologically justify his enormous progress. Greg is troubled. He learned that Armstrong has had close ties with Dr. Michele Ferrari. He was bothered all the more when he heard it said that Lance Armstrong admitted using banned performance-enhancing substances in front of doctors at the Indiana Hospital in Indianapolis. LeMond is incredulous. "I can't believe it. If this story gets to me, it is because the person that reported it to me is someone reliable." This rumor that Armstrong made an avowal in front of two doctors in a consultation room came up several times during our investigation. The scene would have taken place at the end of October 1996, a short time after his brain operation in the presence of six of his closest friends at the time: Chris and Paige Carmichael, Frankie Andreu and his future wife Betsy, Stéphanie Mcllvain and Lisa Shiels. Chris Carmichael, Lance Armstrong's main trainer, has been at his side since the cyclist became part of the American Junior National Team. Frankie Andreu was a team member and a friend. Stéphanie Mcllvain was working for Oakley, one of Lance Armstrong's sponsors, but she also became a friend. Lisa Shiels was the Texan's girlfriend at the time. One of the doctors asked Armstrong if he had used performance-enhancing products. In reply, Armstrong gave a detailed list of doping products that he used, EPO and growth hormone in particular.

We tried to question Lisa Shiels, but could not locate her. On the other hand, we succeeded in tracking down Betsy Andreu and Stéphanie Mcllvain to question them. Here is Betsy Andreu's response:

"Did you visit Lance in October 1996 in the Indiana Hospital?"

"Yes."

"Were you present in the consultation room with Frankie Andreu, your husband-to-be, Chris and Paige Carmichael, Stéphanie Mcllvain, and Lisa Shiels, when Lance admitted in front of his doctors that he used performance-enhancing products?"

A long pause.

"Betsy, are you there? Did Lance admit using performance-enhancing products?"

"I have no comment to make on this point. Ask your question to Lance, not to me."

"But did you hear him say that he used performance-enhancing products?"

"I told you. I have no comment to make about that."

And here is the response of Stéphanie McIlvain:

"Did you visit Lance in the Indiana Hospital at the end of October 1996, after he had an operation linked to his testicular cancer?"

"Yes, I was there."

"Were you in the consultation room with Chris and Paige Carmichael, Frankie and Betsy Andreu and Lisa Shiels when Lance admitting using performance-enhancing products?"

"I'm sorry, but I have no statement to make on this subject. It's Lance's business. I don't have to talk about this."

"Did you hear him, yes or no, declare that he used performance-enhancing products?"

"Sorry, no comment. If you have questions that call for answers, ask Lance."

We also sent the following questions to Lance Armstrong:

"A lot of people have established a link between cancer and taking doping products. Have your oncologists and other doctors already done the same during your meetings?"

We have heard it said that you admitted taking performance-enhancing products to your oncologists."

He did not choose to respond.

The Passion to Win

"I won, and I won by a lot,... I liked the feeling."

Lance Armstrong,
It's Not About the Bike, p. 23.

"Nothing goes to waste," writes Armstrong in his autobiography (*It's Not About the Bike*). "You put it all to use, the old wounds, the long-ago slights become the stuff of competitive energy. But back then I was just a kid with about four chips on his shoulder..."

Armstrong was, without a doubt, molded by his childhood experiences.³ How could they not have developed his emotional armor and forged his determination to make something of his life? His mother, Linda Mooneyham, was seventeen when she became pregnant to someone named Gunderson. The only thing known about him is that he married Linda during her pregnancy, but left two

years later. The abandoned child never asked his mother any questions, never wanted to know anything about his biological father and never tried to establish a relationship with him. Gunderson made his decision, the boy made his, that's it. In his eyes, Gunderson provided the DNA, nothing more, pure chance that doesn't make him a father.

To make ends meet, his mother had to work two or three jobs at the same time and, very quickly, Lance understood the cruelty of life. During the first years of his professional career, when he constantly took people the wrong way, his teammates made fun of his thirst for revenge, which was as immense as his native Texas. In his autobiography, he talks about how his mother always instilled him with the importance of being positive. Hard-working and conscientious, Linda went from one job to another, always looking to do more and to improve everyday life. Practically alone and devoted to her only son, she was in the habit of saying to him: "If you can't give 110 percent, you won't make it." How could she have made it otherwise?

Then Terry Armstrong entered Linda's life. After their marriage, he adopted Lance and gave him his name. He lived with them for ten years, before being asked to leave. Armstrong gives a somber picture of his relationship with his stepfather. "When I was very young, I got along rather well with him. You don't know how to hate someone at that age, but I can tell you that when I did learn to hate someone, it was him. I took his name because he adopted me, that's why I have the name Armstrong. I don't attach any importance to this name, but today it would be hard to change it."

He had good reason to nourish this hostility. Terry Armstrong was in the habit of beating his adoptive son with a paddle, and later the young adolescent would find out that his stepfather had a relationship with another woman. This discovery made him suffer more than the beatings. As soon as he was old enough to see things clearly, Lance was convinced that his mother and he would be better off without him. He was fourteen years old when Linda finally decided to get a divorce. The adolescent did not cry when his adoptive father left. "You grow up. You're fourteen, fifteen, or sixteen years old, you're in high school, your friend's parents divorce and the children are crushed. They cry, get worked up, they need the support of psychologists and all that. I saw all this around me. Me, when my stepfather left, I celebrated. I was so relieved. I was worried. I said to myself: 'What's wrong with you, old boy? The other children are torn apart, and you, you kick this guy out and you're overjoyed.'"

After the divorce, Terry Armstrong continued to send his adopted son birthday cards, the envelopes sometimes stuffed with a hundred dollar bill. Lance gave the money to his mother and asked her to send it back. One day he wrote a letter to his stepfather, explaining to him that he didn't think there was any relationship between them, and that if he could change his name he would. It was his way of letting him understand that everything was over. Like Gunderson, Terry Armstrong had his chance and he blew it. Forever.

"I Love Mom"

Lance and his mother, who was always looking for a better job or a better place to live, settled in a relatively upscale area of Plano, Texas. It was rather frustrating for the young Lance to live in a place where everyone belonged to the local country club, Los Rios, where children drove expensive cars and wore designer clothes. During his last year at Plano East High School, Armstrong, selected for the national cycling team, missed classes for six weeks. He thought that since he represented his country, the school administration would show some indulgence. But he learned with bitterness that that he was given nothing. If he didn't make up the lost time quickly, he could forget about his diploma. Armstrong couldn't help thinking that if he were a football player rather than a cyclist, if his parents were members of Los Rios and if he wore stylish clothes, his problems would be over. But in the world where Armstrong lived, you don't accept a refusal and, above all, you don't let anyone ruin your chances. Linda called all the private schools in the area, pleading her son's cause before explaining that she could not pay the tuition. Finally, one of them, Bending Oaks, accepted Lance.

Swimming was the first sport he participated in. He did well in water, using his natural endurance and his great capacity to train to his advantage. At first, Linda drove him to the swimming pool early in the morning. Then he bought a bike and went there himself, 20 miles round trip. Soon he became an accomplished swimmer and cyclist. Ill at ease in ball sports, he decided to try a triathlon after winning a distance-running race at school. Good swimmer, good cyclist, and good runner, he was attracted by the prizes given out in triathlons. He started at thirteen and was successful at his first attempt: 200-meter swim, 10 kilometer-cycling, and, to finish, a 2-kilometer run. Next, he was the winner at the regional competition in Houston and Dallas, and came in second at the national finals in Orlando. "I did a lot of sports and I wasn't any good at them. Finally I discovered the triathlon and said to myself: 'Hey man! This isn't for the glory, or the trophies, that's what I liked, it was to win and be the best. It was something that I had never experienced before.'" Lance discovered a sensation that hooked him. In particular, he remembers a disputed triathlon in Dallas, which gathered together the best Americans. A thousand competitors lined up at the start, including some hundred professionals. Armstrong, fifteen years old, finished the swim, which opened the competition, neck and neck with Mark Allen, then considered the best triathlete in the United States. He stayed on Allen's wheel for most of the race and finished sixth in the run. The kind of performance that opens the eyes of an adolescent, who, as a bonus, got to have his photo taken beside Allen. But what intoxicated him above all was the feeling that he had made some waves in the triathlete community. Who is this kid? Who does he think he is? Does anyone know where he comes from?

Lance had endurance, and also a reserve of panache. He wanted to confront the best and show that he wasn't a young kid to be taken lightly. Linda did not raise a wannabe. When he was younger, she laughed at his growls when she woke him up at 4:45 in the morning to go and train at the pool. "Come on, Lance," she would say. "It's the first day of the rest of your life." Because it was his mother, he

couldn't get angry; she would tell him over and over again: "Son, you never quit." He couldn't give in. Never. He liked the open air, while classes didn't interest him. He tried football but without success. Then he discovered the triathlon, and the chance to be Plano's best. He had to be the best triathlete, he had to stand out from the crowd. And he wanted to make money. Yes, a lot of money. After coming in sixth place in Dallas, Lance got ready for the national triathlon championship. This young promising talent went looking for the sponsor he thought he deserved. But, fifteen years old and not very well known, he didn't have any luck. Successive refusals just exacerbated his determination and his desire to meet a challenge. In a small shop in Plano, he had "I love Mom" printed with his number. Nothing could be more appropriate, because no one supported him like Linda did. No other athlete had such a sponsor. He finished the competition with a very honorable eighth place and his mother found his bib "cool."

Carmichael Enters the Scene

There was no doubt that a great career as a triathlete had opened to Armstrong, but he was going to turn his back on it. His crossover to cycling was gradual, almost accidental. He didn't ride a bike twenty miles a day without developing a certain complicity with his machine. In the beginning, it was just a matter of Lance improving his cycling abilities and he loved the speeds he could reach. When he got into the triathlon, he began to pay more attention to the bike. He got into bike racing to prepare himself for the triathlon, but the more he raced, the more he liked it. What did this sport give him that swimming and running didn't? Excitement. The three sports required endurance but the bike was the symbol of speed, and speed intoxicated Armstrong. As an adolescent he drove his second car, a Camaro, at 115 or 120 mph. On a bike, he raced stoplights and enjoyed Plano's Tuesday night criteriums, because these races were able to satisfy his taste for speed.

If he took to the bike, it was also because its value was recognized. In 1989, when he was eighteen years old, the United States Cycling Federation invited him to train with the Junior National Team in Colorado Springs, and then to represent his country in the Junior World Championship in Moscow, on the Krylatskoye circuit. A solid cyclist, he went full throttle. His natural tendency is to attack and race as though his life depended on it. An admirable positive attitude, but tactically dismaying, and one that would cost him dearly.

"At the time, I knew nothing about cycling. I presented myself at the starting line of the juniors road race with this outfit you wear for the time trial. I didn't have a lunch bag, no water, nothing. I said to the team manager: 'I don't need a shirt and shorts. I want to be aerodynamic.' I took off in the lead and tried to stay there for the entire day. Without eating or drinking anything. In the final, I went straight into the wall, I was exhausted." One year later in 1990, he took part in the amateur World Championship in Utsunomiya, Japan. Once again, he showed the same reckless aggressiveness and broke out on the second lap, with an advance of up

to a minute and a half. At the halfway point of the race, the solitary attacker broke down and exhausted his reserves while thirty more prudent competitors caught up to him. He finished eleventh, a respectable place, but one that could have been a lot better.

On that day, a irritated Chris Carmichael, coach of the senior US national team, observed from alongside the road.

After the race, Carmichael and Armstrong had a beer together at the hotel bar where the American team was staying. The young cyclist had a grudge against Carmichael, who divided the amateur American team into two groups, A and B. He put Armstrong in the B group. With a beer in hand, Lance ended up relaxing and they joked about the young Texan's tactics, his conviction that he had to go as fast as possible for as long as possible. Carmichael congratulated him for his audacity and his eleventh place. The coach told him that he liked what he saw, and Armstrong was grateful. His reservations towards Carmichael were dissipated. Then the coach laid down his trump card. It's fine to be eleventh, but Lance could have done better. He could have been able to finish on the podium if he had raced with his head rather than his heart. Who knew how far he could go if he knew how to conserve his energy all the way to the end? At first Armstrong was tempted to send him packing: "Hey, stop, I did finish eleventh, it's better than the other Americans." But before he had time to get on his high horse, Carmichael reassured him by bringing up his future: "I'm convinced that you'll be the world champion." He didn't need to say anything more. He had won. Lance Armstrong had just found his first cycling coach.

Born in the Cornfields

I met him in Indianapolis, in a Starbucks, one afternoon in January 2001. He ordered a café au lait and sat down to tell his story. His name is Greg , Dr. Greg Strock, from now on, since he just finished his medical studies and was ready to begin his first year of internship. Medicine had not always been his profession. In fact, up until 1990, Strock did not know much about the medical field. At that time he was a young American cyclist, with the world at his feet. Banesto, with the best professional training back then, reserved a place for him on its team of elite amateurs and everyone saw him getting into the professional peloton. His dream was to participate in the great European races and give the best he had.

Strock was born in Anderson, a city northeast of Indianapolis. Impressed by his cousin, Dan Taylor, who loved riding a bike and could ride up to twenty-five miles at a stretch, Strock, who was then around twelve years old, decided to buy his first bicycle. To earn the money for it, he cut his neighbors' grass. When his parents asked him if he should be spending so much time doing sports, he worked even harder at school to reassure them. "When I started riding a bike, I became more serious and better organized. My grades improved and my parents were really pleased. We had a tactical agreement: I bring home good grades and they support my sports career."

Strock started buying videos of old European races. He especially liked watching

the Paris-Roubaix, the most trying of the one-day classics. The wind blows a lot in Indiana and, while crossing the flat landscape of cornfields, the boy was tossed all over the place. To give himself heart, he imagined himself breaking away in the Paris-Roubaix. In winter, when the weather was too bad to ride outside, he mounted a home trainer bike. At fifteen years old, he became Indiana's best young cyclist and one of the best in the country. About one year later, at the Junior National Championships in Allentown, Pennsylvania, he beat George Hincapie in the individual time trial. This success opened the doors of the American team at the Moscow Junior World Championship in 1989. The same championship where Lance Armstrong rode in his aerodynamic outfit. Strock's success enabled the team to qualify for the junior competition the following year. The USCF (United States Cycling Federation) invited him to the training camps, enthusiastic about the results on physiological tests. "Oh, you do better than Roy Knickman did in his first year," someone said to him. "You know you do as well as Greg LeMond did at the same age." Well prepared, pedaling against a resistance during an ergonomic test, he beat the record held by LeMond. It was a godsend to him because he was one of the most conscientious cyclists of the American program. He watched what he ate, slept well, didn't smoke, didn't drink and lived like a monk, without losing his enthusiasm in any way. "I was just a kid born in the middle of cornfields but I had found a sport that I loved and in which I excelled."

"Just Something for Babies"

Strock's experience at the Junior World Championship of 1989 pushed him into becoming a champion cyclist. At Krylatskoye, he rode in the team time trial, though he knew he was a cyclist for stage races. Those in charge of the US Federation accepted that his program for the 1990 season would highlight the latter. Greg got his high school diploma in January, and he was now free to dedicate himself to his sport. In the spring, he made an exchange with the young Spanish cyclist, Igor Gonzalez de Galdeano, a future yellow jersey of the Tour de France, and spent ten weeks in the Spanish Basque country. Later in the year, Gonzalez de Galdeano came to the United States. In Spain, Strock won three of the six races that he participated in and, after beating the best Spanish hopefuls, Banesto made him a proposal.

Around the same time, at the beginning of 1990, René Wenzel was hired as the coach of the junior American road team. Danish, but a United States resident, Wenzel had been a professional cyclist in Europe, and his recruitment shows the growing ambitions of the US Federation. One of his first jobs, after the relatively modest French races, was to have the team participate in the prestigious Dusika Tour in Australia. Because it was a one-week race with mountain stages, Strock knew he could be successful and make this event one of his main objectives of the season. Before leaving Spain to join Wenzel and his teammates in Brittany, Greg, who was suffering from a bad cold and sore throat, was given antibiotics

by the doctor of the Spanish family where he was staying.

Upon his arrival in France, he didn't feel like himself and his performance suffered from it. It was the first time he worked with Wenzel and he was afraid of making a bad impression. Fearing that he wouldn't be fit for Austria, he talked about it to Wenzel and explained to him that he was taking antibiotics. During their stay in Brittany, Wenzel got in touch with a French soigneur. After a discussion with him, Wenzel asked Greg to stop taking the antibiotics. "I didn't know who this Frenchman was," Strock remembers. "He had black hair, average height, was in his thirties, rather well-dressed, but I didn't have the impression I was dealing with a doctor. He didn't examine me, didn't speak to me, but after talking to him, René came back and asked me to stop taking the antibiotics, which were prescribed by a competent doctor."

They even went further. "They said I needed an injection and they gave me one. I was also given glass vials and packets for around seven to ten days. One vial every day, and the packets twice a day. I was told that it was composed of different products and a cortisone extract. Apart from my vaccinations, it was the first time I had had an injection. At this time, we had started finding packets in our energy bars. I remember very well the first time, I bit into the bar and wondered why it tasted so bad. I could see the section of the packet that I had bitten into. At first, I thought that someone in the manufacturing chain was tampering, then I understood that it was our own boys who did it. I was aware enough to ask questions: 'René, does this pose a health risk? Is it allowed?' I was reassured every time and it was the same for the other riders on the team. You could call it a brainwashing. We were told, 'Boys, at sometime in your professional career, you have to take products to increase performance.' Or, 'Anyway, it's just something for babies, it's legal, there's no problem.' It was their way of leading us into the doping culture, by minimizing the bad that they do and reminding us that one day we were going to have to take the 'real things'."

Strock finally got back in shape before the Dusika Tour where he finished eighth. The race finished on a climb of six kilometers. Three kilometers before the finish line, Greg attacked, picking up ten seconds which, added to the bonus of the stage victory, let him hope for a final victory. But he was caught at least one kilometer from the finish line and had to be content with eight place. All the same, a good result that impressed Wenzel.

In Fraser's Hands

For the American juniors of 1990, the World Championship in Cleveland, England, constituted the most important test of the year. Shortly after they arrived in their quarters on July 8, they were introduced to a Scottish soigneur, who was to work with them throughout the championships. Unknown to the participants, Angus Fraser was in the habit of procuring "medical" aid for cyclists as well as massages. A controversial personality, he would later be accused of providing an Australian track racer, Martin Vinnicombe, the kilometer world champion in 1987 and Olympic vice-champion for distance at the Seoul Games the following year,

with anabolic steroids, as well as a note explaining how to use them, how to sell them to other cyclists, and how to hide them from his trainers by saying that they were a mixture of vitamin B12 and vitamin enzymes. Strock hasn't forgotten his first encounter with Angus. "René was in the room the first time he massaged me. He told me that he had complete confidence in Fraser. He was a professional who knew what he was doing."

Fraser had his own room in the team's hotel. There were other massages. He was officially in charge of "blood tests, medicine, vitamins, etc.," even though he had had no medical training. Wenzel brought the cyclists to Fraser's room, where they went in alone, a towel around the midsection, to lie down on the table. The curtains were drawn and Fraser did his best to make them relax. "You're here to relax, don't say anything." After the massage, he would give them an injection, sometimes two. "He wore a blue and white apron," Strock recalls. "Sometimes he started with the injections, then continued the massage. Sometimes it was the reverse. At the most we got two or three injections a day. I questioned René: 'What is it? Is it legal?', and I could tell by his eyes that I was a troublemaker. 'In the name of God, Greg, if you want to succeed as a professional, you're going to have to have confidence in your trainers and coaches. Pros on the Tour don't waste their energy like this.' In England, I was told that the injections contained vitamins and cortisone extract. One day, someone talked to us about an injection of ATP 4. If you lacked energy, you took an ATP 4, it was legal. For the team time trial, each member of the team also received caffeine suppositories, which, on the contrary, were not authorized. After a suppository, I remember having terrible stomach cramps. I was doubled over with pain in the fetal position. We had a small truck parked near the start and finish line, and that's where we took the suppositories. You put them in your anus and it released a stimulant."

In this time trial, there were four cyclists representing the United States: Greg Strock, Erich Kaiter, Gerrik Latta, and George Hincapie. On their way to win the silver medal during almost the entire race, the American team saw their chances reduced to nothing after a puncture in the last quarter of the competition. Anyway, two of these cyclists, Kaiter and Latta, confirm perfectly Strock's version of this Junior World Championship and other gatherings. As for George Hincapie, today an important member of the US Postal team – its leader in the classics –, he has never made any comment about his experience as a member of the American junior team.

Greg and Lance

The future of Strock, who was considered one of the most promising young American talents, proved to be brilliant. He received an offer from Banesto's amateur team for the beginning of the 1991 season. He was also courted by Motorola's professional team, still new to the sport, which wanted to take on two new amateurs, Lance Armstrong and Bobby Julich. It was an encouraging sign for Strock because Armstrong and Julich were both a year older than him. Another encouragement at the end of his last junior year: he was selected to be

in the elite group A of the US team for the following year. Usually seniors in their first year are in group B. And remember how Armstrong didn't like his placing. Even though Armstrong was one year older than Strock and was a member of the team coached by Chris Carmichael, Lance and Greg met on several occasions. They were both part of the 1989 American juniors team in Moscow, and later, in 1990 and the beginning of 1991, they participated in the same training camps. "I went to the national training camp in February [1991]," Strock recalls. "I was really strong and excited about my future. I remember that my test results were very good. Lance was also there. At that time, my physical capacities were greater than his. The guy who tested us told me that I had the highest VO2 max (oxygen consumption test) he had ever seen in an American cyclist. In our training races, there was always a breakaway by Lance and me, we both raced very well."

Armstrong remembers Strock in Moscow. "I was riding on the road, he on the track. An intelligent type, a good guy, of noble blood, a normal guy, completely normal. But I didn't race a lot with him, rarely, actually. He raced in his class, with guys like George [Hincapie], Eric Harris, Erich Kaiter and Kevin Livingston. Guys who were one year younger than me. Greg was a good racing cyclist, not a great racer, far from it."

Strock Falls Ill

In the beginning of 1991, Strock left Anderson, Indiana, to begin his season with Banesto in Spain. Shortly after, he became ill with a sore throat and ganglionic swelling, then arthritis in the knees and hips. His knees swelled up. When he climbed up stairs, his legs bent slightly and he almost fell down. Banesto sent him to one of its doctors, who threw up his arms and swore he had no idea what was the matter with him. He decided that Strock was the victim of an infection that affects the joints. Unable to help him, Banesto sent him back to the United States so that he could consult his physician.

At home, his condition worsened. When his chronic exhaustion was complicated by respiratory problems, he was transported to the emergency room of the Anderson Community Hospital. Strock manifested symptoms that were completely out of the ordinary for an eighteen-year-old athlete. First he was thought to have cancer of the lymphatic system, an hypothesis suggested by adenopathies to the axilla and the groin. After some of these ganglions were removed, he was told that his joints had been affected. Though it was impossible to confirm that he had lymph cancer, it could not be excluded. Greg went to San Diego for a more intense examination and for an HIV test. During the last series of exams, it was discovered that he was a carrier of human parvovirus. Though this infection is usually benign, it hit Strock hard. He was sleeping twelve to eighteen hours a day and was drained of all energy.

These symptoms persisted for almost the entire year and he was not able to think about his cycling career until December. Chris Carmichael called and told him that, if he felt better, he should try to get back in training. It was still possible

for him to participate in the team time trial for the Olympic Games in Barcelona in a few months. Despite all his efforts, Strock never managed to get back to his former level of fitness. His body wasn't capable of meeting the requirements of elite cycling. He raced a little in 1992, a little more in 1993, but even his best results were below his junior performances. After fighting for nearly three years, he had to face the facts. Competition was over for him. He took up his studies again, managed to get into medical school and was there full time in 1997. One afternoon in 1998, during his second year in medical school, everything became clear to him.

"We were following a class on steroids, anabolics and corticosteroids, such as cortisone. And I said to myself: 'Oh, but what was this cortisone extract?' I had never really thought over my past in cycling, but I suddenly asked myself a question: 'What did they tell me?' I had discovered that cortisone extract doesn't exist. Either it's cortisone or it's not cortisone. I also realized that people with no medical training were involved. Who could be sure that they used new syringes? I blew my stack and said to my wife, Erica, 'I really have to get in touch with someone about this.'"

To what degree could the medications he was administered and the drugs, to which he fell victim, have contributed to the extreme form of parvovirus he contracted? "It is difficult to find a certain cause because parvovirus is rather common. But the risk of suffering symptoms like mine are very low. When you know 60% to 80% of the population is infected with parvovirus, but that only a very small minority is seriously affected by it, you ask yourself questions. Maybe I was already a carrier of this virus, maybe these medical practices destroyed my immune system and let this virus go on a rampage. I am almost certain that when they pretended to give me cortisone extract, that were actually giving me cortisone. This makes a lot of cortisone, a lot of immunodepressors. My main question is the following: What were in all those other injections? Will I ever know? We were dealing with people who would have injected us with antifreeze if they thought it would make us go faster, people who were out of control."

In the summer of 2000, Greg Strock decided to proceed with a civil action against the US Cycling Federation and René Wenzel. Erich Kaiter and Gerrik Latta did likewise. Lawyers for the Federation and Wenzel pleaded for the dismissal of the complaint since the time of the supposed damage exceeded the statute of limitations in civil matters (seven years). Today, the two parties are awaiting the decision of the judge, but it seems that the matter will end up in court.

Face to face with Dr. Greg Strock, one is impressed by his shy dignity and his integrity. If he instituted these proceedings, it's because he has the feeling that what happened to him in 1990, and to other cyclists, is quite simply a systematic matter of doping, a scandal perpetuated by the highest authorities in American cycling and its accredited coaches. In his case, Strock thinks that the substances that were administered to him made him seriously ill, prematurely ending what could have been a great sports career. "I could have easily just turned away from all this. I've made my start in medicine and I don't need financial compensation. But the stakes are more important. Everyone points a finger at the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, and now at China. But we don't want to clean up our

own act. What was inflicted on us in the name of medicine was absolutely reprehensible, and if I accept it, would this be a good way to start a medical career? I have to do it."

Lance Calls Greg

When Lance Armstrong found out during an interview in April 2001 that Strock was lodging a complaint against the Cycling Federation and Wenzel, he showed surprise. "That the affair comes out ten years later, yes, that surprises me. I was surprised that he waited so long, surprised also by the accusations. I don't know the details. My wife [ex-wife now] Kristin saw a program on television about this subject and told me that they talked about steroids and the whole thing. I have only one question: if you received anabolic steroids, how could it be possible that you didn't test positive? But this is why we have a judicial system, they will have to go in front of a court and show evidence. If they have it, they'll win and get money. Well, maybe they're right. Did I also see things like this. Did I find a pill in my energy bar? Absolutely not. It's ridiculous."

At the time, one of the first reports about Strock's complaint confirmed that the human parvovirus is correlated 90% of the time to cancer of the testicles.⁵ This allusion to testicular cancer makes a connection between Strock and the best-known sports figure who suffered from this same cancer, Lance Armstrong. Other articles presented Strock as a former teammate of the Texan and Armstrong showed concern about the consequences.

"Strock is a good guy," Lance declared. "I called him because I found myself implicated in this. If you want to talk about anything to do with American cycling, my name comes up. So it was said 'A teammate of Lance Armstrong, same time, same period, everything's the same.' That's why I called Greg. I said to him: 'Listen, you know as well as I do, we were never on the same team. You participated in the race in Moscow, but I'm one year older than you and I race on the road. It's completely different. You have to make the distinction.'"

Already involved in a judicial battle against the American Federation and René Wenzel, Strock didn't want Armstrong making a complaint against him. After his telephone call, he took time to clarify the situation in an interview with Charles Pelkey for the American monthly magazine, *Velo News*. "People make a connection between Lance and me, and there is no reason to make this connection. We were teammates in the juniors. He was one year older than me and he never had any dealings with this coach [Wenzel]."

The Dark Hand

Strock was in the class of 1990; Lance was in the preceding class, and his coach was Chris Carmichael. "Completely different," Armstrong underlines. "No reason to make the connection," explains Strock.

In the official complaint lodged by Strock in 2000 in front of a court of justice in

Denver, the following paragraph appears:

"On August 22, 1990 in Spokane, Washington, Wenzel brought Strock into the motel room of another coach of the Cycling Federation. At this time, this coach did not have any diploma or authorization. Wenzel had explained to Strock that he was going to see this other coach so that he could get another injection of what had been presented as "cortisone extract." The other coach got out a case, put it at the foot of the bed, and opened it. The case was full of vials and syringes. The coach selected one vial and one syringe, and put the syringe in the vial to suck up the liquid. Strock was lying on his stomach and was given the shot in his buttock. Under Wenzel's supervision, the other coach was the last person that Strock saw holding the syringe before getting the shot."

At the time of our interview in Indianapolis, Strock talked to us about this injection in Spokane. "I was told that it was cortisone extract. René took me to see this other coach. I can't really talk about this coach now. I think that this will come out at the hearings, but I had the impression that he was well prepared to do what he did, because he was ready in a blink of an eye. It was a hard briefcase, full of many different products. He was very informed, had everything at his fingertips. It was the briefcase he took with him on most on his trips and to the races. I did not think he was doing anything new when he attended to me."

In November 2000, in an article that appeared in the *Orange County Register*, the journalist Scott Reid identified this coach as Chris Carmichael, without the latter denying it. Questioned by Charles Pelkey of *Velo News* about his presence in Spokane, Chris Carmichael explained, after a brief hesitation, that he did not remember whether or not he was in Spokane. When Pelkey specified that some elements established that an out-of-court settlement was concluded between Strock and the "other coach" and asked him if his name had recently appeared in a complaint, Carmichael, after hesitating again, replied, "No comment." To Pelkey's last question about whether an amicable settlement had been reached, Carmichael put forward another blunt refusal: "My lawyer does not allow me to comment on these events."

"I Didn't Ask Him"

In April 2001, I interviewed Lance Armstrong about Strock's complaint and the role of Chris Carmichael.

"Have you spoken to Chris about this [the accusation that he injected Greg Strock with 'cortisone extract']?"

"I talked to Chris... Chris is always my main advisor; I talk to him all the time."

"Did Chris tell you whether or not he was the coach who injected Strock in Spokane?"

"What interests me is that you blow everything out of proportion, you dramatize it like he injected this kid with EPO."

"No, Greg Strock thought it was cortisone extract."

"There's a big difference between what he thought and what it was."

"But what was it Chris said to you? Did he talk to you about it?"

"Oh, Chris is completely innocent. Chris Carmichael is really too intelligent to give cortisone to a junior. I'm 100% sure of it. I will believe it until I die, absolutely."

"Why do you think that Chris's name did not appear on the complaint filed by Strock?"

"You'll have to ask Chris or Greg Strock. I'm not their advisor. I'm nobody's lawyer. I don't know."

"Is it true that Chris made an arrangement [financial] with Greg Strock so that his name stayed out of it?"

"Ask Chris or Greg."

"Chris didn't tell you?"

"No."

"Didn't you ask him? Didn't you ever discuss it?"

"As far as I'm concerned, it was a matter between Greg Strock and René Wenzel."

"If Chris made an arrangement, would you be shocked?"

"Once again, I'm not his lawyer. I don't know the details. Would I be shocked? I never even thought about it."

"Let's suppose if Chris paid so that his name did not appear in a doping case, would that show that he had something to hide?"

"It's a supposition."

"But that wouldn't be good, would it?"

"At the same time, is it good that Greg Strock takes money like this? You can turn the question around. Is it a question of money or principle?"

"Has Chris already given you vitamin injections?"

"Absolutely not."

"Never?"

"Never."

"So, it would be surprising if he gave an injection to someone else?"

"Yes."

"Surely you've asked him: 'Chris, did you give a shot to this guy?'"

"Actually, I didn't ask him."

Culture and Dependencies

"I didn't care if it was just a \$100 cash prize, I would tear the legs off the other riders to get at it."

Lance Armstrong,

It's Not About the Bike, p. 28.

Phil Anderson, questioned by telephone in February 2004, remembered the 1993 Tour de France, the first one Lance Armstrong rode in, very precisely. The Australian, who had been a top international cyclist for ten years, knew all the peloton. In 1981 he became the first cyclist of his country to wear the yellow jersey and, since then, his aggressive temperament enabled him to win many races on different terrains. A hunter of classics (winner of the Amstel Gold Race in 1983, the Swiss Grand Prix in 1984, Blois-Chaville in 1986, second in the Flandres Tour in 1985 and 1988, second in the Liège-Bastogne-Liège in 1984), Anderson was also awarded prizes in the stage competitions (victory in the Critérium du Dauphiné Libéré and the Tour de Suisse in 1985), finishing twice in the Tour de France in fifth place (1982 and 1985). In the twilight of his career, he saw things changing. Maybe because he felt he was close to retiring, he took a special interest in Armstrong, thinking to find an opportunity to still be of use to his team. The two men had met the previous year, in 1992, when they were at a Motorola training camp in Santa Rosa, California, where Jim Ochowicz, the team's sports manager, invited Phil. Armstrong, still an amateur, had left the triathlon for cycling and was preparing for the Olympic Games in Barcelona. Anderson was struck by the fact that, though everyone predicted Armstrong would be a triathlon star, he decided to change to the bike. Anderson had a feeling he was going to like Armstrong and thought that he could help him find his place among the professionals. That's actually what happened. They shared the same room, talked about races, and the demands of the sport. The young man was enriched by the contact with the old pro.

The 1993 Tour started out in Puy du Fou, the well-known theme park of Vendée. What does Anderson still remember eleven years later? Not the refreshing stage win of the young Texan in Verdun. Not the mountain stages where he trained the 21-year-old novice in the hills or in the discovery of himself. What is still engraved in his memory is a scene that took place behind the scenes. The evening before their departure, the participating teams were presented to the public during a ceremony. Anderson, Armstrong, and their seven teammates were waiting off stage until the official speaker, Daniel Mangeas, called for them, and most of them were talking excitedly while awaiting their turn.

"We were standing there, and Lance whispered in my ear: 'This is cycling, this is the life.' Thousands of people were gathered outside, the host was warming up the crowd while the orchestra played, images were projected on a giant screen and Lance seemed to adore it. He was a boy with shining eyes who had arrived exactly where he wanted to be. He was at ease, very sure of himself; he also had his straight talk, this Texan impertinence. If he hadn't been the leader of a cycling team, he could have been a political leader or the head of a company. The night before the start of his first Tour, he was there as if to say: 'This is the world that I belong to.' This is what sticks in my mind."

A Name, a Prediction, an Autograph

In the morning of the sixteenth day of the 1993 Tour, I was driving in the Departure Village of Avranches, in the Manche, when Lance Armstrong arrived. The Village was a protected area where orchestras, shows and stands with local specialties mix with the sponsors' white tents. You could only get in with an official certification or an invitation issued by a sponsor. The cyclists often came to get a coffee, read the newspaper in the shade of a parasol, talk with their peers or to journalists, or even get their hair cut. Lance Armstrong today is too well known to go to the Village but this was not the case in 1993. Then he was just a young American who was participating in his first Tour, a kid who had never been at such a celebration before and wanted to taste everything.

This particular morning in Avranches, dressed in a jersey with the stars and stripes of a United States champion, he rode into the Village on his bike, while I watched. He was a new face, but nevertheless people had heard about him. It was known that he was a good amateur, a solid young man, who was said to have a promising future. And then there was his name, Armstrong, which you couldn't forget. Two of his predecessors, Louis and Neil, have passed into posterity. Maybe, in his own way, the young cyclist would also move heaven and earth. He had just arrived in the reserved enclosure when an Italian journalist from *Gazzetta dello Sport*, the Milanese sports daily, approached him: "Lance, Lance, tell me, who is your favorite for the stage today?" At that moment two young women in their twenties passed in front of the American, feigning indifference. "Wow!" he said, looking at them, trying to attract their attention. But they walked on by.

The Italian journalist had asked his question at a bad time. But the two women disappeared in the crowd after a few seconds, and the young Texan finally answered. "Sciandri," he said, "I believe the stage will go to my teammate Max Sciandri and I will do everything I can to help him." The journalist made a note of the prediction while Armstrong looked around. His feet firmly planted on the ground, hands on the handlebars, the youngest cyclist at the competition seemed charged by the desire to become someone and by an almost insatiable thirst for life. An American in Europe avid to learn the existing codes, but just as determined to remain an American. An ambitious, intelligent, interesting kid. But all the same, a kid.

This morning he talked about the race, explaining that he liked each day more than the last. The prologue of the departure had been his worst day because he expected a lot more of himself. But to his dismay, he fell apart. A brutal introduction, as though the Tour de France kicked this young hothead's butt. In the night that followed his introduction, he found himself down and out, so demoralized he could barely speak. But with each passing day this first experience moved further into the past and he started to hope again. Maybe he would manage to show he had guts, to prove to Europeans that he wasn't just another cyclist like the others, make them understand that he wasn't here to be an extra. While he talked of rekindled hope, the two French women appeared with a paper and pencil. "Mr. Armstrong, an autograph please!" He was obviously delighted by the interest that he aroused and very happy to write his name on a blank piece of paper. While playing with the pen, he tried to detain them, but, with

an innate sense of seduction, the two young women slipped away and continued their walk as though they had something more important to do.

At that moment, you could forget that Lance Armstrong had to race 87 miles (140 km) nonstop from Avranches to Péronne. Where Max Sciandri would not finish the winner.

Not Made for the Tour

Anderson liked Armstrong. He could see that the young Texan had courage, power, panache. He was someone who raced to beat you, not to show you respect. In the past, Anderson had been that kind of kid too, and looking at Armstrong, he was reminded of what he had been. And he liked that. He also thought he knew Armstrong and this type of young man well. "He was made for one-day races. I thought he could never, really never, win the Tour de France. Even he didn't think he could win it. He didn't know how to climb, he didn't know how to race in the time trial. Two essential elements to win the Tour. He was able to do something in the small-scale stage races and win stages in the big races. And nothing was more exciting than racing with him at that time. 'Can I attack now? Can I attack now?' If you asked him to wait, explaining that he was not out of the woods yet, he would start all over again a few minutes later. 'And now, can I attack? Can I attack?' He was avid to participate in the breakaways. You couldn't help admiring his enthusiasm and motivation. And he had a lot of power. Not a lot of style, but, me neither, I didn't have a lot at his age."

For Tyler Hamilton, the certainty that Armstrong couldn't win the Tour de France was reinforced again after the first ten days of the race. In the 59-km time trial around Madine Lake in the Meuse, Armstrong was six minutes behind the winner of the stage, the future winner of the Tour, the Spaniard Miguel Indurain. The problem was less his time than the fact that he gave his all. How could he be so far behind the best? Two days later, he rode for six hours through three passes before arriving at Serre-Chevalier, where he registered 21 minutes behind the cyclists who dominated the stage, Switzerland's Tony Rominger and Indurain. During the mountain stages, Anderson raced at Armstrong's side and watched over him in the most difficult stretches. In the evening of his first high altitude stage, Armstrong was in a complete state of exhaustion. The next morning he wasn't any better, but had to endure another day in the Alps. The second mountain stage took the cyclists to the summit of the Bonette-Restefond Pass, the highest in Europe, to be followed by a cyclist race where one road climbs to an altitude of 9,193 feet (2,802 meters). This time, Anderson and Armstrong finished 28 minutes behind Rominger and Indurain.

During these two days in the mountain, nothing foretold that he would someday be a climber.

Verdun, the Bayonet Charge

A day of rest on the Tour de France 1993. Armstrong agreed to meet me in the Motorola team's hotel, the Château de la Commanderie, 16 km south of Grenoble. The hotel was immersed in an atmosphere of bygone days, bathed in a sweet serenity, with chairs around the swimming pool, low tables on the lawn, imposing trees. His teammate Andy Hampsten was sitting down talking to visitors. Sean Yates, Motorola's British cyclist, joked with a photographer friend. A Columbian journalist had come to see Alvaro Mejia, and Armstrong was seated, legs stretched out, ready to tell his story. Words poured out of his mouth in a torrent, he had so much to say and the feeling that there wouldn't be enough time to say it all. He was full of life, so ignorant of dangers. This thirst to be someone, to win respect, stature, money, not to be just a face in the crowd, dwarfs any thought, any emotion.

The training staff of his team wanted him to get an idea of the Tour's weight, its size, but not to the point of being crushed, not to the point that these lessons ended up being too painful. Lance gave up after this second Alpine stage, taken from the race by his Texan friends, the late JT Neal and his wife Frances. But he did not quit the race without leaving his mark, the Armstrong imprint: never accept anonymity. His performance took place in the eighth stage, which finished in Verdun.

"Lance," his teammate Frankie Andreu said to him after the fourth or fifth day of the race, "I see a stage for you, I see one."

"Verdun?"

"It's for you."

"I know it, I know it."

The cyclists needed him at that point. The day before, in the Perrone-Chalons-sur-Marne stage, seven cyclists broke away before the finish, three of whom were from Motorola: Anderson, the Italian Sciandri, and the Columbian Mejia. No one imagined that victory could escape Sciandri, the most watched-over sprinter of the group of seven, except maybe Sciandri himself. "I was exhausted keeping the breakaway together during the last kilometer," Anderson regrets. "But Sciandri lost the sprint. Everyone had some strange expressions that evening, no one was happy."

The stage leading to Verdun took place the next day, and Armstrong understood. The short climb of the Douaumont slope, located before the finish, was made for him. It would eliminate most of the sprinters and if he could arrive at the top with the attackers, he had a good chance of winning. Lance rode with all his strength and found himself near the summit in a breakaway of six riders. "We had just begun to work together, six guys who were moving in perfect cohesion. I didn't say that I was going to win the sprint, I said there was no question of losing it."

The sprint finally came down to a duel between Armstrong and an experienced Frenchman, Ronan Pensec, a yellow jersey for a few days during the 1990 Tour de France. There were only 200 meters to go and the Breton cyclist was a length ahead. Penned in against the barriers to the right of the road, Armstrong still

wanted to get through. "Pensec cut to the right, and I said to myself that he didn't have the right to do that, you have to follow a straight line on the last 200 meters [if not, the race commissioners can disqualify you]. I remember looking when he approached me. He couldn't have been nearer. We were 150 meters from the finish, but he kept pinning me against the barriers and I asked myself what was I going to do. I decided to scream as loud as possible, maybe to give him a little scare. Even if you are the last of the assholes, you hesitate a little if someone screams. He had a second of hesitation and I got through. That's what I needed." Armstrong sprang forward from a very narrow lane. He was going so fast at the finish line that he had just enough time to lift his two arms in victory. A few days later, in the garden of Château de la Commanderie, he tried to explain how he felt at the moment of victory. "Physically, I'm not more gifted than anyone else, but it's just this desire, this passionate will to win. I'm on my bike, I become angry and I scream for around five seconds. I'm trembling like a fool and my eyes bug out. I sweat a little more and my heart is pounding at 200 beats per minute. It's not physical, it's not the legs, it's not the lungs. It's the heart, it's the soul, just the guts."

His teammates were very grateful to him, a gratitude that was often repeated in the future. "Lance's victory that day was very important to the team," Anderson remembers. "Motorola had invited a bigwig from the American Army, a four-star general. He came with his bodyguards and his car with bullet-proof windows. For him, it was important to be there for Lance's stage victory. Armstrong took a risk on the sprint but he made it."

European-style

In Europe, cycling has always been seen as an extraordinary effort. This sport was born on the old continent. Professional cycling grew up on the small roads of France, Belgium, and Italy. Black and white photos of cyclists in wool jerseys with an emergency inner tube around their torso, their faces imprinted with suffering, are the images that defined cycling. Their suffering was an offering, a gift freely given from the cyclist to their public. They got themselves involved in God knows what inferno, enduring the worst tortures, most of the time with no other gratification than the admiration of fans. This sport was so hard that it contributed to every facet of a man's character. It tested the nobility of his character, it forged his capacity to endure hardships. It also presented the cyclist with the temptation of taking refuge in less admirable artifices, and, if by getting into the drug cabinet the athlete could relieve his suffering a little, who could blame the poor wretch that succumbed to it? They are called the slaves of the road, but at the same time they are asked to be paragons of virtue.

Sometimes pedaling until nightfall on cobblestone or waterlogged paths, cyclists developed their own ethics. Probably no worse than conventional ethics, but certainly no better. From the beginning the cyclists' ethics were a variable geometry. Doping was always part of the game, like cheating. The cyclists saw things differently. They thought they had the right to doping. In such a trying

sport, who would say that it was bad to ease the suffering? Yes, these products could maybe end up killing them, but in the meantime they let them live. They took money for letting a rival win because they preferred an assured win to the risk of a fleeting victory. And behind a euphemism like an "understanding," the little arrangements between friends on the same side were always part of the existing rites.

Some American cyclists have had a great deal of difficulty adapting to the European culture. Greg LeMond, for example, tells how the Italian Moreno Argentin offered his services, for financial return, in the final of the 1984 World Road Championship in Barcelona. "Argentin was drafting behind me during the entire race, he followed me like a shadow. I finally asked him, 'Hey, what are you doing?' After a moment, he explained that he could help me become world champion if I agreed to pay him \$10,000. I was furious that anyone could imagine such a thing, and I thought 'Go to hell!' After the race, LeMond made a public complaint, but Argentin denied his accusations. Greg was pointed at for having spoken about the sport's hidden face. He was treated like someone who had ruined a dinner by telling an off-color story. LeMond, Andy Hampsten and the Canadian Steve Bauer never submitted to the European mentality. In Barcelona, the world title finally went to the Belgian Claudy Criquelion.

In the mid-1980s, cortisone, testosterone and caffeine were prohibited substances that were regularly abused. They helped cyclists recuperate and improved performances, but weren't powerful enough for their users to be able to always beat those who didn't take them. When LeMond won the 1986 Tour de France, no one doubted his performance. As for Hampsten, if he knew about current practices, he was determined to stay away from substance abuse. "At the beginning of the season, a lot of guys were really strong, but with the passing months and races, you could see a large number decline. Whatever they took was not enough for the whole season and I was confident. When the Giro or the Tour de France would come along, I knew that I would be up to competing against them."

LeMond and Hampsten were cyclists of the eighties, a period where clean cyclists still had a chance. With the nineties, erythropoietin (EPO) entered the scene, a product that changed the blood's composition and changed the nature of the competition, as was notoriously demonstrated during the fifteen days of proceedings of the Festina trial in the autumn of 2000. For a clean cyclist, with "clean water" as it's called, it became extremely hard to beat a rival taking EPO. And even more so on the Tour de France.

At Any Price

Lance Armstrong came from a different world than LeMond or Hampsten. Bob, LeMond's father, was a real estate agent; Hampsten's parents were both academics. Armstrong never knew his biological father, hated his stepfather Terry Armstrong, and depended completely on his mother Linda. His childhood was a lot harder than LeMond's or Hampsten's, but, without knowing it, he may have been better prepared for the hardships of European cycling. From his first

years in the peloton, Armstrong never showed a remarkable sense of adaptation. Before his first Tour de France in 1993, the Texan cyclist had already made his mark by adding three important races on the American circuit. Important also in the financial sense because the winner of these three competitions was given an exceptional prize of one million dollars. A rather extraordinary success because these three races, like their final endowment, attracted many European teams. Lance Armstrong treated himself to the first of the three alone, a day's course organized in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The second, West Virginia, took place in a different configuration because it involved a race in stages. It didn't matter. Armstrong and his Motorola team had the prize in their sights. The race lasted five days. Armstrong found himself at the top of the general classification from the start, and the team raced all out to help him win.

According to the New Zealander Stephen Swart, a member of the Coors team at the time, Armstrong's victory in West Virginia was in part facilitated by an arrangement. "I also raced in Pittsburgh," he remembers. "That time, I stayed for a split second at the level of Lance, but I was finally shaken off. In West Virginia, Lance wore the leader's jersey. I was fourth or fifth, I think, but not far behind time-wise, and I got better and better as the stages went by. There were two or three other guys in good positions, like the American Steve Hegg, but the Motorola team must have designated me as their most dangerous adversary. We were approached and someone asked us to come and talk at their hotel. One of my teammates and I finally decided to see what they had to offer, and one evening we went to meet them. We found ourselves in Lance's room with a seasoned professional. I was surprised that they offered us money because I didn't think I could beat Lance, even if I did give him a run for his money. He actually had a very solid team around him. They offered us \$50,000 if we didn't try to beat them. It was a rather good deal for us. Either they thought that they could lose control of the race, or they just wanted to guarantee the final victory. What was \$50,000 when you were about to win a million? If Lance lost the prize, we wouldn't get our \$50,000. I imagine it was well thought out on their part. Thinking about it, I believe the experience of this veteran, who knew it all, played a role. Win one dollar without having to hit the pedals too hard..."

For Swart and his teammate the proposition was interesting. Race prizes were not very high and they were not at all sure they could beat Armstrong. Of course, if the latter were to lose the last competition in the race for the prize, the deal would be off, but they were ready to give it a try. "The US Pro Championship took place in Philadelphia," Swart continued. "A road race of 260 km, difficult to buy because there were a lot of participants and there were many who wanted to be the new American champion. The track included a short steep climb, Manayunk Hill, perfect for Lance because he had an explosive finishing kick." The race cleared up when Armstrong pulled away from a small group of cyclists with whom he had worked to get to the decisive breakaway. "Of course, our agreement had to remain confidential because the prize of one million dollars was guaranteed by an insurance company. If it came out, it would amount to fraud, and the insurance company would have refused to pay. Arrangements are always negotiated under the table; they are gentlemen's agreements, with nothing in

writing. They paid \$50,000 to one of us, and we split it. I can assure you that the money was paid."

Questioned about this episode in May 2004, Roy Knickman, who was an experienced cyclist also at the time on the Coors team, gave the following response by telephone: "Actually, I didn't participate in this West Virginia race, but I heard talk about a deal that was made. If you are asking me if Stephen Swart told the truth about this episode, I would say yes. If you asked me if he was a decent man, I would answer you yes, absolutely."

"I'm Going to Be the Bad Guy"

Everything didn't go exactly as planned. To receive the small fortune given to the victor of the three competitions, two options presented themselves to Lance Armstrong: either pocket \$600,000 immediately or get the full amount by accepting payments of \$50,000 a year for twenty years. With his usual pragmatism, Armstrong verified the financial solidity of the paying company, Lloyd's of London, and chose the first option: \$600,000 up front. How to split the money was the next problem. According to a principle usually adhered to by cycling teams, the total annual amount of prizes was put in a common pot and divvied up at the end of the season, each cyclist receiving a share proportional to the number of races he participated in. But Armstrong said that a prize of \$600,000 couldn't be considered as an ordinary prize.

He sought advice from two of the oldest Motorola cyclists, Phil Anderson and Sean Yates. But they didn't know what to tell him. In the Motorola team, the designated "accountant," the one that handled the figures, was Norman Alvis. It was his job to manage the prizes, but if the case was considered extraordinary, his handling was also. At the time of the three American races for one million dollars, another team racing for Motorola was involved in the Giro, the Italian Tour. If the system in place was respected, it had as much right to the prize as those who participated in the races. However, in Armstrong's mind, the decision was not long in coming: only the West Virginia race should be taken into account because it had demanded an enormous effort from the team for five days, as Lance Armstrong explained me in July 1993: "You have maybe five spectators along the road, no, not even five. And it was very hard to win the race. Several times my teammates had to go all out, they had to keep on top of it, control the situation for me. At the same time, a team was racing in the Italian Tour. Nine guys. My position was based on the fact that it was a unique situation that should be handled in a unique way. The ones who were there in West Virginia and were under pressure to help me deserved more money. No way the ones who were on the other side of the world should get the same share. No way I didn't say, 'Hey! I want \$599,000 and do what you want with the rest.' I didn't want one cent more than the others who raced in West Virginia. But this money was different and that was my position."

At the team meetings the discussions continued. What to do? Finally, Armstrong put an end to the controversy. "I said, 'Hey! It's my money, I'm handling things.

I'm going to be the bad guy here. I'll take care of it."

At the time, Lance Armstrong, 21 years old, was still completing his apprenticeship inside his first professional team.

Changing Mounts

When, for the first time, Armstrong reviewed his Motorola teammates, his eyes logically stopped on Anderson, the oldest cyclist on the team. Phil Anderson was an old seasoned pro who raced on French, Dutch and Belgium teams. He couldn't be fooled and Armstrong wanted to learn. It was not surprising that the two of them got on so well because the natural impetus and competitiveness of the American attracted the Australian. They had come to cycling under similar circumstances, i.e., without knowing much about the sport's history before coming to Europe. They shared the same desire to get the most out of it. Anderson had already succeeded, and Armstrong had decided not to fail. Because of his career and his excellent results with Motorola in 1991, Anderson enjoyed a special status. Even though the 1992 season hadn't been as good, it was satisfactory and the team's future was a little more secure. In 1993, Anderson spent a lot of time showing Armstrong the tricks of the trade, and to focus a little less on his own results. This was a little dangerous because the more the kid learned his way around, the less he would need his mentor. In the middle of the 1994 season, Anderson realized that Jim Ochowicz didn't want him on the team for the 1995 season. His name was brought up in connection with the Commonwealth Games and Anderson had to insist in order to get Motorola's authorization to participate in the games that summer.

On Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Anderson won a gold medal for Australia but only met with a cold shoulder on his return to Motorola.

"They told me that they would send me a program at the end of the season, but I never received it. Then they sent me a little note that said they wouldn't need me for the end of the season races. The only instructions I received was where to leave my bike and some wheels. Towards the end of the season, they organized a training camp in Côme, Italy, only a few hours by road from where I lived in the south of France. I said to myself, 'OK, I'm going to go when the cyclists are there, give them the bike and take advantage of the time to say good-bye to my mates.' They didn't want it: 'No, it would be better if you come when the cyclists aren't here.'"

After my departure, Lance started hanging out with Sean Yates. To be successful, you have to be tough and Lance could be. I didn't keep in contact with him, I didn't see him again, I haven't spoken to him since then, I was working for Australian TV at the time of the Sydney Olympics in 2000. There was a press conference the week before the road race. I saw him in the hallway, but I couldn't talk to him there were so many people crowded around him. Now and then I see Steve Bauer, I talk to Greg LeMond and we send e-mails now and then. During the Tour de France, I also saw two other former teammates, the Dane, Dag-Otto Lauritzen, and Sean Yates. Lance and I were close when we raced together, but

that's about it."

A Rainbow Appears

Jim Ochowicz dedicated the best part of his life to cycling. He was at the origin of the American team, 7-Eleven, at the beginning of the 1980s, establishing a model for Motorola and US Postal, the organizations that followed. He could be described as the founder of the professional American teams in Europe. Twenty-five years ago, the challenge for him was to attract American sponsors to a very European sport. First, they had to be convinced to give money, but that wasn't the most difficult thing. The hardest part was to see that the sponsors got something in return. 7-Eleven had a good team. Davis Phinney could win sprints, Hampsten was a cyclist with immense talent and a brilliant climber; Ron Kiefel could sometimes beat the best and these three cyclists were backed by a group of solid professionals, almost all of whom were Americans.

Ochowicz, the team's general manager, did the managing when the team raced in the United States. Mike Neel, an American who had raced in the European peloton, was its sports manager in Europe. Dr. Massimo Testa, a brilliant young Italian who had trained in soccer, was the team doctor. The management of the 7-Eleven team knew that there was a European doping culture, but it was dogmatic about it. Their team had to stay clean. The principles of their most talented cyclist, Andy Hampsten, helped them do it.

"I remember the 1985 Giro (Italian Tour)," Mike Neel recounts. "One evening at the hotel, Hampsten was so exhausted that he collapsed on the floor. He had absorbed an energy drink, Body Fuel, thinking that that would sustain him. He did not eat well and he did not consume enough sugar. After he was back on his feet a bit more, we told him that he needed a perfusion of a glucose solution. He didn't want it and we spent an hour explaining to him that it was necessary. For him, it was a culture from another planet, and he didn't want any part of it. He wanted to be sure that it was only going to be sugar water. We assured him that that was all it was, we pleaded that it wasn't at all illegal or immoral. But it took a lot of persuading."

Ochowicz and Neel managed an irreproachable medical program that reflected their conception of the sport. "They were strangers to the European culture," Greg LeMond underlines. "You have to understand the psychology of the American cyclist. We didn't know this history of the sport, these traditions. The idea that you had to start taking these things at seventeen or eighteen years old was not part of our cyclist baggage." It's true that there was too little money involved in American cycling for it to succumb to temptation. The only big stakes were the Olympic medals.

7-Eleven threw in the towel in 1990 and Ochowicz looked for a new sponsor. It turned out to be Motorola. For this new team, Anderson's recruitment by Ochowicz was important. The Australian was still good enough to win and, even if most of his victories in 1991 were won on smaller scale races, his results

enabled the American organization to keep afloat. The year 1993 was the team's best year, with flattering results in the Tour de France. The victory of Armstrong at Verdun, fourth place in the general classification for the Columbian Alvaro Mejia, and eighth for Hampsten. "Alvaro was a very talented cyclist," Hampsten recalls. "And I knew that he was clean. His fourth place in this Tour cost him extraordinary effort. Alvaro didn't like living so far from his home, and he asked for a lot of money to continue the next year. His position was simple: 'If I get it, I stay; if not, I go back to Columbia.'"

This 1993 Tour saw the third consecutive victory of Miguel Indurain. Tony Rominger, heir apparent, was the only one to challenge him, while the Polish cyclist Zenon Jaskula was an unexpected outsider on the podium, ahead of Mejia. A month later, at the end of August, the Motorola team indirectly experienced its greatest victory, when Armstrong put on the rainbow jersey of the road champion of the world in Oslo, a competition for national teams. For Jim Ochowicz, this result should convince Motorola to change its mind. The company, just about to terminate its partnership, agreed to continue the venture. Under these circumstances, the only victory that counted was to survive and, after its reprieve in 1993, the team could finally look to the future with optimism. But the sport was about to change eras and the Motorola team would not escape controversy.

Taking the Leap?

"[Festina] was an isolated case. It's easy to say that everyone knew about. It is not true. I never heard such a thing at Motorola or Cofidis."

Lance Armstrong,
Le Monde, April 19, 2001.

An evening in November 2003 in Auckland. I meets Swart in a hotel in the city center and he drives us to the port where the yachts rock gently on their anchors. Is it here that the *Rainbow Warrior* sank? Ah, those French... He remembers. Eight years ago, Stephen Swart earned his living riding a bike. He lived in Europe then and the Tour de France was for him the most exhilarating time of the year. When he stopped cycling, he, his wife Jan, and the children went back to their native New Zealand. Stephen worked for awhile in a company associated with cycling, then he started his own real estate promotion company. He liked being his own boss and earned a good living, but the transition hadn't been easy. He

gave the best years of his adult life to professional cycling, and he left it with the feeling of having been deceived. The culture of doping is responsible for that. What could have happened to him if he was committed 100% to a program, how far could he have gone? He could never answer this question.

The return had been difficult. The Swarts didn't have a lot of money, and if it had been easy to unpack the suitcases, it was harder to deal with their contents. "I asked myself, 'Did I really learn the profession?' In other words, did I know enough on the medical plan? Maybe I wasn't a good enough pharmacist? But why was it necessary to learn that? You do not get into sports thinking that you have to learn this type of thing. You don't go to school saying to yourself: 'Well, I want to be a racing cyclist, and to be one, I'll have to know medicine and get a pharmacist's diploma.' I felt that I had more than average abilities, that if you remove everything and just look at the guys naked on their bikes, I would have had an advantage. I knew I had this advantage, but that, with the professional cyclists, it meant nothing."

This feeling of having been deceived only started to fade during the last months, thanks to his success as a real estate promoter in an environment where competition is tough. He found his self-esteem again and he is happy to have moved on. Stephen is not the type to brag, but he is quite satisfied with the turn his life has taken.

Swart made his professional debut in 1987, with the English team ANC Halfords. Unfortunately for him and his teammates, the team was not up to his ambition. After six months, he no longer got his monthly salary of £500. Before the team went bankrupt, the cyclists were taken in hand by Angus Fraser, soigneur in the old style, who injected them with anonymous substances. "We had complete confidence in this guy, because we thought he knew what he was doing. Like if you go to the doctor when you're sick, you have confidence in him. You think it can't be very bad since it doesn't test positive. And I wasn't a big enough cyclist to have the right to ask questions. I remember two cyclists from the team who carried their own briefcases, and it wasn't papers that they carted around with them."

A Year in Belgium

After a year of heartbreak with ANC Halfords, Swart joined the Belgian team SEFB in 1988, which was sponsored by a bank. He left the north of England to go to Liège, France. SEFB was a modest organization, which had to struggle to get invited to the biggest races. Its sports manager was Ferdinand Bracke, a glorious old guy, record holder for the hour in 1967, winner of the Spanish Tour in 1971, third in the Tour de France in 1968. Among his teammates were Johan Bruyneel, the future sports manager of Lance Armstrong and the US Postal team. Bruyneel was then a young professional, who was riding for the first time in the peloton. He forged himself a good reputation with the amateurs of the Belgian circuit and everyone expected he would be one of the strongest on the team. With its small budget, SEFB could not afford an accredited doctor and doping

was a matter of personal choice for each cyclist. Naturally, the team soigneurs offered their help. "One evening, I went to a soigneur's room," Swart remembers. "All the products were there and the cyclists came to use them as they wanted. Another evening during the Tour de Suisse, we were sitting in a room and the soigneur came in with medications. Everyone helped themselves. The guys filled up these enormous syringes like you use for horses and shot up. I can tell you it wasn't the first time. It was the culture."

Swart doesn't know what he took. Because he was young, and he didn't speak Flemish or French, he was left to himself. Afraid of medications and ignorant of their use, he avoided them. This is before the time of EPO, when a clean cyclist could still rival the ones that used substances. Swart finished thirteenth in the general classification of the Tour de Suisse. In the big mountain stages he was equal to the best. After the finish, he went back to Belgium by car with Bracke. They talked a lot. "Bracke was crazy; he couldn't even drive normally. He was anxious over nothing. Something in him wasn't working right. During this trip he told me about all the big projects he had for me."

This season ended prematurely for Swart, whose mother became seriously ill and died two weeks after his return to New Zealand. He worked in a bicycle shop in Auckland, and slowly got back his desire to train. Around the end of the year, he decided to start his career in the United States, a place Swart appreciated because the races weren't as hard there and the doping culture, which poisoned the scene in Europe, was practically nonexistent. First riding with a California club, he won some races where he was noticed. When Jim Ochowicz, the sports manager of Motorola, offered him a place on the team and an opportunity to return to the European circuit, Swart couldn't resist the temptation. "I guess I was bored in the United States. The same races every year, it wasn't competitive enough. I thought it was the moment to go for double or nothing, succeed or leave it all behind for good. Everything I won was used to pay bills and only left me a little extra. Any reasonable job outside of cycling would have been more interesting financially. I had one chance to make something of my career and I couldn't miss it."

New Product, New World

The world he found upon his return had nothing to do with the one he had left five years earlier.

"In 1994, everything was completely changed. The increase in speed was incredible. Especially in the mountains. In 1988, I had been as good as some of the best. In the ascents, I could stay in the top ten. On the 1988 Tour de Suisse, I was at the summit with the Dutchman Gert-Jan Theunisse and Steven Rooks, the best climbers of the Tour de France three weeks later. And now, though I knew I had made progress, I couldn't keep up. They didn't use the same gear as before. No one put on the little brackets any more. All that had disappeared in five years. Incredible, the level had gone through the ceiling.

I understood pretty fast that I was going to have to face something. I had heard

EPO talked about, the word had made its way to the United States. We knew that it doped the blood, that it increased its oxygen capacity, but I never thought that it could have changed things so much. At Motorola, some of the old guys were a little demoralized. For example, in a race at the beginning of the season like Tirreno-Adriatico [an Italian stage competition held at the beginning of March], we spent a week racing full force, only to survive. Just to finish the race. It was completely crazy.”

Gewiss Full Schuss!

Competition was fake. The teams that used EPO were stronger than those that didn't, and those who used it to the max dominated the races. The Italian team Gewiss-Ballan worked under the medical supervision of the Italian doctor Michele Ferrari. Since the beginning of the 1994 season, its cyclists seemed exceptionally strong. Their superiority was demonstrated to the point of absurdity in the first of the two classics in Ardennes: the Flèche wallonne. At a decisive moment of the race, three of the Gewiss cyclists – Moreno Argentin, Evgeni Berzin and Giorgio Furlan – broke away. Wearing the rainbow jersey of the world champion, Lance Armstrong was in shape that day. He pedaled like a maniac to catch up, but couldn't reach them. He was one of the big losers of the day. No one would have worried about these three cyclists breaking away from the peloton, if they hadn't been members of the same team. For observers, it was unusual. How could one team line up three cyclists in such good shape and so much better than the others? The rest of the peloton tried to follow them, but in vain. To the skeptics, who watched these performances and questioned them, Dr. Ferrari would soon provide a clue. The day after the Flèche wallonne, during a press conference held at the team's hotel, he explained that the EPO used in a reasonable way was no more dangerous than the glass of orange juice he held in his hand. In the beginning of 1991, EPO was banned by the ICU. But there was no test capable of detecting its presence in the urine. Ferrari didn't say that the Gewiss cyclists used EPO, but he inferred it and gave the impression that he tolerated its use to improve performance. And among the peloton, many thought that the Gewiss cyclists used it.

Lance Talks About Doping

A weekday afternoon in April 2001. I met Lance Armstrong at La Fauvelaie Hotel, near Saint-Sylvain d'Anjou in eastern France. The interview was to be almost exclusively devoted to doping. Armstrong agreed to the principle and asked that the lawyer who handled his interests, Bill Stapleton, be present at the interview. During the hour and a half that the interview lasted, Stapleton remained silent, with the exception of one brief interjection.

“At some time you must have understood that cycling had a relationship with doping?”

"Certainly, with stories like the one about Tommy Simpson ⁶, but it wasn't a positive test. When I was with Motorola, Motorola was as white as snow, and I stayed there until 1996. With cyclists like Steve Bauer, Andy Hampsten, admirable, professional, clean cyclists."

"What did you think about the extraordinary performance of the Gewiss-Ballan team in the 1994 Flèche wallonne?"

"You know, at the time, I was exasperated because I was wearing the rainbow jersey and I was near to winning. But a team can be capable of this kind of thing. Gewiss had already had a phenomenal spring, and the team had made constant progress ... When a team begins to win! I believe one can accomplish a lot with training."

"Are you telling me that the day after this race, you were not suspicious, that you believed in it 100%?"

"The morning after, there were obviously articles and talk. But it's never been my thing to start saying, 'They cheated, it's a cheat, it's a team of cheaters.' If that was the case, how could I get up every day and do my job?"

"Didn't you have some doubts when Michele Ferrari, their doctor, said that EPO wasn't any more dangerous than orange juice?"

A long pause.

"Uhhh, no."

"You didn't ask yourself what was EPO?"

"I think that sometimes quotes are taken out of context. Even at the time, I knew that."

"Did you know what EPO was?"

"We're talking about something that goes back seven years. Had I heard anyone talking about it? Probably."

"Ferrari actually said that he had given it to his cyclists?"

"I didn't read the article, I don't know."

"After this period, EPO became something important in cycling, something enormous. At Motorola, were you aware that EPO had become a component of the race?"

"We didn't think about it. It's not a question we asked ourselves. It wasn't an option. Jim Ochowicz was responsible for the program [medical], it was a clean program. Max Testa, the doctor, had set up a clean program and it [EPO] was not part of our medical program."

"Surely, you were upset at the idea that these guys used the product Ferrari had talked about?"

"There's no proof of this. I'm not going to sit down and talk about it. This was years ago. You have to understand that this part of my career, this part of my life, is behind me."

The Doctor's Version

Dr. Massimo Testa treated the Motorola team from 1991 to 1996, throughout the

team's entire existence. Before Motorola, Testa collaborated with 7-Eleven from 1985 to 1990. He was the doctor of this American team which, in 1991, changed sponsors to become Motorola. After 1996, he was medical consultant of the Italian team Asics-CGA, and he worked for the Française des Jeux team in 1997. He was on the Tour de France during the scandal of 1998, and this experience left a deep mark on him. Testa left the world of cycling just after it. Today he practices sports medicine at the UC Davis Medical Center in Sacramento, California. There, in the spring of 2001, he met me in his office at 2805 J Street. This meeting was followed by a telephone conversation, three years later in March 2004. Testa was dogmatic. From spring 1994, most of the cyclists of Motorola had had a certain number of discussions about EPO, the way in which this substance increased performance and the risks it posed for their health if they used it.

"I spoke a lot about this subject with the cyclists. They asked me questions. They knew something was going on. I disagree with everyone who said that we never talked about it. My policy was to minimize the effect of medications on performance and exaggerate the risks for health. I just wanted to discourage them from using this type of thing."

At the time Testa lived in Côme, Italy, where he was a general practitioner. He then saw his undertakings in professional cycling as a hobby that could make him a little extra money. At 7-Eleven he was the same age as a lot of the cyclists and became the friend of young men like Andy Hampsten, Ron Kiefel and Jeff Pierce, American cyclists who also lived in Côme. EPO had not yet hit the peloton. Testa considered this time blessed: Hampsten could win the 88 Giro with a hematocrit value (percent of whole blood that is made up of red blood cells) naturally at 38. "I saw the cyclists and I can swear that they didn't take anything. Like Andy, for example."

But cycling was going to change completely in the nineties and Testa had to get familiar with the pharmacopoeia of sports. "In one way, I was like an ostrich during these years. There were things I didn't want to see. But I had to be informed about what was going on and not be afraid to talk about it. If I would have said that I knew nothing, the Motorola cyclists would have completely excluded me. For them, I would have been a nothing. They test you sometimes by trying to figure out what you know, and I kept myself informed to keep contact with them."

Testa recalls that specific conversations about EPO took place in 1994. "I remember one of these discussions in particular. I no longer remember on what race it was, maybe during training camp. We were gathered in one room. I had photocopied several studies on the effects of a high hematocrit and hemoglobin values. It was the time when Gewiss, who was attributed a hematocrit value of 60%, dominated the classics. And I tried to explain that EPO did not have as much effect as everyone believed.

Finally, I began to have doubts about some of my cyclists. Maybe they were taking something. But proof is one thing and medical secrets another. Even if I detest doping, I don't like to make hasty conclusions. Neither can I base myself on confidential information that I got from the cyclists in a privileged relationship

between doctor and patient. The cyclists were my patients, and I have to stay on their side. My job was to discourage them from taking things, but at the same time to leave the door opened if they had a problem."

Lance Armstrong, who joined Motorola around the end of the 1992 season, worked with Testa for the next three seasons. He also decided to live in Côme, where the team had its European quarters. Now and then he even babysat for the doctor. But, towards the end of his third season on the team, Armstrong started to work with Michele Ferrari. This new arrangement affected his relationship with Testa. "I found out about the situation after Lance had already been involved in it for some time," Testa explained. "He didn't say anything to me, at least not right away. I learned about it through a cyclist who had seen Lance in Ferrare, where he went to meet Ferrari. I thought about it. I was a little disappointed, but in one way I was also relieved. I was paid by the day and with Lance and Kevin [Livingston] with Ferrari, it was that much less work."

Did Testa feel rejected, as though Armstrong had said to him, "Sorry, Doc, you're not good enough?" "Yes, maybe a little. But I have to tell you that I never got angry, I never said the kind of thing you might have expected. We were very different, Lance and I. We have never had a close relationship. We were not on the same wavelength. In fact, for the first time, someone had made me feel that I wasn't part of the same generation as the cyclists. At first I liked him, this young Texan cowboy who knew how to joke with his teammates. But he liked video games, which is not my thing. And he wasn't interested in cross-country or downhill skiing. We were completely different. My ideal sports figure was incarnated in an athlete like Andy Hampsten, a young man who knew how to keep a low profile, who didn't look for big cars or new girlfriends every month. This is the type of champion cyclist I appreciate. Andy and I, we still talk to each other on the telephone."

"Och" Loses His Cool

Steeped in good manners, Jim Ochowicz is more a businessman than a coach fueled on testosterone. But someone who has to convince sponsors cannot stop himself from being emotionally involved, if only because he puts his reputation on the line for the quality of his team. With guys like Lance Armstrong, Andy Hampsten, Phil Anderson, Alvaro Mejia, Sean Yates, and Steve Bauer, Ochowicz was confident in his chances for success in 1994. He thought he had the cyclists he needed to win the spring classics. After having won the title of World Champion in 1993 for his first complete season as a professional in Oslo, Armstrong could only get better. And why couldn't Mejia do better than the fourth place he had gotten in the Tour de France the previous year? Hampsten was always a climber, Anderson knew how to drive a race and there were no stronger, more determined cyclists in all the peloton than Bauer and Yates. However, in the Milan-San Remo, the first serious challenge of the season that fell on the first day of spring, Ochowicz's men were simply not up to the competition. Axel Merckx, the only cyclist on the team attended by Ferrari, was

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the only one from the Motorola team in the lead group, but when another follower of Ferrari, Giorgio Furlan, accelerated at his approach to the finish line, he made short work of the Belgian. Three weeks later, in the Flèche wallonne, Armstrong got near but could not catch up to the three Ferrari rockets of Moreno Argentin, Giorgio Furlan and Evgeni Berzin. Four days later, Anderson was the only one to uphold Motorola's colors in the Liège-Bastogne-Liège, but, once again, it was impossible to beat Ferrari's team and Berzin had a new win at Gewiss.

The cyclists called Ochowicz "Och," a nickname that showed the affection they had for this man, who was polite with everyone. However, this spring things became strained. "Ouch" would be the more appropriate nickname because the team's lack of success irritated the sports manager, who passed his anger on to the cyclists. After Milan-San Remo, he took it out on everyone, except Merckx, reproaching them for not being faster and more determined. After Liège-Bastogne-Liège, he continued to act just as disagreeable and demanded why Anderson, the oldest one on the team, was the only one to be in the lead. The season was advancing but the results did not improve. Ochowicz's humor oscillated between gloomy and foul.

In the beginning, most of the cyclists didn't understand anything. They knew they were good, but all the same they couldn't fight against the Italian team, particularly in the Gewiss. If most of the Motorola team ignored how widespread the use of EPO was, they knew something was happening. Cyclists who had lower ranking two or three years before could now crush them. In one year, from 1993 to 1994, the change was tremendous. Fourth in the 1993 Tour, Mejia collapsed into thirty-first place the following year, the year of Indurain's fourth win. Most of the cyclists who finished this 1994 Tour in the ten top spots would be mixed up in doping issues in the next five years.

Worried about his team's commitment to its sponsor Motorola, Ochowicz preferred to think that the solution depended on the team itself. If only the cyclists trained more, raced more intelligently, showed more determination...

The cyclists had begun to understand that the problem did not come from their lack of fitness, but on what was fueling their rivals.

Bauer's Discouragement

First of all, doping is a taboo subject for professional cyclists, but everyone thinks about it constantly. Most do not like to talk about it; the ones that use doping products don't want to have to lie and usually prefer to remain silent about the subject. The ones who are clean know that if they talk honestly about doping, they'll make enemies, particularly among their colleagues. Add to that the impossibility for a clean cyclist to keep his morale high when he thinks of the significant advantage that his rivals hold over him. All the same, it's "the subject" that can't be ignored.

Steve Bauer was at the 1993 Tour de France, and all this injustice undermines his morale. Nevertheless, he is a tough guy, as his second place in the Paris-Roubaix (1990) and his victory in the Swiss Grand Prix (1989) attest. After two

and a half weeks of racing, I found him in the hall of the Xalet Ritz Hotel, which was reserved by Motorola in the village of La Massana in the Pyrenees. The Canadian was exhausted, physically and morally. A two-year-old child was playing near his chair.

"Look at this kid," Bauer said. "I'd bet everything I've ever won that if you measured his testosterone level, he has more than me today. Our team does not use testosterone but some do."

One year later, the situation was a lot worse. Already used illegally—though not yet widespread—in the beginning of the nineties, EPO had become the dominant doping product. Without a doubt, 1994 is the year when everything changed. As the race went on, Bauer and several of his Motorola teammates made more and more of a come back. They constantly heard about the practices of other teams but were not even sure if all the members of their own team were clean.

Ochowicz had meticulously prepared his cyclists for the team time trial of the 1994 Tour. These nine, probably clean cyclists, finished second. An admirable result, but what had taken place at the beginning of the race, before the number of red blood cells diminished and the testosterone levels went down, was a price that had to be paid for cycling clean.

Reality Unveiled

At the beginning of 1994, some Motorola cyclists learned that Italian organizations used a centrifuge to measure their hematocrit. The cyclists took less of a risk of overdosing with EPO. One of the most experienced cyclists of the team, Sean Yates, knew one of these teams and decided to test his hematocrit. The Englishman was a talented cyclist who preferred to be in the peloton of one of the best teams than leader in an average one. The gentle, easygoing young man, stripped of personal ambition and happy to be someone the leaders could depend on, was led on only by his curiosity. By taking from him the smallest amount of blood possible, the Italians informed him that his hematocrit was 41. "Go home and go back to bed. You don't have any chance of winning." When he got back, he told his teammates about his hematocrit value and the sad prediction of the Italians, confirming what most of the Motorola cyclists already knew.

Only those who used EPO had to watch their hematocrit. The product, which stimulates the production of red blood cells, actually thickens the blood, putting the cyclists at risk for embolisms. By constantly monitoring their hematocrit, the cyclists knew the viscosity of their blood and could dilute it if necessary. A new level of sophistication in doping was now reached, and the role of some doctors was simply to regulate already existing practices. Like EPO, growth hormone, now easily available, had become another popular product with the cyclists. At the time neither of them was detectable (EPO would only be in 2000, growth hormone never has been) and only those who are against doping for moral reasons, or who fear the effects on their health, refuse to use them. In cycling, the Frenchman Laurent Chotard was the first to take EPO on May 9, 2001, at the

Tour de Romandie.

Even though Motorola was brimming with good cyclists, the team's results in 1994 were disappointing. Ochowicz continued to complain. More importantly, some cyclists began to tell themselves that something had to be done.

Armstrong's Impatience

A cyclist who raced for Motorola in the middle of the nineties remembers the atmosphere that reigned over the team in 1994, especially Armstrong's feelings about what had to be done.

"As a team, we were rather innocent. I'm not saying that one or two of the cyclists didn't take things in their corner, but as a team we were rather clean. Jim Ochowicz and our doctor, Max Testa, didn't want to know anything about doping. Och left the room if we talked about it, and Max tried to convince us that we could race good naturally. He said we didn't need the junk that the other teams took. That was all Max. If you told him that the pain went down from your knee to your heel, he would answer that this was good, that it was a sign that the pain was leaving your body.

One of our problems was our ignorance. At the time, in 1994, there was no test for EPO. It was undetectable and regulations banning cyclists with a hematocrit value higher than 50% would only be applied three years later. We didn't have any idea what dosage to take, how often, and the risks involved. We only knew one thing: it was expensive.

Lance was one of the ones who didn't want an average career. All this drained him, ate at him. He couldn't handle being beaten by guys who weren't as good as him. But Max and Och did not want to take his side. I'm sure it was the outcome of this that made him decide to work with Michele Ferrari."

Ochowicz and Testa preferred not to deal with the EPO question, but the cyclists couldn't avoid it.

"EPO arrived in the peloton in the beginning of the nineties," explains Phil Anderson. "All the peloton suffered from it. Races were faster and faster. We talked about it in the team. What were we going to do? We knew about its influence on the races, but had no proof about its users. Then Lance, or someone else, would perform an outstanding feat and that would give us the courage to continue. You could easily get depressed listening to what was said about the other teams.

As the nineties wore on, the problems became more serious and I'm not sure what happened with the team after I left in 1994."

"You're In or You're Out"

Stephen Swart is perfectly aware of what happened in the Motorola team after 1994. That year the New Zealander made his debut in the team. After the five years he spent in the United States, speed had increased absurdly, in the ascents above all. Like his teammates, he had the impression of being at a

tuning point.

"In 1994 we suffered. We never had a big victory. This did not weigh on me as much as it did the team leaders. It was hard on the sports manager. He had to answer to the sponsors. If you didn't have results, you didn't get more financing. If you didn't have more financing, you didn't have a team anymore. And the media were beating on us. Jim Ochowicz didn't want to hear about a doping program, but we, the cyclists, we felt the pressure to get results. We wanted to continue racing for this team, we liked the ambience. In one way, it was good that we didn't have to take dope, no one on the team twisted your arm. We knew that they were rather against it, but, in the end, it was a matter of being in or out: either you start doing what the other teams did, or you get out of the sport. We tried other means, like targeting the small races to see if we could win the ones the others weren't interested in. I left the '94 Tour de France in good shape and I went to the Kellogs Tour [a stage race organized in August in England that no longer exists], confident in my chances for success. There I raced well in the time trials, but, nevertheless, I left asking myself what was going on. The Italian Maurizio Fondriest had been injured recently and he crushed me. I understood that if I had taken EPO and it had given me a 5% advantage, I would have beaten him. It's the kind of reasoning you do in this environment. And then there was the Leeds Classic [one-day classic]. I had a good day. I was in the lead group with a chance of winning to the very end. But it happened like this at the time. In the last home stretch, the guys take off and you find yourself behind. After awhile, it ends up getting on your nerves."

According to Swart, some Motorola cyclists had made the decision to start up a doping program in the beginning of 1995 and benefit from the advantages of taking EPO. "As I remember it, we didn't talk a lot about EPO in 1994, but in the following year. Of course, '94 hadn't been a good year and we asked ourselves how much longer the sponsors would support us. Phil [Anderson] and Andy [Hampsten] left the team at the end of '94, a few others were let go and new cyclists arrived, the Italians Fabio Casartelli and Andrea Peron, and Kevin Livingston. As a team, it was time to regroup and find a remedy for the situation. I think it was in March, after Milan-San Remo. I went to Côme for a few days. Lance, Frankie [Andreu], Kevin [Livingston], and George [Hincapie] all were living there, and so was Max Testa. I stayed there a few days in the hotel. I remember during a training day at the time when we were thinking seriously about what we needed to do to remedy the situation. At the time, the balance was swinging more and more in favor of setting up a program. The feeling was that we had to take control, that we had to try something. As far as I can remember about what we agreed upon during this training outing was that those who were racing in the Tour de France should participate in this program.

Neither Kevin nor George was in on it, they had just come to the team. It was rather the decision of the seniors: Lance, Frankie, and me. We talked about it among ourselves, deciding what we had to do. Lance fully participated in the discussion and his opinion was to go with it. The sponsors had turned up the pressure on Jim [Ochowicz] and we knew that to get results, there was only one means, and that was to undertake the program. I don't know if the others were

doing it already, but they acted like that wasn't the case."

Questioned about this conversation, Frankie Andreu asserted that he doesn't have any memory of it, but he confirms the context. "Steve is a good guy, really good. We were friends when we raced for Motorola, but I don't exactly remember this training outing. Steve may have had this conversation, but I don't remember it. On the other hand, I remember how the team was in difficulty at the time, and that we were outmatched. We knew that the other teams were taking things."

Ask for the Program...

Eight years have passed since Swart's last year with Motorola and in Auckland, on this evening in the beginning of summer, the memories of this last roll of the dice remain vivid.

"Did the plan consist of each member of the Motorola team organizing his own doping program, to get his own EPO?"

"Yes, exactly. We didn't do it collectively, it was up to each of us to get organized himself."

"Was it difficult?"

"No. You only had to go to Switzerland. I don't know how the other guys did it, but everything I used, I bought myself."

"Through the intermediary of someone whom you knew in Switzerland?"

"No, no, I was in Switzerland at the time. I went to the pharmacy. If they didn't have it in stock in the morning, I came back in the afternoon and it was ready."

"Did you need a prescription?"

"No."

"Did you use growth hormone in addition to EPO?"

"No, not hGH. I had heard talk about its secondary effects. I had read things about it, how it makes the head and teeth grow, and I didn't want to take that junk."

"Did you only use EPO?"

"It was the biggest thing we used. Cortisone was rather banal on most races. EPO was the most extreme thing that I tried. Cortisone wasn't serious, it was on the truck, it was a standard thing. You had it at your fingertips as often as you wanted it, really. It helped us recover but it was also used in the race. We knew that, used over the long term, it bloated the muscles, so we just used it every other day."

"When did you start using EPO?"

"For the 1995 Tour de Suisse."

"How much did it cost?"

"Between 600 and 700 Swiss francs a box, nearly 1,000 New Zealand dollars, which was a lot of money to put out."

"How did you know what quantities to take?"

"You planned that in advance. We had to take a certain number of doses during

a period of ten days, then every other day for a week. Then, on the Tour de France, and depending on our hematocrit value, one or two injections per week.”

“What were the results?”

“In the first stage of the Tour de Suisse, I finished sixth in the prologue, in the same place I was the year before. After this prologue we started our first EPO treatment. In two days I crashed.

“Crashed? You mean that it didn’t work for you?”

“I learned that you can’t take EPO during a race. Because when it starts to act inside your body, it pumps a lot of energy, the energy that you need to race. I should have started taking it when I was resting. It was just a lack of experience. I did not know how to use it efficiently.”

“Did you talk about it to your wife Jan?”

“Yes, I told her, she didn’t jump for joy. She understood that it wasn’t the cleanest sport. But we had decided together that whoever was in the Tour should do it. A few racers on our team weren’t implicated, like Letton Kaspars Ozers. I think it was also the case for Alvaro [Mejia], for example.”

“Did you use EPO on the Tour de Suisse and the Tour de France?”

“No. I started in Switzerland but when I arrived at the big mountain stages, I was dead. I didn’t understand what happened to me.”

“How did you feel exactly?”

“I had the impression that all my fitness had left me. The Tour de France was coming up and I didn’t know if I would be capable of starting out: I felt so flat. There was a little more than a week between the two races and I continued the EPO treatment, so many units every other day. I continued the first or second day of the Tour and then stopped. I thought, ‘I have nothing to lose, it’s not like I’m going to go on and win stages of the Tour de France.’”

“You didn’t get any benefits from it?”

“Yes. On the first stages of the Tour, the really fast ones, after the first hour, you feel like you haven’t raced yet. And at the end of the day, your ability to recuperate is fabulous. But it didn’t make me win or succeed at extraordinary feats during the race. I didn’t have the impression that it changed anything.”

“But this feeling of well-being and fast recovery, wasn’t that already a big advantage?”

“Yes, but I had already heard it said that the beneficial effects of EPO would disappear a short time after you stopped taking it. I didn’t think that I should continue taking it during the Tour de France. Anyway, I had exhausted my stock and I didn’t want to spend another thousand dollars [New Zealand] to buy it.”

“Jim Ochowicz, could he ignore the decision made by the cyclists?”

“You’d have to be terribly naïve not to know, but if anyone could not know it, Jim was probably the one. As for the soigneurs, the head soigneur knew about it.”

“Was Lance convinced that there was no other choice besides EPO?”

“Yes, it just goes back to ‘it has to be done’. We had to have results. Motorola spent a lot of money for the team and we had show our cards.”

“The feeling that you had to join the doping race, did Lance really agree with it?”

“Yes, and I think it got stronger as time went by, because it was then that he started up his relationship with Ferrari. I remember being at home in New

Zealand watching the results. The years 1995 and 1996 were completely different years for him. At the beginning of 1996 he took off.

"Ninety-eight percent of people think that Armstrong is a real champion..."

"Yes, but ninety-eight percent of the people have never been in the high-level sports arena."

"Armstrong asserts that no one ever talked about doping at Motorola. Does it amuse you to hear this?"

"Very much, yes. I think, 'Old boy, you're really a sucker.'"

Lance's Hand

In spite of the EPO he used in the beginning of the 1995 Tour de France, Stephen Swart had raced better the previous year when he wasn't using it yet. In 1995, his entire season came down to a merciless fight to survive. At the end of the '95 Tour, he hoped that his arrival on the Champs-Élysées was a healthy omen for his season finish. The evening of the finish, Motorola organized a reception for the cyclists, their immediate families, and the team's technical staff. They congratulated Swart and Steve Bauer for their altruistic contribution during the competition. If Stephen still had doubts about the renewal of his contract, they were swept away by the consideration that the team showed him that evening.

After the Tour, the cyclists rested up for a week, then prepared for the end of the season races. First in August for the Leeds Classic in England, and the Grand Prix of Zurich, then for the Vuelta de España that started in September. The day before the Tour de Suisse, Jim Ochowicz told Swart that his contract would not be renewed in 1996.

"It was completely unexpected. We should have discussed it during the Tour de France, but we hadn't, so I presumed everything was OK. Jim asked me to come to his room and told me that there was nothing for me. It's like saying to me, 'There's a plane that's leaving in two hours, and since you're not racing tomorrow, we reserved you a seat on it.' I tried to come to terms with it. I could have started looking for another team, but I thought: 'No, that's enough. I don't want to keep going in this direction. If it was to take more things, this kind of crap no, I didn't want to.' Go on with Motorola I could have, but start again with another team, do everything that I would have had to do, I wasn't interested."

Swart went around to the rooms to say good-bye to his teammates. They already knew. He particularly wanted to shake hands with Yates and Andreu, who he thought were decent guys. "I tried to keep my head high and remain proud. I said 'good luck, see you around sometime.'" Stephen suspects that Ochowicz discussed his situation with Armstrong, but he wanted to say good-bye to him anyway. "I knocked on his door. It was open and I went in, I saw that he was in the bathroom. I called out that I had come to say good-bye to him, he just stuck his hand outside the door. 'See you around.' 'Yeah, see you around.' He didn't say 'wait a minute,' try to take leave of me properly. I understood then that he

had been a part of the decision and he didn't have the guts to look the reality in the face."

Going Through It

Swart does not regret everything he gave to cycling, despite his absence from the winners circle after a professional career of nine years. The experience had more value than staying in New Zealand would have had, one Kiwi among the others. Today, when he buys land for building, he puts into practice what he learned during his years in the peloton. For a long time, he wanted to turn the page, never to go back ten years saying to himself: "What if?" This is also a part of what pushed him to try EPO. "I wanted to try it. It didn't work for me. Good. That's the way it is. There's nothing else to say."

He thinks about his oldest son, now at the age to do serious cycling. "Do I want to encourage him to ride? If he showed physical qualities the same as mine, and if he started to have results, what would my reaction be as a father? I would say to him, 'Son, here is what you have to do to get to the top, and it isn't good.' I don't want to push someone on this path, and certainly not my son. You can feel passion for cycling, it's a magnificent sport with many good sides, but there are also some real crappy sides."

After the announcement of his hasty eviction, Swart, through the irony of destiny, was successful in his last races in the Motorola jersey including the Tour of Holland. Six weeks after his return to New Zealand, he went to Australia for the Commonwealth Bank race. The Motorola team was mostly made up of young cyclists. Without the accident that forced him to abandon the race on the next to the last day, Swart would have ended his career with a victory. The last evening he had a discussion with Kevin Livingston, George Hincapie, and Bobby Julich, three of these promising young American athletes who raced for the same team. "They questioned me about EPO, about what you had to do when you were a professional cyclist. I just told them, 'Listen, if you want to succeed at this game, you quite simply have to go that way.' It wasn't what I wanted to say to them, but if I had given them any other answer, it would have been dishonest of me."

Big Embarrassment

Sometimes, in the middle of winter in Auckland, the Tour de France is on television, and Swart stops what he's doing to find again what was once his world. Stephen is always amazed by the domination that Armstrong has over the race. Because he knows how hard this sport is and he himself feels touched by the brilliance of his former teammate. But another voice whispers to him: "But in the end, Steve, you know well that you don't win this race on mineral water." What bothers him is the way Armstrong insists on broadcasting his innocence, as though he were white as snow.

"When he had his cancer, I thought he would have the opportunity to say in front of the world: 'I made a mistake.' If that had been the case and he had gotten back to a good level, I would see him in a different light. He had the chance to do something positive for the sport; instead of that, he helped keep things the same as they were before his illness. Since the scandal of 1998, what has changed? Nothing. The doping culture has just become more sophisticated. I think he is fooling these people, the cancer survivors. He has become a spokesman for them, but his past is troubled. Of course, he was a cancer victim, but you can't help but ask yourself if he contributed to its development. Personally, I have more respect for a cyclist like the Swiss Alex Zülle who at least raised his hand and confessed, 'I did it. I'm sorry.' Lance had the chance to be honest. By being cured of cancer, he could have, in a small way, helped the sport, and he chose not to do it."

When we sent him this chapter to reread, Stephen Swart, while confirming his agreement, said he wanted to add one point:

"If doping didn't exist, Armstrong would still be a champion."

The Unique Metamorphosis of a Cancer Victim

"If I had to choose between winning the Tour de France and having cancer, I'd choose cancer."

Lance Armstrong,
Every Second Counts, p. 227.

His Best Season

When he reached the year 1996, Lance Armstrong had forged himself into a consistent winner (twenty-four victories), as well as a personality. After three professional seasons, the Texan was no longer only a muscled hot-head who had been the world champion in Oslo in 1993 when he was twenty-one years old. On the 1995 Tour de France, the image of an ecstatic Armstrong, index finger raised to the sky, with his Italian teammate Fabio Casartelli, who had died three days earlier on the last turns of the Pyrenees pass of Portet d'Aspet, went around the world when Armstrong crossed the finish line as winner in Limoges. The American had a remarkable temperament and made it known with no inhibitions, often taking the opposite view of his peers, particularly by declaring that he does a "job" and is not a cyclist to fulfill a passion. The following year the Motorola cyclist had his best professional season. In April 1996, a month after finishing

eleventh in the Milan-San Remo, which opens the classics season, he won the trying Flèche wallonne, a reference one-day race, followed by second place in the "eldest of the classics," Bastogne-Liège, four days later. One month later he took the Tour DuPont, an American stage competition that has since disappeared, which he outclassed by winning five stages. This performance propelled him into the top five in the world rankings. He added an eighth victory by asserting himself in one stage of the Milwaukee Fresca Classic.

After he dropped out of the Tour de France, he took part in two professional competitions that took place in August at the Olympic Games in Atlanta, finishing six in the individual time trial, then twelfth in the in-line race. He returned to Europe and finished second in the Tour of Netherlands, a stage race, fourth in the Leeds Classic in England, and fourth in the Swiss Grand Prix, two competitions labeled "World Cup." He would finish second in the Grand Prix Eddy Merckx, an individual time trial, on September 1 in Belgium, before punctuating the season on September 14 in Germany with the Baden-Baden race, four days before celebrating his birthday with his family in Austin. In total, the American won eight races and gloried in a number of certificates of merit. And, at the very least, was subject to ten doping controls.

Nine Months Without Any Reaction

This professional blossoming, however, masks a haunting evil. According to him, Lance Armstrong had detected unusual pains, even an abnormality, several months ago.⁷ Since the winter of 1995-96, he was aware that his "right testicle was slightly swollen." But he wasn't too alarmed. In May, during the Tour DuPont, his "fans noticed something odd," which stopped him from expressing his joy when he won the competition. His words are prophetic: "I was too exhausted to celebrate on the bike. My eyes were bloodshot and my face was flushed." In July he left the Tour de France prematurely in Aix-les-Bains, after the fifth stage. The fourth time he abandoned it in five participations: "I couldn't breath." The following month, during the Olympic Games in Atlanta, "[his] body let [him] down again." He also says that shortly afterwards he rode in the Leeds Classic, then the Swiss Grand Prix "with an almost generalized cancer."⁸ On September 18, his twenty-fifth birthday, he had a violent headache. Despite these forewarnings, Lance Armstrong still didn't panic, finding "an excuse for everything."⁹ He didn't even question the team doctor. It was only two weeks later that he is "frightened" when he spit blood in his bathroom sink, a rare symptom according to a specialist.¹⁰

In retrospect, Lance Armstrong would avow in *La France Cycliste*, the organ of the *Fédération française de cyclisme*: "If I had been more aware of the symptoms, I would have seen a specialist sooner."¹¹ An almost fatal lack of concern. Lance Armstrong waited nine months after the first warning signs to start worrying. Simply listening to his body, so important to high-level sports figures, could have spared him terrible suffering.

Testicles, Abdomen, Lungs, Brain...

On the recommendation of a neighbor and friend, Dr. Rick Parker, Lance Armstrong consulted Doctor Reeves, a urologist located in downtown Austin on Tuesday, 2 October 1996 at 4:00 P.M.. The diagnosis, confirmed by a radiograph of the lungs, is conclusive. Reeves informs him that he has "cancer of the testicles with large metastases to the lungs."¹² Twelve could be counted in this region, "some of them were specks and some measured as large as 2.7 centimeters,"¹³ as well as in the abdominal belt. The next morning at 7:00 A.M., he recounts in his first book, an appointment is made for the ablation of a testicle at Saint David's Hospital in Austin, an operation that takes three hours, resuscitation included, in the unit of the oncologist J. Dudley Youman.

The first of his four chemotherapy sessions started on 8 October, the day of the public announcement that he had cancer. In total, four cycles, five consecutive days each, were programmed over two months. He would submit to the three others at the University Hospital in Indianapolis, at the unit of Dr. Craig Nichols, an eminent cancer specialist who had been highly recommended to him. Two cancerous lesions on the brain, "grape-sized white spots," were detected in the interval on 11 October. The operation, which took place on 24 October, lasted five to six hours, according to sources. Three more chemotherapy sessions followed, with a break in between of two weeks for recovery, until 13 December. According to the Internet site of the American Medical Association, consulted in 2003, "testicle cancer represents 1.1% of cancers in men. In 2002, it struck four American citizens in 100,000. Though no segment of the population is spared, this type of cancer is more widespread in Americans from twenty to forty years old, especially for white males. If detected early, there is a 95 to 97% chance of being cured. According to the American Cancer Society, "7,600 new cases were estimated in the United States in 2003, of which 400 were fatal. The probability of survival is 95% for five years (for stages I and II), and 74% for stage III."

Stage III... or IV

Most testicle cancers are detected by palpation, by the patients themselves or during a medical examination. There are multiple symptoms: presence of a mass in the testicle; a swollen or enlarged testicle; feeling of weight in the scrotum; vague pain in the abdomen or groin; pain or discomfort in a testicle or the scrotum; blood in the urine; an increased size or heightened sensitivity of the nipples. The type of cancer that struck Lance Armstrong was not only a cancer of the testicle, it was a metastatized cancer, a non-seminoma type, made up of several malignant cell tissues, as revealed by the examination of the removed testicle in which three cancerous tumors were identified: chorionic carcinoma (60%), carcinoma (40%), with some teratoma-type cells (less than 1%). The description the champion made of it in his books and his statements led to

several observations from specialists questioned. First of all, this metastasized cancer is "rare," even more so at the cerebral level, and its classification is still confused. According to Armstrong, it was stage III.¹⁴ A diagnosis that the two oncologists didn't share.

Professor of oncology at the Faculty of Medicine of Montpellier, Professor Jean-Bernard Dubois is director of the Languedoc-Roussillon Val d'Aurelle regional center for the fight against cancer and head of the radiotherapy department. Twenty-three patients with cancer of the testicles were treated there in 2001, out of 3,556 patients. He received us in his office on June 12, 2003.

"A metastasized cancer (abdomen, lungs, brain) is already very evolved," he explained. "It's a stage IV, the last stage. Stage I is the tumor limited to the testicles; stage II is the testicular tumor with ganglions in the abdomen; stage III is the testicular tumor with ganglions in the abdomen and outside the abdomen (thorax or region supra-clavicular); stage IV is the visceral or bone stage. This was Lance Armstrong's case. Fifteen years ago it was a death sentence. Currently, thanks to chemotherapy, metastasized cancers can be cured. This type of metastasized cancer is the only type that can be definitively cured. Mixed tumors (chorionic carcinoma, embryocarcinoma, mixed tumoral cellular lines) are found frequently in the testicles. The chances of a cure fluctuate based on the proportions of the cellular lines, their type of tissue, the chemosensitivity that varies from patient to patient. The evaluation-prognosis range is compressed when the patient has chemotherapy, according to the patient's response mode. To make the prognosis for a testicular tumor, you need to have an idea of the exact extension of this tumor, an idea of the level of the markers, and an idea of the therapeutic response rate."

A thousand patients are treated each year at the Mondor de Créteil hospital in the cancer unit of Professor Jean-Paul Le Bourgeois, dean of the Faculty of Medicine. His opinion, received on July 22, 2003, corroborates the previous one. "Lance Armstrong's cancer was in stage IV," he affirms. "From the time there are metastases, wherever they are found, whatever the tumor's size, it's a stage IV classification. The cerebral metastasized tumors are rare. Many patients have experienced pulmonary metastasized tumors and were cured through chemotherapy. It is well known that chemo does not pass the blood brain barrier easily. It doesn't cure cerebral metastases."

He made a drawing. "A tumor swells up in a testicle, deforms it. From there, it becomes gangrenous in the "lumboaortic" ganglions, i.e. at the level of the lumbosacral spine. Next, it will spread to the liver and lungs, and it can go to the brain. A person could have a microscopic testicular tumor that palpitation does not detect. It is followed by an enormous ganglion that grows in the stomach. This evolution can happen very fast, because it passes through venous circulation."

Lance Armstrong had four chemotherapy sessions, a total of twenty days. Chemotherapy, which has existed since the middle of the 1970s, consists of the injection of high doses of a chemical substance (cisplatin, ifosfamide,

etoposide...) into the blood.

According to Dr. J. Dudley Youman, his chances of being cured varied between 65% and 85%.¹⁵ According to Lance Armstrong and his attending physician in Indianapolis, Lawrence Einhorn, they were 50%,¹⁶ or even less than 40%.¹⁷ Craig Nichols, right arm of Dr. Lawrence Einhorn, confessed to his patient three years later that they dropped to... 3%.¹⁸ From 85% to 3%, the assessment of the seriousness of Lance Armstrong's cancer is the subject of disconcerting evaluations.

Cancer and Doping

In 1997, Gérard Porte, the physician of the Tour de France, affirmed that "taking anabolics can lead to a testicular illness."¹⁹ More recently, Raffaele Guariniello, the judge inquiring about the health scandals in Italian soccer, explained that the experts whom he called upon "estimate that the frequency of these cancers can be explained (particularly those of the liver and testicles) by the over-consumption of anabolics."²⁰

On this question, on the other hand, Jean-Bernard Dubois remains neutral. "Can doping products lead to testicular cancer? I don't know, I am not able to answer you. It is sure that when anabolic substances are administered, you know that you are going to activate cellular divisions. From there to creating cancers, I don't know anything."

Professor Le Bourgeois confirms it. "It is not known whether the products banned for sports figures, anabolics for example, can trigger cancer. I've never seen anything about it in any serious journal."

But is that the real question?

Bêta-hCG, Single or Double...

A blood test enables the measurement of the levels of three substances, for which an abnormally high rate is a warning of the presence of testicular cancer. These biological markers are alpha-fetoprotein (aFP), lactate dehydrogenase (LDH) and the hormone chorionic gonadotropin (beta-hCG). Under normal conditions, the level of bêta-hCG is between 1 and 2 nanograms per milliliter (ng/ml). In Armstrong's case, according to his own statements, beta-hCG reached levels that seemed "very high," "enormous," "gigantic" to the oncologists we questioned. Curiously the figure varies with the passing years according to Armstrong's statements: 52,000 ng/ml, 92,380 ng/ml, even 109,000 ng/ml.²¹ How to explain such a variation, from single to double, depending on whether the American is holding forth in his first or second book? What was his "real" maximum level of beta-hCG, and why did he communicate several different ones?

Whatever figure is selected, it raises one question in any case: how is it possible that this high level was not detected in the antidoping controls? Beta-hCG is a

biological marker present in pregnant women or in people who have testicular cancer of the chorionic carcinoma type. Taking this male hormone effectively increases the production of testosterone, which explains its use for doping. "For someone cheating, hCG is a hormone used after a treatment of anabolic steroids to restart the production of testosterone," explained Michel Audran, professor of the Faculty of Pharmacy at Montpellier, member of the research group, Science and Industry against Blood Doping (SIAB), which makes its contribution to the CPLD (French committee for the prevention and fight against doping): "When this individual is on anabolic steroids, his organism no longer needs his endogenous testosterone."

An "Inexplicable" Non-detection

Comparable to taking anabolics, bêta-hCG favors muscular growth in association with a diet supplemented with proteins, increases training capacity, stimulates the will and aggressiveness, and pushes back the fatigue threshold. In fact, this method, identified in 1983, detectable through urine analysis since 1987, was prohibited by legislation of the CIO and the ICU²² in 1988. That year, a report handed in by the English professor Raymond Brooks revealed that 10% of all English sportsman resorted to it. However, even if beta-hCG was banned, it wasn't systematically tested for in urine because no official threshold for a positive reading had been defined. A rather troubling "maybe" in such a case. Actually, beta-hCG was only looked for if the testosterone epitestosterone ratio was higher than 6. This standard figure was evidence of a suspicious male hormone level in an individual. Examples: if testosterone and epitestosterone read respectively 1-5, even 6-35 or 40-230, the subject does not test positive. "At the time," Jacques de Ceaurriz, supervisor of the *Laboratoire national de dépistage du dopage* (National Laboratory for Dope Screening) located in Chatenay-Malabry (Yvelines, France), did not have an imposed threshold, and beta-hCG was not clearly expressed in the CIO references. This professor of toxicology even goes further. "To tell the truth, I don't know that, at the time, beta-hCG was detected. What I do know is that since the case you are talking about [that of Lance Armstrong], this testing is operational and systematic. I know that beta-hCG was on the list of products to be looked for at the time. But there is a difference between a declaration of intent and the facts. Clearly stated, for an analysis to be valid, it goes through two points. First, the product in question is measured and analyzed in the laboratory. Second, the conclusions are included in a report. At the time, the second point was not carried out. The information could not have been reported. Moreover, the 'Institution' knew full well that it was overlooked. This case caused profound embarrassment."

The "embarrassment" cited by Jacques de Ceaurriz is a euphemism. It was a real panic that overtook the medical commissions of the CIO and ICU. Because if beta-hCG was actually banned and tested for, there was a fear that Lance Armstrong could request an American law firm to bring the sport constituency to court, to obtain compensation for this failure, which could have cost him his life,

and the appreciable harm suffered. Whereas Armstrong seemed unusually serene when confronted with this situation, even though he seemed informed about the screening of this hormone. In the columns of the French newspaper *Le Monde*,²³ he explained it like this: "I knew that hCG was looked for in antidoping controls. I would like to know what my level was at the time of the control [he's talking about the antidoping control given at the Swiss Grand Prix, in August, six months before his cancer was detected]. If it's true that the ICU keeps all the results, it should be possible to know where my cancer was at that time." Oddly enough, he did not try to find out. Or communicate it. And the ICU carefully avoided giving any explanation afterwards.

When all this happened in 1996, the French national laboratory to fight doping was not yet under the leadership of Jacques de Ceaurriz, who only arrived in 1997, but under Jean-Pierre Lafarge. Questioned by *Le Monde*,²⁴ the latter, on the other hand, was categorical. "Control of hCG was systematic. The cases are rare, probably lower than one case out of 10,000. In Lance Armstrong's case, it is surprising that no trace of the illness was detected during the controls."

Another element corroborates the statements of Jean-Pierre Lafarge and Lance Armstrong himself: the analyses of the antidoping controls of the Swiss competition were done at the Institute of Biochemistry of the German sports university based in Cologne. Its director, Wilhelm Schanzer, told the *Monde*²⁵ that his "laboratory had the capacity to find traces of hCG." It seems to me quite clear: the beta-hCG content in Lance Armstrong's blood in August 1996 was screened. At the time, the Cologne laboratory detected a slight abnormality in the analysis of testosterone, but did not find it suspicious enough, sending a negative conclusion to the ICU. The only official reaction to this contradiction came from Anne-Laure Masson, who was then the medical coordinator of ICU. "I'm perplexed because if the level of hCG was also high, Lance Armstrong should have tested positive, in principle. For now, it's inexplicable."²⁶

How could Lance Armstrong be satisfied with this answer? How could it be that this detection, once confirmed, did not trigger an alarm? Professor Jean-Bernard Dubois reflects, "If the bêta-hCG was measured and 52,000 units, even 90,000 or more weren't found, either the flask was broken, or there is a problem."

This oversight is not only evidence of a failure in the medical follow-up of the cyclists. Going beyond this particular case, Armstrong submitted to a dozen controls during the 1996 season. Did the ICU show a negligence that could have been disastrous? Why didn't Lance Armstrong try to find out more about it?

One Month or Two Years

Imprecise evaluation of the seriousness of the cancer, variable percentage for a cure, fluctuating beta-hCG figures... Even the chronology of the illness has given rise to several versions. The American cyclist himself declared, "No one can tell me when I got this cancer, but the existence of the metastases in my bronchial tubes is estimated at around August."²⁷ One of his own attending physicians, Dr. J. Dudley Youman, has, nevertheless, attempted a dating, though evasive, which his patient seems to ignore. "In my opinion, this cancer was in his organism for

several months."²⁸ A former professional cyclist and the public relations manager of the Motorola team at the time, the Englishman Paul Sherwen gives a testimony in a national newspaper that poses problems. "For a very long time, Lance Armstrong felt a shooting pain that did not worry him overmuch. We even made him a special cushion."²⁹ Obviously, this pain didn't worry anyone "overmuch," not the people around him nor the team doctors. How is it possible that the key cyclist of a team, who complains of shooting pains in a very specific region, known "for a long time" by the people surrounding him, who go as far as making him "a special cushion," did not come to the attention of the medical staff that was constantly around him?

According to the oncologists we questioned about the biological markers made public at the time, the American's illness – and still we are taking the low range of 52,000 ng/ml – goes back several months. For Professor Jean-Bernard Dubois, "52,000 units of beta-hCG is a lot. It is difficult to date the cancer based on the number of units. Hormones are protein substances that have a limited life span. A part of these units, which represent the mass of these protein substances, are going to be secreted again by the testicles, by the malignant cellular tumors; another is going to disappear and be metabolized. Three or four months, it's around that."

For Professor Le Bourgeois, "there is a relationship, mathematical, between the level of the marker and the extent of the illness. And this is important. On the other hand, it is difficult to date the beginning of the cancer. It's a cancer that grows very fast. A range? Between two years and three months for this cancer. Less than a month is just not possible."

Other Known Cases

Armstrong's case is not unique among high-level sports figures. Others have been victims of testicular cancer; some have even managed to resume their sports careers again, others haven't. The most well known in France is probably Joël Bats, a former goalie on the French soccer team. In 1982, when he was twenty-four, the cancer stopped him from participating in the Spanish World Cup. Treated with radiation in Boulogne-Billancourt and attended by Dr. Yvan Coscas, he returned to competition and even won the championship of Europe des Nations in 1984. By chance, other goalies experienced the same fate. The Spaniard Francisco Molina of the Deportivo La Corogne had chemotherapy in Valence and was off the field for three months at the end of 2002. Molina, however, was able to return to his position. Another goalie, the Canadian Craig Forrest from the English club West Ham, disclosed his illness in October 2001. In other fields, well-known sports figures have also been victims of this cancer, e.g., the French swimmer Nicolas Grager in 1990. After his chemotherapy, he got back into competition to win second place in the 4 x 200-meter swim of the French championship in 1994. Finally, the handball player Yerime Sylla, then in the national team 1 in Dunkerque, even played while being treated with chemotherapy in 1994.

Patrick Clerc, a Unique Witness

But the most instructive case to better understand the relationship between cancer and cycling is that of Patrick Clerc from Grenoble. To our knowledge, he is the only professional who was affected by a cancer similar to that of Lance Armstrong. Of course we are not comparing the two men, but merely presenting the story of the Frenchman, now 47 years old, who never succeeded in recovering his former abilities, which sheds a useful light on the psychological resources of such a competitor when faced with cancer.

A professional from 1981 to 1986 (Sem France-Loire team in 1981-82, Sem-Mavic in 1983, Skil in 1984, Fagor in 1985, then six months with RMO in 1986), Patrick Clerc raced in four Tour de France races and won a stage on the Midi-Libre in 1982, another on the Critérium du Dauphiné Libéré in 1983, and, on the track, the Grenoble Six Days in 1983 (with the Swiss Daniel Gisiger), and the American-style Coupe de France in 1985.

We interviewed him at his workplace—he has a microbrewery in Grenoble, on the road that passes the rugby stadium—on the afternoon of June 17, 2003, while France was sweltering under a heat wave. Almost twenty years after the end of his career, he still resembles his former self: an open smile, straightforward, still easygoing, although a family tragedy, the death of his son two years ago, plunged him into a depression from which he has not yet recovered. “In comparison, cancer is nothing.” Between cups of strong coffee and menthol cigarettes, Patrick Clerc was very willing to take a walk down memory lane and unravel the thread of his cycling career. Five hours of nostalgia, lucidity, and discussions about one thing and another.

“I read the [first] Armstrong book. Up to the part where he wants to fight cancer, I had the impression of reliving my own story. I experienced exactly the same thing on a psychological level. On a pathological level, it is true that it was completely different. I never experienced the pain, the bleeding, the nausea, nothing, no symptoms; just a cyst the size of a large pinhead on my testicle, with a hardened area around it. My survival rate was on the order of + 80%. I never had chemotherapy. I was not drilled open, I did not have lymph nodes removed, I did not have metastasis. Compared to Lance Armstrong, I had nothing. Testicular cancer goes from Stage I to Stage V. In Stage V, you are dead. I was between I and II. Compared with what he had, I would say he was a good IV.

“During the Tour of 1984, I discovered a cyst on my testicle, the right one. I always had the bad habit of playing with my balls. In the final analysis, that was what saved me. At the same time, I had problems with my left knee during the whole Tour. In 83, when climbing the Alpe d’Huez, I was convinced I was among the ten best times [at that time, there was no individual timekeeping]. In 1984, I was sure that I would be the last on this same climb. Even Vanderaerden passed me ...

"After the Tour, I rode in several criteriums. Because of my knee, I called my doctor, Lucien Maigre, an old doctor on the Tour. I mentioned my sore knee and, before hanging up, talked to him about the cyst. He told me not to wait and to call Dr. Pierre Joire, a urologist at the general clinic of Grenoble, whom I had consulted two years earlier for a simple urinary tract infection. This was Wednesday, August 17, 1984. I called his secretary and got an appointment for Monday, August 20, at 4 P.M. After thirty seconds of auscultation, Joire told me that he would have to remove the testicle. 'Oh? And why?' 'I don't know anything. That's why it's better to take it out and have it analyzed. As quickly as possible.' In fact, he already knew. He told me so later.

"I was uneasy, I wanted to know, but he remained evasive. In reality, I actually knew. Of course I had doubts. In my head, it was cancer, even though nobody told me. I knew that I would have to undergo chemotherapy. In my mind, I also remained a cyclist. I wanted to race. We were looking for a date. I talked about my racing calendar, about the upcoming Tour du Limousin, about the Six Jours in November ... "No, no," he told me. "Wednesday." In two days. I had the operation that day, Wednesday, August 22, 1984. "Chemo" existed at that time. Joire was handling twenty similar cases a year. In fact, I felt completely out of it... before the operation. I can't explain it. At the moment when the doctor told me to get up, I was shattered. I don't know how I got back home. At home, I cried my eyes out for twenty minutes, I couldn't speak. But after several hours, I was convinced that I would be cured. In my mind, I was going to get out of it. I knew what I had. Nevertheless, being emasculated, that's traumatic in itself."

"Something Was Broken"

"My type of cancer was a simple genome / seminoma. No metastasis, no lymph node involvement, nothing. I left the hospital on Saturday. On Sunday, I still had my ten sutures; I took up my bike with my father to go for a twenty-kilometer ride. On all the slight inclines, I held on to him. I had a contract for the Critérium of Châteaulin, the first weekend of September, right after the world championships. I completed more than half the race, ten days after the operation. In the locker room, I changed next to my buddies, Beucherie, Dail'Armellina, Sanders, Menthéour, Tinazzi, Michaud. When they saw the bandage, they asked me about it. I had to explain it to them. I hung onto them to go over the bump, at each turn around track. A little later, during the Six Jours de Grenoble, I even took the yellow jersey with Daniel Gisiger the first night.

"I started radiation therapy at the end of November 1984, on a Monday. I had to take a dose of 3000 rads, at a rate of 200 rads a day. Every day, I went down to the Michalon hospital just before 8:30. 'That' happened on the underground floors. I went home and slipped under the covers. I shivered, I puked until nothing but bile came up. The first three days, it was hell. The radiation therapist, Dr. Michel Bolla, then switched me to 170 rads, plus a treatment with Maalox for the stomach. I had to use two machines, the cobalt therapy, direct radiation aimed at the operated part, and another machine: you get into a sarcophagus as big as a

bar, closed with an armor-plated door like the Bank of France. This was the linear accelerator, which burned a little at the level of the sternum. In each machine, I spent between one minute thirty seconds and two minutes. At nine o'clock I left the hospital. On the other hand, in the afternoon, things went well."

"Because the doses were reduced the session was extended three days. In fact, at the end of three weeks, the radiation therapist told me: 'It's fine, you are done,' although I still had several days left. He could have offered me the moon and it couldn't have been better. The treatment lasted three weeks, three sequences of five days."

"My beta-hCG level? I don't remember. I only remember that it was extremely high. The first three months, I went to Michalon hospital for a monthly check-up; then every two months for a year. At the end of two years, every three months; then every six months. This was for a blood sample and a lung X-ray, because they said that if I had a recurrence, it would appear in the lungs.

"I started jogging again. They had told me to rest for three to four weeks, not to overdo it. When I started jogging, then cycling, I realized that there were some things that no longer worked. Even though I had done the Six Jours de Grenoble, something was broken.

"In 1984, I was on the Skil team, but just before the French championships for that year, even before the Tour, I had signed with Fagor for 1985. At the beginning of January 1985, I started training with the Fagor team. I was always in last place, even during cross-country skiing outings. Never out of breath, never any pains in the legs, but always left behind by five minutes. The first races started. At the end of twenty kilometers, the first railroad bridge, I was left behind, good-bye. Within the peloton, nobody knew. No matter what, I didn't want to have any publicity. It only concerned me. Also, Lucien Maigre told me that Joël Bats had had the same thing. I telephoned Bats. He told me he didn't want to talk about it. He felt the same way about it as I did. (...)

"Then, in 1985, I gave up on one race after another. I was starting to get desperate, but the good days had returned. I always did better in the criterium. I actually finished some races, left behind but happy. But there was no question of being chosen for the Tour. Then, during the month of July, I competed in some races at fairs. I started to recover my morale, but because of a muddle with Fagor who wanted to get rid of some racers, me among them, and since I hadn't been paid since the month of June, I wasn't able to compete in the Tour de l'Avenir. I wanted to take advantage of the Six Jours that were coming up to make some progress. Unfortunately, that year the track at Grenoble burnt down. The French professional track championships were moved to Besançon in mid-October. That's where I won the American-style Coup de France with Garcia. Of course, on the professional level, that did not count for anything, but on the personal level, it was a big victory. I had already lived off of the contracts that I had for the Six-Days. I had to put on a lot of pressure to get into RMO, a regional team that was forming. This said, along with my contract for 1986, Marc Braillon [the sponsor of RMO] had me sign a letter of resignation in case I didn't achieve any results before June. Six-month contracts did not exist. I was sure I would succeed.

"The 1986 season arrived. Unfortunately, I hated cold and there was a terrible cold spell at the start of the season. Our bottles of hot tea were frozen at the end of forty kilometers. This slowed my startup. Not performing well, I was not chosen for the major races coming up. It was only at Châteauroux-Limoges that I began to feel good again. Then at the Midi-Libre, where I raced for Thierry Claveyrolat. I even made a breakaway. And again at the Tour de l'Aude, but it was obvious that it was too late. "Still, I believe that I had my place on the Tour, like Vincent Barteau or Paul Kimmage... The Tour was over. Two weeks later I was in a blue work suit in a factory.

"I never had any recurrences. After two years, Dr. Bolla told me there was no need to come back."

Oncologists Are Perplexed

In an interview with *Le Midi-Libre*,³⁰ Professor Jean-Bernard Dubois stated: "For a cancer that was apparently as advanced as that of Lance Armstrong, the estimate is that one in two patients can be cured. So being part of the 50% of patients who are cured, that is already lucky, because brain metastases are much more difficult to treat with chemotherapy. So you have to operate. And there, Lance Armstrong was lucky once again: the metastases were accessible to surgery. He successfully made it through several stages. But being in the first half is one thing; winning the Tour de France, the epitome of achievement in sports, as far as I'm concerned, is something completely different. Is it a miracle? Some people might call it that. I would simply say that on a statistical level, the chances are infinitesimal."

During our interview on June 12, 2003, Dr. Dubois wanted to say more: "An oncologist does not often see a metastasized cancer that is cured. That is extraordinary. Every day, you see more of them [the patients who have cancer] who lost the battle. And then, when the guy decided to compete in the Tour de France, that was amazing. Amazing, but not suspicious. As far as I'm concerned, he really had a metastasized cancer. He did not undergo chemotherapy for nothing.

On the other hand, if a Tour winner doesn't use dope, now that's something I'm suspicious about. Is there a normal human being who is capable of climbing four hills, stopping his bicycle at the finish line, and going off to hold a press conference, without being out of breath or tired? I ask myself that question. This is not specific to Lance Armstrong or cycling. Is it normal that a guy gets in a boat all by himself, goes around the world in three months, sleeps three hours out of twenty-four, and arrives without being very sick, tired but not very sick? I have already followed up on athletes who had metastasized cancers. Those who came out of it got back to the shape they were in prior to the cancer. But I have never known a case like this one. And there can't have been too many of them.

"Treatments are the same everywhere. The psychological resources of the person in question must play a role. On the level of sports performance, no matter what it was before, it must be recognized that Lance Armstrong must have

a very strong psychology. The fact of recovering from chemotherapy, from such a test, which makes you see death right up close, probably gives you resources that those who have lived an easier life do not have. As far as its impact on his performance, I know nothing about it."

During our meeting, Jean-Paul Le Bourgeois focuses his analysis on cycling, a sport that he practices himself. "I've done a little cycling myself. For a cyclist who had a metastasized cancer to win the Tour several times in a row, that amazes me. I would admire it more if I weren't telling myself that there must be something else behind it. If you put yourself in the context of the Tour de France, you tell yourself that it's not possible that they [the racers] can do all that. If EPO is not involved, that amazes me. Armstrong, I would like to believe in him, but I have doubts. To tell the truth, as far as he's concerned, my doubt is greater than my belief. I have no doubt about his abilities. On the other hand, I have no doubt about the fact that he could not do that naturally. I don't know everything about cycling, but I do know a little about people and medicine. I have doubts about the first and the second. The third ... When I see the Tour on television, I really have the feeling that this is all fake. It's not possible to do all that. And when people talk to me about psychological resources, transcendence, after all, it is the body that produces the effort, that restores itself, that lives through it. I am aware that there are people who are capable of doing things of which I am incapable, but the achievements on the Tour are insane, unbelievable."

Another specialist on this topic, Dr. Thierry Bouillet, in the department of medical oncology and radiation therapy at the Hospital des Peupliers in Paris, has already been more direct in his columns in the newspaper *Le Monde*: "What he did, I don't believe in it a single second, it's impossible."³¹ This oncologist, who has treated athletes suffering from the same disease as Armstrong, claims to have confirmed "the impossibility of bringing them back to their level of performance before their cancer." Dr. Bouillet recalls that with anti-cancer treatments, "it is possible to utilize and benefit from EPO for the rest of your life," and that it is "very easy to tinker with undetectable growth hormones during drug tests."

Although we asked him many times, Dr. Bouillet did not wish to answer our questions.

Cofidis, One Year Of Credit

When the company got into cycling sponsorship in 1997, Cofidis never imagined it would get into such a mess. Specializing in credit by phone, the Unionist company decided, in 1996, to finance a professional team to carry its name. François Migraine, then General Manager, was at the origin of this initiative. This man of finance joined Cetelem in 1965. Having become a regional director, he joined the company's board of directors in 1972. Ten years later, he became an agent at Cofidis, a finance company for distribution that had just been set up.

Cofidis invented the concept of credit by phone, a flourishing sector that is still growing. In 1996, François Migraine became its general manager. Cofidis wanted to become a permanent fixture of the sports world, and after several market studies, cycling was chosen as the vector to help the company become better known. This former handball player, who played in the French Stadium (he was selected twice for the France Espoirs team in the beginning of the 1960s) has always been a sports fanatic. He always loved cycling, and one of his sons, Luc, is involved in competitive track cycling. But it took some arguing to convince his board of directors.

The structure was set up. Alain Bondue, a major regional figure in cycling, was asked to be head of logistics and administration. Cyrille Guimard, assisted by Bernard Quilfen, became manager and sports director. François Migraine not only endowed the team with a budget, he put his whole heart into it. Along with the road team, he organized a small group of "track racers" around Arnaud Toumant, world champion many times over in the kilometer, and world record-holder for distance, who joined Laurent Gané, another multiple world champion for speed, as well as Mickaël Bourgain, Arnaud Dublé, and Robert Sassone. They were treated as equals to road racers, enjoying the first professional contracts issued to track racers, unlike Florian Rousseau, for example, who had to find additional income from regional sponsors. François Migraine appeared several times in the starting areas for line competitions, but more often at the edge of the track, changing out of his suit and tie into jeans, a shirt and cap, and discussing equipment and programs with his cyclists.

Having become president and general manager of Cofidis France in December 2002, this sexagenarian had business sense and an explicit plan. He was the Louis Nicollin of cycling: the expression is sometimes colorful, the tone is indignant. "Between Nicollin and Aulas," he corrects. In January 2004, when he agreed to meet with us, his cycling team, the top French team in the world rankings (seventh), the most richly endowed (8 million euros), includes three world champions in its ranks: the Spaniard Igor Astarloa, World Road Champion, the Englishman David Millar, Time Trial World Champion, and Laurent Gané, World Track Speed Champion. Armstrong? Yes, of course he'll talk about him. "I'll tell you how I feel about him."

The meeting took place in a Paris hotel on January 8, 2004, the day before the official presentation of the team to the press and four days before the "Cofidis affair."³² Briefcase in hand, dark suit, the person who knocked on the door of room 615 was an executive. A hearty handshake, a good sense of humor. His eye is caught by the screen of the laptop computer, where the future design of bicycle frames is displayed. The dictaphone? "No problem, I have nothing to hide." Over the course of several hours, François Migraine confided in us what had always been on his mind with regard to Lance Armstrong's judgments of Cofidis. This was because for more than a year – from September 1996 to October 1997 – the team had only a complex and tense relationship with the entourage of the American champion, and, in particular, with Bill Stapleton.

The First Contract

On September 12, 1996, after four seasons spent on the American team, Motorola, which dropped out of competitive cycling, Lance Armstrong signed a professional contract with Cofidis for a term of two years (1997-1998), for 6 million French francs per year. The agreement was signed three weeks before his cancer was detected.

Five weeks earlier, at the beginning of August, a meeting was held about this agreement, on the terrace of a café in Saint-Sébastien, the day before the Spanish trials for the World Cup. Around the table were François Migraine, Alain Bondue, Cyrille Guimard and Lance Armstrong. "Cyrille said he felt that Lance could one day win the Tour," Alain Bondue remembers. "And Armstrong, who did not yet possess the cycling culture, like many Americans, and who thought of Guimard as being a guy just good enough to drive a car behind the peloton, looked at him askance, as if to say: 'This guy is crazy!'"

François Migraine clarifies: "It's true Cyrille Guimard mentioned that Armstrong could achieve something on the Tour, but nobody ever mentioned it again after his cancer, Guimard or anyone else."

This contract, which went into effect on January 1, 1997, was signed at the headquarters of the credit company at 1 rue du Molinel, Wasquehal, in the Nord region of France.

A "standard" contract, according to François Migraine. "Everything had gone well for signing the contract, when the cancer crashed down on him. I suppose that he himself must have been surprised, even though you ask yourself some questions. In fact, cycling racers receive major medical check-ups as part of the team" So Lance Armstrong wouldn't be able to race along side the Swiss Tony Rominger or the Italian Maurizio Fondriest. How was Cofidis informed about it? "One evening, Paul Sherwen [at that time with Public Relations for the Motorola team] called me at home while he was at the company headquarters in Chicago," Alain Bondue tells us. "He told me: 'Alain, there is a big problem: Lance has testicular cancer.' I immediately called François Migraine. The next day, we had a telephone conference with Lance Armstrong, Bill Stapleton, François Migraine and myself."

Opposing Versions

At the sports headquarters of the Cofidis team, on the first floor of a red brick house in Wasquehal, everyone was hard at work on the morning of September 22, 2003. In an adjoining room, two assistants were working on their computers while the cell phone of our host interrupted the first exchanges. Alain Bondue, general manager since January 1998, was supposed to organize a tribute by all the team cyclists to Andreï Kivilevbe, who had died six months earlier on the Paris-Nice road. It was to take place in November, but it was not easy finding a date that worked for everyone. He was seated behind his desk, his tone was friendly. Scanty furnishings, three armchairs for visitors, and several picture

frames decorated the walls: a signed photo of the Swiss Hugo Koblet on the 1951 Tour de France, another from the 1984 Tour de France, Laurent Fignon in yellow, the Spaniard Pedro Delgado, and the American Greg LeMond. Behind his chair is a poster of the 1985 Dunkirk Four Days, his favorite race, where he poses beside the Belgian Éric Vanderaerden. Twice world pursuit champion in the beginning of the eighties, Olympic silver medal winner at the Moscow Games in 1980, eleven national track titles under his belt, Alain Bondue also compiled a good curriculum vitae on the road during his seven professional seasons: second in Milan-San Remo 1982, third in Paris-Roubaix 1984.

The presence of the dictaphone worried him a bit. Three times he asked that his comments not be recorded.

He has read the Armstrong book, "the first one, not the other one." In certain passages,³³ the American describes the deterioration of his relationship with the French team in somewhat bitter terms; the American is not kind to Alain Bondue, who never reacted. When asked about his version of the facts, Bondue tried to re-establish certain truths. For example, when speaking about the visit of the Frenchman to the hospital in Indianapolis during his fourth cycle of chemotherapy [considering the date, November 20, it appears that this was actually the beginning of the third], Armstrong spoke about a "so-called courtesy visit" while he himself was in a "narcotic haze" and "too nauseated to respond." He also refers to the wastefulness represented by the "\$500-bottle" of wine brought by his visitor. "I did not go to see him with a \$500-bottle, but rather with a \$100 bottle," Alain Bondue says to correct this statement. "It was Mouton-Cadet. I had bought the cycling reviews at Roissy airport, as he asked me to, but I also bought this bottle so I wouldn't arrive empty-handed, and because he likes good wine. A gift, that is not a waste as he says... Furthermore, he thanked me for it. That day we talked about the reviews that I brought him. The next morning, he was not as sick as he makes it seem in his book, because we went down together to have breakfast in the hospital cafeteria. He was just coming out of chemotherapy, that's true, but he could move around. He was walking with an IV set on wheels." The following text is not any more favorable to Alain Bondue: "But as he left my bedside, Bondue gestured to Bill Stapleton—he wanted him to come outside for a conversation.... ..told Bill that he had come to discuss some business matters He explained to Bill in French that regrettably Cofidis would be forced to renegotiate my contract because of my illness. Bondue pointed out that my contract had a clause stating I was required to pass a medical examination. Obviously, I was in no condition to do that. Therefore, Cofidis had the right to cancel my contract. They were offering to renegotiate, which they felt was generous under the circumstances.... If I did not accept the new terms they offered, they would force me to undergo a medical examination, and terminate the contract in its entirety. ... Bill stood up, looked across the table, and said, 'Fuck you!'...after two more hours, they had gotten nowhere. If Cofidis was pulling the rug out from under me while I was in the hospital, fine, he said, 'I'll let the whole world know you abandoned him.'... I thought about it. I couldn't help wondering if the real reason for Bondue's trip was to appraise my health... see if Armstrong is dying.... Apparently, Bondue had taken one look at me and decided

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I was on my deathbed.... Over the next three or four weeks, Cofidis pressed the issue... they would have no problem subjecting me to a medical test. They would fly their own doctor over from France and cancel the entire contract.... In the end, Cofidis paid less than a third of the original two-year contract and required an out clause for themselves for 1998."

Here again, Alain Bondue's recollections do not match up. He does not hide the fact that he went to get an idea, with his own eyes, of the "Lance Armstrong situation, but that was because we had no information about the development of his cancer, in spite of repeated requests. To pay someone for a year of not racing, without knowing his medical record, that's a lot, especially on the salary level. The fact that he accuses us, between the lines, of being inhumane, is not very loyal."

And Alain Bondue comes back to Lance Armstrong's writings: "When I was with Stapleton to discuss the reorganization of the contract, Bill insisted on the first contract. "It was signed, it must apply," he said. I reminded him about one point: 'No problem: there is a doctor's visit scheduled for the beginning of the year.' Stapleton retorted: 'Oh no! You can't make a cancer patient go for a doctor's visit!' To which I replied: 'OK, but don't tell me that the cancer patient you are talking about can compete in cycling on a high level, which we have the right to expect, as stipulated in the contract.' What is more, how could one think, after all that had happened, that the American Federation would issue him a license? But when Lance Armstrong states that we demanded a release clause for 1998, that is wrong. The first contract, like its revisions, also provided for a contract for 1998. That was how we showed our confidence and our support."

An article that appeared in the French newspaper *L'Équipe*³⁴ also confirms that Armstrong and his agent understood the situation at the time: "Taking into account the probable long period of disability of Lance Armstrong, the said contract is being reviewed from the ground up: 'It's logical,' says Lance Armstrong. 'I expect a decrease in salary, but I hope that they will be loyal to me. There is nothing to cause me uncertainty in this regard.'" To which Bill Stapleton adds, in the same article, "We are going to enter into negotiations with Cofidis to update the contract in an elegant manner. They have been marvelous up to now. I can't see why they would stop now."

First (Re)Negotiations

In a letter dated December 12, 1996, François Migraine responded to Bill Stapleton with regard to the restructuring modalities proposed by the American agent: "We have noted that, at the least, this proposal does not correspond at all to the current situation as we can analyze it. In fact, we remind you that when Lance Armstrong joined the Cofidis team last September [1996], Lance was a racer in excellent health, with a total of ICU points³⁵ of around 1,300; that he was very competitive in all competitions, except the major Tours; that he was going to become Cofidis' only leader. Furthermore, for the future, we feel that

under the supervision of Cyrille Guimard, he would be able to develop his potential and reach the podium of the three major Tours, in particular the Tour de France. Now, the serious illness that has affected Lance Armstrong has turned this situation completely upside down, and we simply hope that you will take these circumstances into account in your proposal. We regretfully are aware that this is not the case, and we can only share our perplexity with you. However, in an ultimate concern for negotiations, we make the following counter-proposal, as shown in the attached table.... We also wish to inform you that a prior medical authorization will be provided by a doctor of our choice, before Lance can participate in racing again.... The first week of 1997 is, as you wanted at the time of your discussion with Alain Bondue in Indianapolis, very close to the conditions of the original contract."

Eight years after these facts, the analysis by François Migraine has not changed. "Listen, with regard to French law, he signed an employment contract that he was not able to honor, and for this reason, we could simply have said good-bye to him. I believe that we adopted a very humane attitude, especially since Bill Stapleton told us that Lance Armstrong was badly insured, that his chemotherapy was very trying... His cancer, which had started with a testicle and reached his brain, this was certainly not something slight. There was always some vagueness about the financing for hospitalization, and about taking charge of Lance's treatment, and we thought we had the duty to support him financially."

A letter dated December 18, 1996, signed by Bill Stapleton, makes it understood that the proposed conditions have been accepted. "I am going to convince Lance that Cofidis has done its best to be on his side and that the solution presented [by Cofidis] is an honest one. I believe that Lance will be there and that all of these negotiations will be over with, he will be ready to rejoin his new team. Please let Mr. Migraine know that I apologize if my proposal offended him. I know that he is an honest man, that he has done his best to find a solution to this matter."

The Second Contract

After many negotiations, a new contract was finalized on December 31, 1996. "Never in my whole life have I had such a hard time as I had to conclude this contract with his attorney Bill Stapleton," François Migraine states. For the first half of 1997, this agreement provided for a gross annual salary of \$99,000 (\$15,000 gross salary, \$84,000 endorsement contract). For the second half of the year, \$15,000 gross salary, \$15,000 for endorsement rights, and a scale of premiums indexed on the total monthly ICU points. This contract also included the 1998 season: \$14,000 gross monthly salary, \$26,000 for endorsement rights, and again a scale indexed to the total of ICU points.

One problem had not been settled, however. Cofidis wanted Lance Armstrong to submit to a medical examination in order to judge his abilities. Bill Stapleton and Lance Armstrong were firmly opposed to this. Why? Without it, it would have been very simple to send his medical records to the doctor of his employer.

Nothing like that happened, on the contrary. The episode served as a lesson to Cofidis: "In cycling, unlike soccer, a racer is signed without a doctor's visit, even though medical tests are done before the start of the contract," Alain Bondue explains. "Since this 'misadventure,' at our company we have done things differently. We stipulate that such and such a contract with a racer is only valid if the racer passes a comprehensive medical exam."

Michel Provost was the French team's doctor at the time these events occurred, from 1996 to 1998. With a bushy mustache, a gravelly voice and a flowery way of talking, he is a well-known figure in cycling. Before being the doctor for Cofidis, he was the doctor for the French amateur cycling team from 1986 to 1996. After 1998, he left cycling to start a general practice in Paris. On November 20, 2003, we asked him for his version of these facts.

"What are the reasons for your departure?"

"I don't wish to get into that. Please excuse me... Let's say that was something distasteful."

The conversation then focused on Lance Armstrong.

"Doctor Provost, did you have contact with Lance Armstrong's doctors to get information about his medical records?"

"I did in fact have telephone conversations with his doctors. They told me: 'Everything is OK, everything is going well, the treatment is going well.' I spoke English with them. They told me, 'There is nothing to tell you, everything is OK.'" "Was there any exchange of correspondence between you and them?"

"No, no. There was a complete blockade. I sent letters to his doctor in Indianapolis [particularly one dated January 23, 1997], but I was not able to get any information whatsoever in return. Me, I had the responsibility of saying he couldn't race, because I did not have enough information to say that he could. I was not in charge of his therapy, you understand? As the team doctor, I was there to make sure of his medical ability to participate in competitions, and, at the time, I could only say one thing: he has an illness that he has told us about, an illness that is obviously serious, which absolutely prevents him from racing. What more do you want me to say? I couldn't say anything more, other than that he was being treated, and I checked if he was being effectively treated, not neglected therapeutically... You understand, medical confidentiality does exist, including among doctors. Only the legal system can lift this confidentiality. If Armstrong told his doctors: 'Black-out, don't say anything,' it doesn't matter whether I'm a doctor or the lowest man on the totem pole, it's the same thing. The requests were made several times, over several months. In any case, the only thing we could do, was to say, 'He can't race, that's it.' We didn't have any information, so we definitely couldn't give an authorization to race."

"By therapist, do you mean his oncologists?"

"Yes, yes, of course."

"How did you correspond?"

"By phone. And then there were one or two letters."

"But these went unanswered?"

"Yes, no answer."

"As a doctor, this didn't concern you?"

"Look, let's say I'm the doctor treating you. A doctor from the company where you work asks me for information about the state of your health. But you have told me, 'Provost, don't talk to them. You have a medical secret, keep it. What can I do? What can a doctor for the company do with regard to an attending physician, if the latter has received a directive from his patient not to divulge his secret?'"

"Had you ever been confronted with such a situation?"

"No, never."

"If a racer is transferred, can you get access to his medical records?"

"Yes, but I have never personally been confronted by such a situation with regard to a racer from a foreign country... For me, the Armstrong problem is extremely interesting, but purely on the level of medical deontology. Armstrong, I have never had him under my direct care. We met several times, I've spoken with him. I have sufficiently precise knowledge about his current state of health. I can't tell you more than that. Within the framework of medical confidentiality, he has confided some things to me that I have absolutely no right to divulge. That said, at the time when he was under my supervision, I did not have any argument that could enable me to authorize him to race."

"And you told him that?"

"Yes, of course."

"How did he react?"

"Uh... In any case, this was no longer his problem because at the end of the season [1997], he looked for a different team and left. At the time when the problem of putting him back on the ground would have come up, and also a more in-depth knowledge of his records ..."

"But if he had stayed with Cofidis, you would have found yourself faced with a dilemma ..."

"We had already started, and that is why there were letters, to contact the people who had treated him, so that they could at least give us the current status. And we never got that. I stated a very clear position, which was that if we did not have the records, he could not be authorized [to race]."

François Migraine still does not understand: "Our request for obtaining his medical records was never taken into account, and the letter from his attending physician that we finally received left more questions than certainties about ever seeing him on a bicycle again. And we, being very decent, we waited on him hand and foot. After all, I have a conscience."

A Hypothetical Return

In fact, after several follow-up reminders, a fax written in English was finally addressed to Dr. Michel Provost. Dated February 13, 1997, it is signed by Dr. Craig Nichols of the Medical Center of the University of Indiana, where Lance Armstrong was treated.

Aside from several medical points that are not very precise and not of any particular interest, this document states: "As far as knowing whether he will again

be capable of becoming a professional racer, the question is complex and subject to change. This depends to a great extent on a possible recourse to surgical care, as well as the extent of his recovery from the intense chemotherapy treatment that was administered to him. Planning his return to competition, if the case presents itself, remains vague." It is understandable that Dr. Provost might have forgotten this correspondence.

Lance Transatlantic

In his letter dated February 13, 1997, Dr. Nichols estimates that a possible return to competition by Lance Armstrong remains "vague," that the question is "complex" and "subject to change." There is not yet any question of Lance Armstrong resuming competitive cycling (he will decide this officially in September 1997). Two months later, on April 22, a letter from Alain Bondue to Bill Stapleton, with a copy to François Migraine, reveals a troubling point: "I must inform you that during his period of training in January [at Marcq-en-Barœul], Lance was in Italy to see Dr. Ferrari, and that Cofidis made the reservation and paid for his airfare, although the trip was considered a personal trip that had not been decided by Cofidis."

For what reason did Lance Armstrong go to see someone, in January 1997, whom the American describes as follows: "I knew Michele Ferrari well; he was a friend and I went to him for occasional advice on training. He wasn't one of my major advisors, but he was one of the best minds in cycling, and sometimes, I consulted him."³⁶ Why, if even according to the opinion of his attending physician, his return to competition was still very uncertain? Three weeks after his last session of chemotherapy, taking advantage of a trip to Europe for a press conference held on January 8 at the headquarters of Cofidis, the American racer went to Ferrare, Italy, where the offices of Michele Ferrari are located. A totally unexpected stay in Europe. "Nothing was asked of him, because everyone was too mindful of his convalescence, and preferred to let him recover on his own, but it was Bill Stapleton who suggested that Lance be present at the presentation of the team, stating that it was logical for him," explains Alain Bondue. "His appearance was a great surprise."

"It literally amazed me that a cancer patient coming from chemotherapy could arrive like that, to our great astonishment, on the day of the team's address to the press," François Migraine remembers. "We strictly demanded nothing of him. Perhaps he told himself that for the money he was taking, he had to do a minimum?" This was not the last surprise that Lance Armstrong had for his employer. Cofidis then learned from a Belgian journalist, who called with an interview request, that its racer would come to Europe again at the beginning of April, at the Paris-Roubaix road race. Taken by surprise, Cofidis wanted to know more and sent a letter to Lance on March 20, 1997. It was Bill Stapleton who answered, demanding that Cofidis organize a press conference the day of the Northern classic.

Falsehoods

In his first book,³⁷ Lance Armstrong also talks about these last dealings before the break with Cofidis, which he left to join the American US Postal team. According to him, these events took place in the fall of 1997, when he decided to return to competition. He writes, "Bill called Cofidis and told them I was up and riding.... The Cofidis people suggested that Bill come to France for a meeting. Bill flew to Paris overnight and drove four hours into the country to reach the Cofidis executive offices. He arrived in time for an elegant lunch. Migraine welcomed Bill with a five-minute speech, welcoming Bill to France. And then he said, "We want to thank you for coming here, but we want you to know that we're going to exercise our right to terminate his contract. We need to go in a different direction.' Bill looked at Bondue and said, 'Is he serious?' Bondue looked down at his plate and simply said, 'Yes.' ... Bill left without finishing lunch [When he arrived in Paris] ... he dialed my number. 'What?' I said. 'They terminated your deal.' I paused. 'Why'd they make you fly all the way over there?'"

Alain Bondue demolishes this version of the facts: "Stapleton did in fact come to see us in August 1997. But it was at his request, not ours." Furthermore, a fax dated August 7, sent from the office of Bill Stapleton, confirms that this trip had been planned for a long time with American Airlines on August 26, arrival scheduled for 10:15 A.M. at Roissy Charles de Gaulle airport, returning to the United States the following day. Bill Stapleton had three weeks to jump on the plane ... "At Cofidis, we were a little surprised about this visit," Alain Bondue continues. "When I asked him the purpose for it, he replied that it was to thank us for everything we had done for Lance, and to talk about the future." Alain Bondue pauses, then continues: "Whether or not Bill Stapleton spent four hours driving from Roissy to Wasquehal, whether he had a 'elegant' lunch with us, while we ate in the company restaurant, or whether François Migraine monopolized the conversation for three-quarters of an hour, which is really not his style, is beside the point. ~~Translator's note: Apparently there is an error in the original text. The verb dans la version française de la traduction de Armstrong's 'Le Vélo et le Bike'. The translation states that Migraine's speech lasted three quarters of an hour when Armstrong wrote that it lasted five minutes.~~ During the meeting, Bill Stapleton got around to asking us what we were going to do with Lance. He told us that Lance was going to return to competition and that he had to protect him for 1998. We replied that this was provided for in the revised contract. With that, he asked us to make an effort: 'It is going to be much better than as provided for in the contract.' How could he predict that? Nevertheless, we agreed and we sent him another proposal several days later; a bit better, but all the same on the same level as the initial contract."

Arms of Iron

Reading the exchanges between Cofidis and Bill Stapleton during the three weeks that follow testifies to the tumultuous, unpredictable and exhausting relationship between the two parties, up to their definitive separation. In fact, on September 12, 1997, a letter from François Migraine to Stapleton explains the position of Cofidis. Here is an extract: "As we stated on that occasion [August 26], Lance will not be able, in all likelihood, to resume competition as defined by the contractual arrangements that were in place in 1997 during the second half of 1997. As a consequence, and as was already provided, this contract ... will come to an end on December 31, 1997. Nevertheless, taking into account the support that we have provided to him since the start of his illness, Cofidis would greatly appreciate it, if Lance's return to competition actually takes place in 1998, that his return to the peloton be under the colors of our team. Therefore, we thank you for considering our attached proposal [which] takes into account the margin of progress that Lance makes during the coming year and the potential that we think he has." Cofidis' good faith was not in doubt, since the French team presented an exemption petition to ICU to permit a twenty-third racer.

On September 25, a letter from Bill Stapleton requests, among other things, a re-evaluation of the salary as well as a re-evaluation of the ICU points. But, first alert, it states that he will "receive a proposal from the US Postal team, which is better than that of Cofidis. Though, Lance would prefer to ride for Cofidis." Other exchanges on the same order follow. On September 26, Bill Stapleton called Alain Bondue to indicate his agreement. Moreover, a fax, also from Bill Stapleton, dated October 1, explained that "Lance is thrilled about the idea of racing for Cofidis again in 1998. I am waiting for the original documents to sign them as quickly as possible." The next day, a new fax signed Bill Stapleton specifies the procedure for announcing the return of Lance Armstrong to the French team. "Lance has decided not to give a big press conference next weekend. Instead, once we have signed the contract with Cofidis, he prefers to release a press communiqué throughout Europe. Lance is training assiduously, he asks that the media let him train.... We are very happy about the imminent contract between Lance and Cofidis. Personally, I look forward impatiently to continue working with you."

A letter from François Migraine, dated October 6, 1997, confirms the contract conditions. Everything seemed to show that the parties had finally reached an agreement.

The Third Contract

This third contract, dated October 6, 1997, concerned the following year, 1998. The remuneration consisted of three parts. First, a fixed salary of \$1700 gross per month, plus a bonus of \$1700 for each race finished. Second, an endorsement contract, that is, a bonus of \$51,000 net for his first appearance. Third, the ICU scale which meant that he received \$250 for each new ICU point up to the 150th point, then \$765 for every point thereafter. This implied that if

Lance Armstrong got back to his pre-cancer level, he would get back the outlay of the original contract. On top of this was the disability insurance premium paid by Lloyd's, -- \$20,000 per month for non-availability until the American champion returned to competition,³⁸ sixteen months later.

But look out! The next day, Bill Stapleton sent a new fax asking Cofidis to align itself with US Postal's offer. "I received your fax of 6 October. However, the US Postal Service team has now made a much better offer in terms of US dollars. They are offering a bonus of 500 US dollars for each ICU point up to the 150th point and 1,000 US dollars from the point after the 150th point. Therefore, we ask you to make a better offer in terms of US dollars, similar to that offered by the US Postal. I look forward to hearing from you very shortly."

Alain Bondue told the rest of the story: "When we received this fax, we were flabbergasted. After this, we sent them a letter replying in substance: 'OK, if you've found something better elsewhere, go for it.'" On October 17, 1997, during a press conference held in a New York hotel, Lance Armstrong announced that he would be wearing the US Postal jersey in 1998.

As you can imagine, François Migraine did not appreciate this sudden U-turn. "With Lance Armstrong and Bill Stapleton, I discovered a mentality in the American culture that we do not have, and this is no doubt one of the reasons for our ...lack of understanding. The Americans don't have such precise laws as we do, so relations are very much governed by contracts. I can see how this logic leads someone like Lance Armstrong to say that Cofidis had broken its contract, but I wonder what would have happened if the situation had happened with US Postal. But he had a lot of nerve attacking us all the time. We had proven our generosity to him."

Since then, François Migraine's impassioned views on the people involved in cycling have radically changed. Two weeks after the start of legal proceedings in the "Cofidis Affair," didn't he claim that 'cyclists are mercenaries and half rotten. A cyclist's promise is worth nothing'?³⁹

"This business upset me," admitted the CEO of Cofidis. "I can't understand why this guy bears a grudge against us. He should churn out a third book thanking Cofidis for supporting him financially during the year he was suffering from cancer. Or maybe he considers the millions of francs he received were just peanuts. It was one of the ten top salaries for the peloton at the time, and for a guy who certainly didn't think he could win the Tour. The only thing I would have liked from him was for him to recognize that we didn't let him down. Yet he is doing the exact opposite."

The Obscure Roles of Stapleton

"In fact, we hardly ever saw Lance Armstrong," recalled François Migraine. "We had more of a relationship with his lawyer, Bill Stapleton." And what a relationship...

Bill Stapleton was 38 and had been managing Lance Armstrong's affairs since 1995. He was a former member of the American swimming team and worked for

a firm of lawyers (Brown McCarroll & Oaks Hartline) which occupied the fifteenth floor of the Franklin Plaza glass tower in the center of Austin. Alain Bondue recalled the plenipotentiary role of Bill Stapleton at Lance Armstrong's side. "Bill Stapleton had all the power of attorney needed to sign on behalf of Lance Armstrong," he asserted. "For everything: contracts, endorsement rights, even bank accounts. On February 20, 1997, he actually faxed us the document stipulating this."

He recalled two episodes: "When I went to visit Lance at the hospital in Indianapolis, Bill Stapleton told me there was no point discussing figures with Lance, not even those relating to the renegotiation of the contract. "All this was between us [Bill Stapleton, Alain Bondue and Paul Sherwen who was acting as interpreter then]. 'It's Lance's health that's important,' he told us. 'He is focusing on his illness and doesn't want to deal with anything else.' This all-encompassing mandate had surprised me. I'd never seen anything like it."

The letters were another source of surprise. In 1999, two years after the stormy divorce, Alain Bondue still felt the need to explain himself to Lance Armstrong, man to man. He waited until the end of the Tour de France, the first one the American won, to give him his version. "I did indeed send a letter to Lance Armstrong, in a private capacity, on September 16, 1999, in which I reminded him of the key points of our arduous negotiations," recalled Alain Bondue. "I sent this letter to his home address. On October 12, I received a reply back signed by Bill Stapleton." Armstrong's agent explained, "on behalf of Lance," that this "letter was an attempt to rewrite history, but [that] the real story was the one written in the books." Armstrong's books no doubt omit the many renegotiations of the contract. "Bill Stapleton replied to all the letters sent to Lance Armstrong," added Alain Bondue. "Nothing reached him in person."

As for François Migraine, he considered that "Bill Stapleton didn't help make our relationship with Lance Armstrong any better. I wonder if Armstrong really knew the truth about all these negotiations. I consider this a mitigating circumstance for him. Maybe Stapleton told him exactly what he wanted to concerning the affair. I was never able to talk openly about this to Armstrong because of the language barrier. I didn't have the specific vocabulary required to discuss very specific points."

4.4 Million Francs for a "Betrayal"

In the end, Lance Armstrong received 4,437,118 francs (\$676,630 at the time) from Cofidis, i.e., more than two thirds of the initial contract, for zero days of racing and not "less than one third" as he wrote. When you think about it, this is a lot of money for an athlete who "was betrayed". Apparently, Lance Armstrong received exactly \$118,630 (827,119.24 francs) net after tax under the terms of the work contract, and \$558,000 (3,609,999 francs) under the terms of the endorsement rights contract (not to mention roughly \$12,000 worth of plane tickets archived in the accounting documents). It goes without saying that this far exceeded the French social security compensation ceiling.

Lance Armstrong returned to competition on February 14, 1998 in Spain, in the Andalousian Ruta del sol race, wearing the US Postal jersey. After 518 days of inactivity, a new era had begun.

May 18, 2004, 9:10 A.M. in Villeneuve d'Ascq at Cofidis headquarters. Despite a "nasty cold," François Migraine received us for a last interview. Alain Bondue, who had just taken up his new job at the headquarters, located about ten kilometers from the team's racing department, was also present. The two men read through their statements for nearly two hours. After a few minor corrections, the document was approved. "The truth had to be re-established," concluded François Migraine.

The Emma Years

"In the beginning we had this brand of brash Texan, interesting European sport, a phenomenon. Then you layered in cancer survivor, which broadened and deepened the brand. But even in 1998 there was very little corporate interest in Lance. And then he won the Tour de France in 1999 and the brand was complete. You layered in family man, hero, comeback of the century, all these things. And then everybody wanted him."

Bill Stapleton
Texas Monthly Magazine, June 2001,
interviewed by Mike Hall.

June 2003. In the fifth stage of the Critérium du Dauphiné libéré, Morzine-Chambéry, Lance Armstrong fell 14 km after the start. He won the race two days later but his bruised body made him suffer right to the end of the event. On the same day, Emma O'Reilly, a former employee of US Postal, which she had left three years earlier, telephoned one of her old friends, Julien De Vriese, the team mechanic. After chatting politely, she asked him to get Johan Bruyneel, the sports manager, to call her. Emma had not spoken to Bruyneel for over two years and they were not on good terms. O'Reilly wanted to inform him that a journalist had contacted her and that she was willing to talk to him. If Bruyneel had every reason to be worried, he only had himself to blame because he had made her life hell for one and a half years. Despite her love of cycling, she had been exposed to its darker sides: the doping culture, dishonesty, the conspiracy of silence, and she didn't want to cover all that up through her own silence. Armstrong's fall and the telephone call both took place on the same day – Friday the 13. When he fell, he probably thought it was an unlucky day for him. He was right.

"The Medical Program"

Emma O'Reilly first met me on June 23, 2003, in her Cheshire home in the north of England. No tape recorder and no notebooks. Just a long discussion about the five years she had spent with the team, about professional cycling and the secrets of the US Postal team. Emma enjoyed her first three and a half years but, knowing what she knows now, she could no longer say that cycling was an admirable sport. US Postal was just like all the other teams with its medical program, its doctors, its van full of products, its syringes, and its intravenous injections: black envelopes for big things and white envelopes for small. She saw everything, but like the others, she obeyed the code of silence. She was now ready to break it. Professional cycling was rotten to the core. No, she didn't aim to revolutionize the sport but she hoped for an implosion.

She has mixed memories of her sporting period. Emma is proud of her climb up the professional ladder: "When I started in 1996, I was paid \$18,000 a year. In 1998, after two years, it went up to \$30,000, then in 1999 to \$36,000 and finally to \$45,000 during my last year. In 1999, when I became head soigneur, I was pleased. It was an ego trip, I suppose, but I was thrilled by this promotion. I had succeeded in a man's world without losing my integrity. I had not been involved in the medical aspects and, with only two exceptions, had not transported substances for the cyclists. I had not slept with anyone or played the role of big sister or girlfriend. I was just an Irish girl with a diploma in electricity who had switched to massage, someone who had been hired by a cycling team and ended up working directly with Lance Armstrong when he won his first Tour de France."

Maybe she didn't realize the consequences of her decision?

"When the people in the team see that I'm spilling the beans, they'll say I'm mad or they'll slander me. They'll say I was sleeping with people, which is completely false. But, as my friend Mike used to say, 'I don't care what they say.' I know I'm doing the right thing."

The irony of fate is that Emma O'Reilly really liked Lance Armstrong. They first met back in January 1998 at the Ramona training camp in California. The cyclist, Christian Van de Velde, introduced them.

"Hey Emma, Lance said hi to you!"

"Oh, hello."

Their friendship remained solid. During the first year, Armstrong distrusted the sports manager, Johnny Weltz, and he confided in her. She liked his strong character—he faced up to problems and knew how to make decisions. He was ambitious and not afraid of leading the team in the direction he thought was right, taking every detail into account. For example, it was he who had cereals banned from the breakfast table. One day he pointed to the muesli bars and said, "Look at them. Do you know how many calories they contain? It's sugar that's holding them together. They're out." And the muesli disappeared from the team's table. She found this amusing. Sometimes his sense of humor was absurd but she liked it. She liked the fact that he couldn't give a hoot about being politically correct and even went a step further than her in this field. She liked his vindictive side: when he said he'd do something, he did it. For example, he bore a grudge

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against the European teams that had refused to hire him after his cancer and he wanted to make them pay for it. And Emma thought: "Right, Lance, show them what you can do and make them pay."

However, she wasn't blind. She compared her opinion of Armstrong with Frankie Andreu's opinion. Andreu, one of US Postal's senior cyclists, had known Armstrong when he was with Motorola and they had become friends there. When he signed up with Cofidis in September 1996, Armstrong helped his friend integrate with the French team and they both joined the US Postal team together. According to Emma O'Reilly, Andreu understood Armstrong better than most people. "Frankie saw what he was like and, up to a certain point, respected him for what he was. But he was under no delusions. This sometimes annoyed Lance, but it was a healthy sort of respect. Frankie is an intelligent guy." Emma didn't harbor any illusions either. When she had a brush with Johan Bruyneel and saw her job threatened, Armstrong didn't do anything to save her. When Bruyneel declared "it's her or me," she knew what Armstrong would do. He needed Bruyneel more than he needed her so "bye-bye Emma." Like Andreu, she felt that she understood Lance Armstrong.

Two weeks after this first meeting, we were together again in her living room with a tape recorder. The Tour de France was being broadcast live on Eurosport, but the television was turned off. For six hours, she talked about the years she had spent with US Postal and, in particular, about her two years as Armstrong's soigneur. She told the story plainly and with no bitterness. She mentioned the team's medical program several times. In fact, she mentioned this program more often than the training or racing program. Six weeks later, when reading through the seventy-two typed pages containing the transcript of this six-hour interview, she realized that unconsciously she had forgotten to say what the US Postal team's medical program involved. Therefore, to be as accurate as possible she added, "In my opinion, it involved the administration of legal and illegal drugs to help cyclists recover and improve their results."

The Ritz and the Rolex

Anybody who followed the 1999 Tour de France will remember Armstrong's performance. Not satisfied with having won the prologue, he took the lead in the race after a dazzling victory in the first time trial in Metz and after outdoing his rivals in the mountains. On July 14, he once again gave a magnificent performance at the summit of Alpe d'Huez. Emma recalled how Armstrong had crushed his rivals that day but above all she remembered the conversation she had had that afternoon with Christie, the Eurosport commentator and wife of former Australian cyclist Phil Anderson. O'Reilly had noticed a beautiful Rolex on the California woman's wrist. It was too small to be a man's watch and slightly too big for a woman's watch and this was exactly what she had liked about it. "That's a beautiful watch, Christie. Can I see it?"

"Emma, it's worth \$4,000 and it's a gift from Phil."

"You know what, honey, I can buy myself a watch for \$4,000. There's no need to look down your nose at me just because I'm an employee."

At that time Emma was engaged to Simon and however much she wanted this watch, she couldn't afford it.. That evening, when massaging Armstrong, she told him about her conversation with Christie. "Who does she think she is? I suppose she imagines I can't afford a Rolex. It's a bit stupid to spend so much money on a watch but if I wanted one, I could have one." Armstrong, who also found Christie Anderson exasperating, listened to her sympathetically.

About two weeks later, the Tour arrived in Paris. This meant a great deal of work for Emma. She had to empty the Fiats lent to the teams during the race and make sure that nothing was missing in the US Postal trucks. She was tired and in a bad mood and still had a lot of cleaning to do when someone informed her that she and De Vriese were expected at the Ritz. Armstrong wanted to see them. They were both reluctant to go because they still had a lot to do. "We were exhausted, in a bad mood, and looked awful in our filthy shorts. I was wearing an old Trek shirt – the sort of thing gas station attendants wear. Julien was also wearing his gas station jacket."

They arrived at the hotel just after Armstrong's press conference ended. The receptionist told them that Mr. Armstrong didn't want to be disturbed. O'Reilly and De Vriese's curiosity was aroused and they were not the sort of people to give up.

"Call him in his room and tell him some people from his team are here," insisted O'Reilly.

"I'm sorry, I'm afraid I can't."

"Call the manager, it's important."

The manager refused:

"No, I'm sorry, but he asked us not to disturb him."

"I don't care, just tell him that Emma and Julien are here and he'd better see us because we're in a bad mood."

"Listen, if you're his friends, why don't you call him yourself on his cell phone?"

"Because I've got his damn cell phone in my hand, that's why." After a few morning calls, the Texan often gave her his cell phone in the team's bus before starting out on the day's stage.

"The manager, understanding that we were not going to calm down, softened up. He called an employee and said:

'Go up to Mr. Armstrong's room, knock on his door and see if he wants to speak to these people.' They followed the employee who was shaking with fear. He knocked on the door. 'I asked you not to disturb me!' shouted Armstrong. At that moment, Emma remembered that she had Kristin Armstrong's cell phone. She called her. It was Lance who answered.

'We are outside your door, pig-head!'

'Okay.'

Two seconds later, the door opened and everyone was smiling again, except the hotel employee.

Bedroom, bathroom, and spacious living room – the winner of the Tour de France was already living very comfortably. Kristin was cutting her husband's hair. "Let Kristin finish," Lance said. "We can talk afterwards." While she was waiting, Emma took a hotel pen and, for a joke, she told De Vriese that they should take some soap and shampoo as well and pretend they had stayed there. Once his hair was cut, Lance got up and offered them two magnificent Rolex watches. The gift was given simply but sincerely. Lance wanted to show his gratitude to these two people who had played an important role behind the scenes. Soigneurs and mechanics didn't usually receive Rolex watches from their bosses and the unexpected nature of the present only made them more precious to O'Reilly and De Vriese.

When they were leaving the hotel, Julien joked to Emma. "They must have been presents from Kristin. Lance would never have spent so much money on us." They both knew that it was Lance who had asked his wife to buy them. Back in England, Emma insured the watch, estimated at \$4,000. She noticed the date on the guarantee: July 16. The watches had been purchased two days after the tense conversation with Christie Anderson.

Building an Empire

Emma O'Reilly had left her native Dublin in 1994. She had trained to be an electrician and also a medical masseuse and wanted to work as a masseuse in the United States where she dreamed of being hired by a cycling team. Surely there's no better way of discovering America than by following cycling races. Emma settled down in Boulder, Colorado, and spent most of her first two years working for the Shaklee team. She wasn't paid very well and had little hope of promotion. In December 1995, she went for an interview to get a job with the Montgomery-Bell team, owned by Montgomery Securities. People said the team was going to develop and this rumor seemed to be confirmed by her plane ticket to San Francisco, where the company's head offices were located.

"It was really funny. I thought Montgomery Securities was a company that worked in alarm systems. I was going to wear jeans for the interview – I was only a masseuse, after all. But I met a mechanic who was also going for an interview in San Francisco. 'No, no, no, it's not an alarm system company and you can't go in jeans.' I managed to find something suitable to wear. At San Francisco airport, I took a shuttle into the town center, to the Pyramid Building where Montgomery Securities was located. As I was going in, I thought: 'My God, this certainly isn't an alarm system company.'" Emma had in fact just walked into one of the biggest merchant banks in California.

She was received by Mark Gorski and Dan Osipow, who told her about their ambitions for the team. Gorski also talked about Thom Weisel, the CEO of Montgomery Securities, the driving force behind the team. Weisel was the boss and he dreamt of having a team that would compete in the Tour de France, Gorski explained. The interview went well and, as she was leaving the building, she had the feeling she would be hired. What she didn't know then was that

Weisel had been dreaming of this for several years. Weisel had himself rode in the Masters, coached at that time by Eddie Borysewicz, a Polish immigrant who was to become one of the best-known figures in American cycling. At the beginning of 1989, Weisel agreed to finance a team managed by Borysewicz, and this was how Montgomery-Avenir came into being.

A year later, the team found an important sponsor and became Subaru-Montgomery. The budget allocated to Borysewicz amounted to \$600,000 per year and he could hire a top cyclist. Among his recruits was Lance Armstrong, a Texan teenager with no experience but enormous strength. When the team became professional one year later, Armstrong preferred to stay an amateur in order to prepare for the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona.

That year the Subaru-Montgomery budget amounted to 1 million dollars and, with a view to competing in the Tour de France 1993, Subaru doubled the sum. However, their hopes of being attributed a wild card, i.e., an invitation from the Tour Company, were dashed when they only received half a place. They were asked to merge with Chazal, a French team. Subaru-Montgomery refused the offer and the 1993 Tour, which should have been the team's high point, turned into a major disappointment for Subaru, which left cycling.

In 1994 the team no longer existed. However, Weisel still hoped to line up a team for the Tour de France. This is how Montgomery-Bell came into being in 1995, thanks to the financial commitment of his own company and the sponsoring of an equipment manufacturer. It was a low-budget team but halfway through the season, Weisel got lucky. The US Postal Service, one of the world's biggest employers with a staff of over 800,000, agreed to sponsor the team and signed a three-year contract which included a budget increase in the second and third years. For Weisel, the Tour de France finally became an attainable goal. After the agreement was signed, he started to recruit. The main cyclist was Andy Hampsten, an experienced American with a good record of achievements, including a victory at the Giro in 1988. Hampsten was already at the end of his career, but it was still the name that counted in the European circuit. With him, the new US Postal team couldn't be ignored.

What's Up, Doc?

Doctor Prentice Steffen has very clear memories of the 1996 Tour de Suisse. It was his first major European race and its dangerous speeds pushed the poor US Postal cyclists to their limits. Steffen had been the team's doctor since 1993 and he knew some of the cyclists well and liked all of them. "I can still cite their names: Andy Hampsten, Marty Jemison, Tyler Hamilton, Darren Baker, Eddy Gragus, Mike Engleman, Dariusz Baranowski [a Pole], Tomasz Brozyna [another Pole], and Zven Teutenberg [a German]. Three of them finished the race, Baker, Hampsten and Jemison, but our best cyclist was at least one hour slower than the winner, the Austrian climber Peter Luttenberger. We weren't in the same category."

It wasn't Steffen's first trip to Europe. In 1993, he had already followed several European races with Subaru-Montgomery, but within a few years the situation had evolved. "It was the speed that surprised us, especially in the mountain stages. When the Europeans cycled up the mountain roads, if you stopped looking at the landscape and focused on the cyclists, you could imagine you were on the plain. They were going at the same speed."

The race was so difficult that even the doctor reached the limits of his physical capacities. "It was a really tough mountain stage and I was in the team's second car. We were helping the cyclists who were dropping out. Tyler Hamilton was in difficulty. He was trying really hard to stay with the time period and avoid being eliminated. My job was to jump out of the car and push him as hard as I could. It was forbidden, but Tyler had nothing left to lose. After I had pushed him, I got back into the car, we drove on for a bit and then I started to push him again. I did that as much as I could but, my God, did I wear myself out that day."

What the US Postal cyclists were lacking was preparation. They came straight from the American championships and weren't used to European races. It wasn't so much the physical preparation, but the medical preparation that was posing a problem. At the time, most teams in Europe were using EPO. The longer the race, the greater the suffering of the US Postal team. Baranowski and Brozyna were pleased to escape the torture and gave up before the end of the event in order to take part in their national championships. Two or three days before the end, Steffen had a short conversation with two cyclists, which was to mark the end of his work with this team.

"I can remember the scene clearly. We were in a small village. They came up to me and we walked along for a while chatting. It was Marty Jemison and Tyler Hamilton, I can remember it well. Marty was almost the only one to speak.

'We have to discuss the medical program.'

'Okay.'

I had a good idea of what was to follow.

'As a team, we'll never reach our goal if we go on like this.'

He paused, encouraging a reply from me.

'Well, I think I'm already doing everything I can do.'

As far as I can remember, he replied that 'more could be done.'

'Yes, I understand, but I don't want to get mixed up in that.'

Tyler may not even have said a word. I tried to convince them that we were an American team and that we needed time to get used to European cycling."

On the Wrong Track...

Marty Jemison lives in Park City, Utah, near North America's finest ski slopes. I met him in one of the town's best hotels. He was talkative and friendly and wasn't worried about Armstrong's reactions if he found out that Jemison had spoken to a journalist about US Postal methods. "I was never very close to Lance. Our relationship was always distant. And this never really changed. We spent three years together in the team, but I never got to know him intimately. I didn't have

the same behavior towards him as most people. I was myself and did my own thing. After his cancer, I helped him win his first two races, the Tour du Luxembourg and a race in Germany.⁴⁰ Helping him win these two races was an important moment in my life but, how can I put it, I think the others groveled before him a bit. I didn't."

Although relegated to 1 hour 43 minutes behind the winner, Peter Luttenberger, Marty Jemison was one of the three US Postal cyclists to finish this grueling Tour de Suisse in 1996. Jemison remembers this race as the toughest in his career.

"During an early morning breakaway, we sweated blood and tears to catch up with the others. Mark Gorski was screaming at us from the car. He had no idea of what was going on, of the speed we were doing, or the speed the breakaway group was doing. All Mark saw was that he had put a lot of money on Hampsten and his champion was not in the breakaway group. This race wore the team out." Did Marty also remember his conversation with Prentice Steffen precisely?

"I don't remember this conversation."

"Prentice Steffen remembers it very well."

"I don't remember it. I know I asked him for more B12 injections, things like that. It must have been that."

"But Prentice wouldn't have refused B12 injections."

"He was reluctant to increase the number of B12 injections. I pushed him: 'Go on , Prentice, we need them.' Maybe Tyler and I wanted Prentice to find out what the other teams were taking, just to see how to become more competitive. A year later, Pedro Celaya became our team doctor and I loved working with him. Pedro considered that the cyclist's health was what mattered most. He understood that cycling was very demanding and it was up to him to help us stay healthy."

Fired for Not Doping?

For Prentice Steffen, this conversation with Jemison and Hamilton marked a turning point in his relations with the team. The good relationship that he'd had with the cyclists up until then deteriorated.

"I didn't budge from my position, from what I believed. Doctors all over the world know this motto: *primum non nocere*. First, do not cause harm. If you help someone take growth hormones or corticoids for non-medical reasons, you are causing him harm. I thought it had to be one thing or another. Either the team followed my lead, or I'd signed my own death warrant. Deep down, I knew it was probably the second option. They called upon me for a few small races in the United States, but after that it was finished.

When I telephoned San Francisco, nobody ever called me back. I especially wanted to contact Gorski. He had the reputation of not calling people back so I insisted, I left messages, sent faxes but all in vain. They gave me the cold shoulder."

In late October 1996, Mark Gorski finally left a message on Steffen's answering machine. He explained that the team no longer required his services. Everything changed; Borysewicz had left and been replaced by a Dane, Johnny Weltz. Pedro Celaya, a Spanish doctor, had been hired to replace Steffen. However, the

dismissed doctor did not intend to go silently. On November 4, he sent a letter to Mark Gorski who was the de facto, if not official, general manager of the team. The letter began:

"Dear Mark,

I spent a week thinking about the message you left me concerning your decision to replace me with Johnny's doctor next season. I fear you are seriously mistaken about me, and you should reconsider your decision.

I think that with all the efforts I have put into the team since 1993, I deserve the chance to provide medical assistance to the team at a time when a new and exciting phase of development is opening up to us. My training, my skills, my experience, my knowledge and my devotion cannot be called into question. Therefore, why this decision?

As is my habit, I have discussed this with two close friends. The explanation seemed clear to us. What can a Spanish doctor, who is completely unknown to the organization, offer that I can or will not offer? The answer is obviously doping.

In the next part of the letter, Steffen offered Gorski a solution. He suggests that he reverse his decision and explain to Weitz, the new manager, that the team would prefer to keep the American doctor they know. If Gorski refuses, Steffen threatened to speak about the matter publicly. At the end of the letter, he writes: "Now that we are the only American team of any importance, we have a great responsibility towards both our sponsor and towards American cycling. This responsibility mainly consists in keeping our team and its reputation clean." Gorski replied through the intermediary of lawyers. Keesal, Young and Logan, the team's legal firm, threatened to bring a lawsuit against Steffen. "They claimed that my suspicions were unfounded, but told me that if I aired them publicly and caused the team financial losses, I would be held responsible." Steffen contacted a woman lawyer friend in San Francisco who told him that these were serious threats and advised him to drop the matter. Other friends gave him the same advice. "You can't embark upon this course of action." Steffen was finally convinced and dropped the matter. However, he still felt he'd been treated unfairly.

Thirteen months after this Tour de Suisse, the US Postal team took part in its first Tour de France. Crushed in Switzerland, the same cyclists rode valiantly throughout the whole race. Out of the nine cyclists lined up at the start, all of them reached the finish. "I watched some of the mountain stages," recalled Steffen. "The Postal cyclists didn't seem to be having any problems. From their point of view, this no doubt justified the decision to change doctors. They were probably right when they said that they wouldn't be able to attain their goal with a doctor like me. Absolutely right."

Not a European Doctor

In 1996, despite the fact that the team was sponsored by a powerful American company, it was disorganized. Eddie Borysewicz was a good coach, but unfamiliar with the logistics required by a professional team. Mark Gorski was intelligent but had no experience. The first training camp took place in Ramona, a small village in Southern California where the team ate together at a restaurant called "The Sizzler." The dishes were swimming in grease. Emma observed the team taking their first steps towards top-level European cycling and realized there would be some casualties on the way.

"We thought that Eddy B. would not last long. It was chaos with him. And it was the same with Prentice. He wasn't a European-style doctor. I remember one of the cyclists saying, 'All he's got is vitamin C.' I didn't know anything about the medical program, but they needed more than vitamin C. Prentice was almost too nice to survive in the world of professional cycling. He was more concerned about looking after people than achieving results. He showed a sensitivity that was unusual in this world. I sometimes drove the team's car with Prentice in the passenger's seat. When I drove "energetically," I sometimes braked suddenly and instinctively I would hold out my right arm to protect him from any bangs. I would have acted the same way with any passenger, but Prentice was touched by this gesture. He'd say, 'How nice to see this maternal instinct.' Instinct – yes, but maternal - no, not really... "

Emma O'Reilly liked Steffen better than the other doctors she worked with. She felt he wasn't fully appreciated in the cycling world because he refused to do what the cyclists expected of him. "Pedro was with us in 1997 and 1998. In these two years our nine cyclists crossed the Tour finish line and I remember a comment made by the Rabobank team mechanic who had come to find me: 'Well, you must have a good doctor because it takes a good doctor to get nine cyclists over the finish line.' When Pedro left us in 1998, he went to work for Once, a team that nobody considered perfectly clean. Once would never have offered Prentice a job."

Most US Postal cyclists liked Celaya. "I liked Pedro," said Jonathan Vaughters, who cycled for the team in 1998 and 1999. "I think he was concerned about the cyclist's long-term health. He explained that some drugs could cause problems later in life when the cyclist was in his forties or fifties. He didn't feel obliged to pass judgment on the substances cyclists wanted to use, but he thought it was his job to make sure they didn't kill themselves in the process."

Doctor Aramendi's Room

On the evening of September 8, 1995, Olav Skaaning Andersen and Niels Christian Jung checked into the Hotel Auriense in Orense, northern Spain. These Danish sports journalists wanted to film scenes of the Vuelta de España for a program devoted to cycling. That evening they shared their hotel with the Banesto, Once, and Telekom teams. Anxious not to arouse suspicion, they introduced themselves as simple cyclists wanting to take part in the everyday activities of a race. Their attention was focused more particularly on the Spanish

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team Once, which was the best team in the world at the time. In the evening they filmed the cyclists having dinner and established cordial relations with them. However, beyond this superficial camaraderie, these journalists were really there to do their job.

Like many of their fellow journalists, they were aware of the doping culture. But, unlike most of them, they wanted to provide proof of its existence. A difficult task. Cyclists, like sports people as a whole, do not usually invite television cameras into their hotel rooms when the injections for the next day's race are being given. Managing authorities, race organizers, team managers, cyclists and ex-cyclists are ready to lie to defend their sport. They have very little esteem for people who try to tell the truth, treating them as disgruntled individuals with weak characters and

limited abilities. The Irishman Paul Kimmage and the Frenchman Christophe Bassons were ostracized for telling the truth. Doping? What do you mean? Their detractors claim that cycling is the sport subject to the most controls. Why don't you

take a look at soccer? Why do you always point your finger at cycling? And they go on in the same vein. Journalists have to be extremely persevering to get close to the truth.

On the morning of September 9, the Once, Banesto, and Telekom teams left the Hotel Auriense to take part in a race. As for the journalists, they were in less of a hurry. If the door of room 322 was open, they wouldn't mind having a quick look. It was the room of Dr. José Aramendi, the Once team's doctor for the Vuelta de España, whom Andersen and Jung saw leaving. Luckily, the door was still open. In the book they later wrote,⁴¹ Andersen and Jung recounted what they saw: "We searched Aramendi's room. What we found was surprising and frightening: a big white plastic bag full of medical waste on a shelf behind the television. We emptied the contents of the bag onto the table in our hotel room. Up until then, we had never seen medical waste that revealed such massive use of EPO. The cyclists that Aramendi had treated the previous evening and that morning had received enormous doses. We found twenty-eight syringes in the bag and two torn labels on which was written in Spanish: 'Epopen 1000, epoetinum alfa 1000 UI/0, 5ml.' Epopen is a brand of EPO manufactured in Spain. The bag also contained six vials, whose labels had been carefully removed, and various other products. Subsequent tests revealed that the six phials had contained EPO."

Hear No Evil - See No Evil - Speak No Evil

This medical waste provided proof of the use of different forms of EPO. The journalists questioned Dr. Nicolas Terrados, Once's head doctor, about this. "I wasn't with the team at the 1995 Vuelta de España," explained Terrados, one of the nine defendants called to the Festina trial at the Lille Court of Justice. He was fined 30,000 francs for the illegal import of pharmaceutical products but released by the Court of Appeal. "I was not aware of what you are suggesting." "Does this mean that José Aramendi was responsible then?"

"I don't know. I'm very surprised by what you say."

"The waste we found in an Once doctor's room indicated the massive use of EPO. What do you have to say about this?"

"I have spoken to Once's legal department. They told me that finding medical waste in someone's room does not prove anything. It could have been left by anybody—the journalist who found it, for example."

"Do you know anything about the use of EPO in the Once team?"

"No, I know nothing. I suppose you realize that doctors are bound by professional confidentiality."

A cycling team's doctor who was so ignorant about the practices in his field that he told the courtroom he had learned about the use of EPO in *Air France magazine* on the way to the competition in Lille ... aroused general hilarity, even from the court!

Laurent Jalabert, leader of the Once team, won the 1995 Vuelta de España. One of his teammates, Johan Bruyneel, was to become the sports manager of US Postal. Suspicions of the Spanish team's use of EPO were confirmed by the Swiss, Alex Zülle, during the 1998 Tour de France scandal. In the notebooks of Willy Voet, the Belgian soigneur, Zülle, who was then a member of the Festina team, was cited as a regular user of EPO, human growth hormone, and testosterone. In his statement to police, the Swiss cyclist explained that it would be a mistake to believe Festina was the only team to use doping products.

"When I was cycling for Once, we used EPO under the supervision of Dr. Terrados and a doctor called José." At Once, the only doctor called José was José Aramendi.

Back in Denmark, Andersen and Jung produced a TV documentary on doping in cycling, showing what they discovered in room 322 of the Hotel Auriense. José Aramendi refused to respond. Terrados and Aramendi continued working together through the team's best years. Their collaboration came to an end in 1999, when Aramendi left the team. Considering everything that had been found in his room, shown on television, and described in a book, it would be legitimate to fear for Aramendi's future career prospects in cycling. However, these fears were unfounded.

After leaving Once, Dr. Aramendi went to work for the US Postal team. He is still working for them today.

An Injection of European Culture

By hiring Johnny Wertz to replace Eddie Borysewicz as sports manager, US Postal wanted to take advantage of his successful experience on the European circuit. This seasoned professional knew the races and he also knew quite a few cyclists since he had competed against them. He knew what you needed to succeed: his résumé was much more impressive than that of Borysewicz. Likewise, Pedro Celaya was far more imbued with the European cycling culture than Prentice Steffen would ever be.

A change of culture. The hiring of José Arenas marked the Europeanization of the team more than the arrival of Wertz and Celaya. Arenas had been employed as a *soigneur* and his main duties involved giving massages, preparing meals, transporting luggage from cars to hotels and handing out rations during the races. "I remember him as a lazy and mediocre *soigneur*," said a US Postal cyclist. "When he gave you a massage, he didn't do it very hard and from a cyclist's point of view, it wasn't very good. He smoked a lot and that didn't help much either."

"José worked in close collaboration with Celaya, they were buddies," recalled Emma O'Reilly. "I liked José, he was a nice guy. His level of hygiene left much to be desired and I often had arguments with him in the kitchen. When he prepared the food, he wrapped it up really badly. I used to say to him: 'José, I know it will all end up as a mush when they take it out of the bag to put it into their pockets, but why make a mush of it right from the start?' He used to leave the kitchen in a filthy state and I would moan again. When the weather is hot, food spoils fast and even if it is only slightly spoiled, it's a big problem for the cyclists whose immune systems are weakened by the race. But with José, I had the impression I was talking to the wall. After he had been working, the ice bags came back full of mold. And he wasn't much of a masseur either."

"One day, I realized that the only reason he was there was because he was extremely skilled at giving injections. You had to see him – he was so fast and so precise. He'd have made any doctor jealous. Once, when we were on the Circuit de la Sarthe, he was getting everything ready to give an injection to a cyclist and I asked him:

'Tell me, José, how often have you done that to become so good at it?'

'Well, it's my job, it's really important.'

'Hey, José it's not a matter of life or death here.'

He put the syringe into the vial, slowly pulled up the piston making sure he didn't leave any air and stuck it straight into the cyclist's butt. And he'd finished before the guy noticed he'd been given an injection. 'Next.' It was really impressive, this guy knew what he was doing."

Lance on Sale

Thom Weisel succeeded in his business ventures. First with the merchant bank Montgomery Securities, and more recently with Thom Weisel Partners. He established himself as one of the most important financial players on the West Coast. The seven hundred works of art in this multimillionaire's collection take up a wing of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. He has spent his professional life signing contracts, weighing risks and making decisions. At the beginning of October 1997, Weisel concluded one of the best deals of his life. On behalf of US Postal, a young but fast-growing team managed by Tailwind Sports, a company especially created for this purpose, he signed a contract with Lance Armstrong. The thing that appealed to Weisel in this negotiation was

getting Armstrong for next to nothing. Within the team, it was said that Armstrong would earn \$150,000 the first year. His agent, Bill Stapleton, spoke of \$200,000 in a magazine. Yet, twelve years earlier, Greg LeMond had signed a contract for one million dollars with the French team La Vie Claire, and since then cyclists' salaries had soared. The best cyclists wouldn't get out of bed in the morning for a contract of \$200,000.

Armstrong was cheap because many people were afraid he would never regain his previous physical condition after his cancer. According to him, several European teams were ready to crush him: "They said I was second-rate goods," Armstrong fumed at the time. This reaction hurt him all the more because, at that time, he preferred to join a European team. Weisel seized the opportunity. In any case, if Armstrong failed, the publicity alone would justify his year's salary. But the cyclist had no intention of failing. He was glad of being able to take up his career once again, but aware that Weisel got him for next to nothing. However, Stapleton had upgraded the bonus system: Armstrong would receive \$1,000 more for every ICU point after the 50th one. The cyclist wanted to show Weisel that even sales could sometimes be expensive.

Armstrong was absent for the entire 1997 season because of his illness, but his arrival put new life into the team. Emma O'Reilly was at the world championships in San Sebastian, Spain, when she heard the news. "Freddy Viaene, the Belgian soigneur who was working for us in 1997, called me at my hotel: 'Emma, they got him, they got Lance. It will be great for the team. Things are going to change. He won't put up with our shit. Johnny [Weltz] may have to leave.' Viaene, who didn't get on with Weltz, thought that Armstrong would not put up with the sports manager's lack of organization. Emma shared his analysis. She knew that Armstrong had the reputation of having a strong personality. He would impose his views on the team, and if he regained his previous physical form, would drive them to the top.

With or Without?

It was not difficult to understand this excitement. Armstrong has charisma, natural authority and a driving ambition. As a leader he is as relaxed in a room full of journalists as he is when faced with the top cyclists in the biggest races. Right in the middle of his convalescence, for example, he addressed two hundred tuxedo-dressed guests at a Hollywood dinner party organized in honor of American Olympic medal-winning cyclists:

"What do you think?" he asked them, showing the black beret he was wearing.

"Is it better with it?"

He waited a few seconds before taking it off and revealing his head, which had gone bald as a result of chemotherapy. "Or is it better without it?" Faced with the uneasiness of the audience, he continued. "What do you think?" Then he put his beret back on again: "With." He took it off again: "Or without?"

"Take it off! You don't have to wear it!" shouted a voice in the room. He smiled and took his beret off. He had just brilliantly demonstrated his point, i.e., the fear

inspired by cancer has to be attacked head-on and by attacking it you can wipe it out.

Race to the Sun

The Paris-Nice is known as the "Race to the Sun" because as you go down south, weather conditions are supposed to improve. As this one-week, multi-stage event takes place at the beginning of March, this is just as well. But at the start of the race in 1996, the biting cold and strong wind obliged cyclists to ride in single file, each seeking protection behind the person in front. This Paris-Nice was an important race for US Postal because it marked Lance Armstrong's return to top competitions. His teammates knew that they shouldn't expect too much. Lance had been out of cycling for 518 days and there aren't many cancer survivors in pelotons. Anyway, they had to get on with it and George Hincapie was chosen as leader at the start of the first stage: if Hincapie got a puncture, the team would wait for him.

He did get a puncture. Just at a time when the wind was blowing and each cyclist was struggling to draft behind the bike in front of him. All the US Postal cyclists waited for Hincapie on the right-hand shoulder. Before they had time to notice, Armstrong was on the left-hand shoulder and had got off [dismounted from?] his bike. Linda, his mother, often told him "never give up" and Armstrong prided himself at not being a quitter, but on his return to competition, during the first stage of his first big race, he had to admit defeat. That evening at the hotel, he said to his teammates: "It's impossible for you guys to understand." They knew he was right. How could they guess what it was like to pedal in the cold wind after several sessions of chemotherapy? They all felt sympathetic towards him, thinking it was his last competition. They wished him luck, believing they had just witnessed the failure of one of the most ambitious comebacks in the sport's history.

Back in Texas, Armstrong would lick his wounds and forget this Paris-Nice. Then he would start again. This time, he headed for Boone, North Carolina, with Bob Roll, a former Motorola teammate and Chris Carmichael, his coach and friend. A few months later, when he returned from North Carolina, his teammates discovered a different man from the one who threw in the towel at the Paris-Nice event. "I'm back," he told them. "I want to take part in the American professional championships." These were not just new words, this was a new man. He returned to Europe in June, won the Tour du Luxembourg, running away with more than his contract's 50 ICU points. When he left the finish in the back of a US Postal car, he left a message for Thom Weisel. He had won the Tour du Luxembourg and was owed a bonus. "Thom," he said, "Bill [Stapleton] will be calling you."

A Notepad in his Head

Getting back in shape gave Armstrong greater authority over the team. As Viaene had predicted, he didn't get on with Johnny Weltz and many people saw this as the beginning of the end for the Dane. The team had progressed with Weltz but the backup was substandard and Weltz was not popular with the technical support. Some cyclists thought that the problem with Weltz was that Armstrong was a better cyclist than him. He didn't seem to be able to deal with someone more talented than himself.

Armstrong soon convinced his teammates that he would make an exceptional leader. "The thing about Lance was that he wanted absolute authority," explained Jonathan Vaughters. "He wanted to be an absolute leader. If he lost a race after everyone had worked hard for him, he felt destroyed. He could not accept defeat. It was quite the opposite of those teams where the champion expects everyone to work for him but rarely wins. Lance wasn't like those champions who didn't apologize to their teammates. He was always sorry for not fulfilling his part of the contract."

Frankie Andreu had cycled with Armstrong for four years when they were with Motorola. Older and more experienced, he had looked after the young and enthusiastic Texan and had helped him find his place in the peloton. After leaving Motorola, Andreu spent one year with the French team Cofidis before joining US Postal, signing his contract the same year as Lance. Obviously this wasn't by mere chance as these two men liked and respected each other. Andreu understood perfectly well what Armstrong contributed to the team:

"He was a very good leader, incredibly attentive to the slightest details. For example, we always had cookies in the hotel lobbies so we could nibble at something when we were hungry. Lance asked to have them replaced by fruit. That was the sort of guy he was. He used to say, 'Okay, this is what we're going to do,' and he was able to include people in decisions when it was he who actually made them. If we arrived at a hotel that he considered mediocre, he always wanted us all to change hotels. When he wanted, he could be very brotherly: he used to thank the staff if they had helped him and the cyclists who had done their job and he was perfect at drawing the best out of people. A perfect leader."

Emma O'Reilly, who had grown up in Tallaght, a working suburb in west Dublin, soon identified with Armstrong's objectives. When she started massaging him, their friendship grew. "At the time, I really liked him and part of me still likes him now. He'd kill me if he heard me say this but he has a certain vulnerability about him. It stems from his personal history. His father left before he had time to get to know him and his stepfather made him suffer. Because of that, he feels that his mission is to destroy all his rivals and all those who get in his way.

"He felt he had a mission even before his cancer. That's for sure. But cancer gave him the impetus he needed to focus all the more on his objective. He understood that he'd been given a second chance. He was also driven by his thirst for revenge. Those European teams, who rejected him in 1997 and thought he'd never make a successful come-back, really hurt him. He has a little black book in his head with the names of all those who turned their backs on him. If

your name gets in his book, it's there for life. In fact, he had two missions after his cancer: escaping from his "little white guy" background and being as good as those European teams that didn't believe in his comeback. The only way he could do this was by getting results."

Freddy Turned Upside Down

Armstrong's arrival may have accelerated things but the US Postal team was already on the rise. "Down and out" in 1996, the team picked up in 1997 and improved again in 1998. The organization was tightened and the team started to believe they could reach the highest level. When Pedro Celaya replaced Prentice Steffen, the team developed its medical program. It was no longer at a disadvantage compared to European teams.

The challenge facing US Postal had been clear since the arrest of Willy Voet, Festina team's soigneur, a few days before the start of the 1998 Tour de France. At the time, Festina was the world's number one team, and Voet's car was full of prohibited performance-enhancing drugs. In front of the policemen and while in police custody, the Flemish soigneur admitted that the team systematically doped their cyclists. Like many other teams. When the French or Italian police took the trouble to carry out searches, they found proof of doping. These investigations also showed that the anti-doping testing system was completely ineffective. In such an environment, cyclists who were clean had no chance. US Postal insisted on the fact that its program was beyond reproach, as were its cyclists. According to the terms of the contract, any cyclist who tested positive would be immediately dismissed. The calmness of the team doctor, Pedro Celaya, was also reassuring. If the police had suspicions about other teams, Celaya claimed that his team had nothing to hide. Emma O'Reilly recalled a race in Switzerland in 1997. "Somebody called us early in the morning for an anti-doping test and Freddy Viaene, our head soigneur, got very worked up. He was running in all directions. I asked Pedro what was going on, and Pedro stood still and remained calm, mumbling between his teeth, 'I'm going to kill you, Freddy. He's acting as if we have something to hide.' He said to me, 'Emma, we have nothing to hide.' I thought: 'This guy [Freddy] is crazy, he's a moron.' Freddy didn't stop gesticulating, like a wasp knocking against a window. Pedro, on the other hand, stayed as calm as could be. At the time, I didn't know much and I couldn't understand what was going on.. Apparently, Freddy had ended up losing his temper, faced with the composure and the occasional irony of Scott Mercier, an American cyclist who kept away from drugs. Scott was a brilliant guy. He wanted to finish the season with the team in Europe and then come home. He and I used to observe the spectacle, the way Europeans turned cycling into a matter of life or death and we used to laugh about it. 'What's the matter with them? What planet are they from?'"

Man on a Hot Tin Roof

That morning's drug test in Switzerland took place one year before the 1998 Tour de France. With what had been found in Willy Voet's car, one had the impression that cycling's big secret had finally been revealed. Many people thought cycling should undergo a total transformation and that tolerance towards doping had come to an end. Three days after Voet's arrest, the Tour prologue arrived in Ireland and the US Postal team made its way to its hotel in the hills of Dublin. In the car everyone was talking about the latest scandal and its consequences on cycling.

"Frankie was acting like a public prosecutor," Emma remembers. "He was saying: 'I'm glad Voet was caught. I'm fed up, it's ridiculous. Every year it gets worse and worse. In the past, we could do this race on spaghetti and water but now it's become impossible. I really hope this will clean things up because it's getting annoying.' Frankie was saying out loud what a lot of guys were thinking in their heads."

When the race left Ireland and returned to France, many people were afraid of police raids and searches. The police did in fact turn up at the hotels. Five Spanish teams preferred to leave the Tour rather than pursue a race placed under a cloud of suspicion and the threat of searches. The cyclists protested by going on strike. And Pedro Celaya, US Postal's "Doctor Cool" dropped his mask in front of Emma.

"Pedro was like a cat on a hot tin roof. It was really funny. It all made me laugh. I was sitting there watching them get agitated. Pedro was terrorized. He was trying to make us believe he was worried just because he was a doctor. I didn't believe it. As far as I was concerned, it meant he knew he was going to have problems because of the substances we had. I wasn't taken in by this explanation: 'Ah the poor innocent one is the doctor.' He told me we were a clean team and I thought, 'Yes Pedro, nine of your guys finished the Tour last year and you did it by feeding them spaghetti and water, sure.'"

"Go On, Help Yourself"

Since their first meeting at the training camp, Lance and Emma got on well together. Maybe he liked the serious way she did her work or maybe it was her frankness. It was also her lack of affectation, her ability to fit into a male environment and keep her distances. She was also a very good masseuse—by far the best on the team. So when the champion asked to be massaged by Emma O'Reilly during the first season, nobody was surprised. When he won his first victory after his recovery in the Tour du Luxembourg, O'Reilly was his soigneur.

Their relationship was already good and it improved further, despite the fact that Armstrong had a poor opinion of the soigneurs at US Postal.

"Generally speaking, Lance thought the team had poor backup and he complained about the soigneurs. Sometimes, I felt like slapping him in the face,

but I said to myself, 'Emma, he's not entirely wrong.' He just thought we were useless.

Deep down, I couldn't help thinking it was because we weren't involved in the medical program. I think that was the main reason he said this. One day he started looking for the telephone number of "Shot," who had been his soigneur at Motorola in the mid-nineties. He considered "Shot" a real soigneur, not like us: 'Are these the only soigneurs we've got...' he grumbled and I said to myself, 'Stay calm, Emma, it's not directed against you, stay calm.'

Right from her very first year with the professionals, Emma decided not to get involved in the medical program of the teams she worked for. In European cycling, soigneurs traditionally see to the medical needs of the cyclists. They provide them with everything they need: a multivitamin injection in the butt, a cortisone injection, the right mixture of corticoids, a glucose IV, a saline IV, a testosterone injection. A good soigneur can do all that and more. O'Reilly didn't want to get involved. She wasn't trained to give injections and didn't want to get mixed up in these practices. However, she understood Lance's point of view. "Part of me said, 'I am not doing the medical program, therefore I am not really a soigneur. I am not like a European soigneur, like a Willy Voet.' It didn't bother me hearing Lance complaining. I knew deep down that, in a sense, he was right. During the 1998 Tour du Luxembourg, Lance was fed up with it. There was only me and another soigneur. Neither of us had the slightest idea about the medical program. Lance and Freddie were getting impatient and I felt uncomfortable. I knew we had things in the truck so I opened it and said to them, 'Go on guys, help yourselves.' They pounced on it.

I was embarrassed they had to do it themselves. I'm sure they complained to the higher-ups. It was a part of my job I didn't do. I was a useless soigneur! But it was too late to learn and a voice inside me told me not to get involved, that it wasn't my problem. I knew that sooner or later I would leave the sport and I wanted to be able to leave with my head held high."

Ajax and the Paranoiac

Although Armstrong managed to make her doubt her abilities as a soigneur, he also convinced her that the team was going in the right direction. Since his arrival at the training camp in Ramona, when he started explaining what needed to be done, the team became more ambitious and organization improved somewhat. O'Reilly was also impressed by Frankie Andreu's contribution. "I liked Frankie, he was a great asset to the team. Frankie was a real professional and a very good road captain. He'd usually call a spade a spade. If he had something to tell you, he wouldn't beat about the bush. That's why he was easy to get on with. I got into the habit of calling him "Ajax," because he was so rough. You know the blue grains in scouring powder—Frankie was just like that. He liked his nickname: 'She calls me Ajax.' He took it for a compliment and it was."

By winning the Tour du Luxembourg in June 1998, Armstrong proved that a cyclist who had survived cancer could be competitive in the peloton. The race was a success for US Postal, who protected its leader. Marty Jemison remembered one stage in particular. "After going through a town, there was a very steep, 2-km hill. The team broke away from the peloton and Tyler [Hamilton] and I raced in front. At the top, there were three of us - Tyler, Lance and myself. Lance wasn't extremely strong. You could say he was a fragile leader - certainly not unbeatable. But the team was really good, his teammates were working for him. Two weeks later we went to Germany for another stage race. We felt he was getting his self-confidence back and he cycled stronger. He won again." After his victory in the Tour du Luxembourg, Armstrong went to Metz with Andreu and O'Reilly. They stopped at a Campanile hotel on the outskirts of the city. Andreu and Armstrong waited in the car while Emma asked if there were any rooms vacant.. When she came back, the two cyclists were having an argument with an angry passerby when he saw Andreu throw an orange peel out of the car window. Armstrong had won the race and Andreu had won the last stage so their last day in Luxemburg had been physically trying. They weren't in the mood to be diplomatic and were getting worked up and giving the passerby a hard time. "You guys can't be left alone for five minutes!" exclaimed Emma. At least she'd found some rooms. The three of them arranged to meet five minutes later for dinner in the restaurant.

During the meal, Armstrong told them he had made a trap for his room. If the Frenchman returned to pick a fight, he'd be well received. O'Reilly and Andreu had a fit of giggles. "You're ridiculous, you're absolutely crazy," they told him but that was exactly what Lance was like. He didn't want to take any chances with an irate Frenchman. That night before going to bed, he put a chair in front of his door fearing he would be attacked by surprise. "A maniac, that's what you are," cracked Andreu and O'Reilly the next morning, "a paranoid maniac."

With Clean Hands

The team respected O'Reilly's wishes and she kept out of the medical program even if some cyclists, Armstrong in particular, would have liked her to get involved. Even if she didn't get involved, she knew what was going on around her. She knew what products were in the truck and she knew that the team had black and white plastic bags to transport the products from the truck to the hotel. They bought thick, white, opaque bags for products in small packets. The bigger, black bags were used for syringes and bigger things. When those involved in the medical program wanted their products, they were put in a black bag and nobody else could see what was inside.

O'Reilly realized that not all the products in the truck were authorized. She saw the packets but could not always identify the products because only the brand name was usually displayed. She didn't recognize anything except the Knoll products which were familiar to her because her uncle, a pharmacist, had worked for Knoll for several years. She observed the comings and goings at the hotel—

the guy who came from Spain and turned up at the team's hotel for no apparent reason.

There were other signs. At some small races, Dr. Celaya, José Arenas and Freddie Viaene weren't there and nobody in the staff wanted to give injections. O'Reilly soon learned what happened in those cases: "Most of the cyclists in the team knew how to inject themselves. In fact, we were all familiar with these situations and no longer took any notice. The cyclists must have seen so many syringes they were able to do it themselves." If she turned a blind eye, she also had her own confrontation with this reality.

In 1998, for example, a cyclist who was still working for US Postal asked her to go and pick something up for him from a former soigneur. This cyclist knew O'Reilly had to stop in Gand, where this soigneur could get through easily. "This soigneur gave me the packet and explained it was testosterone. He told me this because he didn't want me to keep it in my possession any longer than necessary. He didn't want me to travel with it. I gave it back to him when we saw each other again, in other words, one or two days later."

Testosterone, commonly used by cyclists, is a class A illegal substance.

Caught by the Patrol...

In mid-August 1998, Armstrong competed in the Ronde de Nederland (Tour of Holland) and came in fourth, showing that he was still in good shape. This race takes place at a time when the teams have not yet recovered from the Tour de France. When you've ridden in the Grande Boucle, you don't want to follow immediately with Holland. That's why the teams there often have only a skeleton staff. That year, the manager of US Postal, Johnny Weltz, sent Denis Gonzales, a Frenchman, to replace him. The team's doctor, Pedro Celaya, wasn't there either. Armstrong despised the man from Toulouse so much that he relied entirely on O'Reilly.

On the last day, Gonzales was supposed to arrange transportation to take Lance to the airport, but just as he was about to leave, he discovered that nothing had been organized. O'Reilly offered to take Lance and they did the trip in one of the team's Passats. At the airport, Armstrong handed Emma a carefully wrapped black bag. "Look, Emma, I didn't throw these out. Can you throw them in the trash?" It was the empty syringes Armstrong had used during the Tour of Holland, which he didn't want to leave behind at the hotel. "Okay, no problem," she replied. It should have been just a routine task.

"I knew the car belonged to the US Postal team and I was starting to panic a bit wondering where I could throw it. I couldn't stop at the first gas station on the highway and it was too dangerous to put it in a public trash can. The scandal-ridden 1998 Tour de France had just finished four weeks ago and there was a real risk someone might find the packet in a trash can. I thought the best thing for me to do was to keep it in the car until I arrived.

"After the Belgian border, I started to drive faster. Not excessively fast but just over the authorized speed. However, given the nature of what I was carrying, I

drove slower than usual. Suddenly, I noticed the flashing lights of a police car in my rear-view mirror. 'Oh, shit!' I was going to have to stop and all I could think about was the syringes. There was a ramp leading to a gas station so I took it and the police car followed me. What was I going to say to them? I felt myself shaking already. I wondered how many syringes were in the packet, 6 or 10? What traces would they find in these syringes? What a situation to get into. I broke into a sweat.

I saw the policeman get out of his car and come up to me. I thought I'd better start by apologizing for driving too fast:

'I'm terribly sorry...'

'No, no, there's no problem. Do you know Mark Gorski?'

'Er... yes, he's my boss.'

'I rode with Mark in the eighties.'

'Really, you don't say!'

'Do you know how I can contact him?'

'Yes, no problem. I've got his number. Do you want it?'

'That would be great. My son rides too and I'd like to speak to Mark, and invite him to our place when he's in Belgium.'

'I'm sure he'd be delighted. Here's his phone number. The next time I see him, I'll tell him I met you.'

'That's very kind of you. Thank you.'

'No, thank you.'

"Before the end of the conversation, this cop had become my best friend. We parted ways on the best of terms with my secret packet safely hidden in the car glove compartment. I didn't know what was in these syringes but I didn't want anyone to find out.

Seen from this angle, it was funny."

Johnny to the Scrap Heap

Everybody says the same thing—Johnny Weltz, the Dane, was a nice guy. He was hired in October 1996 to manage the US Postal team and that's what he did for the following two years. Weltz had been a very good rider and by hiring him, Mark Gorski's theory was being put into practice: if you wanted to beat the Europeans, you had to do as they did. Weltz had ridden for the best European teams. He knew how they organized their programs, what medical support they supplied, and what was required if you were to be competitive in the best European events. There was just one unknown: would he be able to pass his experience on to the US Postal so they could fully benefit from it? The answer to this question was no.

Many riders liked him because he was obviously a man who knew a lot about cyclists. They respected what he had achieved, and in return he understood what was demanded of them. Some people thought his only failing was that he was too lenient. In 1997 and 1998, the team progressed under Weltz's management. Though not without difficulties. Weltz made decisions, which they found absurd,

and their suggestions were never taken into account. Although results improved, day-to-day problems did not. They were just trifling matters that could have been solved, if Weltz had been able to meet one simple imperative: get along with Lance Armstrong.

"Johnny and Lance did not gaze into each other's eyes," explained Jonathan Vaughters. "I like Johnny. We get on well together and I feel a certain loyalty towards him. Some people found him rather strange at times. You got the impression he may have been ill at ease with riders that were better than him and this was obviously the case with Lance. Johnny also tended to speak in riddles and you had to interpret what he said. This didn't bother me. I found it interesting. But I don't think Lance saw things this way. He's a direct sort of guy, says what he thinks and goes straight to the point. He didn't appreciate Johnny's style at all."

Given the situation he had inherited, Weltz did well. In 1997, the dream of Thom Weisel came true when US Postal took part in the Tour de France. But all that didn't mean much, because Lance Armstrong didn't want him around. Weltz contributed to his own fall. Not only was he a mediocre day-to-day manager, but he didn't know how to delegate. He managed the staff badly and the personnel moaned about him and his friend, the assistant sports manager, Denis Gonzales. The riders and technicians called him Speedy, after the cartoon character, Speedy Gonzales, with whom he had nothing whatsoever in common. Everything Gonzales did, he did slowly. Although many riders liked Johnny, they didn't understand where he'd got Speedy from. In the middle of 1998, Armstrong was certain the team should fire Weltz.

Bruyneel and the Visionary E-mail

In September 1998, during the Vuelta de España (Tour of Spain), Weltz and Armstrong were not speaking to each other. Armstrong came in fourth after giving a performance worthy of a candidate for the top events. As it was clear that the team was on Armstrong's side, he had already started to look for a new sports manager. It was precisely at this Vuelta that he found one.

"As he was no longer speaking to Weltz," recalled O'Reilly, "he chatted to me a lot during the massages. He was really performing well in Spain and was more and more excited about the future. We were becoming closer, partly because Lance was no longer speaking to Johnny, partly because we got on well. To be honest, my life was easier when I looked after the star rider and I think he was on my side. As I said, I liked him and in a way I still like him.

"During this Vuelta, we spoke about my situation. I wasn't satisfied with my salary of \$30,000 in 1998. I wanted a raise. When I told Lance that I intended to leave if the team refused, he replied: 'Okay, Emma, but above all come back and see me first.' He started to speak to Johan Bruyneel in Spain. Johan was still riding but it was his last season. Lance told me they were going to meet for a chat. They talked to each other during the Vuelta and I remember that Johan came to our

hotel one evening. After this meeting, Johan sent Lance an e-mail. After receiving the e-mail, Armstrong told me that this was a "first class" guy because he could already see Lance in the yellow jersey on the podium of the Tour de France the following year and in the world champion's rainbow jersey. That was exactly what Lance wanted to hear. Johan knew how to get to him. At that precise moment he got the job."

"Hiring Johan proved that Lance was managing the team," explained Vaughters. "It was Johan who made Lance certain he could win the Tour de France. He was the first one to imagine Lance winning the Tour, and I think this is why Lance is so close to him. Now, even with Johan on board, it's still Lance who is the de facto boss of the team, like in 1998."

When it became clear that Lance wanted Bruyneel to become sports manager, Wertz called another Postal cyclist, Tyler Hamilton, asking him to speak favorably about him to the team owners. Hamilton, who realized the attempt would be in vain, did not bother. In any case, after Thom Weisel, it was Armstrong who was the boss. According to Emma O'Reilly, Johnny Wertz had no reason to complain. "I didn't help Johnny. Very few of us did. I didn't like him when I was working with him. He treated the staff really bad and we were fed up with it. Then there was Johnny's friend, Denis Gonzales, who was assistant sports manager. Honestly, he was just a "shorts sniffer." That's what we call the groupies at the races – those girls that hang around the riders. There are lots of guys like that too. You see them around the supply areas. When you see one coming towards you, you take your cell phone and pretend you're on the phone.

"What's funny is that when Johnny left the team, I discovered a different person. As soon as he left, we started to get on really well and I really like him as a man. I regretted not having supported him when I saw him from this angle but at that time we didn't get on well."

A Pro Among Men

In December 1998, Johan Bruyneel called Emma O'Reilly, who was staying with her sister in Dublin, to officially offer her the job of head soigneur with US Postal. It was an important promotion, with a substantial salary raise, and it came at an important time in the development of the team. As Armstrong had finished fourth in the Vuelta three months earlier, the Tour de France was no longer out of reach. O'Reilly knew that Lance was mentally stronger than the European riders. As head soigneur and masseuse for Armstrong, she would have real responsibilities within the team. Her salary would increase to \$36,000, but before saying yes to Bruyneel, she wanted to clarify one point:

"I'd really like the job, Johan, but I don't want anything to do with the medical program."

She didn't want to help the cyclists in this way. She would not give them injections, or vitamins, or other things. She would not give them IV perfusions

and she would not transport products that they didn't want to have in their possession. She didn't need to explain herself, as Bruyneel understood perfectly. "That's fine," he said. "No problem."

"Johan, I'd like to be head soigneur but I want to make it quite clear from the start. I don't want to be involved in the medical program. I don't know anything about it and I don't want to know anything about it."

"Right, that's fine. I knew that already."

Professional cycling is not inclined to open its doors to women. O'Reilly only had to look at the other teams to see how few women were employed. She was glad at simply getting a job with a cycling team and now she was being offered a highly prestigious job: head soigneur of a fast-progressing team and its leader's masseuse. Yet, she had her doubts. A little voice was telling her that it was ridiculous not wanting to take part in the medical program and that she was being a hypocrite. "I felt really stupid. How can you be head soigneur without taking part in the program? This wasn't a problem for Johan and Lance, though. I think that this was one of the reasons they decided to give me the job: 'She's not involved with the program so she can't make any problems, that's good.' Johan thought it was up to the doctor to deal with the program and not the soigneurs." O'Reilly was very efficient in her job as soigneur too. "I really liked Emma," declared Marty Jemison, who rode for the team for five seasons, at the same time O'Reilly was there. "She was a great soigneur. She worked hard and was very demanding sometimes. She had this Irish pride, but she looked after us. She really looked after us. She was a phenomenal masseuse and when she was there, everything was impeccably clean. She was totally professional, truly invested in what she was doing. Was she the best I worked with? Yes – no doubt about it!"

Jonathan Vaughters was just as laudatory. "Emma was always very professional with me. She had a good sense of humor. She did her work very well. She expected a lot from those around her and professionally she was very demanding. She gave her all and she expected everyone else to do the same. She wanted to get the job done, whatever the price. If she had to stay up till three in the morning to prepare the bottles of water, she would. I got on really well with Emma, as did almost everyone in fact.

"She was a young woman working in a male environment and she managed really well. I suppose if a female soigneur is ugly or plain-looking, there's no problem. But Emma is a pretty girl. She was the same age as the riders and had the same energy. As far as I know, she was 100% professional and that says a lot in this type of environment." Frankie Andreu had good memories of O'Reilly too. "I liked Emma a lot and I considered her a friend. She was very professional and very good at her job. Probably the best soigneur I've ever had."

José Marti, alias "Pepe the Courier"...

At the end of the 1998 season, important changes were made to the US Postal team personnel. Bruyneel replaced Weltz as sports manager, and the doctor

Pedro Celaya left the team for a lucrative fifty-day contract with the Once team. Luis del Moral replaced his fellow-countryman as team doctor and would stay on the job for five years. These were not the only changes. Bruyneel gave his wife, Christelle, the job of organizer and this would have important consequences for Emma O'Reilly. There was also the departure of José Arenas, the injection genius, and the arrival of José Marti. The new arrival, called "Pepe," officially worked as a trainer.

"We tried to work out what José actually did," O'Reilly said. "He worked a lot with Luis, the doctor, but nobody knew what their relations were exactly. He was supposed to be a trainer or coach but we didn't see him at many training sessions. Sometimes he spoke to riders about their training, but in matters of coaching, Jonathan Vaughters was overwhelmingly better. In matters of physiology, Jonathan was very intelligent. Pepe was not in the same category. Yet, throughout the season, he was always around. We couldn't help wondering if he served as a medicine chest for Luis when we saw him unloading his car and taking the stuff into the hotel. Why try to hide large quantities of nothing? "The courier"—that's what we called Pepe."

Bad Vibes

Her job as head soigneur did not come up to O'Reilly's expectations. Everything went well for a while and her relationship with Armstrong continued to thrive. Problems arose when Bruyneel got Christelle, his wife at the time, to take part in the team organization. She had to reserve plane tickets and rooms for riders and staff, then pass this information on to O'Reilly, who ensured the riders were picked up at the airport and the rooms were ready before they arrived at the hotel. O'Reilly complained that Christelle was inefficient, but she learned that you can never win when your opponent is the boss's wife. A silent hostility broke out between her and Bruyneel, interrupted only when he gave her orders or harassed her.

Members of the team knew that her relations with Bruyneel had deteriorated, and they kept their distance. If the technicians in the cycling team were to keep their jobs, they had to stay on the boss's good side. After her conflict with Bruyneel, O'Reilly found out that, out of all her colleagues, she could only count on the friendship of De Vriese, the mechanic. In the middle of 1999, she realized she would never be on good terms with Bruyneel and, sooner or later, she would have to leave the team. What she reproached her boss for was the fact that he thought he was always right. He treated people the way he wanted and was accountable to nobody. She wondered what Armstrong would do when the test of strength came, but she could guess the answer. He needed his sports manager more than he needed his soigneur. Once she had admitted that her departure from US Postal was inevitable, O'Reilly decided to note down anecdotes and snatches of confidential information on the team in a diary. She usually did this on the same day and rarely later on. "Before this, almost everything I wrote in this diary was related to my work. Maybe I'd understood that we were heading for

difficulties and that I should note down exactly what was going on. In this way, I would be able to explain what was happening and what my role in it was."

Emma Crosses the Border

On May 6, 1999, Lance Armstrong was finishing a short training session in the Pyrenees. He had gone on a reconnaissance trip to explore the route the Tour de France would follow two months later. Only a few handpicked people were with him: the sports manager Johan Bruyneel, the doctor Luis del Moral, the mechanic Julien De Vriese and Emma O'Reilly. All of them already knew that it would be very difficult to beat Armstrong in the Tour. Although she liked being part of the happy few, O'Reilly no longer harbored any illusions about professional cycling. And the episode that was to follow this meeting in the Pyrenees would do nothing to change her opinion.

As they were all getting ready to return to their respective homes, Armstrong asked her if she could go to Piles, on the east coast of Spain, where the team's headquarters was located to pick up some medical products from Del Moral. She accepted: "Okay, I'll do it this one time." O'Reilly told Armstrong that she wanted her fiancé, Simon Lillistone, to go with her. "Don't tell Simon what you are doing," he said. At the end of the training camp, Bruyneel drove home to Spain in the US Postal car that O'Reilly had used in the Pyrenees. Julien De Vriese took her back to a place near Valras Plage, where she rejoined Lillistone. For her trip to Piles, she rented a car with her professional credit card. "A navy blue Xsara, from a Citroën garage in Béziers. I wondered why Johan had taken the team's car on purpose and left me to rent another car. Part of me was saying that he knew the purpose of my journey and he wanted me to travel in a hired car because a car without any names on it was less likely to be stopped by customs than the car of a professional cycling team. I left on a Friday afternoon and took the motorway. It took me nearly five hours to get to Piles. It was about 9:15 P.M. when I arrived. I was exhausted and all I wanted to do was go to bed. But Louise Donald, the girlfriend of the mechanic Geoff Brown, liked talking so I stayed chatting for a while."

The US Postal team rented two houses in Piles. One for Brown and Donald where she stayed. Another for the other staff members and a few riders. Each house had a basement garage. The one in Brown and Donald's house was used by the soigneurs and the other by the mechanics. On the next morning, a Saturday, O'Reilly went out for a jog. The weather was beautiful. Emma was soon out of the village, running through a grove of orange trees towards the beach. At the sea front, she turned left and continued running for more than a kilometer before returning to the team's Spanish headquarters. Then she decided to prepare the trucks for the coming races. The old Isuzu was parked in front of the riders' house and the Volvo in front of Geoff and Louise's house. The task was difficult and unrewarding, but she liked doing it with Ryszard Kielpinski, the Polish soigneur, because they worked well together.

They loaded the riders' clothes into the cars, renewed the food supply, went to buy what they needed, and cleaned the inside of the vehicles, which always took a lot of time.

"On Saturday afternoon, while we were cleaning the trucks, Bruyneel turned up. I was standing at the entrance to Geoff's garage when Johan discreetly slipped a bottle of pills into my hand. He handed it to me like that with the box hidden in the palm of his hand. He was walking past me and I took it without anyone seeing. Johan was especially charming that day. I hadn't asked Lance what I had to transport because I didn't want to know. The bottle was round and measured no more than 10 or 12 cm. You could see the white pills through the brown plastic. It contained about two dozen pills. I went into the house and carefully put the bottle into my toilet bag."

On Sunday morning, the members of US Postal all went to the beach and had lunch in a restaurant on the sea front. After the meal, O'Reilly started out on her long journey back to France.

"It was already nighttime when I arrived at the border. I suppose it was because it was a Sunday evening, but it is the only time in my life I've seen a line of cars at a border crossing. It was unbelievable—the last thing I needed. While waiting in the line, I started to get nervous. I tried to reassure myself, telling myself that there was little chance my rented car would get searched. What if it was though? What if I was caught and arrested? I felt sick.

"I went over the people I should call if there was a problem. If I was only allowed one telephone call, I'd phone Thom Weisel, the team's big boss. He knew some good lawyers and wouldn't let me down like an old rag. I wasn't going to act like Willy Voet and claim it was for my personal use. No way. This was when I thought I shouldn't have gotten mixed up in this. I should have just said no. I wondered how so many other soigneurs could do it on a regular basis. 'They're crazy, absolutely crazy.' The drama came to an end as I was told to go through. I heaved a sigh of relief. Thank God, I made it."

O'Reilly spent Sunday night with Lillistone, in Valras Plage, and agreed to meet Armstrong the next morning in the McDonald's parking lot in the suburbs of Nice. The rendezvous was for 11:30 A.M. but it was nearly noon when she arrived. She put the bottle of pills into the driver's parcel tray to facilitate the operation. Armstrong didn't like being kept waiting so on the way she called him up to apologize. "I said, 'I'm sorry. I'm going to be late.' He answered 'Don't worry, that's okay.' It wasn't like him. When I arrived at McDonald's parking lot, I parked to the right of Lance's blue Passat. Lance got out of his car, and I handed him the bottle. It was all over in a few seconds. We never spoke about this trip to Spain after that."

"I'm Going to Do What the Others Do"

Emma O'Reilly remembered the 1999 Critérium du Dauphiné Libéré for several reasons. In particular, it was the race in which Jonathan Vaughters showed what

he was capable of doing. She had always liked Vaughters. The Dauphiné is the second biggest stage race on the French calendar, and although concentrated into one week, it can be very trying.

Vaughters achieved an impressive feat in the individual time trial on the slopes of Mont Ventoux, a victory that won him the yellow jersey. Lance Armstrong was riding with Vaughters, and with the Tour de France coming up the following month, he was pleased to help Vaughters in a race of lesser importance.

At the time, Vaughters' victory in the Ventoux was one of the best results ever attained by US Postal, but Armstrong wanted his teammate to keep the yellow jersey right to the end. The evening before the final stage, which is very difficult, Vaughters was nervous. It was the first time such a race was within his reach.

"You could see the responsibility weighing on Jonathan," O'Reilly recalled.

"Lance could see that the pressure was making things even more difficult for him, and he wondered if the team had done the right thing putting so much energy into helping Jonathan."

In this last stage, Alexander Vinokurov, the rider from Kazakhstan, attacked and Vaughters tried to keep up with him but in vain. Armstrong was at his side, trying to get him back on level with the leaders but his teammate couldn't manage it. It was a painful experience for Vaughters. Not only did he lose the race but he slowed down Armstrong, who was clearly the better of the two that day. "I was nervous the evening before," explained Vaughters. "But I don't think that was why I lost the jersey. Vinokurov was simply better than me. You can imagine how Lance reacted to this defeat. He obviously didn't put his hand on my shoulder and say it didn't matter. I lost the race. He probably thought that the team had put out a lot of effort for me and I had failed. There was nothing to be happy about."

"Lance could really be unfair to Jonathan," O'Reilly explains. "He saw that Jonathan was an intelligent guy, and they talked about training and physiology together, because Jonathan knew a lot about it. In fact, it was more Lance using Jonathan to improve his own knowledge." Vaughters remembered these conversations. "Lance was more intelligent than 90% of the riders. He understood quickly. When you explained something to him, you sometimes had to repeat it two or three times, but once he'd understood the idea, if he believed in it, he followed it right through. He was smarter than most of the others."

For O'Reilly, Vaughters' lively intelligence was more of a handicap in the European peloton. "Jonathan was a talented rider, there's no doubt about it. He was just too intelligent for his environment. He didn't give his body up to doctors like most of the others did. He didn't go to the truck for products. He asked questions about the things they gave him. He wanted to know if they were necessary and legal. Of course he took things to help him recover but he wanted to know exactly what they were, and deep down he wasn't into that sort of culture. Jonathan didn't have the mentality of a European cyclist. On the other hand, he had a sports manager, Bruyneel, whose point of view was simple: he should ride, ride, and ride some more. He had less esteem for riders who were not prepared to make great sacrifices for the sport. Jonathan wasn't like that—not like Lance. 'Poor Jonathan,' we would moan to each other. I was the bitch,

who was nasty to Johan's poor wife and he was the bad rider who didn't do all he should to climb higher. I thought he was really unique in a positive way." Vaughters' professional background is full of irony. Genetically, Jonathan had a red blood cell count. The average count for an athlete practicing an endurance sport is 41 or 42. Vaughters' was 48 or 49. His father's was similar and Vaughters' natural red cell count climbed even higher during the first eighteen years of his life in Denver, a town located 5,280 feet above sea level. When he was cycling as an amateur on the American continent, Vaughters' natural red cell count was an advantage for him because his blood could circulate more oxygen. However, he lost this advantage when he became a professional cyclist competing with riders who increased their red cell count artificially with erythropoietin (EPO). If Vaughters had wanted to cheat during his career, which was not the case, his high red cell count would have been a disadvantage, because even if he had taken very small quantities of EPO, his cell count would have exceeded the 50% threshold laid down by the official cycling authorities. Emma O'Reilly not only remembered the 1999 Critérium du Dauphiné Libéré because of her friend's setback on the last day. She had another reason for remembering it. "One evening, during the race I was giving Lance a massage and he told me his red cell count was 41 that day. Without thinking, I replied: 'Forty-one - that's terrible. What are you going to do?' Everyone in cycling knows that you can't win with a red cell count of 41. He looked at me and said: 'Emma, you know what I'm going to do. I'm going to do what the others do.' I thought, 'My God, yes!' I sounded so stupid asking him that. I noted it down in my diary: His red cell count was 41 today and when I asked what he was going to do, he laughed and said: 'You know - what everyone else does.' I knew exactly what he was going to do."

Lance Borrows Some Make-up

There is usually a certain complicity between a rider and his soigneur. Every evening, they spend about an hour together while the soigneur gives him a massage. The best soigneurs look after the riders' morale too, making them laugh when they need to, reassuring them, in their moments of doubt, and knowing when to keep quiet. Everyone at US Postal knew that Emma and Armstrong formed a good team. She was an excellent masseuse, and while everyone else tended to grovel to Sir Lancelot, she treated him like an ordinary human being. Aware of the pressure that Armstrong was exerting upon himself, she didn't bother him with her little problems. As for Armstrong, he was able to feel the cold relations between Bruyneel and O'Reilly, but he must have decided that it wasn't his problem. Whatever Johan's opinion of Emma, Lance liked her. The 1999 Tour de France was to start on Saturday, July 3. The evening before, the riders had to undergo a medical to ascertain if they were fit enough to ride for three weeks. Even if this official ceremony was organized more for the media than for medical reasons, riders couldn't get out of it. A rider of Lance Armstrong's stature realized that when his blood pressure, respiratory capacity,

and heart rate were being measured, the photographers would be there. However, there was a problem that day.

"Lance asked me to see if I had something in my make-up bag to hide the bruising on his arm caused by syringes," recalled O'Reilly. "It was his right arm if I remember correctly. He didn't want people to see these marks and start suspecting anything. I said, 'Lance, you need something heavier than what I've got.' It was the first time anybody had asked me for something like that. I knew my make-up would be useless so I went to a shop to buy some make-up that covered well. He applied it and we laughed because I didn't think it did a very good job."

Cyclists are continually receiving vitamin injections and glucose IV. Why did Armstrong go to so much trouble to hide the syringe marks on his arm? What substances can be injected into this part of the body? We sought the opinion of several specialists.

Jean-Pierre de Mondenard, who worked ten years in a center for diabetic children, explained that injections to the outer side of the upper arm are very specific: "Vaccinations, insulin, EPO, or growth hormone are injected there. All authorized substances, i.e., vitamins, iron and substances to aid recovery, are injected into the buttock. An intra-muscular injection can also be given in the thigh. Injections can only be given to a limited depth in the upper arm so small insulin needles have to be used. And it is easier to cause bruising there."

Jérôme Chiotti, a former mountain bike world-champion wrote a book entitled *De son plein gré* (meaning "Of His Own Free Will") in which he admitted having recourse to doping at the height of his cycling career. He claimed there is nothing mysterious about injections to the upper arm: "That's where growth hormones, EPO, or corticoids are injected," he said. "Personally, I injected EPO into the fold of the stomach or the upper thigh but everyone has their own way of doing things. In my opinion, in that particular place, there's a 99% chance it was corticoids." Does this apply to substances for recovery too? "No, no," he interrupted. "It's no use injecting them into the arm. Iron and vitamins are injected via an IV or IM into the buttock. In this case, the muscle must be very relaxed and a good size. The arm is not suitable and in any case it would be painful." What did Willy Voet, the former soigneur for the Festina team, think with his twenty years "experience" in this field? "We injected growth hormone, EPO, corticoids, or even amphetamines into the upper arm," he explained. "In fact, everything that's not "oily." As for the other substances, iron and vitamins, for example, we injected them into the buttock, somewhere there was enough flesh. Injections to the arm are subcutaneous. Small insulin-like needles are used." But could they have been glucose injections? "No, glucose is injected via an IV, into the inner fold of the elbow," replied Jérôme Chiotti. "Glucose is injected into a vein, mainly at the inner fold of the elbow where the vein is called a "freeway" by the cyclists," confirmed Jean-Pierre Mondenard. "Injections of glucose are always IV and never subcutaneous," Willy Voet asserted.

O'Reilly's make-up fulfilled its purpose and the medical went without a hitch. The next day, Armstrong rode in the Puy-du-Fou prologue and crushed his rivals after

a dazzling performance. "When he won, we were flabbergasted," said O'Reilly. "We all hoped he'd perform well but we didn't think he could win. But he won and it was great, absolutely fantastic. Even Mark [Gorski] was thrilled. I was near the finish line. He sped forward. We heard his time announced and felt the excitement around us. I said to myself, 'Wow!' I shouted to Kristin [his wife]: 'We've won, we've won!' It was an exquisite moment. There was a feeling of joy all around. I was delighted for him. We stayed in the same hotel for two days. That evening, after his victory in the prologue, we didn't drink champagne. I don't know why. Maybe because it was very late.

"It wasn't until the second evening that we cracked the champagne open. I was taking a shower because I had finished after the others. It was normal. There were four soigneurs for nine riders. Three of the soigneurs had two riders and the fourth had three. As I was head soigneur, I was looking after three: Lance, Vaughters, and Livingston. So I was having a shower when Mark knocked. I thought – oh no, you can't even take a shower in peace! He said: 'Emma, hurry up, we've got a bottle of champagne and we don't want to open it without you.' It was thoughtful of him and showed that the team had a spirit of camaraderie."

The ICU Leads a Charge

The evening before the 1999 prologue of the Tour de France in Puy-du-Fou, Vendée, all the sports managers got together, as they do every year, for a last joint meeting before the big start. Hein Verbruggen, the International Cycling Union president, invited himself to the talks. And he certainly had something to say. The message was short: from now on, the International Cyclist's Union would search for corticoids! As from when? As from the prologue, beginning the following day...

Battle stations! What had got into the ICU? Why had the hunt for corticoids been opened now, when they had been prohibited since 1978? Why was the ICU showing so much promptness in endorsing a detection method developed a week earlier by the National Drug Screening Laboratory (*Laboratoire national de dépistage du dopage, LNDD*)?

Not only did the news come as a bombshell to the cycling world but it was being interpreted in different ways. According to the LNDD and its head, Jacques de Ceaurriz, "This pilot operation is a preventive measure of an educational nature. It will provide another picture of the general condition of the cyclists' bodies. The riders spotted will not necessarily be declared positive, especially if they are able to provide evidence of medical treatment."⁴² However, on the same day, the Dutchman, Léon Schattenberg, president of the Commission for Safety and Sports Conditions for the ICU, the equivalent of a medical commission, declared: "We shall contact the rider concerned and he will be entitled to a second opinion. If the latter confirms the result, the rider will be punished. However, the taking of corticoids only concerns a very small number of riders."⁴³ How naïve can they be?

By jumping from prevention to sanction, the ICU was minimizing or unaware of previous reports on the widespread use of corticoids by cyclists. According to Jacques de Ceaurriz, tests carried out on the samples from the 1998 Tour de France would have had one consequence: this "Tour would not have been held through lack of competitors ..."⁴⁴ However, there were never any sanctions handed out, because a medical certificates justifying use became an ideal lightning rod for accused athletes. One month later in August, the low-season for news, the plan to implement this "anti-corticoid wave" was abandoned on the sly because of the extent of the phenomenon.

Nevertheless, one of the four samples taken after the prologue on July 3 was sent to the laboratory of Chatenay-Malabry and tested positive for corticoids.⁴⁵ This sample was taken from the Dane, Bo Hamburger.

Armstrong Tests Positive

The next day, the Tour went from Montaigu to Challans, in the west of France, and Armstrong managed to keep the yellow jersey. And so, he once again had to submit to the anti-doping test. On July 4, the American Independence Day, Armstrong tested positive. Traces of triamcinolone acetonide were found in his urine. This is a delayed-release synthetic corticoid which could in no way be secreted naturally.

According to the list of products prohibited by the ICU, the use of corticoids is screened in the following way:

"Article 111: classes of products subject to certain restrictions

c): the use of corticoids is prohibited, except for external use (auricular, ophthalmologic, or dermatological), in inhalations (for asthma or allergic rhinitis), or in local and intra-articular injections. Riders must provide medical certificates as evidence of such use."

However, a problem arose. The report, drawn up after Armstrong's medical examination in Challans, contained a column to indicate the "medications taken." In it was written 'nothing.' The test was carried out on a Sunday evening at 5 P.M. and two weeks went by before Armstrong's positive result was revealed in the daily newspaper *Le Monde*. During this period, it was rumored that some riders had tested positive to corticoids, "twenty to thirty cases,"⁴⁶ but nothing more happened. In Tarbes, on July 19, a day off, Armstrong held a press conference at which he claimed he had never taken corticoids and that he did not have a medical certificate for the use of prohibited products. All he did was repeat the answers given during an interview carried out by the newspaper *L'Equipe* on July 8. However, the evening before this press conference, a journalist from *Le Monde* received information from a reliable source saying that Armstrong had tested positive on July 4. *Le Monde* journalists present at the Tour tried to get confirmation of this from the president of the ICU, Hein Verbruggen, and the head of the medical commission, Léon Schattenberg. They were unable to

contact Schattenberg, who did not reply to messages left on his cell phone, and Verbruggen claimed he had no knowledge of it. On July 19, many US Postal members realized the affair was really going to break out.

Magic Cream

The next day the race continued with a stage in the Pyrenees that finished at the winter sports resort of Piau Engaly. Armstrong had won back the yellow jersey he had lost two days earlier after his prologue in Puy-du-Fou, and he was controlling the race in a masterly fashion. That evening, he took the helicopter from the finish line, flying over the traffic jams, and arrived at the team's hotel quite a while before his teammates. O'Reilly was stuck in traffic, but she consoled herself by saying she would have less work that evening.

"One of my three riders, Jonathan Vaughters, had already had to drop out, so I only had Lance and Kevin to look after. By taking the helicopter, Lance would arrive about two hours before us, and I thought he would have asked another soigneur to give him his massage. He needed to eat and sleep as much as he could. I thought, 'Good, I'll only have to look after Kevin this evening. That will be great.' But when I arrived at the hotel, there he was, sitting on his bed, waiting for me. I thought that was sweet."

That afternoon, one of the journalists from *Le Monde* had seen a copy of the results and had tried to get a reaction from US Postal to the article that had just come out in Paris (the next day in the provinces), which reported that Armstrong had tested positive for corticoids. Of his own accord, Armstrong had admitted to *L'Equipe* and at a press conference that he did not have any medical certificate authorizing him to take prohibited products, but *Le Monde* still wanted to get US Postal's reaction. In the evening, one of the three journalists covering the event managed to contact Dan Osipow, who dealt with the team's public relations. He refused to comment. The journalist asked him if Armstrong had used a cream, which could have made him test positive. The spokesman said he could not answer.

According to O'Reilly, US Postal's answer was devised during Armstrong's belated massage that evening.

"Two US Postal staff members came to the room for a while. They said things like, 'What are we going to do? What are we going to do? We must stay calm and stick together. We mustn't panic. When we leave this room, we all have to have the same story.' We had the impression all hell was going to break out and we had to find an explanation. This is what they decided: saddle sore, a cream containing corticoids, an antedated prescription. I already knew about the corticoid because Lance had told me. He told me he'd taken a corticoid before or during the Route du Sud the previous month and he thought he'd be okay for the Tour. He thought the product had been completely eliminated from his system, but without us understanding how, it had reappeared. I don't remember ever hearing about saddle sore at the beginning of the Tour de France, but in any case, he told me categorically that it wasn't the cream. Later that evening,

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everyone desperately tried to find Luis [del Moral, the team's doctor], who would have to write out a prescription. "So the official reason was saddle sore caused by allergic dermatitis. "

This kind of recourse to antedated evidence of medical treatment is not new. The case had already arisen when Laurent Brochard was tested for lidocaine (a prohibited anesthetic) when he became World Road Cycling Champion in Saint-Sebastian (Spain) in 1997. Bruno Roussel recounts the story in his book,⁴⁷ explaining that article 43 of the ICU anti-doping regulations was quite simply not respected by the international institution.⁴⁸

"Now You Know Enough To Bring Me Down"

On July 22, the ICU published a press release claiming that Armstrong was using Cemalyt, a cream containing triamcinolone, to treat allergic dermatitis. The ICU also claimed to have seen the prescription issued for this. However, the ICU did not specify whether Armstrong had declared the Cemalyt on his anti-doping control form, or when it had received the prescription. At the end of this press release, the ICU, which was obviously standing up for the American champion and his team, asked journalists not to make hasty conclusions on doping:

"We would like to ask all press representatives to consider the complexity of these matters and the regulations and legal aspects before publishing their articles. This will insure that superficial and unfounded claims are avoided."

The ICU referred to a regrettable error made by *Le Monde* concerning the urine samples taken from Armstrong and other riders, which specified the ratio of testosterone to epitestosterone. This information was irrelevant in the present case because it had nothing to do with a positive corticoid test. This overzealousness on the part of journalists was a great opportunity for the ICU to discredit work that in other ways was beyond reproach.

In any case, Cemalyt, whose active substance is indeed triamcinolone acetonide, should have been listed by US Postal and an import application should have been made to the French Agency for Sanitary Security of Health Products (*Agence française de sécurité sanitaire des produits de santé* or AFSSAPS). However, Henriette Chaibriant, the communications director of AFSSAPS, consulted the agency archives and said categorically, "No import authorization was issued to US Postal for Cemalyt for the 1999 Tour de France."

A few days later at a press conference, Armstrong also refers to *Le Monde* as nothing more than vulture journalism. Benoît Hopquin did indeed ask Armstrong why, on two occasions, he claimed he had no documentary evidence of medical treatment for a prohibited product, when now he was claiming the opposite? Armstrong replied, "Does *Le Monde* accuse me of being a liar or a dooper?" The journalist had not accused him of being a liar or a dooper. He had simply asked a frank and legitimate question. Armstrong had either lied in his last two interviews, or his team had antedated a prescription. Where does the truth lie? In the room filled with journalists, *Le Monde's* special correspondent was very much on his own. None of his colleagues backed him up.

That Tuesday evening Armstrong said to O'Reilly, in a pitiful voice, "Emma, now you know enough to bring me down." This striking remark was the last thing Emma wrote in her diary. It was dated July 20.

A Friend in the Enemies' Camp

Marty Jemison remembered hearing about what had happened to Jean-Cyril Robin in the 1999 Tour de France. The Frenchman had ridden for US Postal for two seasons, in 1997 and 1998, the scandal-fraught Tour, where he finished in sixth place according to the final results. The massive withdrawal of the Spanish teams and the exclusion of Festina had partly helped him achieve his success. The prize money went straight to Robin, and after he had joined the French team fdj.com, many US Postal members were unhappy. Lance Armstrong, who did not ride in the 1998 Tour, had heard some of his teammates speak ill of Robin, saying that the money should have been put in the shared kitty.

Here is Robin's explanation: he wanted "all the allocations [based on the whole season] to be made before doing it. I preferred to give part of my earnings back later, rather than wait for the share I would receive—which would have been smaller anyway—after the accounts were balanced."

However, the battled raged. "The guys told me," explained Jemison, "that at the beginning of the Tour, Lance had said, 'OK, this guy owes you money. He's not going anywhere until he's paid you.' It was typical of Lance. He was merciless but if you were in his team and on his side, he looked after you. The sum at stake was not very large, but it was a matter of principle. Jean-Cyril was unable to do anything for the first ten days of the race. If he attempted to breakaway, a gang of US Postal riders were hot on his heels."

This was how Armstrong won the friendship of his teammates. He challenged them and, although he behaved like an exacting boss, he often showed his satisfaction for their work and would compliment the staff generously if he thought they deserved it. Problems arose when friendship conflicted with business. In these cases, it was like a sedan face to face with an 18-wheeler. The sedan being the friends, obviously. If Armstrong thought one of his teammates didn't deserve his salary, the fact that this teammate was his friend no longer counted. One member of the staff used to say to Emma, "Lance has one single friend, Emma, one single true friend—George Washington. The George Washington printed on the greenbacks."

Among his teammates, Kevin Livingston was the main victim. In his first book, *It's Not About the Bike*, Armstrong described Livingston as a brother. They were very close and, according to the other riders, Kevin almost looked at Lance like a big brother. When Lance bought a house in Austin, Kevin left his house in St Louis, Missouri, to buy an identical house in Austin. If Lance bought a Tahoe 4x4, Kevin also bought a 4x4 Tahoe. If Lance went to see a controversial doctor like Michele Ferrari, Kevin went to Ferrari. If Lance had a dog, Kevin bought a dog of the

same breed. In the team, the other riders made fun of Livingston, groveling to the number one, but Kevin was like that – overly faithful.

When Armstrong won his first Tour in 1999, Livingston was at his side. Not during the first stages on the plain, but in the mountains, when his skills as a climber really counted. If Armstrong had to step up the speed when going uphill, he turned to Livingston and the pace increased. Livingston did everything an altruistic team member should do: he gave himself to his leader, body and soul. As the star was also his best friend, Livingston gave even more of himself. After the 2000 Tour, Livingston, who had always been one of Armstrong's most influential teammates, renegotiated his contract with US Postal. He must have spoken to Johan Bruyneel, the sports manager, or Mark Gorski, the general manager, but he was in fact negotiating with his best friend. It was Armstrong who would have the last word.

The result was that US Postal (Armstrong in fact) did not think Livingston was worth the money he was asking. The almighty greenback, mentioned by one of the staff, was going to destroy their friendship for a while. Between Livingston and Armstrong's estimations, there was a difference of \$200,000. And the answer was no. Livingston could leave if he wanted. He negotiated a contract with an English team called Linda McCartney, and when it ran out of money, he joined Armstrong's most dangerous rival, Jan Ullrich, on the German team Deutsche Telekom. Surprisingly, Armstrong felt he had been betrayed. He likened Livingston's defection to "Colin Powell going to work in China." He had done so much for Livingston, and now Kevin was going over to the enemy. He broke off his relationship with Kevin, qualifying him as an ungrateful and disloyal former friend. It was like kicking Lassie, the forever faithful collie. Livingston only rode for Deutsche Telekom one year, before retiring, disgusted with the sport. Since then, he and Armstrong have become friends again and, although it's not quite like old times, Livingston still tries to please his buddy.

Jonathan's Calculation

When US Postal riders are considered expendable, they find themselves face to face with an 18-wheeler. At the end of the 1999 season, Jonathan Vaughters left of his own free will and with no regrets. However, there was one thing that needed settling, in his opinion. Vaughters had dropped out of the 1999 Tour on the third day, after falling on the Passage du Gois that connects the continent to Noirmoutier Island. Although he had not contributed much to the team effort, according to his contract he was entitled to a small share of the money the team had won. This share was proportional to the number of days raced. As Vaughters had ridden for three out of the twenty-one days of the Tour, he was entitled to one-seventh of his share. This came to about \$6,000 dollars that Vaughters did not receive.

In cycling, riders who change teams are often not paid their share, and Vaughters was not particularly surprised when the money did not arrive. But

given the sum involved, it was at least worth going into. The following March, he rode in the Paris-Nice for his new team, Crédit Agricole, and discussed this money matter with Frankie Andreu. As a senior member of the team and friend of Armstrong, Andreu must have known about the matter. He explained that they had discussed this, but because Vaughters had moved to another team, Lance had decided not to pay him. Andreu said that he could try again, but it was probably better to drop the matter. Vaughters did a bit of mental arithmetic and immediately found easier ways of earning \$6,000.

Andreu Forced to Retire

Andreu had also been one of Lance's closest friends. When Armstrong joined Motorola at the end of 1992, for his first year with professional cyclists, Andreu was one of those who helped him settle in. They rode together with Motorola for four years, and when, in October 1996, Armstrong's cancer was diagnosed, Andreu and his wife Betsy visited him in Indiana Hospital. They rode together again in 1998, 1999 and 2000, but towards the end their friendship cooled off. In 2003, when questioned about his relationship with Armstrong, Andreu was not evasive:

"Friendly, I'd say. We get on fine but we're not as close as we used to be. I see him during the Tour and we maybe speak to each other a couple of times."

"As a TV commentator, do you have much contact with him?"

"Yes, and he answers my questions in a friendly way. Everything's fine between us, you know. He has a lot of stress to cope with during the Tour. We used to be closer before, but now we have different lives. It's the same with Hincapie. George and I were really good friends. We still speak to each other, but it's not the same. I was really close to Steve Bauer and Phil Anderson since the days we rode together with Motorola but once you leave the world of sports, you distance yourself. Even if our relationship cooled off before then."

"It is rumored that you and Lance had a major break-up before the Amstel Gold Race in 1999?"

"That's right. We started yelling at each other just before the race started. About a quarter of an hour before. It had been simmering for awhile. We were expecting it but I don't know why it blew up at that particular moment, nearly on the starting line. We were behind one of the team's cars and we started yelling at each other. I can't quite remember what caused it. I think it was about an e-mail my wife had sent to Lance. He didn't appreciate it and was furious. He said it was like an employee's wife sending an insulting letter to her husband's boss. Maybe Betsy shouldn't have sent this e-mail but I didn't really consider myself an employee and he my boss."

"Is it all over and forgotten now?"

"I don't think so – not completely. I had practically forgotten it. Not him... We'd been really close, good friends. We always rode together and for a month or a month and a half things were a bit difficult. We continued to train together. We

spoke to each other but I don't know if he genuinely put it behind him. I'm not saying it bothered him, just that we were never as close as before."

Andreu performed well during the 1999 and 2000 Tour de France races, even if his last week in 2000 was spoiled. He was 33 at the time and wanted to finish his career at the end of the 2001 season. He had spent three seasons with the team and was still a strong rider, so he was sure US Postal would renew his contract for one more season. However, Bruyneel and Armstrong had the opposite opinion. Because of his age and salary, they decided it was more in the team's interest to let him leave. "I think I deserved the job. I wasn't asking for charity. I honestly thought I was riding as well as before. For two years I'd been breaking my back helping him win the yellow jersey. I'd been pushing everybody to get these results. During the Tour, they told me they weren't sure they wanted to keep me for another year. It came as a shock. After all I'd done. I'd sacrificed my whole life for these guys and I was a bit, how can I say, surprised."

When Andreu questioned Bruyneel about his contract for 2001, he replied that it was Mark Gorski who made the decisions. But Gorski told him it was Bruyneel. At other times, they both said it was Armstrong's fault, who in turn told Andreu that it had nothing to do with him. They kept passing the buck. But Andreu knew that when it was a matter of riders' contracts, the team leader was very much involved. Things dragged on until October when they made Andreu an unacceptable offer: a low salary with large bonuses linked to team results.

Andreu, who felt betrayed, decided to retire.

"I don't know if I was furious with Lance, Gorski, or Johan. More than anything else, I was disappointed. I didn't want to leave the team because I loved riding with these guys. They were the best I'd ever known. I tried to put myself in Mark, Johan and Lance's place. They were taking two things into account: my age and my salary, which was relatively high. They wanted to lower the average age of the team and costs. If I left, they'd win on both counts. I had to accept it. I just wanted to ride for another year, but I had already clocked up twelve years. A year more or a year less wouldn't make much difference."

US Postal finally offered Andreu a job as second assistant to the sports manager, in charge of the team when it was competing in the United States. He accepted with pleasure because this offer enabled him to stay in cycling and save for his retirement. It was also a role he appreciated, especially the second year, when he was involved in managing team logistics. But Gorski, Bruyneel and Armstrong then re-examined the budget and decided they needed to cut costs; as on the previous occasion, they made Andreu an offer he considered unacceptable.

Angry once again, he resigned himself to the idea and decided to get on with his life. What he couldn't understand was being replaced as second assistant to the sports manager by Lorenzo Lapage. The Belgian man, a modest track cyclist, had been hired in 2003 after testing positive to ephedrine at the Gand Six-Day race in November 2002.

Andreu knew he had spent the best time of his career with US Postal, especially when he had helped Armstrong win the Tours in 1999 and 2000. This career hadn't finished as he had wished, but that sort of thing often happens in life.

Andreu did not receive the bonus Armstrong offered the riders who had helped him win the 2000 Tour. It was both a tradition and a moral obligation for the winner of the Tour to give his teammates a substantial bonus in appreciation of their contribution to his victory. While the champion's earnings can amount to millions, his teammates only earn relatively small sums. After playing his role in 1999, Andreu received the bonus. He gave as much of himself the following year and fulfilled his duty as far as Paris, but did not receive the bonus of \$20,000. At the time, Armstrong knew Andreu was going to retire, and that at home, in Detroit, he would no longer be able to do much for the leader of US Postal. Therefore, he received no bonus. Was it fair? That wasn't the question.

Bruyneel's Call

Emma O'Reilly read and re-read the pages recounting her story. On several occasions she had a feeling of guilt. She wondered if it would be better to pass over all she'd seen during these years of silence. Had she the right to do it? One weekend, however, when she was reading through her account, Marco Pantani was found dead in a hotel room. The Italian cyclist, who had won the Tour de France in 1998, died alone in a small hotel with his anti-depressants as his only companions. Pantani was 34. Two days earlier, Johan Sermon, aged 21, a young Belgian rider with Daiken, died in his sleep. Premature and unexplained deaths continue to hit cycling. Reading through her statements, O'Reilly harbored no illusions as to their effect. "I think professional cycling has descended so low it's impossible to change things. But one day, it will implode." However remorseful she felt about betraying confidences, however pessimistic she was that cycling would change, she knew that the silence of honest people destroyed this sport as much as the actions of dishonest people.

After phoning Julien De Vriese on Friday, June 13, 2003, she soon received a call from her former boss.

"Emma, it's Johan."

"Oh, Johan..."

"How are you?"

"Fine Johan, and you?"

"Fine. Listen, first I'd like to apologize for the way I treated you during your last one and a half years with the team. I was completely wrong. You did good work. My ex-wife wasn't good for the team. I didn't realize it at the time."

O'Reilly was not touched by Bruyneel's repentance. "The only reason he was apologizing was because Julien had told him I was going to speak to a journalist he didn't like. Otherwise, I would never have heard from him again. I thought: 'Hey, man, you could have phoned me anytime over the past two years.' At the end of this call, he even told me that if he could do anything for me, I just had to give him a ring. It was really funny. I had a good laugh. I never thought the day would come when I heard Johan Bruyneel speaking so politely. He doesn't like groveling in front of anybody."

She remembered the day he came into the kitchen of the team bus while she was preparing the rider's meals. He startled her, closed the door behind him and told her that in the future she wasn't to call his wife's qualities into question. "Whatever Christelle does," he said "comes from me." Emma was totally isolated during these last eighteen months. The soigneurs and mechanics couldn't take her side because they were worried about losing their contracts. For a while, she stopped eating with the team. She ate cereals in her room while they went out to eat in restaurants. Her morale was very low. Bruyneel tried to convince her that it was she who was the problem, and she started wondering whether he may be right. "Maybe I'm the bad one. Maybe it's me."

It was in October 1999, during a reception with the sponsors in Orlando, that he fired her. He asked her to come to his room at 10:30 in the morning and told her that the Belgian soigneur Freddy Viaene was joining the team and that he no longer needed her. He added that there was no point in calling Lance or Mark Gorski, implying they agreed. The problem was that he needed to have good relations with all the staff and that it wasn't the case with her. She felt humiliated and unfairly treated. When she returned to France, she called Jonathan Vaughters, whose father was a lawyer in Denver. Vaughters was sympathetic and told her Johan couldn't fire her just like that. He didn't think the team's boss would allow it. "I don't think he spoke to Lance or Mark. Lance and you got on too well for this to happen."

O'Reilly called Gorski and Armstrong. She left a message for Lance but she spoke to Mark. They did not know about Bruyneel's decision. One week later, Gorski said to her, "What Johan said is null and void." Armstrong also played an important role in her reinstatement. Gorski apologized and admitted that Bruyneel had acted on his own initiative, without speaking to anybody and that Emma O'Reilly could stay in her job as long as she wanted. Bruyneel really lost face: he was the youngest sports manager to have won the Tour de France, and yet he couldn't fire a soigneur.

Julien, like a Father

Her victory against Bruyneel was short-lived because even if Emma was still in the team, her heart was not. Bruyneel broke her morale and she knew it. During what was to be her last year on the team, Emma was demoted. From head soigneur, she became a simple soigneur. Curiously enough, her salary increased, going from \$36,000 to \$45,000. She wondered whether this increase was the price they were paying for her silence. She didn't think it was logical to be paid more for working less.

In January 2000, at the pre-season training camp in San Luis Obispo, California, she took up the working relationship with Armstrong again. He came to get her several times and they continued as in the past. But one evening, Armstrong didn't come and he would never come again. Viaene, the new head soigneur, told O'Reilly that Bruyneel had made the decision. "Emma,' Johan said to Lance,

"It's her or me. I will not go to the races she goes to. You'll have to choose." Armstrong never spoke to Emma about it. Everyone knew who had been chosen. O'Reilly was marginalized for almost the whole season. She worked on the small races and had fewer responsibilities. At the beginning of the next season, a mechanic told her that Bruyneel had, unbeknownst to her, read the notes she had written down in her diary up until the end of the previous season. This news made her blood boil. O'Reilly didn't know yet, but several riders had been told that she had written nasty things about them in this diary. This lie affected her relations with Frankie Andreu and George Hincapie, and maybe others too. "Somebody had taken my diary from my room and showed it to Johan, just to get into his good books. That's what people are prepared to do to stay in cycling." During the Tour des Flandres, in April 2000, she told Mark Gorski, the general manager, that she was going to hand in her notice at the end of the season. Vaughters, who had left US Postal to go and ride for Crédit Agricole, a French team, asked her if she wanted to work for them. "Work for a French team?" she replied. "Are you crazy? It's bad enough with the Yankees." Johnny Weltz, her boss at US Postal before Bruyneel, wanted her to join the Danish team, CSC, but she'd had enough. The time had come for her to leave the world of professional cycling and return to the real world.

Her departure from the team went almost unnoticed. Only Julien De Vriese celebrated by inviting her to his home in Gand, Belgium. He uncorked a bottle of champagne and they reminisced over the good old times—the never-ending lunch in a prestigious restaurant before the Paris-Roubaix; the long discussions over glasses of Perrier and peppermint; the evening Julien asked Chris, the Rabobank mechanic, to return to his hotel for a shave if he wanted to take Emma out for a drink. And this is what Chris did, he returned to his hotel for a shave. Julien looked after her like a father.

Choosing to Talk

On Saturday, July 14, 2003, the day after this fateful telephone call, De Vriese called her back.

"What are you going to do with this journalist?" he asked her.

"Oh I don't know, Julien. I probably won't speak to him. Honestly, I don't know. Maybe I will."

"Oh, Emma, you shouldn't. You shouldn't talk to him."

"I don't think I'll do it, but I wanted to scare Johan, for a laugh."

"Emma, if you speak to this journalist, you'll lose all your friends in cycling."

"Julien, don't make me laugh. All my friends? You're the only person I'm still in contact with. I've got a new life now."

There was no point discussing the matter with Julien. He had been the mechanic for Eddy Merckx and Greg LeMond, and now he was looking after Armstrong's bike. Cycling was his whole life. How could he understand that Emma was leading another life and cared little about the US Postal team? The people she worked with, and the people she went out with now had nothing to do with the

sport. She knew that Julien could never understand why she wanted to tell the story of her life with US Postal. But she was going to do it. She called Bruyneel back to tell him she had decided to talk and she found the imperious Johan she had always known.

Having a Say in the Matter

In 1998 and 1999, Armstrong didn't want to be massaged by anyone but Emma O'Reilly. It was flattering for her and gratifying to be able to say that she had looked after the winner of the Tour de France. It was also partly due to her association with Armstrong that she won the respect of the other soigneurs of the team. She always tried to keep a cool head: yes, she got on well with Lance, but deep down, she knew the sort of person he was. She didn't expect loyalty from him, and when she needed it, she didn't get it. Lance, however, expected her eternal loyalty. This is what made her laugh and still makes her laugh. But she still wondered whether she had been right to talk. A storm raged in her head. And one thought stood out, establishing itself as more pertinent than the others. She wrote it down and explained that she would like it to be included in the chapter recounting her story: "Because Johan Bruyneel and Lance are involved in a sport and a team that tolerates the use of performance-enhancing drugs, they discredit those who are not sufficiently docile. Well, you can't get away with it forever."

State of Siege

"Lance Armstrong is the living proof of a rider who does not cheat. This rider does not use any drugs whatsoever although the press believes he takes dope."
Hein Verbruggen,
President of the International
Cyclist's Union when he addressed the World Forum on Drugs and
Dependencies in Montreal on September 25, 2002.

Sacked

Tour de France 2000. On July 13, during the crossing of the Pyrenees, Lance Armstrong had just given an exceptional performance climbing up the Hautacam Pass. It was a reminder of his spectacular climb towards Sestrières the previous year. This time, at the start of the climb, the American swiftly left behind the Italian cyclist Marco Pantani, an outstanding climber, as he "swept up the hill."⁴⁹ Even though, as he admits in his book, "effort in the mountains can not last a long time." Yet, a climb of eight and a half miles, demanding half an hour of maximum effort, on "slopes with 7.9% gradient—an average of 7.9 feet up for

every 100 feet traveled," awaited the Texan champion if he wanted to win the Tour again. Armstrong, who finished second in the stage, behind the Spanish rider Javier Otxoa, did indeed don the yellow jersey, leaving his main opponents (the German rider Ullrich, the Swiss rider Alex Zülle, Pantani, the Spanish rider Fernando Escartin and the French rider Richard Virenque) at least seven minutes behind. Halfway through the race, he had won the Tour.

This feat left some journalists ~~suspicious~~ suspicious. Hugues Huet was one of them. This reporter working for the "General News" department of the national television channel France 3, decided to stop keeping to the "official positions" of the organizers who, since the throes of 1998, first talked about a "regenerated Tour" (1999), and then halfway through talked about a "transition" when they realized they had been a bit too hasty. Hugues Huet was never very good at the sort of journalism that involved just writing what you're told to write. In his opinion, informing the public took precedence over any other priority, even if it meant annoying the sports world. He is a sports journalist, but above all he is a journalist. Like many of his colleagues, his incredulity gave way to questions. But, unlike his colleagues, who reserve their suspicions for press room discussions, Hugues Huet applied one of the first precepts taught in schools of journalism: be curious. After obtaining carte blanche from the management of France 3, he decided to freely enquire into the matter over a period of "three or four days.. But where should he start? Accompanied by a cameraman and a soundman, his investigation took him to a hiding spot in front of US Postal's hotel. "Every morning, we parked in their hotel parking lot, not really knowing what we were going to do," he explained. "We were about to give up when..." Hugues Huet told us the rest of the story in great detail during an interview that took place on February 10, 2003, in his office at the headquarters of France Télévisions.

"It was the morning of July 15, 2000. The Tour was stopping off in Draguignan [Var], and we were around the American team's hotel when we noticed a Volkswagen. It was a metallic blue, rented Passat Tdi, registered in Germany, without any significant logos or stickers. Two men came out of the hotel. They headed for the Passat and each of them took a trash bag out of his backpack and threw them into the trunk. Other trash bags had already been placed there. These two men attracted our attention because they were Luis Garcia del Moral, the team's official doctor, and Jeff Spencer, the chiropractor. They then got into the car. We followed them but soon after they got onto the freeway, about ten kilometers away, we lost sight of them. They were driving at 200 km/hr."

This journey didn't fail to intrigue them and revived their curiosity just when it was wavering. However, during the two days that followed, their 'hide-out' produced no results. The same two men left the hotel after the team convoy to travel to the next stage town.

Frustrated at having been left behind the first time, the television team decided to put a tailing system into place in case the scenario recurred. Three cars were stationed at different points on the route, two white Meganas belonging to France 3, with no visible markings, and a hired vehicle. On the morning of July 18, the day of the Courchevel-Morzine stage in the Alps, the two men being trailed got

into the Passat, but the car did not go to the start of the stage and did not take the route not affected by the race and recommended in the Road Book given to those following the Tour. The chase had begun.

They drove the Passat for one and a half hours and stopped at a rest area, just before Sallanches. The journalists, who had been filming right from the start, witnessed some strange goings-on: the two men were getting rid of five identical trash bags. Once they had left, the journalists got closer to take a look. Inside these five bags, they found a jumble of syringe packets, blood-stained compresses, IV equipment and packets of drugs. Eleven products were found: Coltramyl, Esafosfina, Epargriseovit, Ipoazotal, Prefolic 50, Traumeel S, Zyloric, Noctamide, S Amet 200, Thioctacid, Actovegin, as well as 160 packets of syringes of different sizes.

"At the time, we were a bit disappointed," admitted Hugues Huet. "We thought we would find a box containing EPO. However, we decided to find out more about three packets containing instructions for use in German."

The Eleventh Element

The small team from France 3 did not realize what they had come across. Admittedly, the 160 syringes found corresponded to 4 or 5 days' use: 4 to 6 injections per day, per rider, as Willy Voet, Festina's ex-soigneur, explained when they phoned him about the matter. But as these injections concerned substances for recovery they could be totally legal. Admittedly, US Postal had not used the containers designed for medical waste that the Tour de France Company had recently implemented. But that was not enough to arouse suspicion. Nevertheless, Hugues Huet did not drop the matter. "Our aim," he explained, "was to broadcast our enquiry at the end of the Tour de France. But the specialists told us that it would take at least one week to analyze the blood-stained compresses. The Tour would have been over by then. We either took the tabloid approach and broadcast a spectacular report, or we took the professional approach. We decided to wait."

The nature of ten substances was established on July 18. This was not the case, however, with the eleventh substance, Actovegin. "We were stuck. We contacted several doctors, the Chatenay-Malabry National Anti-Doping Laboratory, Patrick Laure, a specialist,⁵⁰ Gérard Dine, a hematologist, and two German researchers, as the product came from Germany. But nobody was able to tell us what it really was."

What's Actovegin Used For?

What Hugues Huet did not yet know was that this product, manufactured in Norway, contained extracts of calf's blood. It improved the circulation of oxygen in the blood, in the same way as EPO. In technical terms, Actovegin is an extract

of deproteinized calf blood (to avoid allergies) that can be injected into the blood. When diluted in glucose, its main purpose is to 'dialyze' (decompose) blood clots, and it is prescribed for strokes. Glucose is the most important element for cerebral cells. Actovegin is also active on mitochondria⁵¹ inside cells, and it reactivates their oxygenation.

In 1992, its manufacturer, the Norwegian laboratory Hafslund Nycomed Pharma, defined its properties and physiological effects as follows: "Actovegin increases the efficiency of the metabolism while respecting the regulation of energy at the cell level. This effect can be measured by the increase of the consumption and use of glucose and oxygen. The combination of these two functions leads to an increase of energy resources available to cells. In the event of a deficiency in metabolic activity (hypoxia, substrate deficiency) and an increase in energy requirements, Actovegin improves the metabolic processes by maintaining cell functions: the increase in the blood circulation is an induced effect.

Side effects: the contraindications are the same as those for other injections: cardiac decompensation problems, pulmonary edema, oliguria, hyper-hydration, etc. The concentration of glucose in the Actovegin administered intravenously with a glucose supplementation must be taken into account for diabetics." This warning is not mentioned on the instructions for use.

Blood Donation

For cyclists in Val de Marne, the Chennevières "bump," its sudden change in altitude and its automobile traffic are real nuisances. Once you reach the plateau overlooking Saint-Maur-des-Fossés, the view is magnificent. Jean-Pierre de Mondenard lives just a step away in a quiet little residential street. On the gate is a plaque for a "Sports Doctor." On the ground floor, the waiting room of his practice sets the tone. In a display cabinet are a few of the thirty works he has published over the last thirty years or so. Their common denominator is doping or preparing top athletes, which is Dr. Mondenard's second specialty. When he is not seeing patients, he spends most of his time sitting on the saddle of a bike set up in an office full of numerous archives, under a harsh neon light. Upstairs is a long bookcase on one side of his living room, from which he can pull out the book he is looking for with his eyes closed. Despite appearances, 'JPDM' is not like the picture we may have of a meticulous archivist. His figure (6'2", 176 lbs.) at the age of 61 shows he loves sports and practices them regularly. His weekend schedule usually involves cycling on uneven terrain, followed by a frugal dinner (a choice of apple or yogurt).

As the international specialist on sports physiology, he has been closely involved in professional cycling and was a doctor for Tour de France anti-doping tests in 1973, 1974 and 1975. That was before breaking away from this "hypocrisy." He says, "First of all, in matters of doping, research has always focused on blood. Right from the beginning of the twentieth century, everybody understood that it was necessary to increase the number of red blood cells to improve the transport of oxygen. The oldest advertisement, appearing in the medical journals of the

time, dates from 1912. It praised the merits of Globéol produced by the Châtelain company. It was horse's blood. Serodos, a bull blood serum, was also available on the market. An artificial Actovegin has existed since the 1920s, but at that time injection and manufacturing techniques were not the same as they are today. The appearance of Actovegin, under one name or another, dates back to the 1970s." Jean-Pierre de Mondenard informed us:

"The French product is called Solcoséryl. In 1969, a German study carried out by Drs. Hans and Elisabeth Albrecht concluded that the effects of Actovegin were 'stronger than anabolic steroids' after comparing Actovegin, anabolic steroids and a placebo.

In his book *Coup de sifflet*, published in 1986, Harald Schumacher, the German team's goalkeeper, wrote that, during the 1986 World Cup in Mexico, the players were 'bombarded with injections, particularly calf extract for altitude-related problems.' The following year, in 1987, a German doctor made the headlines when he injected calf's blood into German soccer players at the time of the European Cup final. Therefore, it was a common practice. Another top athlete, the Australian discus thrower, Werner Reiterer, mentioned Actovegin in the book he published just before the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000. Moreover, the Prince de Merode admitted that the trash cans were full of it during the 2000 Olympic Games."

When the ICU and the IOC Get Tangled Up...

Actovegin, like so many other products, has never received much attention from international medical bodies. When it started appearing in the sports news, these bodies often found themselves in awkward positions. Jean-Pierre de Mondenard recounts: "Prince Alexandre de Merode was one of the pioneers who helped create the IOC medical commission in 1965. As he wasn't a doctor, he was always somewhat out of touch." "Out of touch" and with very limited resources, as Richard Pound, the current Canadian president of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) admitted at a world anti-doping conference held in Copenhagen on March 5, 2003. De Merode worked "with very limited resources for decades." In 1986, the IOC and the ICU introduced a new group to the list of prohibited substances entitled: blood doping methods. At the beginning, this classification only concerned blood transfusions. But in 1999 when it was updated, a new expression appeared: "artificial oxygen carriers," a term that encompasses blood substitutes. "Actovegin was then cataloged under related products," continued Mondenard, "under the heading 'administration of artificial oxygen carriers or blood doping substitutes' in the official list of doping products." But the US Postal affair continued. On December 10, 2000, i.e., eighteen days after the opening of the US Postal legal enquiry, the IOC medical commission decided to prohibit Actovegin, specifically mentioning it by name. The product was then put into "class 2, paragraph A" of the prohibited methods under the title "artificial oxygen carrier, blood substitutes."

A dispatch from the Associated Press⁵² provided the following details: "Actovegin, a product Lance Armstrong's team reportedly used during the last Tour de France, is considered a prohibited substance by the IOC. The IOC medical commission announced this on Tuesday, underlining that the substance, a calf's blood extract, was prohibited under the blood doping category." "The medical commission considers that it is a prohibited substance," declared its president, Prince Alexandre de Merode. "A few months ago, there may have been some hesitation. Now, there is no hesitation."

In this same dispatch the medical director of the IOC, Patrick Schamasch, agreed wholeheartedly: "If the product carries oxygen to the brain, as is stated, it can also bring oxygen to other parts of the body."

A dispatch from France-Presse agency, dated December 18, 2000, was just as categorical: "The first tests [on the urine samples taken from US Postal riders during the 2000 Tour de France] did not reveal the presence of any hard-line doping products like EPO, but products suggesting that doping like Actovegin (which is not on the list of prohibited products) may have taken place. The president of the IOC medical commission, Prince Alexandre de Merode, confirmed that through its thinning action, Actovegin improved the oxygenation of the blood without increasing the hematocrit. Therefore, it was considered a doping product."

Despite these declarations, this certainty did not seem definitive. Presented as a form of blood doping, Actovegin was cleared by Hein Verbruggen, vice-president of the IOC and president of the ICU, a few days later. In *L'Équipe* of July 7, 2001, the latter likened it to creatine, and said that many sports people used it in massive quantities at the Sydney Olympic Games. This little bombshell passed unnoticed. In February 2001, Dr. Schattenberg, director of the ICU Medical Commission, decided to study its effects and issue an opinion the following April. His report is still awaited.

Proving the uneasiness provoked by this product, a turnaround occurred two years later. In the updated list of doping products fixed on March 27, 2002, and signed jointly by the ICU, the IOC and the French Ministry for Youth and Sports, the term Actovegin was no longer specified: "International regulations prohibit artificial oxygen carriers or plasma substitutes." The name of the products are not specified. It is implied that Actovegin belongs to this category. But only implied.

Sports Diversions

For Jacques de Ceaurriz (head of the Chatenay-Malabry National Anti-Doping Laboratory), Actovegin is of no real interest. "In my opinion, it's second-rate. Mainly marketed in Eastern Europe and Asia, the preparation is made from calf's serum and has supposedly wide-ranging properties. I'm not saying it's charlatanism, but it's all rather vague."

Why was the product prohibited then? Several people disagree with Jacques de Ceaurriz. First of all, Professor Jan Van Driel from the Department of Pathology and Immunity at the University of Melbourne (Australia), who studied the

scientific characteristics of the product. In the summary of his work, he states: "It improves the transport and use of oxygen and activates aerobic channels and the metabolism of energy. (...) Although Actovegin contains no oxygen carriers, it can influence this natural property in the blood. One of its constituents has an influence on a hemoglobin receiver and forces it to release more oxygen, increasing the quantity available to peripheral tissue."⁵³ More oxygen for the tissue means more energy, therefore more strength. "No study shows that Actovegin improves athletic capacity but its properties should contribute to this," JanVan Driel reiterated.

Professor Audran Fort, recognized in his field, was more explicit: "When you take EPO, you have to take aspirin to avoid accidents. But the advantage of Actovegin is that you don't have to take aspirin and it provides glucose, an element that is essential for cell recovery. You don't take EPO without Actovegin or without aspirin. To prevent blood clots from forming (thrombosis) when at rest, you have to take aspirin or Actovegin."

When asked to comment on the opinion held by Jacques de Ceaurriz that Actovegin is of no "interest," Michel Audran did not hesitate: "Do you mean if an athlete only took Actovegin? I don't really see what the point would be. No point, actually. For an athlete who is not lacking iron, there is no point in taking it without EPO. Some people even take iron, thinking it will raise their hematocrit values! We see this from tests. In fact, Actovegin complements EPO. On its own EPO is useless. You need iron and vitamin C to go with it."

For Michel Audran, the use of Actovegin is an open secret: "Many athletes take it and have been taking it for years. Armand M gret, the doctor for the French Cycling Federation, said so himself in 1999, during a conference at the Federation's headquarters that gathered top specialists in detection, hematology, etc. Athletes take it but we cannot detect it. I myself got hold of some Actovegin in Switzerland. You can't detect it in the tests because the guys inject 5 milliliters of a product that is already diluted in glucose and all this into five liters of blood."

In the third of his five-part "confessions," published at the end of March 2004 by the Spanish daily sports paper *As*, Jesus Manzano, from the Kelme team, referred to the Actovegin injections, among other things, given particularly before time trials. In a passage devoted to the use of animal hemoglobin and veterinary products, Manzano explained that Actovegin "oxygenates the blood better and cannot be detected. In cycling jargon, we call it "bus fuel." Its effects only last one day We inject it into the vein the day before the stage targeted, and particularly the time trials.... We put 10 ml of Actovegin mixed with 10 ml of a physiological salt solution into a 20 ml syringe."

Six Weeks in the Freezer

Lance Armstrong won the 2000 Tour de France for the second time. The month of July came to an end. Hugues Huet still had the blood compresses in his possession. "I kept them in my freezer until I could have them tested. Why?"

Because I was intrigued by these large blood stains soaked into the compresses. The impact of an intravenous needle wouldn't have produced such stains." During the summer vacation it takes a long time to get a test done. "First of all, I had to obtain the consent of management because each test cost about 10,000 francs (roughly \$1,600). Hervé Brusini, head of the national editorial offices at the time, finally gave me the green light but, in August, all the specialist centers I contacted were deserted. Therefore, I kept the compresses at my place for some time. "More than a month and a half, in fact."

Hugues Huet called these specialists back at the beginning of September. "Several refused," he remembered. He finally contacted Michel Audran, who agreed to carry out this research. In the middle of September, Hugues Huet went to Montpellier to give him the ten or so compresses he had kept.

The scientist agreed to carry out his request without much conviction. "Despite the fact they had been frozen, the products were damaged," he iterated. However, he carried out the tests. For what purpose? "To see if any hemoglobin could be found." Because at first, doubt is permitted. "Indeed, at the time, you could procure oxyglobin, i.e., hemoglobin for veterinary use, which was originally intended for human use. I had been able to obtain some myself, to carry out comparative studies.

"What was the result?"

"All the blood compresses were normal. All except one. One of the compresses did indeed pose a problem for me. In fact, we didn't find human hemoglobin on one of them but some unknown product. It could well have been Mercurochrome. It was very strange. Unknown. But when we tested it a second time, we used up all the sample. We felt like fools then."

For lack of meaningful elements, the compresses delivered an incomplete verdict.

An Anonymous Letter

A month later, however, the affair was to start up again. On October 18, an anonymous, typed letter arrived on the desk of the State Prosecutor of Paris, Jean-Pierre Dintilhac. Posted on October 1, it stated that a France 3 team "was in possession of elements proving the use of illegal substances by US Postal" and mentioned a report made on July 18 at the Tour de France. It also accused Hugues Huet of withholding information.

A preliminary investigation was immediately opened by the public prosecutor's office in Paris and, Franchi, the prosecutor, gave the assignment to the Paris Drug Squad, more precisely, the "overdose and doping" section, located at 36, quai des Orfèvres (France's Scotland Yard) and headed by Police Chief Serge Le Dantec. This group, made up of seven policemen, had only been set up recently. Up until then, it had concentrated on bodybuilding circles where the traffic of steroids is rife. Just as the media was starting to focus attention on the Festina trial, Hugues Huet was approached by Le Dantec in Lille. The exchange was courteous but firm. The police chief was intent on viewing the VHS cassette,

but Hughes Huet wanted to keep his scoop, hoping it would be broadcast during the Festina trial to be held from October 23 to November 7. He balked at handing it over. In a registered letter, Le Dantec summoned him, the cameraman and soundman to the Quai des Orfèvres the following week. Hugues Huet went to the meeting but did not take the cassette. Relations between the two men became strained. Huet was ordered to hand over the cassette, but he was trying to gain time.

The Lawyer Sends a Fax

On November 22, 2000, a judicial enquiry was opened against person or persons unknown for "breach of the law relating to the prevention of the use of doping products, incitement to use doping products and breach of the law relating to poisonous substances," and given to the Paris judge Sophie-Hélène Château. Two days later, the film shot by the France 3 team was broadcast on the 7-8 P.M. national news. During the six-minute report, Luis Garcia del Moral and Jeff Spencer were mainly seen from the back, dressed in US Postal-marked clothes, but recognizable.

The American team had asked Georges Kiejman to defend its interests. How did they get to know about this lawyer? "You know, in the past I have acted for the US government," the former justice minister revealed. He had also defended other American citizens, namely the actor Robert de Niro, in a recent sex case. As soon as Mr. Kiejman took on the case, he exercised all his powers of persuasion to discourage the TV channel from broadcasting this film. Wanting to protect himself, Hervé Brusini warned the lawyer that the film was about to be broadcast and the lawyer reacted courteously and firmly. "First of all, he expressed his displeasure, but in very cordial terms," said Hervé Brusini, who had since become news manager. "Mr. Kiejman reacted as any lawyer defending his client in a sensitive case would react. With his very detailed language and carefully chosen words, he led me to understand what we were getting ourselves in to. In clearer terms, "be careful of what you say," but I felt no sense of threat on his part. Moreover, the situation was particularly delicate because the Tour de France is broadcast on a public network."

The afternoon before the broadcast, Mr. Kiejman sent a two-page fax to the management of France 3, warning them not to make any misjudgment or misinterpretation with regard to Actovegin, suggesting that this could lead to legal proceedings.

Why had Mr. Kiejman focused on Actovegin? After all, US Postal had done all they could to deny the existence of this product and then to minimize its importance.

Bad Hair Day

A few days later, Serge Le Dantec, instructed by Judge Château, discreetly summoned Dr. Luis Garcia del Moral and Johan Bruyneel, the sports manager of US Postal. The hearings remained affable. Not surprising.. "They spoke a lot of cant," confided an investigating officer present, "both referring to their team's healthy lifestyle."

Another meeting was set for a hearing with the riders, but none of them attended. A dispatch issued by the press agency Reuter, dated December 13, 2000, stated that "Lance Armstrong had been summoned to 36, Quai des Orfèvres" as a simple witness, in the same capacity as the other US Postal riders who had competed in the Tour. But "they all refused to attend for a fuller preliminary expert opinion". Another meeting was scheduled. "They did not turn up," reported a policeman involved in the enquiry. "They probably guessed that we wanted to take samples. Then everything would have been easier..."

"Samples? "

"Yes, hair samples."

These hair samples were to be given to a well-known toxicology specialist, Gilbert Pépin. In charge of Toxlab, a private laboratory, doctor of pharmacy and toxicology, expert for the Court of Cassation (highest court of civil and criminal appeal in France) for over ten years. Often called upon to give scientific opinions in criminal cases, he made an appearance that attracted a lot of attention during the Festina trial, explaining all the information that a simple hair can reveal. "The study of hair enables us to detect whether corticoids or amphetamines have been taken, and to differentiate between epitestosterone and testosterone," he explained in the hall of law courts. This would certainly be significant in such a case. Michel Audran noted that "Gilbert Pépin's work is of wider scope than Jacques de Ceaurriz's work at the National Drug Screening Laboratory (LNDD) in Chatenay-Malabry. He screens for benzodiazepines,⁵⁴ and everything related to narcotics."

As the expertise of this "overdose and doping" group was restricted to a limited area, they could go no further. Police Chief Le Dantec had considered contacting Cosmolis, the company designated by the Tour de France Company to collect and incinerate medical waste—incineration has the advantage of leaving no trace. However, he never put his intention into action.

As for Gilbert Pépin, he preferred to make no comment. First, because disclosing his investigations had attracted criticism. Second, because the sports 'market' had turned a deaf ear to his results and no federation had contacted him to take advantage of his skills despite the fact that they were recognized by the legal system.

An Invisible Witness

On December 13, 2000,⁵⁵ Mr. Kiejman informed the press in prophetic terms that the enquiry had "totally clarified" the facts [relating to the discovery of Actovegin]

...

In any case, the rider's attitude contrasted sharply with the declaration of intent made by the leader of US Postal. Following the recommendations of his lawyer, Lance Armstrong had personally addressed a letter to Judge Sophie-Hélène Château, in which he had expressed his willingness to assist the course of justice: "I will submit to any further medical examination," he had assured her. An offer he never fulfilled. And the French legal system could not force him to, because it has no coercive means of obliging witnesses to obey a summons. "Lance Armstrong would have liked to be heard, but with a view to being cleared," somebody in the Judge's entourage told us. "As things stand, we don't even have enough ammunition to call him as a witness."

This attitude also contrasts with Armstrong's writings. In his second book,⁵⁶ he expresses his feelings of impotence regarding the French legal system: "The investigation would go so quiet for long periods and I wouldn't have had an idea of what was going on, and it drove me crazy. I couldn't defend myself. I couldn't talk to either the Judge or the Prosecutors Sophie-Hélène Château had all the power and she could make it last as long as she wanted to." Lance Armstrong asserted once again in *L'Équipe* on April 12, 2001, "I am accessible to the law and to everyone. I'll give them anything they want – my blood, my urine, my hair and whatever else." However, he was careful not to do this.

In the interval, Judge Château got down to work on the case and extended her investigation. She got in touch with the experts, including Gilbert Pépin. She gave him the three empty packets of Actovegin but the tests did not reveal anything conclusive. She also noticed that out of the twenty-one teams that had taken part in the 2000 Tour de France, US Postal was the only team that had not given the medical data collected before the start of the event to the appropriate authorities and this did not fail to surprise her.

Interchangeable Defense

Meanwhile, US Postal was preparing its counterattack on two fronts – the judicial approach and the media approach. It was forced to react. On November 8, 2000, the headlines of the French satirical newspaper, *Le Canard Enchaîné*, were hard-hitting: "The Tour Winner's Team Is Shooting Up With Calf's Blood." The US Postal defense, fluctuating according to the reactions of the press and public, only aggravated the situation. Three versions took shape as the strategy kept changing. First of all, on his website, Lance Armstrong said he had never heard of Actovegin. This was taken up by the news agency Reuters on December 13, 2000. Here are some extracts: "I would like to remind you that we are totally innocent. We are a clean professional team which is victim of its own success. It's a really distressing situation that we simply have to clarify. I don't want to give any vague political reply like 'we have never tested positive,' because this is not very fair either. What I can say is that this activo-whatever-it's-called is something new to us. Before now, I'd never heard of it. Neither had my teammates. Our doctor is with us during the three weeks of the Tour de

France, taking care of a group of twenty or twenty-five people and he has to deal with all sorts of situations. That's why he has all sorts of things like adrenalin, cortisone and scissors and thread for stitches. They can be considered performance-enhancers but that is not why we use them. We follow strict moral rules in everything we do."

This "activo-whatever-it's-called" is definitely included on the import authorization request sent on May 8, 2000 to the French Agency for Sanitary Security of Health Products (AFSSAPS) by US Postal's Spanish doctor, Luis Garcia del Moral. Actovegin is in second place in an alphabetical list containing as many as 126 different products.

The detailed descriptions of these medicines are written in Spanish. They specify that Actovegin is dialyzed calf's blood (meaning it has been filtered to remove the toxins and other impurities), that it comes in injectable form (IV or IM), that the product comes from Germany but that it is marketed by the Norwegian laboratory Nycomed; above all that each box contains 5 solutions and that the import request concerns ... 8 boxes, i.e., a total of 40 doses.

Prohibited but Authorized...

It has to be said that the supply of legal medical substances to cycling teams is very precisely organized. In the case in question, the import authorization request came, as always, from the Institute for Sports Medicine and Traumatology, located in Valence. It was then sent to "the importer," which was none other than the French Cycling Federation in Rosny-sous-Bois (Seine-Saint-Denis) in its capacity as "organization in charge of holding medicines likely to be prescribed to cyclists of the United States Postal Service team." The stock was then "held by the aforementioned doctor of the United States Postal Service team," Luis Garcia del Moral.

However, this request had to be approved by the AFSSAPS, whose offices are located in Saint-Denis (Seine-Saint-Denis, France). The authorizations are issued by its Department for the Assessment of Medicines and Health Products. Henriette Chaibriant, head of the communications department explains:

"To obtain a product marketing authorization, you first have to submit a dossier. There are two procedures: the European procedure or the mutual recognition procedure between two countries. Before being granted this authorization, three assessments are carried out: a pharmaceutical, a toxicological and a clinical assessment. Then the benefits are weighed up against the risks. It must have been the immuno-hematology department which carried out the assessment on Actovegin. Having said this, it is possible to import a product without going through the mutual recognition procedure if an assessment has been carried out in a European country. Products likely to be used for doping are transmitted to the Ministry for Youth and Sports."

Concerning the import authorization request for Actovegin drawn up by US Postal for the 2000 Tour, Henriette Chaibriant pointed out that "the authorization was granted the first time in 2000, but not in 2001. This prohibition followed a

more extensive study of this kind of importation. We refined our approach. We wanted to know whether there was an equivalent of Actovegin in France, which was not the case; whether this product was of biological origin, which was not the case, and whether it was to be used for therapeutic purposes, which was not proven. Moreover, it was necessary to be vigilant with regard to the doping phenomenon. In addition, the manufacturer had not submitted a product marketing request for France.”

Therefore, Actovegin has no proven efficacy according to the French health authorities which had, nevertheless, granted the American team’s request in 2000.

Circulation Disorders

After first claiming they knew nothing about Actovegin, the US Postal managers then announced that one of the supervisors, the Belgian mechanic Julien De Vriese, used this product to treat his diabetes. The former mechanic of Eddy Merckx and Greg LeMond confirmed this. But the alibi was very weak: in the import document, the medical indication given by Luis Garcia del Moral to justify the presence of Actovegin in the list specified “circulation disorder,” but there was no reference to diabetes in the corresponding box. Moreover, Actovegin is not absolutely essential for diabetics, as Professor Jan Van Driel explained: “It is first and foremost prescribed for circulation disorders. It is not commonly used in the United States and cannot be considered as a main treatment for diabetes.” As stated before, no indication of this type is given in Actovegin’s instructions for use.

This is confirmed once again by Jean-Pierre de Mondenard: “Actovegin is not used to treat diabetes. This product simply promotes rehydration. Moreover, the patient has to add insulin.”

It should also be noted that Julien De Vriese did not follow the whole 2000 Tour de France—far from it. “Julien was only there to prepare the bikes for the time trials,” recalled Cédric Vasseur, who rode for US Postal in the 2000 Tour. He was there for the big start but afterwards he arrived in the evening and then left again the next morning.” The famous trash bags were found before the Tour’s last time trial, i.e., after the mechanic had come three times: the prologue, the team time trial and the first individual time trial. This meant he had been present for six days at the most. The medical import request that US Postal gave the AFSSAPS concerned eight boxes of Actovegin (the France 3 team only found three), i.e., forty 5 ml doses. If Julien De Vriese was the only person to use Actovegin in the American team, this means he must have injected 200 ml in 6 days. In other words, between 6 and 7 injections per day...

The ICU Puts the Brakes On

To back up her case, Judge Château decided to obtain the urine samples taken from US Postal during the 2000 Tour de France and kept at the LNDD in Chatenay-Malabry. Her request came in the middle of a terrible trial of strength between Marie-George Buffet, the Minister of Youth and Sports, and the Dutchman Hein Verbruggen, the president of the International Cycling Union (ICU), which had been going on for two months. The subject of their discord? Precisely the use of these samples.

Here is a short rundown of the facts. On May 26, 2000, in Geneva, the ICU, the Tour de France organizers and the French Minister for Youth and Sports decided to start screening for EPO at this important cycling event. Approval had yet to be obtained for the urine screening method developed at the LNDD by a French team (Jacques de Ceauriz, director, and Françoise Lane, director and head of research and development). There was only one month left to do this. The time scale was extremely short, to say the least. On June 22, as no scientific validation had yet been obtained, the ICU decided to freeze the urine samples that would be taken during the Tour, which was scheduled to start fifteen days later.

On October 9, 2000, the ICU announced its intention to recover the frozen samples from the Chatenay-Malabry laboratory in order to destroy them. The Sports Ministry refused. After six weeks silence, the ICU seemed to be on the same side as the French Ministry. In a press release given on Saturday, November 22, the ICU stated that it had asked the LNDD to hand over the samples on November 14, so that they could be given to the French authorities if they were requested. They seemed to be in agreement once again. However, two days later there was a new development. In a letter to the Ministry of Sports, Hein Verbruggen renewed his request to have the samples destroyed. "The anti-doping tests are over," he wrote. "As far as we are concerned, the samples are of no value now. They must be destroyed." On the same day, the ICU asserted in another press release that it had "never intended to hide anything from the judicial system."⁵⁷

To put an end to this blockade, Judge Château intervened forcefully. On November 28, she issued a rogatory commission to seize the 91 frozen samples. On Friday, December 1, policemen burst into the Chatenay-Malabry laboratory to affix seals on the urine-filled test tubes.

Address Unknown

Lance Armstrong's reaction was clear-cut. On December 13, 2000, the English press agency Reuter quoted a statement made by the American cyclist on his website, in which he threatened to boycott the Tour. "If the situation remains the same, I shall not compete in the 2001 Tour de France. I am not threatening or warning anybody because I really don't think the French care whether I'm there or not." One month later, there was a change of strategy, as the *Équipe* of January 10, 2001 shows: "The American cyclist intends to compete in the Tour de France despite the boycott threats he had made as a result of the suspicion

surrounding on his team. He will not, however, be competing in France between now and then. During this period, he will be leaving his home in the Nice area to move to Spain." Indeed, the following winter, the leader of the American team moved to Gerona, halfway between Barcelona and Perpignan, where his sports manager, Johan Bruyneel, several US Postal riders and some of the medical supervisors lived. On January 26, 2001, in the Spanish town of Altea, where the American team was presented, Lance Armstrong confirmed this change of tone. A France-Press dispatch issued on the same day quoted the cyclist: "Lance Armstrong went back on his previous declarations in which he stated he was unhappy that the Tour de France took place in France. 'I would like to clarify this matter. The quotation was cut. I like France. I like this country. I have not sold my house in Nice. I want my children to know France and Nice, now and in the future, in ten or twenty years.'"

On the same day, the leader of US Postal went as far as involving the community of cancer sufferers: "What is happening affects all of us a lot. But winning the Tour de France in 1999, 2000 and in 2001, I hope affects the lives of tens and even hundreds of millions of people. There may be an enquiry, but it won't affect me or somebody in the hospital, or somebody that has a family member in the hospital. I will influence their life by being a successful athlete and a cancer survivor." How do you say demagoguery in Texan?

Clear Urine – Too Clear

The LNDD urine samples were given to two experts who would collaborate in the scientific investigation, First, Gilbert Pépin and then Michel Audran. "In this sort of case, I always work second," explained Michel Audran. Gilbert Pépin looked for doping products and drugs and then passed the samples on to Michel Audran who looked for proteins and hormone-related substances (EPO, growth hormone, IGF1, insulin, ACTH – a hormone secreted by the pituitary gland, etc.). "I carried out EPO tests at the Chatenay-Malabry laboratory with the personnel," recalled Michel Audran. "It takes two and a half days because the migration times have to be respected. The body contains at least thirty molecules with different electric charges. They resemble each other to a greater or lesser degree. The aim is to separate the molecules. The EPO secreted by the body presents molecules which migrate differently from others. When compared to exogenous EPO, it is as plain as the nose on your face. In fact, it is possible to see three things: exogenous EPO, physiological EPO or... nothing at all. It is possible to find this 'nothing at all' if the person took EPO, then stopped taking it, because when a person takes EPO the body takes a rest. And it stops producing it." Professeur Audran had fifteen urine samples at his disposal, thirteen of which were from Lance Armstrong. This is logical enough, given the great number of anti-doping tests a champion like him is subjected to. First observation: "These tests revealed physiological EPO, proving that he did not take EPO. He was clean – very, very clean...."

This led to the second observation: he was almost too clean. "In Armstrong's urine, there was nothing. Nothing at all. It was as clear as clear could be! Admittedly, I have already seen adult urine as clear as that, but with his, it was clear every day. Thirteen samples – all the same! Okay, for somebody who follows the same strict diet, it is conceivable. The nature of urine varies according to what you do during the day and what you eat. Here, you have to imagine somebody producing the same amount of effort, following the same diet, all identical, as surprising as it seems." "Babies' urine," remarked another observer. The biophysicist was intrigued. "There is always EPO in urine, except if the person has stopped taking an EPO treatment a week earlier. Between the moment he stops and the moment his body produces some, there can be nothing. He was so intrigued he started to wonder if this was really American's urine. He stressed the fact that Gilbert Pépin and he had both had this thought at the same time. "It might be a crazy hypothesis, but what if Lance Armstrong had been crafty enough to falsify his urine, his cancer could then have gone unnoticed...."

EPO Screening Method

In his laboratory in Montpellier, Michel Audran explained the urine testing procedure used to detect whether exogenous EPO had been taken.

"An extract of urine is placed under a support, i.e., a plastic plate covered with a special gel. Then an electric field in an Eph radian [acid value] is established on this plate. The molecules migrate and then at a given moment become stable on the plate. What is so clever about Françoise Lane's EPO urine test is that it is possible to get the EPO to migrate, ...

"The resulting graph presents peaks, which can be displayed on a photocopy. If a sequence of these peaks, corresponding to a sample of urine to be analyzed, represents 80% of the surface area of a graph of urine containing exogenous EPO, the rider is declared "non negative." I had a problem with the sample taken from another US Postal rider. He tested negative to EPO but his test was ambiguous. The profile of a 'line of five peaks' of urine to be tested represented 60% of the profile of urine from a person who had taken Eprex [one of the brand names under which EPO is marketed]. This borderline case was not enough to declare him "non-negative" in complete certainty, though. Our interpretation criterion are very strict, you know."

Exogenous EPO "non-negativity" can sometimes be refuted during the second analysis. "It can indeed happen," Michel Audran admits. "It's an extremely delicate job, and the second analysis is sometimes botched. Also, we're dealing with a number of reagents. For example, we have to be absolutely sure that we're using the same ones. If they come from another batch, it's over."

Audran recalled one unfortunate case: "The EPO screening test never worked during the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, simply because the plates used to

migrate the molecules were not identical. They came from another manufacturer, and those plates did not allow the [endogenous and exogenous] EPO to be separated. Spanish analysts realized this when they performed the French test in Barcelona. They started out with the plates from Paris, and they bought another batch of plates from another distributor, which were intended for the Sydney Games. And it didn't work. This completely messed up all the tests, the migrations were wrong, and so on. This gives you an idea of how complex the detection procedure can be."

Bad Company

The numerous investigations at the time focused on Actovegin and neglected the ten other products (not to mention the 160 syringes) that were in the five trash bags thrown away on July 18, 2000, by two members of the US Postal team. However, the perspective gained by comparing these products with lists drawn up previously in other affairs is enlightening. When Dr. Mondenard was asked to take on the task, he found Coltramyl (medication to treat cramps caused by anabolic steroids), Esafosfina (a fluidifying fructose diphosphate for respiratory deficiencies), Epargriseovit (vitamins B12, PP, and C, folic acid), Ipoazotal (a chain of amino acids that fights hyperammonemia⁵⁸ due to effort, but plays a role in the secretion of growth hormones), Prefolic 50 (a folic acid with anti-anemic effects, hepatic detoxifier), Traumeel S (to fight trauma and tendonitis), Zyloric (prevents formation of uric acid), Noctamide (induces sleep), S Amet 200 (a hepatic detoxifier), and Thioctacid (a "booster" that facilitates the passage of glucose into the cells and optimizes energizers; often mentioned in bodybuilding periodicals), among others.

Let's compare the above list to those from two previous affairs and to information revealed by several "repentant" cyclists:

– The Rumsas affair. Edita, the wife of the Lithuanian cyclist who finished third in the 2002 Tour de France, was arrested by French customs agents near Chamonix on July 28, 2002. Fifty-four different products were found in her vehicle, eight of which are mentioned on the list of products forbidden by the ICU and the IOC on July 18, 2000. Moreover, three 250-ml bottles of Actovegin were discovered in her trunk. Under "description," the seizure report reads "anti-hypoxic, blood thinner, glucose transporter, masking agent." In total, three products – Actovegin, Ipoazotal, Thioctacid – coincided with those found in the US Postal team bags. On May 7, 2004, the court in Bonneville issued an international arrest warrant for Raimondas Rumsas for acts of "importing and possessing prohibited goods as contraband."

– The TVM affair. On July 23, 1998, during that year's Tour de France, searches were conducted on the Dutch team in its Pamiers hotel. Esafosfina and Epargriseovit were found among the products seized.

– In books by Erwann Menthéour (a former professional cyclist with La Française des Jeux) and Willy Voet (a former Festina soigneur), published in 1999,⁵⁹ and in

a book by Jérôme Chiotti, the 1996 world mountain biking champion who admits to taking steroids,⁶⁰ three of the same products that were on the US Postal list appear: lipoazotal, Thioctacid, Esafosfina.

"These connections are not as harmless as the principals involved allow us to assume," Jean-Pierre de Mondenard explains. "Equivalent products, but with different names, are not taken into account. It's kind of like the revolver Goldfinger assembles in the James Bond movie: the individual pieces are harmless, but once they are put together, they're extremely dangerous. [...] The three products mentioned are essential ingredients for the manufacturing of red blood cells. In this environment, everyone knows that the association of iron, folic acid and B12 vitamins is a prerequisite for the taking of EPO. The health aspect is completely ignored: all these products are transported not to take care of the cyclist, but of his performance."

On his website, Lance Armstrong adopted an astonishing attitude to the exhaustive inventory of the contents of the trash cans: in his comments, he gives credence to France 3's journalistic work and the connection to his own team. "The medical products found were certainly intended to treat between twenty-five and thirty people on the Grande Boucle for a three-week period [...] I can assure everyone that we do everything according to the highest moral criteria."

At Least Twelve Medications a Day

The moral criteria were not the only things that were high. In the copy of US Postal's import authorization list for the 2000 Tour de France that we procured, 126 different products are listed (5 from Germany, 15 from Italy, and the others from Spain), a dozen of which (primarily corticoids) are outlawed under anti-doping legislation. This comes to a total of 684 boxes of various medications, or 7,422 capsules, pills, injectable solutions and various vials and tubes.

Let's go back to the (very) large number of "thirty people" given by Lance Armstrong – which was only "twenty or twenty-five" in his remarks of December 13, 2000. Assuming that each of the trainers "partook" of the same amount as the nine cyclists, divide by three weeks of racing; this comes to an average of 11.78 medications per person per day. This is not far from the "riding alembics" of which Daniel Delegove, the presiding judge at the Festina trial, spoke.

There was nothing exceptional about this consumption. The following year, for the 2001 Tour, the import authorization list included a total of 119 different products (Actovegin had been removed), or 790 boxes of medications for 8,334 units: a daily average of at least 13.2 medications per person per day, according to the same calculating method.

According to our information, this consumption of legal medication represented the largest quantity of products declared by a team taking part in the 2000 Tour de France: twice the consumption of the French teams and over a third more than the Italian teams. In any case, this consumption does not have any therapeutic purpose. "The main purpose of medication is to combat disease,"

Jean-Pierre de Mondenard says. "Once medication is given to enhance performance, a doping system develops. Originally, sport has its virtues, but sport organized by man has eliminated them. It's only human; sports institutions are not going to commit hara-kiri by running after users of illegal substances. What is superhuman is to be able to keep up with the dope users."

Mass Lies

Armstrong had stopped denying facts and started explaining them. His last attempt can be found in his book,⁶¹ published in the autumn of 2003. It contains a string of untruths: "I made some calls, and tried to figure out how we could be in such a situation. According to our team doctor and chiropractor, after a Tour stage in Morzine, they had bagged up the garbage left over from our medical care as they normally did. They didn't want to leave it at the hotel where we had stayed. However, the more unsavory media was always picking through our garbage in its relentless hunt to prove me a dooper, and we resented it. So they decided to frustrate the press by taking it from the hotel in Morzine and throwing it away in a roadside garbage can. This was their 'suspicious behavior.' The 'medical waste' consisted of some wrappers and cotton swabs and empty boxes, nothing more."

Actovegin – which he carefully avoided mentioning – was just "routine treatment" and two US Postal members had wanted to play a trick on the press ... a drive of 60 miles. As an article in *Sport et Vie*⁶² asked, "Why would two US Postal employees have gone to so much trouble to get rid of simple medical waste?" This medical waste could not be "summed up" as just a few odds and ends but as eleven different medications.

Lance Armstrong said:

"In France, as in this country, there are strict rules about how to properly dispose of any serious medical problem such as syringes and IV needles. Those had been handled as required, placed in yellow biohazard containers that were picked up by a French medical-waste service."

However, the facts prove the opposite. In addition to the listed products, 160 syringes were also found in a trash can at a freeway rest area. They were not "[thrown] in accordance with regulations... into containers... that were collected by a specialized removal service."

That year, the Tour de France Company had indeed organized a waste removal service to prevent any blunders. The team, whose leader had won the Tour, was now caught in the act of illegally disposing of wastes. When Jean-Marie Leblanc, the sports manager of the Tour, viewed the France 3 film, he appeared very annoyed. "They've really gone too far now ... there are a lot of questions we should ask ourselves and we should continue carrying out investigations, but that's it," he said. Hervé Brusini confirmed that Jean-Marie Leblanc had asked himself some questions but "that's it." In other words, he did not try to find the answers.

The Red Light

As the urine tests and blood-stained compresses produced no conclusive results, one last channel had to be explored—blood tests. To clarify matters, the medical experts considered it necessary to recover the blood samples taken from the US Postal team at the start of the 2000 Tour de France. "We needed to get some blood to be able to compare the blood DNA to the urine DNA." In other words, to detect any deception.

Judge Château issued another rogatory commission to recover these samples, which belonged to the ICU. On March 15, 2001, the judge and some investigators went to the ICU headquarters in Lausanne to have the samples handed over, as well as their identification codes. "These samples were taken for medical reasons and are confidential. They were not intended for anti-doping testing," the ICU lawyer, Philippe Verbiest, announced.

The blood samples were examined by Gilbert Pépin. According to somebody in close contact with the Drug Squad, the expert did not have enough blood to enable him to return a reliable verdict. "Which samples did he have?" Professor Audran asked himself. "Those taken the evening before the start of the Tour de France? If I wanted to cycle up the Tourmalet, I wouldn't take my hemoglobin at the start of the event. I would take it on the day of the stage, four hours before the climb." We know that Gilbert Pépin tried to get hold of the DNA of US Postal's blood samples kept by an American laboratory. Comparing his samples with elementary cells would have enabled him to clarify matters. But the laboratory in question never replied to his request.

Moreover, the value of this pre-Tour medical examination was recently put into perspective by the president of the Amaury Sports Organization (which manages the Tour): "We know that the big medical examination carried out three days before the start of the event is not enough, but we must continue doing it anyway."⁶³

Premonitory Violation

In any case, tests were still being carried out when a press conference was called by Lance Armstrong and his lawyer at the George V Hotel in Paris on April 7, 2001. The scoop came when the American champion read his text: "As you know, the team and I have had a difficult winter. Today, I am very happy to be able to announce that the urine tests proved negative. I myself never had any doubts because I have never used prohibited substances, whether it is EPO or any other illegal substance."

When questioned about the illegal dumping of medical waste, he made a slip of the tongue, which almost went unnoticed. "People are obsessed with doping at the moment and will pounce on any bit of gauze or packaging as soon as we leave a hotel room. That is why we throw dangerous products a distance away."⁶⁴ Dangerous? Really, wasn't this waste supposed to be insignificant...?

Anyway, Mr. Kiejman, who was sitting next to him, drove the nail in even further: "The rider received this information a few weeks ago..., it is unofficial but certain."

This unexpected announcement made Judge Sophie-Hélène Château furious and her anger did not let up. "The lawyer has violated the confidentiality of the judicial enquiry." It would be interesting to know how she reacted to Lance Armstrong's statement one and a half years later: "All the tests were clean....exactly as we had insisted all along. My lawyer in Paris called the judge, Château. She confirmed it."⁶⁵

It was enough to make her tear out her blond hair. "The expert appraisals were still underway when they decided to say the team had been cleared," she told us. "It's intolerable." Intolerable, and yet...

Several months went by without anything being found to support the investigator's thesis. The Drug Squad did question the Italian authorities on the supposedly shady relationship between Lance Armstrong and Dr. Ferrari, but the reply was slow to arrive. The blood tests depended on the American laboratory's reply, but they were in no hurry to answer either. The investigation was making little headway and time was on the side of the American champion who had won his third consecutive Tour de France.

Seven months later, on February 6, 2002, Mr. Kiejman showed signs of impatience. His declarations were quoted by the Reuters press agency. "Lance Armstrong, who refused to obey a police summons relating to a case of supposed doping, will refuse to comply with any other orders issued by the French legal system. This police summons was legally and factually unfounded. No evidence exists. We refuse to act as guinea pigs for some expert who is intent on making a name for himself in legal medicine," declared Georges Kiejman. "It is time to put an end to these proceedings. No suspicions or reasons exist to justify a special investigation of US Postal." The Drug Squad was also investigating other US Postal riders. But none of them complied with the judge's orders. None of them was interviewed.

Case Dismissed

Dependent upon a blood test, which was in turn dependent upon a molecule for comparison which never arrived, the French legal system could not allow the suspense to go on forever. Especially as the "Italian" lead got them nowhere either: "We never managed to consult Ferrari's hard disk," explained one of the investigators. "We contacted the appropriate authorities but waited for one year before being told there was nothing. The reply from Interpol in Rome reached us on August 5, 2002."

All the leads turned into deadends. Judge Château had to order a decree that squashed the indictment at the end of August 2002, in other words, nearly two years after the judicial inquiry had been opened..

This conclusion disappointed many people, starting with the Drug Squad investigators. François Franchi, the prosecutor in charge of the prevention of

non-organized crime at the Paris public prosecutor's department, summed up the prevailing feelings on September 2, 2002.⁶⁶ "We are unable to say that doping did not take place, insofar as we were unable to carry out all the tests we wanted to carry out. In matters of doping, French law rules out all means of coercion towards athletes. The law targets those who supply the products, but not those who use the products." When we questioned Judge Château, she wholeheartedly agreed: "Our legal system targets those who do the doping and not those who take the dope," she complained. The responsibility of the consumer is still an open debate.

As for Lance Armstrong, who said he was "relieved" by such a verdict, he appeared very irritated when a journalist questioned him during the Circuit de la Sarthe. The sports newspaper *L'Équipe* of April 12, 2001 quoted the exchange: "Do you think that one day doping will disappear from cycling?" In an annoyed voice he replied, "But, I thought it had been proven?" Failing this, presumption of innocence, which he claimed did not exist under French law,⁶⁷ remained the best defense. This saved him from conviction but not from suspicion.

Plots Everywhere

The Lance Armstrong of US Postal is not the same as the Lance Armstrong of the Motorola days when he used to be part of the communal life. The pervading suspicion that has surrounded his performances for five years has no doubt exacerbated his desire to be the best (or was it his anguish of not succeeding?). For example, he thought there was a plot being hatched against him during the 2003 Tour de France when, due to a mechanical incident, things didn't go as planned. The relations Lance Armstrong had with his sporting environment were baffling. Apart from the Tour organizers, Eddy Merckx, a few sports managers and his own team, very few people tooted his amiability. Quite the opposite. This admittedly brilliant man had become withdrawn, had distanced himself from the press and the public, called in the services of a bodyguard—a new thing in cycling—and only authorized television interviews in which he spoke faltering French in order to repair his tarnished image. Of course, champions always have strong personalities, but this is no reason for behaving rudely as soon as things don't go your way. When this subject is broached, cyclists usually clam up but there are a few who have breached this wall of silence.

Lance Calls Greg

An article based on an interview with Greg LeMond, published in the *Sunday Times* on July 15, 2001, revealed the low esteem he held for Michele Ferrari. He was expecting to get a call from Lance Armstrong about it. The then three-time winner of the Tour de France not only criticized the Italian doctor, but also expressed his doubts about his fellow countryman's career. At the end of July

2001, a few days after this article was published, LeMond went to London to meet representatives of Conoco, a multinational oil company which was thinking about sponsoring a cycling team. When he got back from England, his wife Kathy went to pick him up at Minneapolis-Saint Paul Airport in Minnesota, where the couple live. Just as he was getting into the driver's seat of Kathy's Audi Station Wagon, Greg LeMond's cell phone rang. "It's Lance," he whispered to his wife when he realized who was calling.

This telephone conversation took place on August 1, 2001. Greg LeMond refused to speak about its content. By virtue of an agreement with Trek, one of the main sponsors of US Postal and one of the distributors of the bike with the LeMond brand name, he had agreed not to speak publicly about the person who had succeeded him as winner of the Tour de France. However, there was nothing to prevent Kathy, his wife, from speaking about him.

"Since it was Lance calling, I noted down everything Greg said on the phone. Then I reformulated Lance's words straight after their conversation. Lance was speaking very loudly. I could even hear some of the words he said. It was clear that the conversation was strained at certain moments." Here are the contents of that conversation, according to Kathy LeMond:

"Greg, it's Lance."

"Hi Lance, what are you doing?"

"I'm in New York."

"Ah, OK."

"Greg, I thought we were friends."

"I thought we were too."

"Why did you say that?"

"About Ferrari? Well, there's something not right about Ferrari. I'm disappointed you're seeing someone like him. I've got a problem with this guy and doctors like him. My career was cut short, I saw a teammate die, I saw clean riders destroyed and obliged to give up their careers. I don't like what our sport has become."

"OK, OK, and maybe you're going to tell me you've never taken EPO?"

"What makes you say I've taken EPO?"

"Go on, everybody takes EPO."

"Why do you think I've taken it?"

"You know, your comeback in 1989 [the year LeMond won his second Tour de France] was spectacular. Mine [his first victory in 1999] was a miracle. Yours was another. You couldn't have been so good in 1989 if you hadn't used EPO."

"Listen, Lance, I won the Tour de France before EPO turned up in cycling. The first time I rode in the Tour, I finished third [in 1984]. The second time, I should have finished first, but my team slowed me down [second in 1985, behind Bernard Hinault]. And the third time [in 1986], I won it. It wasn't because of EPO that I won the Tour, especially since my hematocrit value never exceeded 45, but because I had a VO2 max of 95, while yours is 82. Name just one person who said I took EPO."

"Everybody knows it."

"Are you threatening me?"

"If you want a war, you're going to get it!"

"So you are threatening me? Listen, Lance, I know a lot about physiology: no training load can transform an athlete with a VO2 max of 82 into an athlete with a VO2 max of 95, especially since you rode faster than me."

"I could find at least ten people who'd say you've taken EPO. Ten people who would talk."

"It's impossible. I know I've never taken any. Nobody can say I have. If I had taken EPO, my hematocrit value would have exceeded 45 and this never happened. It's impossible and it's false. I could produce all my blood parameters which prove my hematocrit value never rose above 45. And if I hear this accusation leveled against me, I'll know who made it."

"You shouldn't have said what you did. It wasn't right."

"I try to avoid speaking to journalists. David Walsh called me. He knew about your relations with Ferrari. What should I have said? No comment? I'm not that sort of person. Then a journalist from *Sports Illustrated* also called me. I've spoken to two journalists altogether, full stop. Maybe I shouldn't have spoken to them but I only told them the truth."

"I thought we respected each other."

"So did I. Listen, Lance, I tried to warn you about Ferrari. This guy's trial is opening in September [2001]. What he did in the 1990s changed riders. You should get away from him. How do you think I should have reacted?"

A few days after this conversation, Kathy LeMond noted with amusement that Lance Armstrong's VO2 max had been changed on his website, going from 82 to 83.9 ml.

Hey Doc, You're Going to Have Problems

On June 25, 2001, Lance Armstrong called Chann McRae, a cyclist with Mercury, on his cell phone. The Tour de France was starting in one week, but Armstrong wanted to sort something out before concentrating on his third consecutive victory in the world's most important cycling race. He wanted to speak to Prentice Steffen, the Mercury team doctor, and he asked McRae to pass his telephone to Steffen. The discussion between Armstrong and Steffen lasted about ten to fifteen minutes. Armstrong monopolized most of the conversation. Steffen was a bit shaken by this conversation and he took notes on it that evening. Using these notes and his memory, he wrote this report on the conversation and sent it to us in August 2003.

"Chann came to see me and told me I had a call. 'Prentice,' I said.

'It's Lance Armstrong.' He told me he had heard my name repeated several times by people around him. He sounded threatening. According to him, I had spoken to several journalists who knew each other and were plotting together. On at least four occasions, he told me I should be very careful about who I spoke to and what I said. He asserted that Mark Gorski had already told him a lot of worrying things about me and 'that I had already been warned.' 'I know you've been carrying out a vendetta against this team [US Postal] for a long time.' I replied that all I had done was describe how, during the 1996 Tour de Suisse,

Tyler [Hamilton] and Marty [Jemison] had asked me to do more for them than I was already doing and when I refused, I was fired from the team. He mentioned an article published in the magazine *Texas Monthly* and read a quote attributed to an anonymous doctor, who had worked for an American cycling team. The quote threw doubts on the legitimacy of Lance's clean reputation. I never said it came from me. Lance claimed that our team, Mercury, was the only team, apart from US Postal, to have a doctor so it could only have been made by me. I told him that was false and that most American teams had a doctor.

He then touched on legal action.

'According to the laws of Texas, I can make the author of this article reveal his sources.'

'I think freedom of the press is a federal law and not at the whim of each state.'

'Some of the best Texan press law specialists told me the opposite and I am ready to spend a lot of money to find out who said that. I will win the lawsuit against this person. Why would I take substances after all I went through during my cancer?'

Steffen did not answer this question.

"I find it rather strange you talking about doping when you [Mercury] are one of the rare teams to have had a rider test positive for EPO."

"I have nothing to hide on this subject and would be pleased to talk to anyone about it."

A Question of Misunderstandings

Almost 35 years old, Jean-Cyril Robin was in his fourteenth and last season as a professional cyclist with the French team fdj.com. The Nantes man came in sixth in the 1998 Tour, won a bronze medal at the world championships in Verona in 1999 and spent two years with US Postal, in 1997 and 1998. Lanky with light-colored eyes, he was finishing his cycling career as leader of Marc Madiot's team and his future career prospects were assured. Robin not only has a recognized record of achievements, he also has a well-structured mind. Discouraged by the severe criticism that his anti-doping stands had provoked, Jean-Cyril Robin finally agreed to meet us for lunch in his hometown of Nantes on December 2, 2003. The location was strategic: a creperie in the town center, not far from the station. "I often come here with my wife," he smiled. He felt comfortable there and that was preferable when discussing Lance Armstrong. Although he was almost 5,000 miles away, the American made him feel uncomfortable. What's more, when he sees the dictaphone placed on the table, he smiles because he prefers face to face discussions. In fact, between two full crepes and a jug of dry cider, the description of his relationship with Lance Armstrong can be summed up as a series of "misunderstandings."

"The first time I met him was during the team's training session in Ramona [California], in January 1998," he recalled. "He was returning to competitions. Down there, he was already impressive during the training sessions. He got the riders peddling. He was running the show. Pascal Deramé (his French

teammate), and I used to say, 'Goddamn it! Look how fit he is already!' As far as I know, all the French riders who rode with Lance have had a misunderstanding with him for one reason or another. Except for Pascal, because he won the Tour (1999) in his team. I had three misunderstandings. The first one occurred at the Circuit de la Sarthe in April 1999. A few days earlier, during the Critérium International, I had openly expressed my opinions to the press on doping and the two-tier cycling system [those who dope and those who don't], mentioning in particular the Paris-Nice race where the Dutch team Rabobank had ridden with unabashed ease. Hein Verbruggen, the president of the ICU, had sharply reprimanded me, officially at least. Privately, he told me that the ICU was obliged to condemn me, not because of the actual declarations I'd made but because I'd focused my words on a team and sponsor, Rabobank, and that he could not allow that. Daniel Baal, who was the current president of the French Cycling Union, supported my remarks. At the Circuit de la Sarthe, during the first stage in Sillé-le-Guillaume, we had just set out on a road through a forest when Lance cycled up beside me. He told me that I shouldn't have said that, not publicly. He wasn't aggressive. His tone was neutral but firm..."

Another minced beef-filled crepe came and interrupted his monologue. Appetite comes with speaking. "The second misunderstanding occurred when the prize money was to be shared out after the 1998 season, my last year with US Postal. I had finished sixth in the Tour that year and I alone had brought in 120,000 francs (roughly \$15,500) in endowments. The team did not have a kitty. Each cyclist received his prize money and then shared it out with those concerned a few months later. In fact, I was waiting for Vyacheslav Ekimov to finish working out each cyclist's share of the prize money won from races abroad. So, in the meantime, I had put this money into my account. However, two riders [Marty Jemison and George Hincapie] complained to Lance, who was not even concerned by the 1998 Tour. He told me to share the money out but I stuck to my guns. I wanted all the endowments to be paid before doing so. I preferred to give part of my earnings back later, rather than wait for the share I would receive (which would have been smaller anyway) after the balance of the accounts was settled. During the 1999 Tour, when I was with La Française des Jeux, the US Postal team was hot on my heels as soon as I tried to make a breakaway. Getting even, you could say. I couldn't move my little finger. I was finally allowed out during one stage at the end of the Tour, the one that arrived in Poitiers. I found out that Frankie [Andreu] had told Lance to drop it, that this matter had nothing to do with him anyway and that the team [US Postal] couldn't ride after every breakaway cyclist."

The third misunderstanding Jean-Cyril Robin referred to dated back to the prologue of the 1999 Tour de France. "The day after his success, the stage started in Montaigu. It was raining and I remember a reporter from *L'Équipe*, Jean-Luc Gatellier, coming up to me to ask me for my impressions. I mentioned that Lance had a strong personality and was sometimes selfish. This last word did not fall on deaf ears. During the stage that finished in Laval, he came to see me. He said with an ambiguous tone: "Selfish? Thanks, thanks a lot!"

Jean-Cyril Robin summed up the general feeling in a few sentences. "After all these misunderstandings, I decided to keep quiet. I didn't want to spoil my life with all that. When Armstrong comes to see you, he doesn't leave you indifferent. He has got, how can I say, such striking force! He really puts the wind up you when he talks to you. He scares people, that's it. The only time I saw him nice and cool during the two seasons was during the Tour de Galice, in August 1997. He helped me come in sixth in the event and he was in a good mood from start to finish. Teammates have told me of his moments of humanity when he was with Motorola. Apparently, he was cooler then, taking people out to restaurants and buying them good wine."

Turpin harassed, Pizzardini snubbed

In 2001, in the Aix-les-Bains-Alpe d'Huez stage, the leader of the American team was particularly resentful of Ludovic Turpin from the AG2R-Prévoyance team "The pace was quite relaxed, we were in the first third of the peloton, and had just started the downhill ride after the Col de Frêne when I swerved slightly, quite unintentionally, as often happens in a peloton," he recounted. "He was just behind me and it had annoyed him. Looking down his nose at me, speaking first in French and then in English, he said: 'Do you want to make me lose the Tour?' After this warning, Turpin continued on his way. "A few kilometers further on, he got me into his clutches again, just as I was overtaking. He spoke to me in English, in a firm voice, but I didn't understand a word. Given the layout of the race with two insignificant breakaways in front, there was nothing to get excited about." Ludovic Turpin thought the leader of the Tour was done harassing him. But that evening, in the hotel that both teams shared, Lance Armstrong started up again. "We were having dinner when he came up to my table. He spoke to me in English again. I could tell he was lecturing me. When the actual incident happened I could understand he was angry. The second time, I understood a little less. But then the third time, when he had just won the stage three hours earlier, I thought he'd have something better to do. My teammates and I were shaken to see him blowing hot air for nothing."

Eddy Pizzardini, a freelance journalist, was doing a story for the TV program *Hors Stade*, broadcast in December 2000 on channel M6. After three months of negotiations, the journalist finally met Lance Armstrong in front of the citadel of Villefranche-sur-Mer, not far from his home at the time. "When the opportunity arose, I spoke to him about his relationship with Michele Ferrari. He clammed up. He probably hadn't expected such a targeted question. He evaded and changed the subject while getting slightly angry. "But everybody knows Ferrari... Why does everybody ask so many questions about cycling, why are they so suspicious ... That's enough!" In fact, he has never openly admitted this collaboration. He asked the cameraman to stop filming and said to me. "This is the first and last time I am going to give you an interview. You're stirring up shit, aren't you? If you want to talk about doping, go see Bassons or Ballester." We

continued talking for a quarter of an hour next to his scooter, but for him it was finished. I learned later that he had seen the TV program. Apparently, he thought it was the most negative report ever done on him..."

Filthy Language

Champions are noted for their strong personalities. The pugnacity of Bernard Hinault is often quoted as an example. Although this man from Brittany, five-time winner of the Tour, sometimes exercised his natural authority, this never stopped him from being friendly and he was never as rude as Lance Armstrong.

An example is the time when he hurled insults at Patrice Halgand, a cyclist with Jean Delatour, during the 2003 Critérium du Dauphiné, because according to him and according to him only, the French man had attacked just after the US Postal leader had fallen. "This asshole attacked twice when I was on the ground. It's unacceptable.... It's the attitude of an amateur. That's why people wondered whether it was a good idea to accept the Jean Delatour team in the Tour de France."⁶⁸ Halgand denied the accusation and nobody who witnessed the scene condemned him. He tried to explain things to Armstrong that evening. "He refused to hear my version." This is how the newspaper *L'Équipe* reported the story: "This story perfectly sums up the influence and control the American has on the peloton. They are totally paralyzed by his sometimes scathing personality ... and dare not hope for anything better than a simple place of honor."⁶⁹

What about when he turned on Christophe Bassons during the 1999 Tour. Bassons was considered the black sheep of the professional peloton because of his anti-doping stands and his "Mr. Clean" status that no other rider wanted to share. In a moving book,⁷⁰ Bassons expressed his torment at being an indirect victim of doping—guilty for showing he was offended by it. Two days before giving up on the Tour, after many humiliations, he was confronted with the "boss" in person. When contacted on the phone, he recalled this episode. "I had already been pushed aside from the peloton when he performed his exploit on the climb up to Sestrières, in terrible weather conditions. I told the newspapers I had my doubts about the authenticity of such a performance. The next morning, at the start of the stage, nobody was speaking to me. US Postal had announced a relaxed start as far as the bottom of the hill, but as soon as we got to the flat road, show-off that I am, I attacked. That stirred things up in the valley and US Postal started chasing me. When they caught up with me, Armstrong grabbed me by the shoulder, all his teammates around him like bodyguards. He wanted to frighten me but he soon realized that wouldn't work with me. He spoke to me in English but I understood. 'That's enough. You're damaging cycling. It would be better if you went—if you left cycling. You're a lousy rider, you know. Fuck you!'" On July 17, the day Christophe Bassons gave up, Lance Armstrong was questioned on the 8 P.M. news on TF1 and he was just as harsh: "His accusations are bad for cycling, for his team, for me, for everybody. If he thinks cycling works like that, he's wrong and it's best he went home."

Three days later, when the press asked him to comment on the incident, the American toned his version down to explain his attitude. "I never told him to keep quiet.... I understand his position. I understand what he's trying to say... but it's not appropriate at a time like this..., what he said was not realistic." Then at the risk of contradicting himself, "I never asked him to shut up and I never told him to go home."⁷¹

A Man of Letters

Then there was the arrogant letter Armstrong sent to Richard Pound, president of the World Anti-Doping Association, on March 4, 2004, taking the pain to send it to six daily newspapers – the *New York Times*, *Herald Tribune*, *USA Today*, the French *L'Équipe*, Italian *La Gazzetta dello Sport* and the Spanish *Marca*. In this letter, the Texan champion went as far as asking for the resignation of Richard Pound, who had said in the newspaper *Le Monde* on the previous January 28, that "the public know that cyclists in the Tour de France and others take illegal substances." "Should a person with such a conviction direct the world's most important anti-doping agency? My answer is – no." He then claimed, "Cycling has certainly had problems. But we have cleaned it up. Nobody can deny that." At the end of his letter, Armstrong didn't hesitate to tell Richard Pound what he should do. "Would you please concentrate on fighting against doping rather than spending your time accusing innocent athletes?" Move along, Mr. Pound, there's nothing here to see.

This fiery letter could have been put down to a spontaneous reaction, but Lance Armstrong started up again two months later during an interview published in *L'Équipe*.⁷² And he certainly went for it! "The job of an organization like the WADA is to remain silent. It should strengthen the laws ... but it does not have a public relations role. On this point, it has often gone too far."

A List of Names

"Lust for life," a cassette intended for sale, came out in 1999, just after he won the Tour for the first time. It shows Armstrong sitting next to his pool talking about his relations with others. Suddenly, he gets heated. "I keep a list in my head. A list of names. And if I have the occasion, if I can, I will take this list out again." He said something similar to a weekly magazine.⁷³ When asked about the "cold man" image he projected, he used an icy image. "I don't have many friends and I don't need many. I just want to have a few who are prepared to kill for me. I would do everything for them." Then again: "Yes, I like controlling everything ..., I can control my condition, what I eat, what my team does, relationships between riders and what I decide to say to the press." A little later in the same article he says, "Everybody thinks I take dope. I won't forget that." For those people, his reply is short: "Stay at home!" This is how he responded to the booing crowds running after him as he cycled up the Ventoux next to the

Italian rider Marco Pantani, at the 2002 Tour de France. "I'm not here to make friends with roadside spectators who have had a bit too much to drink."⁷⁴ An idyllic vision of France in the month of July.

Many people think this unjustified attitude morally belittles the Yellow Jersey and the prestige of the Tour de France. This is the opinion of Cédric Vasseur, who wore the jersey for five days during the 1997 Tour. "All Yellow Jerseys were or are in contact with the public," explains this rider from the north of France. "This is not the case for Armstrong. The only sort of contact he gets is booing spectators. And when he insulted the public at Ventoux, it was appalling. The Tour de France Company is too indulgent with him. Yet, he doesn't return the favor, like when he turns up just a second before the start of the stage. Yellow Jerseys have a duty towards the public. He should give some of his time and at least go and greet the local representatives who have invested a lot of money to have a stage start in their town. This is one of the duties of Yellow Jerseys. Except for Armstrong. Another thing, when he goes round with a bodyguard, that's not cycling, it's a presidential candidate. When Eddy Merckx was hit by a spectator as he cycled up the Puy de Dôme in 1975—and that can happen to anybody, anywhere—he didn't decide to hire a bunch of bodyguards. It's up to the Tour de France Company to remind him of these principles."

Silence is Golden

In 2004, Cédric Vasseur completed his fourteenth season of professional cycling in the Cofidis team. This cyclist from the north of France is best known for wearing the Tour de France yellow jersey for five days in 1997, when he broke away from the peloton on his own and won the La Châtre stage. He rode for US Postal for two seasons in 2000 and 2001 and competed in the 2000 Tour de France with them.

Cédric Vasseur, the son of a good professional cyclist of the 1970s, is good-natured and well liked by the public. With university qualifications, he successfully combines physical and intellectual activities. When one of the authors phoned him, he was vacationing on an island. In reply to the message left in his voice mailbox, he sent this SMS message almost immediately. "No problem. Return December 13. Call me then."

Three weeks later, Cédric Vasseur replied in person. It was nearly 9.30 P.M. on Thursday, January 8, 2004, and the next day the Cofidis team would be officially presented. Cédric left his teammates after dinner to join us at the bar of the Hotel Sofitel at Porte de Sèvres in Paris. Some tourists were in the bar having a nightcap. Cédric Vasseur spoke to us about his life with US Postal over a cup of Darjeeling tea.

He had had some some run-ins with the American champion and on two occasions he gave his opinion on a specific point. The first time was in the March 2002 issue of *La France Cycliste*, the organ of the French Cycling Federation, in which he criticized the American cyclist's overall attitude, saying it was "disappointing." The second time was in *L'Équipe* on July 10, 2003, in which he

said he thought "something was wrong" regarding the Texan champion. Indeed, a jury made up of people from the organizers magazine and the Tour de France Company had ranked him seventh in the list of one hundred top riders who were part of the history of the Tour de France.⁷⁴

In the cycling world, standing up to the Texan is uncommon and, as one can imagine, Armstrong did not appreciate this repeated rebellion—not at all. He was used to "controlling [his] riders" and didn't allow them to say what they thought about him openly.

Two hot cups were placed on the round table. Cédric Vasseur could begin. "I spent two years with US Postal. The first contacts I had with Armstrong date back to 1994, when I was riding with Histor-Nové-mail. That autumn, I performed well in the Paris-Brussels where I found myself in a breakaway with him. A few days later, Jim Ochowicz, the sports manager of Motorola, contacted me and asked me to join their team. He offered me a one-year contract but I finally decided to join Gan with Roger Legeay. The future proved me right because Motorola stopped competing [in 1996] and I won the yellow jersey in 1997. In 1999, at the last stage of the Tour, I went to congratulate Armstrong, like many other people. He asked me what I was doing the following year. I told him I was at the end of my contract with Legeay's team, which had become the Crédit Agricole. He answered 'Really? We're interested.' He asked for my telephone number and used the car radio to give it to Johan [Bruyneel]. 'He'll call you during the week sometime.' Indeed, Johan did call me. When we met up again at the Saint-Sébastien Grand Prix in August, Johan explained how the team worked. We also talked about salary but I wanted to win the jackpot working for them. I wanted more than they were offering me. It took a bit of time but they accepted. I learned that Armstrong had insisted on me being hired. I signed with them for two years. Why me? In my opinion, they needed a French rider because of the Tour de France. A rider who spoke English and who wasn't useless."

Cédric was getting ready to move on to a new adventure and he viewed the future with confidence. "In January 2000, during the Majorca Challenge, Johan said to me: 'We want you for the Tour. Do what you like for the rest.' Therefore I was being treated with kid gloves just so I could be ready for July. I competed in the Tour, even if I am not a born flat racer like Pascal Deramé or Vyacheslav Ekimov."

Although he did not have the right "job profile," Cédric Vasseur fulfilled his job as flat racer. "I had been hired to cycle on the straight stretches for Armstrong. That's what I did. It was my job, wasn't it? I may have underestimated the role I was going to be given in this team. Of course, I knew I was going to have to work for Armstrong, but I thought I'd have a certain amount of room to maneuver. My natural ability is to provoke breakaways. But in that kind of team that defends the yellow jersey, you don't have the right to breakaway. They take pride in it. I know what it means to sublimate yourself for the Yellow Jersey."

But a second disillusionment awaited him on the evening Armstrong won his second Tour de France. "A private celebration party had been organized in the

rooms of the Conciergerie, in Paris. I went there with my wife. I remember saying to her, 'I don't like this team.' Armstrong was the center of attention. For three weeks, we'd worked like maniacs and that evening we were just shit. All eyes were focused on him. In fact, they buy you with big salaries and in return you have to keep your mouth shut. I understood the real conditions of employment. They want riders who have no personal ambition. You have to stifle any ambition you've got. In any case, when US Postal riders other than Armstrong have any ambition, they leave, like Livingston, Hamilton, Heras... It's not a small matter. They realized they could achieve something elsewhere. And Livingston, his 'friend' was very angry when he left, I can tell you that."

The Clash

However, Vasseur still had one year of his contract left. In January 2001, he went to Spain on a training session with his teammates. "I was off and running again," Vasseur continued. "But during a conversation, Dirk De Mol [the assistant sports manager] whispered to me: 'Concerning the Tour, it's not going to be easy for you this year.' I didn't understand. The Tour was in six months. I had plenty of time to prove myself. What's more, I was starting the season well. My role involved supporting and protecting Armstrong wherever I was, at the Bicicleta Vasca [a Spanish stage event held in May], at the Amstel Gold Race [the Dutch round of the World Cup], etc."

Cédric Vasseur had the feeling he was doing his job. Moreover, Johan Bruyneel told him so: "At the Bicicleta Vasca, on the day Frank Vandenbroucke gave up, Bruyneel came into my room. 'Cédric, calm down now,' he told me. 'Don't work so hard. You're going to ride in the Tour, so stop clinging on like you do on the hills.' I was thrilled." Then the Tour de Suisse came along in the middle of June. "The composition of the Tour de France team still hadn't been decided," remembered Vasseur. "They said they were hesitating, but I didn't feel concerned by this choice." It was only after the French Championships in Argenton-sur-Creuse, four days later, that he was informed. "I was going back home by car with Philippe Crépel [his manager] and we were having dinner in a restaurant along the road when my cell phone rang." It was Bruyneel. "Cédric, I've got some bad news for you: you're not doing the Tour."

What? What do you mean I'm not doing the Tour? Three weeks ago, you told me that...

"Yes, but it's changed."

"So that was that. No explanation whatsoever. I really felt screwed, betrayed like never before."

Six days later, the 2001 Tour de France was leaving from Dunkerque, Cédric Vasseur's birthplace. Cédric was really upset about not being selected and he decided to go to the event "as a neighbor, a visitor and also a civilian. That way, they had nothing against me." When he was there, outside the circuit of official press conferences, several journalists interviewed him and he expressed his

discontent. On his home ground, his anger boiled. US Postal had obviously underestimated the Frenchman's popularity ratings. A small group, baptized the Revolutionary Front of Independent Cyclists (FRIC), threatened to throw cream pies at Armstrong and on the day of the prologue, the American was booed by some of the spectators. "I think gravel was thrown at him," Vasseur adds. "In any case, once he'd crossed the finish line, he went to see Bruyneel. Who then went to speak to Philippe Cr  pel to tell him, "We don't want to see Vasseur any more." Lance Armstrong won the Tour de France for the third time. "Philippe Cr  pel insisted on me finishing the season and getting back in touch with the managers of US Postal. So, on the last day of the event, I went to their hotel. I met De Mol and Bruyneel, who seemed to be putting me on. He told me I'd do the Vuelta in September, but he couldn't promise me anything. I knew perfectly well he wouldn't do anything. I never saw Armstrong again."

The quarrel lasted more than two years. Meanwhile, C  dric Vasseur joined the Cofidis team and crossed paths with Armstrong at different races. "From the Tour de Suisse in June 2001 to March 2002, I never saw Armstrong again. That year at the Crit  rium International, I passed him on the ramp leading to the sign-in podium. As I am a well brought-up guy, I greeted him. He gave me a withering look. Later, just as the race took off, I found myself not far from him, at the back of the peloton, but he didn't say anything. Not a word. Just the cold look of a killer. This situation lasted until the 2003 Tour de France, and the interview I gave to *L'  quipe* in which I showed my surprise at his being in seventh place in the rankings of the one hundred champions who had written the history of the Tour. Moreover, when you think about this famous ranking which was revised after his fifth victory, there's still something wrong. When you've won five Tours after surviving cancer, you should quite simply be first, don't you think? In any case, the next day when it was published, I felt a hand tapping me on the shoulder in the starting area. It was him.

'Hey, when are all these lousy articles going to stop?' he asked.

'What do you mean lousy? Everything I said was true.'

I jumped on the opportunity to tell him what was bugging me.

'Wait, Lance, you know very well I didn't receive my money. I was excluded from the [2001] Tour without the least explanation. Since then you have never spoken to me. That's no way of solving problems.'

We talked for about five minutes and the race started. At the end of the conversation, he just replied, 'OK, OK, we'll give you a present.' And that was that. As for the present, I'm still waiting."

Armstrong's Strange Emails

In fact, the two men had had another disagreement, this time financial. "I've got two problems with the people at US Postal," said Vasseur. "My exclusion from the 2001 Tour and the bonuses they never paid me. During the last week of the 2001 Tour de Suisse, Ekimov, the good Russian that he was, asked Armstrong

to pay the riders the bonuses he still had not paid for the 2000 Tour. The deal was: if Lance won the Tour, he would share out the bonuses in full. Armstrong sent an e-mail of apology to all the riders concerned, asking them for their bank details to enable him to make the payment. I learned that there was around \$12,750 for each person.⁷⁶ When the 2001 Tour was over, I found out that the bonuses for the 2000 Tour had been divided out. So I sent an e-mail to Armstrong and included my bank details. I got no answer. Time went by and the season finished. I sent two more e-mails but still got no answer. I signed up with Cofidis and then, at the beginning of the 2002 season, there was this article in *La France Cycliste*. Three or four days later, Armstrong sent me an e-mail. First he quoted my declarations, making comments in brackets and writing annotations everywhere like "interesting reading." Then he wrote this in English: 'I would like to refresh your memory. It is thanks to me that you got into the team. I even insisted on your salary being improved. It was a lot of money. You should also know that I didn't make all the decisions alone. There are five or six people in the committee who decide. I thought you were a rider with a promising future and that you would have a good career. As for your bonus, forget it. You have received enough money as it is. What's more, you gave a press conference in the US Postal outfit – that was a professional error. We could have fired you on the spot, if we'd wanted.'

Cédric Vasseur received another e-mail in the same vein from Armstrong after his interview with *L'Équipe* in the July 10, 2003 issue. "He must have had it translated," Vasseur decided. "This e-mail was written in the same way: he picked out the terms I had used and made comments on them like 'Mmm... interesting reading...' I couldn't give a damn, though. He's a bluffer. Sure, it works with some people but not with me. I will never win the Tour—we're not on the same level. That didn't stop me winning my stage at the 2003 Dauphiné, with him hot on my heels. If he had been able to follow, he would have got his guys peddling faster. But he was slowed down by his injured arm after his fall. He must have been really pissed off about my winning this stage."

The tension temporarily came to an end in the Champs-Élysées, at the end of the 2003 Tour. "Like many cyclists, I went to congratulate him for winning his fifth Tour de France. I saluted the performance and the champion and I was full of admiration. He answered, 'My sincere thanks.' I had the impression that he wanted to make peace. That's our story."

Spitting Image

Like many of his peers, Cédric Vasseur has conflicting opinions about Lance Armstrong, depending on whether he is judging his sports performance, which he admires despite everything, or his human behavior. But unlike the riders in his team, he expresses his opinions openly. The fact that he rubbed shoulders with the American champion for two seasons enabled him to refine his reflections. How does he see the now six-time winner of the Tour de France?

The Cult of Secrecy: "More than anything else, Armstrong is very smart. Nobody can really have a hold over him. He leads a separate life. For example, he changes physiotherapists every one or two years to protect himself. Since 2000, Emma O'Reilly, Freddy Viaene, then "Riszard" followed one another. He's organized a 'schedule' so nobody can guess his habits. He's an intelligent guy. He knows he is exposed and being watched."

The Need for Middlemen: "He likes to be taken for the boss, for God. The only time he's able to be pleasant is in January when he's not on a bike. Otherwise, he'll never tell you things directly. He'll go through somebody else—in this case Bruyneel. That was his middleman. For example, in the Tour de Suisse he won, he found himself alone in the final of the first stage. The next morning, we had an awful meeting. Bruyneel gave us a real going-over. Armstrong was sitting there like us, not saying anything. He got Bruyneel to pass his message across. I can't certify that it was Armstrong who did not select me for the Tour, but that's the feeling I have. In my opinion, Bruyneel wanted to select me, but at the last minute, something made Armstrong tell Bruyneel not to take me. That's why Johan couldn't give me an explanation."

Permanent Suspicion: "He's a perfectionist. He leaves nothing to chance. He is also paranoid. Since the September 11 attack, he's been on his guard.

Americans are scared someone will put some powder in their drinks, things like that. He's got a bodyguard to make sure a Bin Laden fan doesn't slit his throat in a mountain pass. But his bodyguard doesn't ride next to him in the Tourmalet. In fact, that suits him. In that way, nobody can get near him."

The Force of Intimidation: "In cycling, if you want to win races, you have to crush the others. Armstrong taught me to be nasty. He runs on aggression, anger, intimidation and the fear he can put into others. When something escapes him, all he wants to do is regain control. He doesn't kick up a big fuss but he goes into a state of cold, suppressed anger. He wants to impose the law of the strongest and most of the time it works. Not with me, though. When there was a bone of contention in the team, everyone went along with his opinion. He was the boss. He decided everything. Maybe it has something to do with his Texan genes, but he behaves like Bush Junior, wanting to run everything using force."

A Contested Humanity

Patrick Clerc, the only other professional cyclist to have suffered the same illness as Armstrong, thought the champion would pay him a bit more attention when they met, especially since Armstrong had shown a certain solidarity to the community of cancer sufferers. The reality proved very disappointing: "I met Lance Armstrong twice during the Tour where I was driving a France 2 car for Céline Géraud," he explained. "The first time was at the end of the stage arriving at the Beille during Gérard Holtz's TV show in July 1997 [i.e. seven months after Lance Armstrong's chemotherapy sessions]. Saying I met him is a bit of an exaggeration. We were not sitting next to each other on the set. The account of my experience was translated for him. Once the program had finished, Cyrille

Guimard, who was also present in his capacity as manager of Cofidis, with whom Armstrong had signed a contract, asked me to go and talk to the American and tell him to persevere, get back on his bike and he could make a comeback, etc. What he was asking me to do was understandable from the point of view of a sponsor but not from the point of view of a cancer sufferer. In short, I jawed a few words in English to Armstrong, but he hardly even nodded his head.

The second time was at the start of the race in Puy-du-Fou in 1999, the year he first won the Tour. I was with the France Télévision team and we were staying at the same hotel as US Postal. We met each other by chance over breakfast. I said hello to him and gibbered a few words of English: 'French TV', 'Gérard Holtz', 'two years ago'... He just replied, 'Oh yeah,' and continued helping himself. I never insisted."

If anyone is in a position to judge Lance Armstrong, it must be François Migraine, the CEO of Cofidis. With the disagreement between them lasting seven years, he has had time to think things over. "I'd like to say three things first," François Migraine stated. "One, Lance Armstrong obviously has exceptional innate gifts. Two, if what he says in his [first] book is true, he has an extraordinary force of character and mind. Three, given all the lies he has tossed off about us, he is aggressive. It doesn't take much to get his back up. He has the physical gifts and extraordinary mind needed to become a champion. But actually imagining him capable of winning the Tour de France [at the time he signed up with Cofidis], was a different story."

With hindsight and after the American had five wins at the Tour de France, did Migraine have any regrets? "Looking back, I don't regret anything at all, even if he wins his sixth Tour de France," he said. "I think we would have been incapable of managing this cyclist. I would not have had the budget necessary anyway! I admire him for what he does at the Tour de France, but from my point of view, he is not of the same caliber as Merckx or Hinault. I don't like people who are as egocentric as he is. Personally, I think I have fewer enemies than he. He's a media product pushed to its extreme. A marketing product, too. He does all he can to make as much money as possible. I can't imagine the Cofidis team being as dominated by him as his own team is."

After the scandal that hit his team in January 2004, the CEO of Cofidis tempered his certitudes concerning the behavior of cyclists as a whole. And concerning Armstrong in particular. "In some respects, he has the mind of a killer," he said. "That is what makes him what he is. He has an exceptional mind. Maybe his mental qualities are stronger than his physical qualities. Today, I don't find him likeable but I respect him. Tomorrow, if I learned that he had 'done something,' I would consider him a thief. For me, he would become a guy who has stolen success from others, and I wouldn't be able to stand the idea even if it didn't change matters. If something was discovered, it would be a fantastic scandal, and I would no longer be able to respect him. He would be a complete cheat. If it is proved he wasn't clean when he won all the Tour de France races, that would mean he stole them."

Even Jean-Marie Leblanc, the sports director of the Tour de France and a former professional cyclist himself, could not escape these questions. The report on the contents of the American team's trash bags broadcast by France 3 left him skeptical, but since then he has had time to think about it. "If I learned that Armstrong's career was nothing but a fraud, I would walk out on cycling."⁷⁷ The newspaper, *L'Équipe*, considered this hypothesis crazy in its final editorial: "There is nothing surprising about a cancer survivor being able to achieve this feat five [now six] times."⁷⁸

Rich Lonesome Cowboy

Cedric Vasseur says, "I never saw Armstrong take any pills. Anyway, he lives apart from the others. The only thing I could see is that he drinks five or six cups of coffee in the morning. He was always the first to arrive in the dining room. Once he drank down his coffees, he would go back up into his room to do some stretching with a chiropractor for an hour. Then he would come back down, eat, and after that, no one would see him again until the start of the race. That was the pattern: we did the course with him. Once the course was run, we would take the team bus and he would go back on his own. We would get together again for the evening meal, and that's it ..."

Another cyclist, who preferred to remain anonymous, refers to this great reserve around Armstrong: "From what I was able to see along the race, was that Lance Armstrong was always alone in his room. No team member shared it with him." "After the trash can story [in 2000]," says Vasseur, "the team was even more vigilant. Maybe, being French, I was subconsciously left out of things. French friends would come to visit me in the hotel, and he didn't like that. Because of a kind of domino effect, my presence was perhaps a bit of a nuisance, I might represent some danger. I was subject to long-term medical monitoring and my four blood samples were taken in France. I was the only one in that situation. I might also have served as a kind of moral yellow light. In any event, this put me on the sidelines. The medical checkups of all the other racers on the Tour team were organized by US Postal in Spain. 'You,' I was told, 'you work things out with France.' When I was sick and went to see the doctor, and if I had to use some product on the ICU list, I would be told, 'So, go see a doctor in France.' I think he didn't want to make anything applicable to the whole team. They needed a few guys who "passed all the tests." If all the racers on the same team resort to medical certificates or develop abnormal parameters, it sticks out like a sore thumb. This said, regarding the 2000 Tour, they never said to me, 'We need this, this and that.' As a Frenchman, never."

Too High, Too Far,
Too Strong

"If I found out that Armstrong's career was just a fraud, I would slam the door on cycling."

Jean-Marie Leblanc,
Le Monde, July 7, 2003

Meeting in San Antonio

After leaving professional cycling in 1994, Greg LeMond lost his passion for his sport. To be precise, his disaffection extends only to professional cycling. He started to harbor doubts before his retirement from the sport because, in the three preceding years, the peloton had increased its speed to an unbelievable degree. Greg, winner of the 1986 Tour de France, victim of a serious hunting accident in April 1987, won again in 1989 after one of the most breathtaking races (only 8 seconds separated him from Laurent Fignon in the final ranking). After winning the Tour de France again the following year, he was preparing to take on the 1991 Tour in much better physical condition. But that year, he was no longer even in the race. "I especially remember the St-Brieuc-Nantes stage. The average speed was 31 miles an hour and yet we had been stopped on two occasions by a train. Something had changed in the peloton." Toward the end of his career, LeMond fell victim to mitochondrial myopathy [a degenerative muscle disease] that drains his strength. Given the ever-growing speed of his competitors, he was losing ground.

But a three-time winner of the Tour de France cannot disappear overnight from the world of cycling, and LeMond has continued his ties to the sport through his two companies, LeMond Bikes and LeMond Fitness. He is frequently asked to grace some sponsor's banquet with his presence, speak at cyclist gatherings, make a guest star appearance at an event or to give his opinion on Lance Armstrong. LeMond has learned to keep what he thinks of Armstrong to himself because, in July 2001, when he expressed some reservations about the professional relations of his compatriot with Michele Ferrari, he fell out with some of the most influential personalities in American cycling. He received phone calls from Thom Weisel, chief executive of Thom Weisel and Partners and the key man of the US Postal team, from Terry Lee, the chief executive officer of Bell Helmet, and from John Bucksbaum, a multimillionaire businessman and cycling fan. Politely, they all explained to him that he should not have cast doubt on Armstrong's success. "I said to them, 'Look, I have my opinion about Ferrari, I don't like what he's done to the sport, and I have a right to express my views.' They replied that it was not a good thing for me to be the one to say that."

"It was like a general mobilization to shut Greg up," LeMond's wife Kathy underlines.

Three days before his article appeared on July 15, 2001, Greg – who had not yet agreed to keep his views about his Armstrong to himself, explained that he didn't like Ferrari, whom he thought was hurting cycling. He added that Armstrong should not have any working relations with him. His comments would probably not please Armstrong, but it is his last comment that would cause the most trouble. "If Lance's story is true, it is the greatest comeback in the history of the sport. If it isn't, it is the biggest fraud." LeMond was aware of the relations between the cyclist and the Italian doctor before this telephone call from a journalist. After his 1999 and 2000 Tour de France victories, he had believed in him. But his participation at a conference in San Antonio, Texas, in April 2001, had helped him change his mind.

"Brian Halpern, an orthopedic surgeon, was organizing a symposium for American sports physicians and he asked me to talk about doctors working for cycling teams. I warned him that I would be very frank on the subject. I wasn't too keen on doctors. The only reason for having a doctor as part of a team is doping, and that's what I'm going to say." He replied, "Very good, perfect." This symposium, which was not open to journalists, was for me a chance to speak directly to the best US sports physicians on a subject close to my heart." Greg and Kathy LeMond took a plane from Minneapolis, where they live, to San Antonio. During the trip, Greg practiced his presentation. He wanted to be honest, but reasonable. He wouldn't say that all team doctors are there only for the purpose of doping, but that since doctors have been accompanying teams, doping has increased. He would explain that cycling is a sport where you don't often get hurt, and where if a racer is sick, all he has to do is check with the race doctor. He would tell them that he won the Tour de France without ever taking any glucose intravenously. He also wanted to tell them other things, things heard in the early 1990s when cyclists were talking about certain Italian doctors who could help people win.

At the symposium, LeMond nervously waited his turn, listening to the presentation by the preceding speaker, Eddie Coyle, a physiologist from the University of Texas in Austin. His talk was devoted to ergogenic aids, and how supplements and drinks can help athletes. "I remember it as if it was yesterday," LeMond says. "During Eddie Coyle's talk, I asked myself whether he would talk about performance-enhancing substances. I knew what was going on in cycling, and I wondered what his opinion about steroids might be. The first part of his talk concentrated on sports drinks and the importance of hydration. While mentally rehearsing my own text, I was listening to what Eddie was saying. At one point, he said something about Lance, whose name appeared on a screen. I looked up and I heard Coyle say, 'I test Lance Armstrong. I know what I'm talking about.' At the time, Eddie had been conducting physiological tests on Lance for more than ten years.

"At that time, I was skeptical about the sport. I wanted to believe that Lance was clean but the year before, Actogevin, a product linked to blood doping, had been associated with the US Postal team. I had also heard that he worked with Ferrari.

But I wanted to believe in him." Eddie Coyle then put up on the screen a black and white graph. "That is when I realized that Lance's performances were not physically possible," Greg LeMond continues. The graph included three curves. The first represented his oxygen consumption and his maximum VO₂. Eddie had kept these data from the time Lance was 17 until his first victory in the Tour (1999). The second curve followed the changes in his body weight before and after the cancer (1996), and the third curve, more cryptic, showed his phenomenal progress until that first victory. Eddie Coyle calmly explained that the curve showing Lance's weight loss could not be taken into account to explain the improvement in his performance because the weight difference before and after the cancer was at most 6 1/2 or 9 lbs, and not around 20 lbs as Lance and his coaches had claimed. His oxygen consumption curve showed no variation—none at all—between 1993 and 1999. It was 5.9 liters, which guaranteed a correct maximum VO₂ of 82 for Lance. The mysterious third curve made reference to the efficiency of his pedaling, (mechanical efficiency). While referring to this aspect, Eddie Coyle scratched his head as he explained to the five hundred specialists present in the room that it was on that point that doctors and physiologists should concentrate their research. Eddie Coyle then cited Chris Carmichael, who thought Lance's leap forward was due to the efficiency of his pedaling. Kathy LeMond was sitting next to her husband during Coyle's presentation. "When Eddie Coyle talked about the pedaling frequency, Greg said, 'Oh, my God!'" LeMond's incredulous surprise is based on his knowledge of physiology and the precise impact of improved pedaling frequency. "At the end of my career, I worked with Adrie Van Dieman, a Dutch trainer," Greg LeMond recalls. "He convinced me that RPMs (revolutions per minute) were important, that pedaling faster improves your endurance. But we are talking here of a 0.5 or 1% improvement. I know this subject very well and was ready to discuss it with any doctor. I looked at my wife and I said, 'He can't say that. It's not possible for Lance to have gone from fortieth place in the general ranking of the Tour de France (thirty-sixth in 1995, his best result before 1999) by improving his pedaling frequency.' If that was enough, a lot of cyclists could train with high RPMs and win the Tour."

Following Greg's speech, many doctors gathered around him. Some wanted to ask questions, others wanted his autograph. Eddie Coyle was among them. "Eddie, I have to talk to you, could you wait up a moment?" The crowd finally thinned out, and the two men were alone.

"Eddie," Greg LeMond began, "I have to talk to you about your study. I think it's wrong."

"What?" Coyle answered.

"This pedaling frequency thing doesn't hold water. It doesn't give us any key. Think of an athlete in a 10,000 meter run. If you tell him to move his legs faster, what's going to happen?"

"Well, that runner's going to experience oxygen deficiency."

"Precisely. It's the same thing in cycling. The cyclist's body will demand more oxygen. There's only one thing that will let him go faster: more oxygen."

"So, what's your explanation?"

"You're his doctor, right?"

Kathy LeMond remembers the end of the conversation. "When Greg said to him: 'You're his doctor, right?', Eddie Coyle just answered, 'Well, I can't explain it.' Greg then pressed on: 'Why don't you ask Michele Ferrari?'. Eddie just asked, 'He's with Ferrari?' 'That's what I've heard,' Greg replied. It was quite obvious that Eddie was completely stunned. He went pale. 'That makes me sick,' is all he could add. We then took the elevator and Eddie made one final comment: 'I feel like throwing up'. I'll never forget that."

The Era of Superpower

The doubts about Lance Armstrong's sports performances do not go back just to the "corticoid affair" of the 99 Tour, but to his first breakout in that same Tour, the prologue on July 3 at Puy-du-Fou. On a leg (8.2 km or around 5 miles) identical to the one Miguel Indurain won in 1993 under similar weather conditions, the Texan had posted a time that was ten seconds better (8' 2" for a 50.788 km/hour average compared to 8' 12", or 49.6 km/hour for the Spaniard). But while the man from Navarre was *the* unquestioned standard reference for time trials, the American had no particular reputation in this area; up until then he had won only two trials like this one in five seasons: the prologue to the US K-Mart Classic in 1993 and an individual time trial at the DuPont Tour in 1995. His victory in the 1999 Dauphiné Libéré prologue came only one month before the start of the Tour de France

At least, taking into consideration an improved road surface for the occasion, Armstrong was now Indurain's equal. Heir apparent and involuntary referee, Alex Zülle of Switzerland, had finished 8 seconds behind the leader of the Banesto team, and 7 seconds behind the leader of US Postal six years later. On July 20, seventeen days later, the Texas champion gave a strange reaction to *L'Équipe*. Refuting the comparison between the two races, he said, "It wasn't the same thing," and went on to explain "there was like a 10% difference," which is objectively untrue, adding that he "had been amazed at (his) hourly average. It's hard to believe." And again: "By that I mean that I did great. But in six years, everything progresses." Everything, and suspicions, too.

The scientific analysis of performances is Antoine Vaoyer's favorite subject. At age 42, the Mayenne native, a former amateur cyclist, with a sport and physical education diploma, has trained many cyclists (mountain bike cyclists like Jerome Chitty, racers like Laurent Brochure, 1997 World Champion, or Christophe Bassons, and also Laurence Leboucher, Cross-Country Race World Champion in 2004.). By turns a columnist for *Le Monde*, *l'Humanité* and *Libération*, writing articles for *Le Cycle* and *Sport et Vie* magazines, he has always stressed, supported by data, the physical impossibility of Lance Armstrong's performances without exogenous contribution. Located near Laval, Antoine Vayer's office has equipment that analyzes every movement a cyclist makes. He received us at his office in June 2003. As an introduction, he explained to us the meaning of his work: "I use basic research to carry out applied research on athletes. It is easy

for me to establish a strong presumption of doping compared to scientific and physiological data that reflect the true potential of athletes. That is also the reason why, as an expert in this obvious phenomena of indirect doping, I was invited to testify at the Festina trial in November 2000. Some people refute our calculations, like Jean-Marie Leblanc, the Tour de France patron who, as everyone knows, is a great engineer. At the end of an editorial, he spoke out against our work without knowing its content.⁷⁹ His assessment was erroneous because all the parameters are taken into account. But there are none so deaf as those who don't want to hear."

How does he do his work? "Four of us developed a video technique based on scientifically validated work involving the measurement of power: Frédéric Portoleau, an onboard software engineer, Cyrille Tronche, a regional technical consultant and trainer for David Moncoutié (a cyclist with Cofidis), Grégoire Millet, senior lecturer at the School of Sports Sciences in Montpellier, and myself. We used television images as our starting point. We can dissect the performances in 3-D images. Everything is referenced: each turn, each percentage of gradients, the force of the wind, the condition of the roadway, the morphology of the racer, etc. The result of our work is the assessment of an indirect method for estimating external mechanical power in cycling. This external mechanical power is a parameter of cycling performance and can be measured by power sensors."

Reliability Within 5%

Technical innovation and computer hardware have enabled Antoine Vayer to collect precise data. "Our findings are based on these power sensors, devices mounted on the bikes. The most reliable is a German product called SRM. It is a circular plate the size of a CD installed on the crankshaft, which makes it possible to precisely measure the propulsive performance. I have been using this SRM for years, and Lance Armstrong uses it faithfully to optimize his training. This disk records all the data: speed, heart rate, distance traveled and, in addition, the power, like the horsepower of a car. The purpose of this study is to validate in the field the tested hypothesis that gradient is the most important factor in the precision of the performance, and that the greater the gradient, the lower the estimation error. The harder the climb, the less the errors." While Antoine Vayer is not the only one to use the SRM results, not everyone reads them the same way: "Chris Carmichael, Lance Armstrong's trainer, also does analyses along those lines. But if one relied on the data he discloses on the Internet, Armstrong would be 50 in the Tour..."

What confidence can one have in these results? "We grouped each cyclist's data in comparative tables," Antoine Vayer continues. "Through experimentation, one can then establish performance predictions with a margin of error on the order of 5%. It is then possible to predict to within a few seconds the time that an athlete, who does a 5 km race at top speed, will do in a marathon. Athletes know the time

they can expect." Antoine Vayer, a trainer at Festina before the 1997 disaster, could rely on quantified data before extrapolating. "For example," he says, "we were able to predict to within seconds the times of Christophe Bassons and Christophe Moreau in the individual time trial for the World Championship at Lugano in 1996. Within 4 seconds for Bassons, 12 seconds for Moreau. The performances of Christophe Bassons, for example, have always turned out to be accurate to within 5%. We also have to say that his hematocrit value varied between 38 and 42%, his watt production was between 380 and 400, and his max VO₂ between 77 and 84, while specifying that Christophe Bassons had an enormous rib cage! Whereas, for other Festina cyclists, the variations were quite different..."

Strength, Speed, but No Fatigue.

"Power is the absolute value in comparing athletes," he continues. "It is the product of the speed of movement of the cyclist and the force he applies to the pedals." In other words, it is the combination of pedaling force and speed, which corresponds, for example, to the horsepower in a car or motorcycle. This power is measured in watts. "A watt is produced when an object weighing 98 grams is moved vertically 1 meter in 1 second at a constant speed,"⁸⁰ says Antoine Vayer. "This is a standard value similar to the joule for heat. In cycling, it is the combination of the gear setting and the rotation of the legs. For example, the German Jan Ullrich does not turn his legs, but applies a great deal of force. The watt is the power imparted to the pedals multiplied by the speed. A cyclist either applies a lot of force, or he rotates his legs rapidly, or a combination of the two. There are climbers who develop a lot of speed, but do not apply a lot of force." What is the story with Lance Armstrong? "Lance Armstrong has the best force-velocity combination," he points out. "Besides pedaling hard in the Tour de France stages, Lance Armstrong pedals fast. His pedaling speed is up to 90-100 turns per minute in the mountain passes.⁸¹ That is not common. In fact, Armstrong turns the program around. He says himself in his American way: 'I go fast and I produce a lot of power because I turn my legs a lot.' But that's too hard to do. When an athlete is tired, he can no longer turn his legs. But after five hours on a bicycle, in a mountain stage, when he ought to be feeling fatigue, that's when he turns his legs even more. Indeed, he has such strength that all he does is manage his velocity. That's it, all he does is manage."

Anabolic Steroids, EPO and Big Muscles

The use of anabolic steroids by some cyclists has enabled them to optimize posted performances. "When I was devising training programs for the Festina cyclists, Richard Virenque and Laurent Dufaux of Switzerland had requested an SRM during the winter to observe the effects of anabolic steroids, before and after a Clenbuterol treatment. They found that they could push out 300 watts at

160 beats per minute before the treatment; after the treatment, at the same heart rate, they were producing an additional 70 watts. It was not difficult to figure out that the two men had used anabolic steroids. Actually, I wondered why Virenque was asking me for an SRM when he did not even know how to use a computer. I understood this when Eric Rijckaert, the team doctor, told me that they were going to use the Cybex."

What's the Cybex? "It's a functional re-education machine for people with major muscular traumas," Antoine Vayer explains. "A kind of bodybuilding device, to keep it simple. People are attached to it, and their muscles are worked in a certain way. It makes it possible to get the muscles working intelligently. Anabolic steroid treatments increase muscle mass. Therefore, it is necessary to make the muscle work intelligently. The nourished muscle metabolizes the anabolic steroid. With this apparatus, it is possible to identify people who have used steroids. Also, doctors know that a 30-year-old athlete should be experiencing muscular degeneration. If, at age 32, one's rate coming out of the Cybex is higher, it is not naturally possible. The strength measured in an individual on a Cybex unit or an SRM is one of the indirect tests for doping."

But even before looking too closely at the results of this famous Cybex, it was easy for him to appreciate the effects of doping products on performance. "I was able to determine the differential between doped and non-doped athletes at Festina very simply," says Antoine Vayer. "For example, I would have them do MAP (Maximum Aerobic Power) sequences, a series of 30 seconds all-out, with a 30-second recovery period, and so on. The results were striking. I could directly optimize the products they were taking. This exercise had actually been carried out in May 1996 in the Sentinelle pass, a tough spot that would be a part of the Tour de France again. I was the passenger of Bruno Roussel, then the sports director of Festina, who was driving the car that followed the cyclists. On the first blast of the horn, the guys took off at top speed; on the second blast, they pushed even harder; on the third blast, even faster! The more they went, the stronger they got. At the sixth blast, they jumped off their cycles, carried them cross-country style on their shoulders and started to run like mad in the final sprint, laughing all the while. Bruno and I were impressed. Even astounded by such tremendous power! That was the EPO, the oxygenation: the cyclist is at 100% all the time."

Figures Never Seen Before

But how are scientific results concretely obtained? "To push your cycle forward," Antoine Vayer explains, "you have to overcome three types of resistance: air resistance, the friction of the ground and the mechanical parts, and the resistance due to gravity (the hills). If one knows the profile of the terrain, the weather conditions and the morphological characteristics of a cyclist, one can estimate the mechanical power in watts necessary to move at a given speed. Then, it is necessary to estimate the average power that a cyclist can generate for a given period to estimate his time over a certain distance. Software that uses

mechanical and aerodynamic models associated with physiological models makes it possible to evaluate the effort endurance of a cyclist and thus to estimate the time that can be posted in a given time trial. The estimate is reliable in most cases. For example, the estimated time for Christophe Bessons in the Metz individual time trial on the 1999 Tour de France was 1 hour 16 minutes and 8 seconds; his actual time was 1 hour 16 minutes and 13 seconds, with an average power of 384 watts."

To simplify things, the researchers then determined a standard profile. "We fixed upon our standard cyclist as weighing 154 pounds, riding an 8 kg (17.6 lb) bike," Antoine Vayer continues. "We adjusted our studies in terms of this standard. Therefore, it doesn't matter whether the cyclist is 6' 2" or 5' 2" tall and weighs 176 or 132 lbs. Our method is certain in terms of these visual and televisual parameters. In terms of the times, but also of the weather (wind, rain), the road surface, the position of the cyclist, his weight, etc., we established a statistical table. With a margin of error of less than 5%, we know that a given cyclist has to produce so many watts."

Based on this data, the researchers were able to develop a scale that led them to certain conclusions. "We were able to identify inhuman and inadmissible values for an individual who does not take steroids," the Laval man said. "We can determine the threshold in watts, beyond which one can state that a performance is no longer normal. So, in a mountain stage with two intermediate passes to cross, and a last long pass with a climb of over 20 minutes, the maximum threshold was fixed at 400 watts, 420 at the very most. Beyond that, they are cheating."

And Antoine Vayer has created a veritable hit-parade of cyclists. "There is the 380-400 watt club to which some thirty professional cyclists belong, and for whom questions can arise... but, well, it remains in the realm of the possible. At 400 watts, we have the "top ten." After that comes the 420-450 watt, or even 470-480 watt group that Lance Armstrong completely dominates. In 1997, they recorded 494 watts with Ullrich in the Arcalis climb."

By way of comparison, the data for cyclist David Moncoutié (thirteenth in the 2002 Tour de France), are eloquent: qualified as a pure climber with a reputation for irreproachable conduct, Moncoutié has never gone over 400 watts in climbing a major pass at the end of the Tour de France stage.⁸² There are three reasons for that, all linked to the fatigue logically felt:

1. His potential on the last pass is affected by long hours in the saddle—in short, he tires when the others seem not to have even tapped their potential.
 2. The results obtained show the effects of a three-week race. Moncoutié does not develop the same power as a Paris-Nice or Critérium du Dauphiné (one-week race), where he can exceed 400 watts on a stage.
 3. His maximum power is obtained during time trials, stages where the cyclist is fresher at the start than he is after having negotiated a number of passes.
- Finally, Antoine Vayer stresses that mental strength cannot be taken into consideration. The psychological spring that affects a performance is the media mask, he maintains. By definition, top level athletes are all warriors. And it is not psychology that leads to watt production. When someone breathes every five

strokes rather than every eleven strokes [per minute], that is quantifiable. Doping can be quantified. Doping cuts these sequences in half. When, in the jargon, people say that a cyclist "is breathing through his ears," that means that he is moving with his mouth closed. When they never hurt, that is also quantifiable. Compare the climbs in Fignon's time and the EPO era. Only the body language is different, the breathing motion, their face too. No cyclist in the 80Fs ever produced over 400 watts."

Lance Armstrong knows what Antoine Vayer is talking about. In an interview granted on February 3, 2004, on the Canadian Internet site *Pez Cycling News*, the Texan cyclist declared his interest in these data. Questioned on the most important data in his view, the Texan replied: "Chronometric time and watts. Watts give you a much better indication of yourself than the chronometer which is hostage to weather conditions, temperature, wind, humidity, the road surface... a lot of things In 1999, I developed 495 watts of power for more than thirty minutes," he declared, without providing further details.

To support his observations, Antoine Vayer dissected some concrete examples. Knowing Lance Armstrong's physiological data (5'10" tall, 156 lbs, his weight in the Tour de France), combined with the results furnished by the SRM, he is able to assess the power provided by the cyclist. "Let's take the example of Alpe d'Huez, a climb of 8.57 miles (13.8 km) at an average gradient of 8.11%. All the parameters already indicated are taken into account, along with the course circumstances that are broken down into four groups:

1. Solitary victories with a spurt at the base (Armstrong in 2001, Marco Pantani in 1994, Luis Herrera in 1987).
2. Solitary attack towards the summit.
3. Victories achieved from breakaways starting prior to Alpe d'Huez.
4. Victories attained in a small group sprint. This typical case used to take place before the EPO years or when they were just starting...Everything is recreated on our cartographic profile with the progressive curves."⁸³

According to him, the "out of the norm" cyclists are those who produce over 450 watts, with spurts starting at the base of the pass. This was the case with Marco Pantani in 1994, who did a shotgun time of 37 minutes 15 seconds at 13.8 mph (22.23 km/hr) after dealing with an alpine stage. Without a clear spurt right from the first hairpin turns, Alpe d'Huez demands, if it is to be climbed in 41 minutes 20 seconds at an average of 12.42 mph (20 km/hr), an individual production of 400 watts for a person weighing 154 lbs. A David Moncoutié on his best days could do it. The record to beat is 36 minutes 50 seconds set by Marco Pantini in 1995 at 13.9 mph (22.48 km/hr) who developed an average of 461 watts after clearing the Madeleine and Croix de Fer passes. Lance Armstrong, for his part, has the fifth best time (the top three belong to Pantani, the fourth to Ullrich) in 2001 with 38 minutes 5 seconds, at 13.5 mph (21.74 km/hr) with an average of 442 watts, after conquering nothing less than the La Madeleine and Glandon passes."

To be more explicit, Antoine Vayer agreed to detail four achievements by Lance Armstrong on the Tour de France.

1) Metz 1999: 400 meter all-out, covered... 125 times!

On July 11, Lance Armstrong signed a "time" that astounded the Tour. The American does the eighth stage, a 35.1 miles (56.5 km) long individual time trial, at an average of 30.705 mph (49.416 km/hour). He led the Swiss Alex Zülle by 58 seconds and the Frenchman Christophe Moreau, in third place, by 2 minutes 5 seconds. Armstrong put on the yellow jersey and he would never take it off. "In this Lance Armstrong win, one parameter is really astonishing," Antoine Vayer explains. "The American cyclist's max VO₂, in other words, his blood oxygen consumption. As always, we based ourselves on known data – 5'10" tall, 156 lbs, cycle weight 8 kg, air resistance, surface of the course, etc. Lance Armstrong was credited on that day with a time of 1 hour 8 min and 36 seconds. To do this, he needed a max VO₂ of 89-90. I worked with parameters readings on more than half the cyclists on the Festina team of the good old days, and specifically the EPO. The EPO, or any other carrier of oxygen in the blood, made exceptional physiological criteria commonplace. And Lance Armstrong did even better than that. In this eighth stage, he had to maintain an average power of 450 watts. If we consider that the endurance index corresponds to that of the best cyclists in the world, the 450 watts he maintained for more than an hour corresponds to 89 max VO₂, considering that a 100 meter sprinter is at 100% of his maximum. In short, Lance Armstrong was at 89% of his maximum potential for more than an hour. If he was a track and field man, if he was a 400 meter sprinter, he would be able to run one hundred twenty-five 400 meter races in a row, practically at the same pace on the first lap as on the 125th lap! To be at max without suffering is out of the question. His performances are beyond real."

But, comparatively speaking, what about other cyclists? "Based on our studies, few cyclists on the Tour are capable of maintaining an average of 450 for over 7 minutes. Lance Armstrong's maximum in the Metz time trial was 520 watts, an improbable figure. An extrapolation of the calculations shows that Miguel Indurain, in his glory days, would have been relegated on that day to 2 minutes 20 seconds and Jan Ullrich to 2 minutes. Another comparison: on this same Metz course, assuming that the cyclists all left at the same time, Bassons would have taken a 3.72 mile (6 km) lead, Brochard a 3.42 mile (5.5 km) lead and Boardman a 1.74 mile (2.8 km) lead, the latter having set the record for the hour at 32.029 mph (56.375 km/hr)!" In this time trial, the second of the Tour, Lance Armstrong's watt production was such that he would have beaten, hands down, Chris Boardman's first hour record, nothing less. Armstrong "plays" with his watts. But he does even "worse" in 2000, in the individual time trial held at the end of every Tour [stage 18, Fribourg-Mulhouse, more than 36.3 miles (58.5 km)]," Antoine Vayer continues. "He won by cruising along at an average speed of 33.55 mph (54 km/hr), to be precise, covering the distance in 1 hour 5 minutes 1 second without apparent fatigue. By way of comparison, he rode alone at nearly the same average record speed as posted by the infamous Gewiss-Ballan team! [Mayenne-Alençon, 1995, 34.13 mph (54.930 km/hr) over the 41.63 miles (67 km) of the stage]. A record set by nine cyclists who worked in relays, and

which, moreover, occurred at the very beginning of the Tour, with the athletes fresh. Is this guy a god, or what?"

The Tour de France Internet site then soberly states that this was "the best average ever posted in a Tour de France time trial of more than 15.5 miles (25 km)."

2) Hautacam 2000: 2,175 leg lifts at a stretch with a 99.2 lb (45 kg) weight attached.

The Pyrenees stage, 127.38 miles (205 km) long, ridden in cold weather with some rain, was won by Javier Otxoa, a Spanish cyclist on the Kelme team, at the end of a 96.3 miles (155 km) breakaway. Lance Armstrong finished second in this tenth stage and took the yellow jersey, outpacing Jan Ullrich by 4 minutes 14 seconds in the general ranking.

"This time," Antoine Vayer recalls, "he provided an average of 457 watts after a 557 push at the base to keep up with Marco Pantani, then geared up to over 500 watts to leave the Italian behind in the poor weather conditions at the end of a succession of passes. Right where he ought to be losing efficiency on a constant climb after five hours in the saddle, he thrives! He was able to accelerate without fatigue. At Hautacam, he 'stalled' after leaving Pantani behind and producing more than 500 watts, then was able to accelerate again at the top to overtake and pass a breakaway cyclist, the Spaniard José-María Jiménez,⁸⁴ producing 450 watts. This is no longer cycling."

To make these figures even more relevant, Antoine Vayer makes some comparisons: "During his climb, Armstrong produced an average of 457 watts for a climb lasting 36 minutes 25 seconds. If one puts the watt production and the time done into perspective, the results are stupefying: the equivalent of the force deployed by pushing the pedals corresponds to raising alternatively one leg, then the other, to a height of over 3 feet with a 45 kg weight attached to each of his feet. An effort repeated every second for 36 minutes 25 seconds, or an action performed 2,175 times at a stretch without weakening! 2,175 times! Training and bodybuilding do not explain everything, especially since these efforts come at the end of the stage and at the end of the Tour de France..."

3) Alpe d'Huez 2001: World Champion of... pursuit!

After having "bluffed" in climbing the La Madeleine and Glandon passes, grimacing a lot at the rear of the lead group to feign being out of shape, the leader of the US Postal team suddenly accelerated at the foot of Alpe d'Huez, leaving behind Jan Ullrich and his teammates of the German Telekom team, who had set the pace. Armstrong overtook the breakaway cyclist, Frenchman Laurent Roux, to climb the 8.69 miles (14 km) of the day's last challenge alone. Winner at the top, he outpaced Ullrich by 1 minutes 59 seconds. However, the Frenchman François Simon still wore the yellow jersey, which the American cyclist put on for good three days later.

"Lance Armstrong approached the base of Alpe d'Huez after overcoming two tough challenges, the La Madeleine and Glandon passes," Antoine Vayer points out. "In other words, he started climbing Alpe d'Huez after 5 hrs 50 minutes of

cycling and with nearly 200 km already on his legs, not really on flat terrain, either. At the base of the last challenge of the day, he produced for 4 minutes an effort of 530 watts to leave Jan Ullrich behind. This effort corresponds to that provided by Philippe Ermenault (530 watts) in 1998, when he became the World Champion of Pursuit on the Bordeaux track (4 minutes 20 seconds)⁸⁹ After six hours in the saddle! He then goes on to climb for a half hour at an average of 450 watts, which is the equivalent of a time trial of the first order. At the end of 460.7 miles (209 km) and 6 hrs 23 minutes, he won the stage, beating Jan Ullrich by 1 minutes 59 seconds."

4) Ardiden 2003: two records, two...

This stage, the fifteenth of the Tour, held on July 21 over 98.8 miles (159 km) between Bagnères de Bigorre and Luz Ardiden, across the Aspin and Tourmalet passes, livened things up: Lance Armstrong actually fell 6.4 miles (10.3 km) from the finish line, after clipping a spectator while cutting too sharp a turn. He miraculously avoided another fall shortly after that due to a mechanical problem. Twenty minutes later, he took the stage, beating the trio of Mayo-Ullrich-Zubeldia, thereby strengthening his hold on the yellow jersey at the expense of the German cyclist, Jan Ullrich.

"Lance Armstrong broke two records that day," says Antoine Vayer. "The first was on the Tourmalet ascent where, together with Ullrich, Zubeldia and Mayo, he beat the record for that ascent by 1 minutes 7 seconds [7.8 miles (12.6 km) with an average gradient of 8.67%] set by Marco Pantani in 1994 on the same stretch. In so doing, he developed 469 watts of power for 4 minutes 35 seconds during an acceleration at 7 km from the summit. The second record, during the final ascent of Luz-Ardiden [8.57 miles (13.8 km) with an average gradient of 7.4%], which he did in 35 minutes 33 seconds or 1 minutes 47 seconds less than the record set by the Spanish cyclist Laiseka in 2001. Except for the fall and the accident, which made him lose some forty seconds, Armstrong apparently developed an average of 452 watts of power. Practically the same as Hautacam in 2000."

Going beyond the Armstrong case, this scientific data appears unambiguous. "You cannot get a non-doped athlete after 5 hours on the course to deal with a 20-minute climb in a pass while producing, being generous, more than 420 watts," Antoine Vayer assures us. "Since we know how to quantify performance, it is possible to determine a performance that seems inhuman to us. Moreover, one can see how easily certain performances are achieved. Fatigue does not have any place. Guys who are not doped get tired, especially in the final week. For the others, the notion of fatigue does not arise. The effects of the EPO can be summarized as follows: the more you work, the more you advance in the Tour, and the more progress you make!"

What does Antoine Vayer think of the explanation often advanced, that it is because Lance Armstrong trains specifically for the Tour by reconnoitering the major stages, on which he can achieve these results? "He claims that his reconnaissance of passes is part of the plus that makes the difference. According to him, that is one of the secrets of his success. But he has invented nothing

there! In 1996, the Festina team also did stages, one in the Alps, one in the Pyrenees, one against the clock. Laurent Jalabert had also done that. And others as well."

And during this time, the Tour de France has continued to post faster and faster times. The 2003 version, the one hundredth anniversary, beat the speed record set in 1999 of 25.02 mph (40.276 km/hr) establishing the new record of 25.438 mph (40.940 km/hr). For the record, the last place cyclist of this Tour, the Belgian Hans De Clerq, had a better hourly average than the winner of the 1996 Tour, Bjarne Riis of Denmark. Just one cyclist, the Spaniard Javier-Pascual Llorente, tested positive for EPO out of 80 urine tests.⁸⁵

Too Good to Be True?

In January 1997, Lawrence Einhorn, an oncologist at the Indiana University Hospital who was treating Lance Armstrong at the time, chose to react to the first questions raised in the media concerning the performance of his patient: "I read about the suspected doping. That is ridiculous. This guy has such a lifestyle, you cannot imagine. Getting back to the highest possible level is the result of his courage and his character. It's one thing to be cured and resume one's job as an accountant, but it's quite another thing to resume sports competition after the terrible experiences he endured."

Lawrence Einhorn inadvertently posed the problem: how was an athlete who had experienced the horrors of metastasized cancer able not only to recover his previous physiological resources, but to raise them to even higher levels in such a demanding discipline? Many people ask that question, whether they are cyclists, trainers, sponsors, sports directors, cycling fans, doctors, scientists or journalists. Some have openly expressed their confusion. Even the late Marco Pantani and Jan Ullrich⁸⁶ have expressed their doubts.

Jean-Paul Escande, a doctor who was chairman of the anti-doping commission for a long time, and is a current member of the Ethics Committee of the French Rugby Federation, has also questioned the performance of Lance Armstrong: "For my part, I see what everyone in the world sees, namely that he speeds up when he ought to be tired," he points out. "But I refrain from commenting on the rumors and, under the sports laws, a doped athlete is an individual who tests positive in the doping tests. Still, Armstrong's behavior intrigues me, disconcerts me. In the United States, his popularity lies in the fact that he had cancer, and not that he is involved in cycling. His secret is to be formidable and clean. Or not clean. We have already seen reassuring health bulletins that reported the opposite of what was really happening," he recalls, referring to François Mitterrand and his prostate cancer. "Among cyclists, there are even those who believe that he didn't have cancer," says Cédric Vasseur. "That it's all bluff. Overall, most cyclists have admiration for what he does, for his performance, but deep down, nobody believes it. We've all done high level cycling for years, we all know that it's tough and we are in good shape. So, somebody who wasn't ... A guy who breaks a leg takes a year to get back in shape. And here, now, two

years after cancer..." "If a cyclist annihilates the course, well, others have done it before him," Professor Audran recalls. "But here we are talking about chemotherapy. Are you aware of what that destroys? After all, we are talking about testicular cancer with metastasis. Apparently there were no metastases, OK, and yet. But in this case...Who can resume supernormal activity after that?" Indeed, who hasn't asked this question?

~~Cropped Shots~~

The questions are not only about the performances of Lance Armstrong but extend to the entire US Postal team.

When questioned, Bruno Roussel, vilified for having set up a medicalized system to control doping, points out certain analogies. "When four cyclists on the US Postal team are ranked among the 8 top entries in the prologue to the 2003 Tour de France ahead of all the world's best, it reminds me of Festina's best days," he notes ironically. "It just seems too much, too brazen. A little like we were in our time, especially in 1997, when we lost all common sense. It was the feeling of being the strongest that bewitched us."

During our conversation, Patrick Clerc said that he felt the same unease in the mountain stages.

"In fact, in the Armstrong system, where I don't go along, it's not with him personally, but with his team."

And Clerc then calls on Willy Voet, who has joined us, as his witness.

"Tell me, Willy, how many times in the Tour have we seen a complete team reach the base of the last pass in a Pyrenees stage?"

"We [Festina] did it. In 1997. And we know what we were heading for!"

"Last year [during the 2002 Tour], when I saw that, I could not believe my eyes. There were 30 guys left, including seven US Postal. What is that all about? The cyclists, the Joachims, the Hincapiés, they are still there. Something's wrong. That's where it doesn't work any more. Even in the days of the great Renault team with Hinault, Lucien Didier, Vigneron and Bonnet, they 'burnt out' after the very first pass. Personally, I give Armstrong some credit because he went through a lot. And then, he is quite different from Patrick Clerc. Even with his pre-cancer record. I have nothing against him. We're not in the same league. But here, I say no."

Cédric Vasseur shares the same confusion over these cyclists who are built like flat racers but defy the mountains.

"Looking at a Pademos who is climbing, for example, I have some questions. That may seem surprising, but I have no answer on this point. True, the fact that you are fighting to defend the yellow jersey leads you to go all out. But I know what it means to go all out for this jersey."

As for Willy Voet, his reasoning contains some good common sense. "Climber or sprinter, you don't invent that. A Lucien Van Impe (winner of the Tour in 1976) was already a climber among the young athletes. Losing three or four pounds would be too simple an explanation for a metamorphosis. Mario Cipollini may

lose four pounds but that is not going to make him a climber. Abraham Olano tried it, but without success.”

A suspicion that pushes some journalists to derision, since they don't know what else to say. For example, in 2000, in *Libération*,⁸⁷ Jean-Louis Le Touzet snapped his fingers in looking for the answer, like the Inspector Derrick. "Lance Armstrong is so thin that you can see through him. Before his illness, he would pull a little cartful of grease behind his cycle. If one follows this reasoning, low-ranked cyclists, especially the French, should pedal along pulling a trailer full of grease that was twice as big. Lance Armstrong is content with a radish and an apple while the French cyclists undoubtedly swallow wild boars in honey ... while drinking wine by the jugful that stains their bibs. Two different cycling worlds are hiding in our plates, all just the result of what we eat, we just can't see it, we're so blind.”

Blood Rush

Giuseppe d'Onofrio is a man who knows how to live. Lanky, a history aficionado, cultured and a lover of good food, he speaks thoughtfully, listens attentively and analyzes very carefully. Since 1969, he has been a hematologist in a laboratory, "a hematologist" he hastens to underline, neither a clinician nor a practitioner. At age 53, Giuseppe d'Onofrio has been working since 1977 at the Catholic University of Rome, on the outskirts of the city, though his professional pied-à-terre is located in the city center on via Muzio Clementi. A monastic office on the first floor: a dark room, with a desk, two chairs, display cabinets filled with scientific books, some of them on the subject of doping. Here, in 2000, he received a call from Francesco Lanza. The latter is also a hematologist at the University of Ferrara. These long-term colleagues meet regularly at conventions and congresses. Francesco Lanza had just been called in to help Michele Ferrari prepare his defense for his upcoming trial. Ferrari has been accused of doping cyclists and his lawyer, Mr. Bolognesi, had decided to call upon an expert. As a result, Lanza asked Giuseppe d'Onofrio for his help.

Giuseppe d'Onofrio accepted. Coincidentally, he was working on EPO at the time, though the world of sports was a total unknown for him. He had, of course, heard about Professor Conconi or Dr. Ferrari but without paying any particular attention. His only passion was the laboratory. He was about to learn that hematology is not of interest only to hematologists, and discover the world of blood doping.

To prepare the defense of Michele Ferrari, whose trial would start on December 14, 2001 in Bologna, Giuseppe d'Onofrio had to understand what the accusations were based on. Michele Ferrari was accused of having administered and distributed doping substances (EPO, growth hormones, testosterone, corticosteroids, adrenalin) to a number of top-level cyclists, and also of sports fraud (criminally punishable in Italy), illegally exercising the profession of pharmacist and the illegal importation of drugs. The findings of the experts for the other side, delivered by hematologist Mario Gazzola and chemist Mario Plebani,

of the University of Padua, showed that the hematological variations among cyclists who were treated by the doctor were too broad to be natural, that blood doping was the only possible conclusion.

A counterattack was necessary. The lawyer, Dario Bolognesi, turned over to d'Onofrio copies of the clinical records of Michele Ferrari's "patients." The list of sports figures was long, and their hematocrit values highly suspect, but Professor d'Onofrio's role was exclusively technical. He was to focus on the blood count, in other words, on the breakdown of such parameters as red cells, white cells, the hematocrit, reticulocytes. Nothing else.

More precisely, it was his job to find a weakness in the other side's arguments. How? The main gambit was to put into question the conditions, under which blood samples were taken, since these have to be done according to strict rules to be scientifically valid. Every time he was called to the witness stand, Giuseppe d'Onofrio gave a very detailed demonstration. This happened on two occasions, the last time on April 20, 2004. The procedure had become familiar to him, since he was named an expert, this time for the prosecution, in the trial of Professor Conconi and the Juventus Turin soccer club, which started on January 21, 2002 in Turin. That same year, he published a report on "Strategies for detecting blood doping in sports."

While awaiting the verdict in an endless trial that started two and a half years ago, and in which Michele Ferrari's attorneys had pulled every procedural string possible to exceed the statute of limitations, Professor d'Onofrio played his part in the other trial. In his view, Ferrari should get off. The hematological variations in the athletes monitored by Professor Conconi were much greater than those of the sports figures treated by Dr. Michele Ferrari. D'Onofrio was present in the Ferrara court as the prosecution expert when the verdict came down in November 2003: Conconi avoided any sentence or verdict due to the expiration of the statute of limitations. In March, 2004, the charges against Conconi were dismissed in Ferrara in another case, even though the judge considered him "morally guilty." Two Conconi trials, two victories for the "blood doctor" – his nickname in Italy – who will be able to quietly prepare for his retirement as director of the Biomedical Studies Center of the University of Ferrara, scheduled for October 2004.

Armstrong's Hematocrit

Among Ferrari's many clients – including around twenty-five professional cyclists – Armstrong does not figure *a priori* among the most spectacular cases. Not because of the long-standing nature of their relationship—Ferrari and Armstrong have known one another since 1995—but because the hematological variations of the six-time winner of the Tour de France are smaller than those of other professional cyclists. For example, the hematocrit values of Marco Pantani, read in 1995, were 38% in winter and 60% in the summer. A twenty-two point difference. And, after him, the fluctuations in the hematocrit of the Dane Bjarne

Riis and the Russian Piotr Ugrumov, to mention only those two, are even more disturbing..

On April 20, the final day of the Ferrari trial, Dr. Roberto Conte, chief of the medical experts retained by the court, turned over to Maurizio Passarini a 78-page document. This exhibit, attached to the file and entitled *Consulenza tecnica* (Technical Consultation), contains all the physiological parameters of the cyclists handled by Dr. Michele Ferrari. Among these files is Lance Armstrong's. Curiously, only three dates are given, against some ten for the other cyclists, with, for each date, the hematocrit, hemoglobin and ferritin values.

Dates	Hematocrit	Hemoglobin	Ferritin
12/2/97	41.2 %	14.4 g/dl	249 ng/ml
2/14/98	46.7 %	15.4 g/dl	148 ng/ml
6/17/98	41.4 %	14.0 g/dl	271 ng/ml

At first glance, there is nothing surprising here: the three hematocrit values, spaced out over six months' time, are under the 50% level not to be exceeded, according to ICU criteria, in order to qualify for participation in a competition. If the value is over 50%, the cyclist must "rest" for fifteen days. However, these figures do require some clarification.

1. First, the dates:

The February 14, 1998 test corresponds to Armstrong's return to competition on the Ruta del Sol, an Andalusian stage race, after 518 days of inactivity. The American cyclist ends up fifteenth in the final general ranking. The other two dates are not connected to any "sports event," certainly not in winter nor even in June, as Armstrong did not enter the Tour de France that year.

2. Ferritin levels

The first two figures show a drop of 101 nanograms per milliliter (ng/ml), from 249 to 148, in nine weeks. We submitted these data to Dr. Michel Guinot, a state physician attached to the French Cycling Federation (FCF) since the beginning of 1999, and a physiologist at Grenoble, without identifying the cyclist. We reached him at the Grenoble branch of the Doping Prevention Center. "Along with the increase in the hematocrit level, this means that he used his iron reserves to make red cells, with the possibility that there was some pharmacological manipulation—completely legal, to be sure. Under those circumstances, 249 is a frequent rate among professional cyclists, but it is rather high in comparison with participants in other endurance sports, such as marathoners, for example. Their ferritin level is around 100 to 150."

We did the same thing with Michel Audran, with similar precautions. "These comparisons are interesting. Of course, iron is lost when one is dehydrated, for example, but athletes generally take iron in combination with EPO, which then causes their endogenous reserves to drop. Thus, there is a drop."

3. Hematocrit values:

In ten weeks, from December 1997 to February 1998, Lance Armstrong's hematocrit value rose 5.5 percentage points.

When confronted with these variations, Professor d'Onofrio shrugged: "5.5% in ten weeks ... you can't come to any conclusions with that, really. It's under 10%."

"Excuse me, Professor, but it's more than that: it's 12% to be precise."

"Yes....still, I think that it is a small variation. In my view, one cannot reach any conclusions from that. It would be imprudent to extrapolate from that, I'm quite sure of that. It could be due to intensive training. It can be explained by external factors."

We also submitted this increase to other specialists, while still preserving the anonymity of the athlete. First of all to Armand Mégret, a doctor with the French Cycling Federation. The telephone interview took place on April 7 of last year.

When we gave him the figures, Armand Mégret had us repeat:

"From what to what? From bottom to top, or the opposite?"

"From 41.2 to 46.7."

"In 10 weeks?"

"Yes."

"...That's really borderline. He's a cyclist?"

"Yes."

"Cold, just like that... There would have to be other parameters, 41.2 to 46.7, is that it? What would be interesting was to see what it was before. It's borderline, but I can't say more than that."

Another opinion, this time Michel Audran's. The biophysician is more formal:

"This evaluation does not seem to me to be physiologically possible. Or perhaps," he continues, joining Giuseppe d'Onofrio, "in the case of overtraining." Overtraining, really? On February 14, 1998, Lance Armstrong completed the first stage of the Ruta del Sol, a race around Seville and with no difficult spots, under optimum conditions and under mild weather conditions (77°F). The individual concerned even admits, on arrival, that he "wisely stayed in the peloton The day went more easily than I had expected." He even pointed out that his average heart rate was 116 pulses/minute. The short stage of 98.05 miles (157.8 km) ended in a sprint (victory by the Australian Robbie McEwen) after 4 hrs 2 minutes 42 seconds of racing at an hourly average speed of 24.24 mph (39.011 km/hr).

"Of course," Jean-Pierre de Mondenard explains, "to establish a reliable and comparable reading among several values, the blood has to be sampled during the same time frame. This is why the ICU monitoring doctor goes to the cyclists' rooms early in the morning, specifically in order to avoid variations due to effort. It's like when monitoring one's weight: it's better to climb onto the scale in the morning, before eating, rather than after lunch, and that is always true. But I think that a specialist as knowledgeable in this field as Ferrari has to know that," he adds with a smile.

Michel Guinot stated in journalist Eric Maitrot's book:⁸⁸ "So as not to make a mistake, let us say that over 8%, it can be affirmed that physiological variations are no longer involved."

"Doctor, can you confirm your statements?"

"Did I say 'affirm'? Let us say 'reasonably think' instead of using the verb 'affirm,' according to the sacrosanct principle of precaution. Still, the sense of the phrase remains."

"On what do you base this statement?"

"On my own reading and calculations done on a population of top level cyclists."

"In what proportions?"

"I rely on several hundred observations made over several years. Indeed, my data base represents 2,000 athletes and even more blood formulas carried out in the context of biological monitoring. Also, my own experimental work matches to nearly one-tenth of a percentage point the figures indicated in a similar study published in November 2003 in the scientific magazine in English *Sports Medicine*, relative to the coefficients of intra-individual variation involving fluctuations in hematocrit values linked to all sorts of reasons."⁸⁹

"A rise of 5.5 percentage points in the hematocrit value in ten weeks, or a 12% increase, is that physiologically possible?"

"One can say no with 99.99% certainty, out of respect for the principle of prudence that I just evoked. One reasons statistically and, in fact, there is just a very tiny probability that this rise in the hematocrit value is linked only to physiological modifications."

"But can't the use of a hypoxic tent or strong heat distort the calculations?"

"When the hematocrit value is measured at rest, in other words, apart from any effort, no, not in this measurement. On the other hand, in certain cases such as a viral ailment, which can stimulate the production of red cells by the bone marrow, the hematocrit value can vary in a wider proportion."

"In the case of a cancer, for example?"

"It depends on the type of cancer."

"And even a year later?"

"Ah, no! Once the cancer is cured, it's over. Only in the context of a disease."

The Tent Alibi

After having to admit his relationship with Michele Ferrari, Lance Armstrong stressed another element of his preparation in his second book,⁹⁰ which appeared in the fall of 2003: the use of a hypoxic tent, which can effectively explain the rise in the hematocrit value. "I was training at Saint-Moritz once a year, and when I was not staying in the mountains, I would frequently spend nights in an altitude tent ... This is a regular tent, but its got a device attached to it that's essentially a filter to suction some of the oxygen out of the air to simulate high altitude."⁹¹ I used it often in Europe, and I kept one at home, where I also would make use of it." Here again, Armstrong was forced to acknowledge it. An article published in *l'Équipe Magazine*⁹² at the beginning of the year had referred to it, stating, "Lance Armstrong has never claimed that he uses a hypoxic tent at home in Texas."

To justify himself, Armstrong had then argued that Christophe Bassons, the Mr. Clean of the peloton—until he was evicted from it on the 1999 Tour—had himself

used a hypoxic tent. "I think Christophe Bassons was a strong partisan of this system."⁹³

In point of fact, this "strong partisan" tried the hypoxic tent only once. It was in July 1998 at ... Brides-les-Bains (he was not riding in the Tour de France at the time), at the famous "Auberge du Phoque," run by Lionel Laurent. "I actually spent eighteen days in a hypoxic chamber," recalls Christophe Bassons, who, moreover, never disavowed this unique experience.

As to Saint-Moritz, its ski station located at an altitude of 6,069 feet (1,850 m) is a known base for the best African long distance runners, swimmers, cyclists and ... 'assistants,' like Michele Ferrari, as revealed by Françoise Inizan, in a remarkable issue of *L'Équipe Magazine* devoted to altitude training.

Going Higher

On July 21, 2003, in an attempt to explain the effects of these famous tents, we interviewed Lionel Laurent, current national trainer of the Junior French Biathlon team. Lionel Laurent, former top-level athlete himself—bronze medal for the biathlon team relay at the 1994 Games, Vice-Champion of the World in the team biathlon in 1995 (with Thierry Dussert, Hervé Flandin and Patrice Bailly-Salin)—ended his career in 1997. At the end of that same year, with his brother, he opened a hotel at Brides-les-Bains, in Savoie, France that included some hypoxic tents. But for financial reasons, the Auberge du Phoque had to shut its doors in 2002.

"A Norwegian company sold me this system," he explains. "I equipped three chambers (pumps, measuring instruments, air tightness) for an investment of about 38,225 euros (around \$32,000).

"The point is to recreate the benefits of altitude on the organism for top-level athletes. And only for them. This system involves only the oxygen level. At high elevations, less oxygen enters the lungs because of the lack of pressure. Normally, at sea level, air consists of 20% oxygen; at 2,625 ft (800 m) it is 13%. The pumps installed "capture" the oxygen. The treatment program lasted a maximum of twenty-one days, a reconstitution of the air at an altitude of 9,186 ft. (2,800 m). In five years, I saw some fifty athletes from all disciplines that rely on endurance: triathletes, oarsmen, long-distance runners, mountain climbers, cyclists. I must have hosted about a half-dozen professional cyclists, including Christophe Bassons and the late Andreï Kivilev."

Packaged Mountain Air

Lionel Laurent does not avoid the question dealing with the ambiguity of such a process. "The interpretation of these hypoxic tents is still unsettled," he admits. "It is right at the borderline (of doping), that's true. They have never been prohibited or authorized. People play with this tolerance. They go to the physiological limit of what can be done. The body is stressed artificially so that it will 'respond.'

Artificially, it may appear to be doping. But it can also be considered 'natural' to make the body react in this way, because it amounts to a stay at a high elevation in any area. Nobody ever said anything to me when I installed this system. But I know very well that we are walking on a tight rope. Otherwise, there are no side effects except, sometimes, some headaches. When they finish the program, the athletes are in good shape. Generally, they are at their peak fifteen days later. After that, the beneficial effects last between a month and a month and a half." After the Savoie hotel closed its doors, another French establishment, more structured and registered with the national sports federations, has continued the experiment. Since 2002, there has been an official site in France for hypoxic chambers, at the National Nordic Skiing Center at Prémamanon, in the Jura Mountains.

Laurent Schmitt, the coordinator for Olympic Training for the French Ski Federation, is a professor at Prémamanon, where he handles the physiological portion of the training. Contacted by telephone on July 21, 2003, and again on February 2, 2004, he outlined for us the way this center operates.

"Hypoxic tent training simply reproduces an altitude situation artificially," he confirms. "But our testing and research has shown that it is less dangerous for the organism. The advantage of hypoxic tents is that they reduce the quantity of oxygen that will pass through the lungs. Hypoxia is attained in four ways: either by actual altitude, by reducing the amount of oxygen passing through the lungs or by providing more nitrogen—which amounts to the same thing—or, finally by lowering the pressure, thereby simulating what happens at real altitudes, which is what the so-called hypobaric chambers do.

"At Prémamanon, we have six hypoxic chambers which can hold fourteen top-level athletes. The sessions run from fifteen days to three weeks. Elevations of 8203 to 11,483 ft (2,500 to 3,500 meters) are reproduced."

A Decision on the Back Burner.

Laurent Schmitt recognizes that there is a very strong demand for these tents. "At the present time, there is a kind of underground use of this method under hypoxia. We know that many individual athletes are getting the tents via the Internet, in other words, without any type of specifications. Traceability is impossible. And this approach can be suicidal. Some people think that the higher they go, the better. That is false and dangerous."

This is why a group of researchers has been commissioned to evaluate and set some guidelines for using this method. "We needed to answer two questions," Laurent Schmitt goes on. "First of all: is it dangerous to health? The conclusions of our work, done between 8,203 to 11,483 ft (2,500 to 3,500 meters), prove that it is not dangerous in our well-defined and restricted context. Second question: is it effective? We have actually shown that it is, that it works for a large majority, but not for everybody, because there are good and bad 'responders.'"

To define the parameters of such a system, "approved guinea pigs" were used. "We signed an agreement with the French Ski Federation, the French Swimming Federation and the French Track and Field Federation," Laurent Schmitt declares. "We tried these tents with 18 long-distance swimmers, 12 Nordic skiers and 12 track and field athletes. We separated each discipline into two groups: half in an experimental group (under a tent), the other half in a control group (at a true elevation of 3773 ft (1,150 m).

The results of the supervised athletes followed similar progress curves. "A first peak of condition (improved performances) takes place within five days after the session. Then, this condition declines for ten days, then picks up again, but with no rise in the hematocrit or hemoglobin readings. Now it is muscle development that is at play. The athlete thus retains a fifteen-day 'plateau' with performances better than those obtained right after the end of the session."

All these results were then subjected to an official inquiry. "Professor Jean-Paul Richalet (physiologist at the University of Bobigny) and I were chosen more than a year ago by the IOC to conduct a study on the value of these hypoxic tent sessions," says Laurent Schmitt. "Richalet is the technical consultant of the CNSN of Prémanon, and I am the sports consultant. On November 2003, we submitted the conclusions of our work."⁹⁴

Physiologically impossible

Could hypoxic chambers really explain a 12% variation in the hematocrit value? Based on their work and the experiments they conducted, Lionel Laurent and Laurent Schmitt are categorical. Lionel Laurent reports: "A hematocrit value that varies by 5.5 points over 10 weeks? In the athletes who passed through my hotel, some fifty, I never found this kind of variation. The rise in this level was between....nothing and 3 points. Never higher. That was never seen."

Same observation from Laurent Schmitt: "5.5 points, that's enormous. We find on the average a hematocrit value of 2, even 3 points maximum in those for whom it works after a three-week session;⁹⁵ 5.5 points, to my knowledge, was unheard of. For me, I even have major doubts. Five, six percentage points, there has to be some suspicion." Of course, but assuming that an individual spends not three but nine weeks under a hypoxic tent, what would happen then? "If you string together three three-week sessions, which is not done, that would not increase the hematocrit value by 5.5 points," Lionel Laurent points out. "You have to understand that, while the organism responds, it then levels out. To my knowledge, it cannot go up and up just because we combine three sessions, for example." Laurent Schmitt's conclusions are similar: "It's not a question of repeating sessions to multiply this average elevation by 3. It doesn't work that way. After some time, the body tires, the organism breaks down. There is an operational limit, if only in terms of hydration. The more viscous the blood, the more it has trouble circulating. The organism then quickly returns to its initial base." Relying on experiments conducted with 42 top-level athletes and the resulting extrapolations, Laurent Schmitt is categorical: "The changes in

hematocrit values are between two and three points. They can be pushed to four to leave a margin of safety. But, no matter what, athletes cannot point to the use of a hypoxic chamber to explain that they gained 5 or 6 points in their hematocrit value. It's not possible."

Ferrari Lingers in the Shadows

On March 2, 2004, a respected editorial writer for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Gwenn Knapp, discussed in an article the association between Lance Armstrong and Dr. Michele Ferrari. Knapp was not the first person to be surprised that an athlete who claimed to be anti-doping should choose to work with a doctor accused of doping practices since September 10, 2001 in Italy. Bill Stapleton, Armstrong's lawyer, protested to the newspaper and the cyclist was granted a broad "right of clarification." In his response, Armstrong explained that his trainer is Chris Carmichael and not Ferrari, and that this association with the Italian doctor does not extend beyond some occasional consultations on diet, hypoxia work and recovery. Armstrong also refutes Knapp's assertion to the effect that his collaboration with Ferrari remained a secret between 1996 and July 8, 2001, when it was revealed by a London weekly, the *Sunday Times*. "The truth is," he writes, "that my collaboration with Dr. Ferrari was never a secret. I never denied it nor intentionally tried to hide it. What's more, since 1996, a number of reputable journalists knew about it. I think they chose not to write anything on this subject because they felt that there was nothing sensational or particularly remarkable about it."

But what "reputable journalists" would not have considered as good information the fact that the most famous cyclist of our time is working with a doctor accused of distributing doping products? Fortunately for these 'reputable journalists,' Armstrong does not mention their names.

Armstrong wrote his autobiography in 1999, three years after he started to work with Ferrari. In this book, he manages not to mention the name of the Italian doctor in 276 pages.⁹⁶ In the heroic story of an athlete who recovered from cancer, perhaps there is no place for a doctor who stated one day that EPO wasn't more dangerous than orange juice. One might feel that Armstrong, according to his statements in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, did not conceal his relationships from any of his own US Postal teammates, even those who were not part of his close entourage.

"I knew nothing about it," says Marty Jemison, who raced for the team from 1996 to 2000. "I had no idea. I don't know when I found out about it, it was probably from the newspapers." Jonathan Vaughters, a member of the US Postal team in 1998 and in 1999, with whom Armstrong often talked about training matters, was also unaware. "I never officially found out about it. I knew vaguely that Lance was working with somebody outside the team and possibly because Kevin [Livingston] had gone to see Ferrari, I thought that it might be him."

Cédric Vasseur remembers the obligatory discretion: "I never went to see Ferrari," says the Nordic cyclist who raced for two seasons with the US Postal team. "Even in 2000, I was unaware of his existence. I never heard him mentioned within the team. The only time I saw him was in January 2001, during the Altea stage in Spain. He was there, wearing a hat like Haroun Tazieff's. Some cyclists did tests with SRMs on a mogul with him. I was not part of it. As a matter of fact, [it was] the guys from the 2001 Tour team. During this stage, I did have one conversation with Armstrong about Ferrari.

'Look, there's Ferrari over there,' I said to him.

'Yes, you know, Ferrari has a bad reputation. But I can tell you that he never gives any EPO, no cortisone, no hormones.'

I understood that this not a subject you could discuss with him."

In the spring of 1999, Armstrong participated in two high altitude training camps, the first in the Pyrenees, the second in the Alps. During this second session, Ferrari, who lives in Ferrare, in the north of Italy, found his patient in Sestrières. Livingston and Hamilton, two of his teammates, were with Armstrong in the Alps. Vaughters, one of the best climbers on the team, who counts the three cyclists among his friends, does not know about this training camp and is unaware of Ferrari's presence. But it is not a secret. Armstrong did not try to hide from anyone his relations with Ferrari. He simply forgot to tell Vaughters and Jemison.

Code Name McIlvenny

Emma O'Reilly, the head soigneur for US Postal in 1999, was also the personal soigneur of Armstrong, with whom a professional relationship began in 1998. Her position gave her access to the inner sanctuary of the team and, in May 1999, O'Reilly was at the training camp in the Pyrenees and, later that month, at the Alps training camp. "Ferrari arrived in the Alps on May 18," she says. "He stayed in his own camping car but that night he came to dinner with us. We were all around the table in the small Sestrières restaurant, "Le Dernier Tango," where I had reserved a table. Present were Ferrari, Lance, Johan Bruyneel, our sports director, Kevin Livingston, Tyler Hamilton, Louis del Moral, the team physician, Christelle, who was married at the time to Bruyneel, trainer Peter van Boken and myself. It was easy to see right then and there that relations between Lance and Ferrari were good. They sat next to each other at dinner, very much at ease with one another. For us, Ferrari was welcome because he was with Lance. Luis was a little annoyed because he was the team doctor. He wanted to get more involved with Lance. That was true for most of the members of the team. If you were in with Lance, you had an easier life. But Ferrari had arrived and it was clear that he was the man of the hour. Whether Luis was happy about it or not didn't matter."

Like everyone else in that circle, O'Reilly had heard about Ferrari, but she had never seen him before this Alpine meeting. No one had told her that Armstrong was working with him, but she was not surprised. "I knew that Ferrari had a bad reputation in cycling. I had ambivalent feelings. It was something between him

and the cyclists. If they wanted to see him, that was their problem. Everybody seemed to be say he was the best and that the best cyclists often came to see him. When you experience this from the inside, you see things differently, and you judge things in a way that may seem illogical to most people. The cyclists who went to see Ferrari had to pay him out of their own pockets, whereas the team doctor was free. I used to tell myself that these cyclists were the ones who were ready to invest in their careers and I respected them for that. Tyler was not involved and I thought that it was because he was too tight with his money. He knew what Ferrari was doing for Lance and for Kevin, but for me, at the time, he was not ready to dip into his wallet. But when I was there, I didn't attach very much importance to the fact that what Ferrari was doing was perhaps contrary to ethics and morality."

O'Reilly heard that Ferrari had visited the team during the 1999 Tour de France. She was not a direct witness but from that meeting in the Alps, she knew that the Italian doctor could be discreet. "He (Ferrari) probably liked motorcycles because the son of a mechanic offered him the jacket of one of the bikers on the Tour. This boy was delighted to have found a jacket for McIlvenny. McIlvenny was what he and the others called Ferrari. This code name allowed them to talk about Ferrari without anyone knowing it."

Embarrassing Liaison

Before the 2001 Tour de France, Michele Ferrari was known for having declared the day after the famous triple win of the Gewiss-Ballan team on the Flèche Walloon that EPO was no more dangerous than orange juice. At that time in 1994, some young professional cyclists had died under mysterious circumstances linked to EPO abuse. This comparison with orange juice cost him his position as physician on the Gewiss-Ballan team, but this punishment was just a media decoy. Gewiss terminated Ferrari's position, but discreetly allowed its best cyclists to continue to work with him. Ferrari was pleased to become independent since he had been working with cycling teams since 1984 and was tired of accommodating himself to other people's agendas. Working on his own, he could choose the cyclists he wanted to work with and ask them whatever pay he considered appropriate. In the mid-1990s, Toni Rominger, the Swiss, was one of his best known clients. Their collaboration went back to the end of the 80s. Ferrari helped him break the world hour record twice in fifteen days, on October 22 with 33.449 miles (53.832 km), then again in November 5, 1994 with 34.356 (55.291 km). These feats took place in Bordeaux's covered velodrome, even though the Swiss racer had never been on a track before.

Shortly before the 2001 Tour de France, on July 8, the *Sunday Times* published a long article that shed light on the relationship between Armstrong and Ferrari. Few people were informed about their collaboration and, since the Italian had been under investigation for three years, this discovery sowed doubts about the integrity of the most famous cyclist in the world. Ferrari's trial for doping was to start in September, two months after the end of the 2001 Tour de France. On the

Thursday before the trial started, the *Sunday Times* sent an e-mail to Bill Stapleton with evidence showing the links between the cyclist and Ferrari to get his reaction. The journalist, David Walsh, one of the authors of this book, wanted to know the reasons why Armstrong was working with a doctor the Italian police considered to be involved with dope.

Not only did the *Sunday Times* not receive a reply, but the next day, the cyclist granted an interview to Pier Bergonzi, a sports writer for *Gazzetta dello Sport*. Toward the end of that interview, Armstrong, on his own initiative, acknowledged his relations with Ferrari. This news made the first page of the Italian newspaper. Bergonzi understood later that Armstrong had jumped the gun on the *Sunday Times* article, which was to appear the following day. Armstrong explained to Bergonzi that he was working with Ferrari to prepare for an attempt to beat the world time record, since that was apparently the doctor's areas of specialization. In the Tour de France press room, the journalists present wanted to know more about this project, but the cyclist refused to talk about it for the first two weeks of the trial. Then, on the day the cyclists rested, at a very crowded press conference, he brought up the questions raised because of his association with Michele Ferrari.

In his book, *Every Second Counts*,⁹⁷ he sums up the way in which he defended his doctor/trainer that afternoon: "I knew Michele Ferrari well; he was a friend and I sometimes went to see him to get some advice about my training. He was not one of my main consultants, but he was one of the best minds in cycling, and sometimes I consulted him. He had instructed me in altitude training and advised me about my diet.... I refused to turn on Michele, or to apologize for knowing him and, as far as I could tell, there was no evidence against him. The investigation was based on the fact that, a few years earlier, he had treated a cyclist named Filippo Simeoni, who was later found to have doped. "He is innocent until a trial proves otherwise," I said. "The reporter asked me how I could reconcile my anti-drug stance with maintaining a relationship with Ferrari. 'It's my choice,' I told him. 'I consider him an honest man, a fair man and an innocent man.'"

In the press room, a substantial number of journalists, both "veterans" and skeptics, had smiled at this reference to an attempt to break the hour record. This explanation seemed to me neither more nor less than a crude stratagem to justify a very dubious collaboration, a way of making a relationship difficult for an ethics-conscious cyclist to defend more respectable.

The skeptics were right. Three years later, Lance Armstrong has still not made the slightest move in that direction.

As to this friend that he "sometimes" went to see, he also listened to him. While discreet and not apt to give explanations, Michele Ferrari revealed to two Danish journalists from the daily *Eksra Bladet*⁹⁸ that, during the 2000 Tour de France, he had been in direct telephone contact with Armstrong in the midst of a mountain stage! The communication, requested by Armstrong when Marco Pantani attacked in the stage leading to Courchevel, had been relayed by Johan Bruyneel who, from his follower's car, had put the two men in contact through the champion's earpiece.

Conconi the Precursor

Today nearly seventy years old, Professor Francesco Conconi is the godfather of Italian sports medicine. Many of the best specialists in this field came out of the University of Ferrara, which he headed. This complex and controversial man was an influential member of the Italian Olympic Committee (*CONI*) and the Medical Commission of the International Olympic Committee (*IOC*), whose chairman, Prince Alexandre de Merode, was one of his close friends. He was also a friend of Romano Prodi, the ex-prime minister of Italy, subsequently the head of the European Commission.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the professor devoted part of his efforts to developing a test capable of detecting the presence of EPO in the urine. This work was financed both by the *CONI* and by the *IOC*. Professor Conconi was, however, not one might call a guardian of sports ethics. Conconi had based his research on the blood tests of a group of 23 athletes to whom he administered EPO for 45 days. The EPO was provided by a company in Mannheim, Germany, with the authorization of the *IOC*. While he did not find any definitive test, Conconi submitted reports on his attempts, on the progress made and remaining to be made. The antidoping community believed in Conconi and found it reassuring that he would devote so much time to such important work.

In reality, Conconi was doing more than that. A subsequent inquiry, inspired by an anti-doping militant, Sandro Donati, established that Conconi was a fraud. His research was not based on amateur athletes. His "test" group included, as a matter of fact, some top-level professional athletes, mostly cyclists, and the administration of EPO was intended to improve their performance. They paid for Conconi's help, from which they benefited in the main cycling competitions. During an interminable trial, Conconi was accused of distributing doping products but, in November 2003, the proceedings concluded in a dismissal because the statute of limitations had run out. The presiding judge at the trial, Franca Oliva, did, however, write an opinion concluding that Conconi and his two colleagues, Giovanni Grazzi and Ilario Casoni, were indeed morally guilty of administering doping products. The judge's verdict was unequivocal. The supposedly anti-doping doctor was indeed a doper. In the 44-page report, Judge Olivia wrote the following lines: "The accused did, for seven years and in a systematic manner, aid and encourage the athletes named in the court's indictment with their consumption of erythropoietin, supporting them and encouraging them in their consumption by a reassuring series of health tests, with examinations, analyses and tests intended to establish and maximize the impact of this consumption on athletic performance. Therefore, from the standpoint of the law, the crime with which the accused was originally charged remains."

Michele Ferrari was Professor Conconi's assistant at the time the latter was involved in the blood doping on a number of Italian athletes. This was in the early 1980s, when Ferrari started to work with sports teams and really understand sports. After his interest in cycling deepened, Ferrari left his mentor and the

university environment of Ferrara to establish himself as a sports doctor, looking particularly for a clientele of professional cyclists. When his notoriety increased and people, even in the corridors of the university, started to talk about the money he was making, Professor Conconi was heard to say, "Ferrari is like a son who went bad."

Between Two Slices of Sausage

Long-limbed, with a proud mustache and a bright look, Eugenio Capodacqua is one of those conscientious and unostentatious sports journalists, a man who rides a bicycle to enjoy himself and writes about cycling to earn his living. One of the authors met with him at 11 P.M. in the Roman offices of his newspaper *La Repubblica*, on Piazza Indipendentia, a short distance from the Termini station. On duty that night, he locked up the paper's sports section before talking about his passion for cycling. At the beginning of the 1990s, Eugenio began to understand that the major competitions no longer made it possible to identify the best riders, but were too often won by the best-doped competitors. He then decided to change the angle of attack and to devote himself to the problems of this sport. He ended up annoying a lot of cyclists and most cycling officials. Old friends in the field continued to talk to him, but on condition that they not be seen together. "Eugenio, we can talk, but it would be better if you called me on the phone." Capodacqua never lost his love for the sport and never accepted its cheating practices.

In 1993, his vacation in the Italian Alps involved doing a 16.78 miles (27 km) time trial in the Stelvio Pass. He was accompanied by one of his friends, Alfredo Camaponeschi, a former respectable amateur cyclist. Camaponeschi, age 34, was hoping to clock a good time, and Capodacqua a respectable time. The journalist did well. He took off 4 minutes after Hein Verbruggen, the president of the International Cycling Union, whom he overtook in mid-slope. But after arriving, neither Capodacqua nor Camaponeschi felt like talking about their results. A 56-year-old participant had finished among the top five, posting a remarkable time. At the summit, he had put a quarter of an hour between himself and Alfredo, who was at least twenty years younger, not to mention Eugenio. This 56-year-old prodigy was Professor Francesco Conconi.

"I had known since 1989 that a new product had appeared in cycling," Capodacqua begins. "It was still not very well known at the time but during the next three years, it expanded substantially. Cyclists were dying in their sleep, we were seeing strange results in the races, and we knew that something serious was happening. A short time later, we heard about EPO. I quickly realized that it was a revolutionary product because it could change results significantly. An American study stated that it improved performance between 12 and 18%. Using it, a minor athlete could become a champion. Once a cyclist took EPO, others were forced to imitate him. Years later, the Italian police seized documents that showed that Conconi was himself part of the group that was taking EPO. Today I

know why he went so fast on the Stelvio pass. I think that it was a good way for him to advertise EPO."

Between 1993 and 1994, Capodacqua realized that erythropoietin was a cancer that was eating away at professional cycling. He continued to follow the races, to write about the winners, but never stopped asking questions. In the spring of 1994, he found himself in Huy, a small town in Belgium, along with his friend Marco Evangelisti, a colleague from the *Corriere dello Sport*, a paper from the same group as *La Repubblica*. Ardennes marks the finish of the Flèche Wallonne. That day, the Italian Gewiss-Ballan team managed an unprecedented feat by placing three of its racers—Moreno Argentin, Giorgio Furlan and Evgueni Berzin—on the podium after they all broke away together in the race. Capodacqua and Evangelisti had understood that, in the age of EPO, the person to talk to was the team doctor. Which is what led them to Michele Ferrari.

They met at the summit of Mur de Huy, a formidable climb, which included a section with a 20% gradient in mid-slope that the riders have to climb three times during the day. "He was eating sausages, and I said to him: 'Doctor, there's a lot of fat there.' 'No problem,' he answered. 'There's also good stuff in there.' We started to chat and we eventually asked him what he thought permissible in cycling. He explained to us that whatever was not prohibited was authorized. He added that it was more dangerous to the body to train at altitude than to take EPO. I asked him: 'Isn't it dangerous for a cyclist to take EPO?' He answered that everything is dangerous. Then he said: 'If you drink a glass of orange juice, that's good. If you drink 3 quarts of it, you will have colic.' It was a persuasive argument, one that worked with professional athletes. Like, 'A little bit of this product will help you stay in good health.' Marco and I felt that what counted for Ferrari was the difference between what could be detected and what could not. To us, he had a doper's mentality."

Ferrari's Arsenal

In his numerous attempts to defend Ferrari, Lance Armstrong insists on the lack of evidence against his trainer. The accusation, according to him, is apparently based only on the statements of the Italian cyclist Filippo Simeoni, who was already a doper even before becoming a client of the Italian doctor. If Armstrong really believes that there is no evidence against Ferrari, it is because he has not taken the trouble to follow the trial of his trainer and friend in Bologna. The inquiry began when the Italian police unit responsible for health affairs (NAS)⁹⁹ was informed of astonishingly bold trafficking in doping products in a Bologna pharmacy. Massimo Guandalini, a partner in that pharmacy, and Michele Ferrari were among the individuals placed under surveillance and officially charged. The evidence against Ferrari included wiretaps, a written prescription in his own hand for 500 gelcaps of DHEA (dehydroepiandrosterone, a prohibited product), IGF1, Saizen and Androsten. In other words, of testosterone, growth hormone,

corticosteroids, as well as adrenalin. All these products had been discovered during a police raid, and the testimony of five cyclists confirmed this evidence. Guandalini asked for and got a *giudizio abbreviato*, in other words, a quick ruling that avoided the possibility of a long and costly trial. By accepting this *giudizio abbreviato*, a specific feature of Italian law, the accused, if found guilty, is assured of a reduction of one-third of the sentence incurred. Judge Massimo Poppi ruled that Guandalini was guilty of unlawful commerce in dangerous products and sentenced him to two years in prison. Guandalini was also prohibited from practicing as a pharmacist for five years. For Giovanni Spinosa, the examining magistrate, the enormous quantities of products sold by Guandalini had been the basis for his conviction. In his findings, Spinosa wrote that Guandalini had sold Ferrari unusual quantities of certain products. In a wiretap, Guandalini had said, "Ferrari cleaned out the pharmacy."

Simeoni's Accusation

Michele Ferrari's trial opened on September 20, 2001. Assistant prosecutor Giovanni Spinosa was presiding over the proceedings. The Italian doctor was suspected of having administered and distributed doping substances (EPO, growth hormone, testosterone, corticosteroids, adrenalin) to a number of top-level cyclists, but also of sports fraud (a criminal offense in Italy), of illegally engaging in the profession of pharmacist and the illegal importation of drugs. The hearings started on December 11. The trial lasted so long that Judge Maurizio Passarini ended up replacing Massimo Poppi. Passarini had conducted the investigation into the death of Brazilian race car driver Ayrton Senna in 1994. From the outset of the trial, Giovanni Spinosa encountered some clear difficulties. The Belgian cyclist Axel Merckx, son of the great Eddy Merckx, history's greatest cyclist, was called to testify, but did not appear. Axel Merckx was one of the cyclists who had been working with Ferrari since at least 1993, but he did not live in Italy and could not be forced to appear. Gianluca Bortolami, a participant in classic competitions, who had received the top ranking in the World Cup in 1994, stated that he was injured and, like Claudio Chiappucci, did not appear on the date originally scheduled. Few cyclists seemed to want to testify under oath on the subject of their doctor/trainer. Filippo Simeoni, a cyclist who was 30 years old at the time of the trial and a professional since 1995, was one of the few to testify. On February 12, 2002, he testified on the witness stand in the Bologna courtroom. "From November 1996 to November 1997, I was treated by Ferrari," he explained. "Before that, I had already taken doping products. Ferrari set up a training plan for me that was increasingly grueling. We talked about EPO from the start. That year, I actually took EPO on his instructions. Later on, in March and April, we talked about Andriol (testosterone). I was supposed to take it after particularly rough training sessions. With Andriol, you compensate for hormone deficiency."

The Asterisk and the Magic Potion

These training programs included advice on a medical preparation. Ferrari did not write down the name of the medication. Instead, he would put in an asterisk. Simeoni explained what that asterisk meant for him: "The asterisks indicated that I was supposed to take Andriol after 5 or 6 hours of training. Ferrari also asked me to make sure not to take testosterone just before a competition because of the risk of testing positive. To avoid the anti-doping tests, he used to tell me to use Emagel and Albumina, two products that artificially lowered the hematocrit value. I was to get the EPO and the Andriol in a pharmacy in Switzerland." Simeoni broke off relations with Ferrari when his team stopped reimbursing him for the doctor's fees.

After Simeoni, another cyclist of modest talent, Fabrizio Convalle, went up on the witness stand. For him, too, there was no question about it. Ferrari was a doping doctor. "I was treated by Ferrari, and he gave me thirty unlabeled bottles to be kept in the refrigerator. He didn't tell me what they were and, in the training schedule he gave me, he had put in asterisks that stood for the bottles." Ferrari's lawyers tried to show that neither Simeoni nor Convalle could be relied upon. Other cyclists defended Ferrari. Gianluca Bortolami stated that the asterisks referred to amino acids, legal organic compounds for use during recovery. When he was reminded that in a previous statement to the police, he had declared that the asterisks meant EPO, Bortolami claimed that he had been coerced to say that. In his earlier deposition, Bortolami stated, in effect, that "1/2" written in front of the asterisk mean a half-vial of EPO. Spinosa asked him how he could be so precise in this statement. The cyclist replied, "That time, in Alassio, right after the race, I was brought in for questioning. The police wouldn't have let me go if I hadn't said that." Spinosa rejoined that many other cyclists had been questioned on that day, that nobody had talked about EPO and they had all been allowed to leave.

The meaning of these asterisks was at the heart of the trial. Judge Passarini tried to understand it more fully. "If the asterisk means amino acid, why does it say 'AA' on the chart, followed by two asterisks?" he asked. Later on, he pointed out to Eddy Mazzoleni, a faithful "minor member" of the Italian team Saeco, that this explanation made no sense. "The asterisks," said Mazzoleni, "indicated that you were supposed to take amino acids, or proteins, or glutamic acid." Passarini was not impressed. "If the asterisks meant glutamic acid, then that would read glutamic acid before glutamic acid. If it corresponds to the same thing, why put in asterisks?" Another cyclist, Gianni Faresin, whose claim to fame is a victory on the Lombardy Tour in 1995, was asked the meaning of the term "*oil" that appeared in his training schedule. He explained that Ferrari had recommended that he massage his legs with oil for the Trentine Tour. "But why put an asterisk there if the name of the product is already written?" Passarini asked. "Ferrari is very precise," was Faresin's reply. "He wanted everything to go the way he had planned it." The judge asked him why, according to him, Ferrari had changed his name in his medical record and written "Ferrarin" instead of "Faresin". "It is true that Ferrari used phony names to protect his clients," Faresin admitted.

After being fined for failure to appear, Chiappucci testified on February 11, 2003. He told the court that, for him, the asterisks referred to amino acids. When he was asked why, in a statement to the police in 1998, he had stated that he did not know what they meant, he replied that at the time he had not had time to think it through clearly. Spinosa reminded him that his questioning had lasted 2 hours and 45 minutes. "Not enough time?" asked the judge

Michele the Family Doctor

During the two and a half years of an interminable trial, broken up by postponements requested by the attorneys for Ferrari, including Mr. Bolognesi, who was waiting for the statute of limitations to run out, Michele Ferrari appeared on the witness stand twice. The first time, he took advantage of the opportunity to make a "spontaneous declaration" on the abnormally high levels of iron found in the blood tests of cyclists he was monitoring. During the trial, Professor Giuseppe d'Onofrio, a Roman expert in hematology retained by the Ferrari defense team, was killing time by entering his observations in a notebook. When Ferrari started to testify, a journalist sitting next to d'Onofrio saw him write: "I can only hope that Michele won't mess things up by testifying on the witness stand." D'Onofrio's fears were understandable because Ferrari was so sure of himself that he was capable of being arrogant and, at the same time, imprudent.

In his "spontaneous declaration," Ferrari explained that these high rates were a reflection of the cycling culture and the ease with which cyclists self-medicated. Ferrari stated that he was perfectly well aware that too much iron can harm one's physical shape. To lower the iron level in cyclists, he bled them. When asked how come the police had been able to find 60 iron capsules in his home, he replied: "I keep iron at home because my father-in-law takes it. He is a blood donor and he needs it." When he was asked why he had 300 capsules of DHEA, a banned product, this time he affirmed that it was for his own father. "The DHEA offsets the effect of the cortisone he takes for his arthritis and reduces the level of DHEA that his body naturally produces. My father takes three tablets a day."

The trial concluded on April 20, 2004, with the opinion of the experts Judge Passarini had called upon to talk about the medical tests provided to the court. Ferrari's own files included the most thorny point. It showed astonishing variations in the hematocrit values of the top-level athletes that he handled, twenty-five of them to be precise, which had nothing to do with the variations induced by training at altitude or in oxygen tents.

Mario Cazzola, a hematologist, was asked to give his expert advice as to the figures that appeared in the cyclists' training charts.

"I cannot say with any certainty whether the use of a product explains these figures, but I see no other explanation."

The verdict in the trial should be handed down no earlier than the fall of 2004.

Armstrong Shakes His Head

At the time Livingston was working with Michele Ferrari, he was riding for US Postal and was considered by Armstrong almost like his younger brother. In April 2001, five years after Armstrong himself had started to work with the Italian physician, one of the others had asked the leader of the US Postal team about the relations between Livingston and Ferrari.

"Did you know that Kevin's name came up in the investigation of Ferrari in Italy?"

"Yes."

"Did you discuss it with him? Did you talk to him about it?"

"No."

"Never?"

He shakes his head to indicate no.

"Even if you knew he was working with Ferrari? A lot of newspapers had reported that....."

"You always come back to these related stories. I can only talk about Lance Armstrong. I don't want to speak for the others. I don't pry... I don't get involved in other people's affairs."

"Is he your best friend?"

"But I don't get involved in their affairs, their problems."

"A guy who is your best buddy... I would have thought it natural for you to ask Kevin: 'What's going on? Did you go see Ferrari? Is it a set-up, did he list your name by mistake?' But you're telling me that you never talked to him. Never?" He gestured that they had never talked about it.

"Would you be shocked if Ferrari's records indicated that Kevin took EPO?"

"I wouldn't believe it."

"Even if you saw the records?"

"I would not believe it."

"These records indicate that in 1998, Kevin's hematocrit value went from 41.2 to 49.9 in a period of 7 months. A nearly 20% increase."

"I didn't see the files."

We know that Armstrong was working with Ferrari at the same time as his best friend. And yet, according to Armstrong, they never talked about the fact that Livingston showed up in the inquiry on the Italian physician. Armstrong likes to say that his collaboration with Ferrari is a minor element in his preparation, that he visits him only to get "occasional advice on his training," and that his role is much less important than the role of his long-time trainer, Chris Carmichael. That is not what some of his US Postal teammates claimed, nor what the facts show. The police investigations conducted in Italy indicate that Armstrong went to see Ferrari for two days in March 1999, for three days in May 2000, two days in August 2000, two days in September 2000 and three days in April 2001. Not to mention his visit in January 1997. In Ferrare, during his visits, Armstrong stayed either at the Annunziata, a four-star hotel, or at the Duchessa Isabella, a five-star hotel.

A final anecdote. After the 2000 Tour de France ended in a second victory for the Texan champion, Armstrong, Livingston and Hamilton teamed up to offer a Rolex to Ferrari. Just as a sign of their gratitude.

Frankie Avoids Ferrari

Frankie Andreu rode with Armstrong from 1993 to 1996 on the Motorola team, then after a season with Cofidis, for three more years in US Postal until the end of 2000. During the Motorola years, in particular, Andreu was a close friend of Armstrong's. It would not have been surprising if he had also worked with Ferrari. But he preferred not to do so.

"That's true," Andreu explains. "I never worked with Ferrari. Some cyclists went to see Michele because they said that he knew everything about developing training programs. But I did not want to work with him."

"Why?"

"I would not have been comfortable at the idea of being associated with him. I didn't want to."

"It is perhaps because of the suspicions that were raised about his methods?"

"One hears rumors, but I don't know the facts. He developed the training program for some cyclists, I don't really know much more about him. I wasn't interested in that."

"But you didn't want to be associated with him."

"On the team, was any pressure put on you to work with Ferrari?"

"There really was no pressure on the part of the team. Lance asked me if I wanted to be trained by Michele, and I simply replied that I was not interested in that. I preferred to continue what I was doing on my own. He asked me one time and we never really talked about it again. So that's not what I call pressure. All we did was talk about it."

The Benefits of Neupogen

In his second book,¹⁰⁰ the six-time Tour de France winner refers to a friend, Bart, who is about to have some bone marrow taken for his brother's transplant.

"Following a series of tests to make sure that the donor was in perfect health, the doctors put Bart on Neupogen, the blood activating product that I myself had received in my own chemotherapy."

What is Neupogen? "It is the commercial name of a growth factor that acts directly on the stem cells of the bone marrow, and that has the effect of increasing the number of blood cells," explains Doctor Jean-Pierre de Mondenard. Neupogen, which is administered in a solution injected either intravenously or subcutaneously and is used to counter the devastating effects of chemotherapy on the blood cells. It works first on the white cells, but also on the red cells. Put into a sports context, "it is a blood booster that is undetectable." All the more undetectable because "people don't look for it," Professor Michel Audran confirms. Since 1999, Neupogen has been on the detailed list of products

banned in sports competitions published by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, "blood doping" category. To be more precise, the World Anti-Doping Agency bans any and all growth factors, a family of drugs which in France includes Neupogen, among others.

Apparently, Lance Armstrong had access to this product during his own illness. His fight against cancer must have expanded his knowledge of these boosters, Neupogen, EPO or others. Could the American cyclist have had recourse to this product after his treatment? For oncologist Jean-Bernard Dubois, it is "frequently used in conjunction with chemotherapy. It creates no danger for the patient, and has practically no action on the red cells. But, in France, it is administered only by prescription within the framework of a marketing authorization. It is an expensive product because a Neupogen treatment costs around \$180 (150 euros). It is administered once a week, for three weeks or once a day for several days." According to Jean-Bernard Dubois, "While Neupogen is less powerful than EPO," it is indeed a blood activator.

Lying Under EPO

If the figures put forth by Lance Armstrong on his cancer are very imprecise (beta hCG, dating, stage), the relationship between him and EPO is also marked by a certain ambiguity. In this first book, he explains that he used it at the beginning of the third or his fourth chemotherapy sessions. "During the third cycle, my hematocrit – the ratio of cell volume to total blood volume – fell to under 25, whereas the norm is 46," he writes. "Irony of fate, I was given a red cell stimulator, Epogen, or EPO. In any other situation, taking EPO would have generated some major problems with the International Cycling Federation [ICU, actually] and the International Olympic Committee, because this substance is considered a doping product. But, in my case, this term was not truly appropriate. EPO was the only thing that could keep me alive."

Which no one disputes. For Professor Le Bourgeois, "patients with testicular cancer show relatively little anemia. Therefore, there is not much reliance on EPO. It is exceptional. When people talk about a drop in blood cells, they are talking about white cells, or platelets. The third element that drops is red cells. In that case, we use either blood transfusions, or patients are given EPO. But that is the last wheel on the cart in terms of hematological tolerance." On the other hand, Professor Jean-Bernard Dubois explains that "the consumption of EPO among us (at Val d'Aurelle) is very substantial [he mentions the names of pharmaceutical specialties of erythropoietin such as Eprex, Nesp, Aranesp, NeoRecormon]." And for Professor Bernard Debré, "EPO is administered to cancer patients with anemia. It is not frequent, but chemotherapy can lead to anemia and leucopenia [reduction in white cells] and it is true that EPO can at that point be given to the patient to multiply red cells."

In any case, while Armstrong justifies such use in his book, published in 2000, he denied it categorically during an endless interview granted to one of the authors,

Pierre Ballester, on July 19, 1999 at *L'Équipe*, on the Tour de France rest day at Saint-Gaudens before the book appeared. The interview itself was published on July 20:

"You don't have any doctor's certificate?"

"None."

"For nothing? Not for corticoids, not for EPO?"

"Nothing."

"You never used products of this type to cure your cancer?"

"No, never."

Since this use of EPO was justified, why the lie?

Testosterone with a Medical Certificate

It is often said that among the banned products that Lance Armstrong could have benefited from medically is testosterone, the male hormone produced by the testicles and, secondarily, by the adrenal cortex. In cycling circles, the removal of a testicle could serve as a pretext for using exogenous testosterone. A cyclist, whose identity shall remain anonymous, echoes this rumor: "The fact of having one less testicle can, in the eyes of the ICU, justify taking testosterone," he says. "In any case, Vicente Belda, then the sports director at Kelme, stated the same thing some years ago." But is it possible to take testosterone with the authorization of the International Cycling Union? Let us analyze the case of Sébastien Demarbaix, whom we questioned by phone. At age 31, Sébastien Demarbaix works for a company that takes soil samples to assess soil viability. He also serves as the sports director for a semi-professional Belgian team. After seven professional seasons, Sébastien Demarbaix ended his career in May 2002. A "minor" Belgian cyclist, as he himself acknowledges, he nevertheless did have some encouraging results (sixth in the Wallonia GP in 1998, seventh in the 1999 Haut-Var Tour, fifteenth in the 1999 Midi-Libre, fifteenth in the 1999 Critérium du Dauphiné...) He cycled on Belgian teams (Lotto, Home Market-Charleroi, Lotto again), as well as a French team (AG2R-Prévoyance in 2001 and the beginning of 2002).

Yet, the rider from Hainaut entered the professional ranks with a handicap. "In my last season in the juniors, in 1993," he recalls, "I suffered from terrible drops in energy levels. Blood tests found some hormonal problems. There was talk of toxoplasmosis, mononucleosis, a blood virus, but the doctors never were able to identify the causes. My pituitary, my thyroid, my testicles, all the hormone glands were in perfect condition."

Sébastien Demarbaix did, however, manage to sign a professional contract with Lotto in 1996. "But I never again regained my former hormone values, which were around 8 to 9."¹⁰¹

When he joined the French team AG2R-Prévoyance in 2001, he explained his problem to the team doctor, Eric Bouvat. "After reading my blood test results, he asked me to consult an endocrinologist, who had me undergo some additional tests to find out the source of the drop in testosterone, which had dropped to 0.5

ng/ml. One of the first effects of very low testosterone, combined with intense physical activity, is decalcification. That is what was happening with me." Desirous of pursuing his career despite this unexplained testosterone, Demarbaix did not know what to think. "Neither did Dr. Bouvat," he continues. "Since my case was not getting any better, I sent a letter to Daniel Zorzoli (head of the ICU medical commission), along with my medical record in which the endocrinologist recommended that I take testosterone. But I never received a reply. Not even a rejection slip. In May 2002, Dr. Bouvat stopped me from cycling. He had shown my file to a specialist at the CHU in Grenoble, who replied that it made no sense to let me keep cycling. In my case, any fall would have been serious, and they would be legally responsible. He recommended a six-month break so we could look at things more closely. But at age 29 and a half, that meant the end of my career. I preferred to put it all behind me." While Dr. Bouvat acted wisely, Sébastien Demarbaix still harbors a certain bitterness, forgetting the risk involved and retaining only his certainties. "I know that there are some very good cyclists who get exemptions to take testosterone. Riders who are part of the Top 15 in the ICU rankings. But they are major racers who have a different name. If I had been on another team, especially in Belgium, if I had had a doctor with influence at the ICU and if I had won a competition, I would still be cycling."

While Sébastien Demarbaix's request was not successful, there have been cases. Three French cyclists, one of them still active, were able to get a therapeutic exemption as of 1999 because they did not secrete testosterone. All three men were victims of hypogonadism: their testicles do not produce testosterone. "One man did not have any testicles, and that case is evident," Michel Guinot explains. The situation is more complicated when the subjects have both testicles. "That was the case with the other two cyclists," says Michel Guinot. "So, people rely on the endocrinologist's report." There is no longer any question of a very rare or exceptional case. The racers submit a request to the medical commission of the ICU, whose chairman, Leon Schattenberg, then issues an authorization based on the endocrinological examination provided. Which is what he did for the three French cyclists. "It goes over our heads," says Michel Guinot. "The ICU does not know us; it deals more with team physicians." Might the ICU have done the same for Lance Armstrong? "That is what people say, but I am not aware of anything."

The Dangers of Testosterone

We questioned three specialists on the possibility of taking testosterone. For Professor Bernard Debré, chief of the Urology Department at the Cochin Hospital in Paris, "It is very rare for testosterone to be prescribed for a patient suffering from testicular cancer. Or else the patient must have lost both testicles (which is not the case with Lance Armstrong). Hormone treatment could then be indicated. But the risks are not known. In a case such as Lance Armstrong's, it would be

somewhat ill-advised on the part of a doctor to give products that always involve risks to someone coming out of chemotherapy. When the subject still has one testicle (which is Armstrong's case), the pituitary gland works, causing the testicle to work and the testicle secretes. You only need one testicle to provide the normal dosage of testosterone. If he was given testosterone, it would then be in addition to what is normal. We know that it is not harmless. Testosterone promotes the multiplication of muscle cells. Here we're talking about an individual who has developed an anarchic multiplication of the other cancerous cells. Personally, I would be extremely reluctant to prescribe it. It would be unreasonable, dangerous. Dishonest. In a case like this, one would have to imagine that he got one from a complaisant doctor, a hormone treatment officially unauthorized for medical reasons after his illness."

In the opinion of Professor Jean-Bernard Dubois, testosterone is the only fatal contribution to an athlete who is the victim of cancer. "The consumption of testosterone in a man is dangerous for a very special tissue called the prostate. Prostate cancer is very hormone-dependent, dependent on the male sexual hormone which is testosterone. Because of this, one of the major treatments for prostate cancer is suppression of testosterone secretion. I would not even give it to a non-cancer patient. In general, testosterone, in a supraphysiological dose, must not be prescribed. The risk is prostate cancer. Testosterone is prescribed only on a compensatory, not therapeutic, basis, and that involves doses that are clearly superior to physiological doses. If Lance Armstrong used testosterone after his cancer, it could be dangerous. Not for the testicles: he is simply preparing his own prostate cancer, just like, for that matter, a non-cancer patient. In this scenario, one is increasing one's own risk, like a smoker who increases his lung cancer risk."

For his part, Professor Jean-Paul Le Bourgeois even considers the use of the banned products already cited to be unjustified even to activate a cure. "Giving testosterone to a man is like given estrogen to a woman: it increases the risk of breast cancer. Testosterone activates prostate cancer."

Banned, Dangerous, But Not Contraindicated

While nothing permits us to affirm that testicular cancer can be caused by the over-consumption of certain substances, these specialists do not deny that a cancer patient can, though with some risk, consume products that are prohibited by sports laws.

To this question whether a cancer victim can still take doping products, the answer given by Professor Dubois is identical to the answer he gave to a journalist for a regional daily:¹⁰² "I believe so. The treatment that Lance Armstrong received is not at all contraindicated for the administration of a doping product." As for Professor Debré, he showed prudence in the columns of a national newspaper.¹⁰³

"Could a racer who is a cancer victim handle doping products?"

"No, I can't imagine who would go ahead and give products like EPO, corticoids or testosterone to a former cancer victim. It would be very dangerous."

He talked with us about the same matter. "When a man has just had a very specific cancer, it is the testicle that secretes testosterone. There is very likely no relationship between hormones and this cancer. I cannot see a doctor taking the responsibility of giving doping medications to a patient recovering from testicular cancer. For one reason: no one knows the effect of these new drugs and doping products on the cancer itself..."

As for the corticoids that Lance Armstrong used after his illness, Professor Dubois does not think doping substances are especially bad for a cancer patient. "It is not because a person has been treated for cancer that doping products are medically prohibited," he points out. "There is no interference, no contraindication. Once chemotherapy is completed, one can use doping products like any other person. EPO, growth hormone, corticoids, steroids, anabolic steroids, no problem." And he specifies that there are no "harmful effects from the use of corticoids in the context of cancer. Besides, corticotherapy is part of the treatment of cancers."

According to Professor Debré, the conclusion is at least as radical: "If he takes all the doping products he wants, no one will be able to go after him. If he takes corticoids in high doses, he can take refuge behind a doctor's prescription."

In any event, the party concerned cannot take advantage of his cancer to use them. According to Professor Jean-Paul Le Bourgeois, "After treatment, there is no reason to prescribe testosterone, corticoids, growth hormones or EPO to a cancer patient."

Patrick Clerc's Initiation

Here again, the testimony of Patrick Clerc can enlighten us as to the state of mind of a cyclist touched by cancer with respect to doping products, even when formally contraindicated.

This is the stage by stage account of an itinerary that begins with his initiation to doping. "I signed my first pro road contract with Jean de Gribaldy in March of 1981, and I knew nothing about doping. That same year, I participated in my first Tour de France. I still had not 'taken' anything. I started to learn what amphetamines were during the 1981 post-Tour heats. My consumption of anabolic steroids began in 1982. It was very minor at that point. I soon found out that it served no purpose to take 100 mg when 20 was enough. At the time, it was empirical. I 'used' from August 1981 to the end of 1983, but my highest consumption goes back to 1983. That year, I must have taken 300 mg of anabolic steroids in all. I probably gave myself two injections of growth hormones. I was not convinced, and besides, it was expensive at that time."

On the 1983 Tour de France, Patrick Clerc tested positive for anabolic steroids. "After that, there was no way I would taken them again," he goes on. "When I asked the surgeon whether the 'anabolics' had any connection with my cancer,

he replied that it had nothing to do with it. On the other hand, he told me that these products can promote the process once it is underway. But they do not bring about the onset.

Playing With Death

The discovery of a cancer is the first shock. But post-operative trauma is a second shock, this time of a psychological nature. Put out on the scrap heap, Patrick Clerc had to redefine himself as soon as possible: "Following the radiotherapy," he continues, "I starting taking cortisone again medically, on a simulation test basis at the Lyon Hospital. A dose that I had never taken while racing. They wanted to check, through this artificial means, whether my corticoadrenal system was working normally. Everything was working perfectly well. That took a morning. I was probably tempted to start the 'corticoids' after that. Because of my liver problems, I started working again with FEV 300, vitamin B complexes, Striadyne, all authorized substances. I had a trunk full of them. But other things, no. There were no more 'anabolic steroids'; there never was any testosterone for me. Just twice, some natural 'testosterone' - a white milky substance, but that wasn't for me. Amphetamines, a little more afterward. In fact, quacks never really scared me about anabolic steroids or other products. I was scared on my own. Afterward, I had to restart life from some other angle. I first worked in a paper mill, then in my father's business. My career was finished." The regret is always there. But even facing the prospect of relapse, could he have risked it? "For me, cycling was my passion," he repeated with conviction. "I would have done anything to stay in cycling, to be under the stage lights, to be on the inside, to see everything that is there all around, the trips, being next to a leader like Sean Kelly. I did everything I could to stay. Armstrong turns it all into advertising, he lives from it twice. But yes, at the time, I would have done anything to stay in cycling. If, for example, people had told me that it is possible by using products that are risky for me, for my cancer ... I don't know ... I would have thought about it. It's hard to say. That was twenty years ago.... Either you put it all on the table, get back into the crap, or else you get scared to death and you stop. I don't know. It's 50-50. But OK, at that age, you believe nothing will happen to you. But something did happen to me. Oh, well, I don't know. It's true that I could have jumped back in it."

Notes

Questions About A Champion

1. David Walsh, *Inside the Tour de France*, Random House, 1994.
2. "Avant, j'étais un petit c...", *L'Équipe*, April 24; 1996.

The Passion to Win

3. All of the information on Lance Armstrong's youth comes from the following books and a long interview between Armstrong and one of the authors in July 1993. For the French edition: Lance Armstrong and Sally Jenkins, *Il n'y a pas que le vélo dans la vie*, Albin Michel, 2000, Livre de Poche, 2003.

For the English translation: Lance Armstrong and Sally Jenkins, *It's Not About the Bike*, Berkeley Books, New York, 2000, (the pages cited refer to the paperback edition). For the French edition: Lance Armstrong and Sally Jenkins, *Chaque seconde compte*, Albin Michel, 2003. For the English translation: Lance Armstrong and Sally Jenkins, *Every Second Counts*, Broadway Books, New York, 2004. David Walsh based one chapter of his book "Inside the Tour de France", op. cit., on his interview.

4. Adenosine triphosphate, a molecular substance which is the body's main source of energy, is marketed in France under the name Striadyne ®.

5. When Professor Jean-Paul Le Bourgeois was asked to comment on this, he was much more cautious: "Parvoviruses are viruses used to carry out gene therapy" explained the cancer specialist who works at Mondor Hospital in Créteil. "These are gene-carrying viruses. It is clear there is a link between viruses and cancer but not, a priori, by means of parvoviruses. We do not have enough experience to be able to judge. To date, parvoviruses are not known to be cancer inducing viruses. They are completely harmless viruses, which are used on non-cancer patients to carry a gene that the body lacks." As for any possible correlation between corticoids and cancer, Professor Le Bourgeois is skeptical once again. "Taking large doses of corticoids can lead to immuno-depression. This can possibly lead to cancer via the viruses caught. However, this reasoning is purely theoretical."

Taking the leap?

6. The English cyclist Tom Simpson died on the morning of this thirteenth stage, on the slopes of Mont Ventoux when he was in seventh position in the overall results of the competition. Amphetamines were found in the back pocket of his cycling shorts and in his blood. There is little doubt that doping products, mixed with the alcohol he had consumed, played a role in his tragic death.

The Unique Metamorphosis of a Cancer Patient.

7. Lance Armstrong and Sally Jenkins, *It's Not About the Bike*, Berkeley Books, New York, 2000, p. 5-8.

8. *L'Équipe*, November 19, 1996.

9. Lance Armstrong, op. cit., p. 8.

10. "He spat blood? That's strange. Even in the case of spermorrhage, you do not spit blood." This is the surprised reaction of Professor Le Bourgeois, a cancer specialist at Mondor Hospital in Créteil, when asked about the nature of the symptoms.

11. *La France Cycliste*, 25 October 1996.

12. Lance Armstrong, op. cit., P. 12.

13. Lance Armstrong, op. cit., P. 103.
14. Lance Armstrong and Sally Jenkins, *It's Not About the Bike*, New York, 2004, p. 76 and *Every Second Counts* P.7
15. *L'Équipe*, November 19, 1996.
16. *L'Équipe*, November 19, 1996 and *Le Monde*, July 19, 1999.
17. Lance Armstrong and Sally Jenkins, *It's Not About the Bike*, p. 2.
18. Lance Armstrong, op. cit., P. 267.
19. *France Soir*, January 16, 1997.
20. Éric Maitrot, *Le Scandale du sport contaminé*, Flammarion, 2003, P. 240.
21. *L'Équipe*, November 19, 1996, and Lance Armstrong, *It's Not About the Bike*, p. 91.
22. International Olympic Committee and International Cyclist's Union.
23. *Le Monde*, January 11, 1997.
24. *Le Monde*, November 24, 1996.
25. *Le Monde*, January 11, 1997.
26. *Le Monde*, January 11, 1997.
27. *L'Équipe*, November 18, 1996.
28. *Le Monde*, January 11, 1997.
29. *France Soir*, January 16, 1997.
30. *Le Midi-libre*, July 23, 1999.
31. *Le Monde*, July 5, 2003.
32. In this affair the names of five riders appear: two former riders – Rutkiewicz and Sassone and 3 current riders - Gaumont, Vasseur and Clain, and the name of a soigneur - Madejak. After withdrawing from competition for several weeks, the company changed its sports organization chart. Alain Bondue was given different duties in another sector of activity and the resignation of Jean-Jacques Menuet, the team's doctor, was accepted.
33. Lance Armstrong, *It's Not About the Bike*, pp. 136-140 and pp. 174-175.
34. *L'Équipe*, November 19, 1996.
35. ICU scale (International Cyclists Union) which allows a world ranking to be established.
36. Lance Armstrong, *Every Second Counts*, p. 120.
37. Lance Armstrong, *It's Not About the Bike*, pp.174-175.
38. Lance Armstrong, op. cit., p. 178.
39. *L'Équipe*, January 26, 2004.

The Emma Years

40. Le Tour de Rhénanie Palatinat.
41. Olav Skaaning Andersen and Niels Christian Jung, "Doping pa landevejen" (Doping on the Road), Monttertarden, 1999. This work has not been translated.
42. *L'Équipe*, July 8, 1999.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.

45. The four riders tested after the prologue were Lance Armstrong, the Dane Bo Hamburger, the Spanish cyclist Manuel Beltran and the Columbian cyclist Joaquim Castelblanco.
46. *L'Humanité*, July 20, 1999.
47. Bruno Roussel, *Tour de vice*, Hachette Littératures, 2001.
48. Article 43 stipulates that any rider who fails to mention special conditions in the test report on the day of the test will be sanctioned.

State of Siege

49. Lance Armstrong, *Every Second Counts*, p. 43.
50. Doctor and researcher, director of the Department for the study of doping and performance enhancing drugs at the University of Nancy.
51. Corpuscle measuring one micron, shaped like a grain, present in large quantities in the cytoplasm of cells.
52. *Lausanne*, December 12, 2000.
53. *L'Équipe*, July 7, 2001.
54. Generic name of various substances endowed with anxiolytic, antiepileptic and hypnotic properties.
55. Reuter press agency dispatch, December 13, 2000.
56. Lance Armstrong, *Every Second Counts*, p. 118.
57. *Le Monde*, December 5, 2000.
58. The increase of carbonate of ammonium in the blood. It causes serious digestive and nervous disorders and increases hepatic comas.
59. *Secret défoncé* Jean-Claude Lattès, 1999, and *Massacre à la chaîne*, Calmann-Lévy, 1999 respectively.
60. Jérôme Chiotti, *De mon plein gré*, Calmann-Lévy, 2001.
61. Lance Armstrong, *Every Second Counts*, p. 72-74.
62. *Sport et Vie*, issue 67.
63. *L'Équipe*, January 29, 2004.
64. *Le Dauphiné Libéré*, April 10, 2001.
65. Lance Armstrong, *Every Second Counts*, P. 92.
66. *L'Équipe*, September 3, 2000.
67. In *Every Second Counts* p. 73, Lance Armstrong writes:
 "The judicial system in France seemed to be the reverse of American law, with no presumption of innocence..."
68. *L'Équipe*, June 14, 2003.
69. Ibid.
70. Christophe Bassons, *Positif*, Stock, 2000.
71. *L'Équipe*, July 20, 1999.
72. *L'Équipe*, April 28, 2004.
73. *L'Équipe* magazine, June 21, 2003.
74. *Le Parisien*, July 22, 2002.
75. *L'Équipe*, July 10, 2003. Cédric Vasseur explained that, in this ranking, Lance Armstrong "should have been much higher if he had been a complete champion

who was respected and respectable". After this Tour, the jury updated its ranking to place him in fourth position.

76. If Lance Armstrong is to be believed in his book *Every Second Counts*, P. 153, Cédric Vasseur could have won three times this sum because he was a member of the winning team: "Floyd [Landis] was making a salary of \$60,000, but it he bore down and made the nine-man squad that raced in the Tour, and we won, he would get about \$50,000 more in prize money.

77. *Le Monde*, July 7, 2003.

78. *L'Équipe*, July 28, 2003.

Too High, Too Far, Too Strong

79. Jean-Marie Leblanc wrote an editorial in *Vélo Magazine* in February 2003, in which he said: "Modernity – okay, but within limits. Do you realize that there are some people who do not accept the fact that Armstrong or anyone else can achieve a high performance on the last hill of a mountain stage by virtue of some supposedly scientific equation. And they fling this at you, sitting in their comfortable armchairs in front of their televisions, without knowing whether the wind is favorable, if it's freezing cold or scorching hot or whether the course had been tough up till then. Beware of ~~pests!~~"

80. Antoine Vayer and Frédéric Portoleau, *Pouvez-vous gagner le Tour?*, Polar, 2003.

81. Lance Armstrong confirms this in his book *Every Second Counts*, referring to a stage in the Pyrenees, p. 115: "He [Ullrich] peddled 75 times a minute, and I pedaled 90."

82. Antoine Vayer and Frédéric Portoleau, op. cit.

83. Antoine Vayer and Frédéric Portoleau, op. cit.

84. The Spanish rider died on December 6, 2003 at the age of 32 from a heart attack in a psychiatric hospital.

85. *Le Monde*, July 29, 2003.

86. *Journal du Dimanche*, February 10, 2002: "Pantani had taken advantage of the presentation of his team Mercatone Uno to criticize Lance Armstrong: 'Lance Armstrong is a cycling phenomenon but he does not respect his opponents. He's a great cyclist but not a great champion. I really admired him before his illness but since then I admire him less. I find it hard to believe in fairy tales.' On July 4, 2001, Marco Pantani was also interviewed on radio Stream Sport. He said: "I wouldn't be surprised if, one day, I was told that Lance Armstrong's blood values were abnormal too." Marco Pantani died on February 14, 2004 at the age of 34. *Libération*, July 24, 2001: 'After the arrival at Luz-Ardiden, the German cyclist's trainers had insinuated that Lance Armstrong's achievements were rather dubious. Yesterday [July 23], Telekom [Jan Ullrich's team at the time] did a reverse turn. "Our remarks were badly translated."'

87. *Libération*, July 18, 2000.

88. Éric Maitrot, *Le Scandale du sport contaminé*, Flammarion, 2003, p. 255.
89. 'Hematocrits: intra-subjects and seasonal fluctuations', *Sports Medicine*, New Zealand monthly journal, issue 33, pp. 231-243.
90. Lance Armstrong, *Every Second Counts*, p. 81.
91. This note was put in the French version of this book: *L.A. Confidential: les secrets de Lance Armstrong*, Editions de la Manufacture, 2004, to explain that Lance Armstrong was mistaken in his explanation of how an altitude tent works. In fact, the error appears in the translation of his book *Every Second Counts* and not in the original English.
92. *L'Equipe Magazine*, January 11, 2003.
93. *Libération*, July 24, 2001:
94. Answers to questions on the health safety and the effectiveness of the tents led to a third question: is it ethical? "The IOC, the AMA, the Ministry of Sports and the CPLD have to decide whether this method is ethical. It is up to them to decide," answered Laurent Schmitt. What is his opinion though? "Our structured and approved study should help to classify things. It is not up to me to make a decision. It is my personal method as a trainer of top athletes. That is what I've worked for. Fighting against doping – it is an alternative. And I would be disappointed if it was not approved." When are sports institutions going to decide whether to validate this method or not? "We are waiting for their decision."
95. Christophe Bassons was in this bracket: "My hematocrit level rose from 40.5 to 43, i.e. 2.5 points, and two weeks later it fell to 40."
96. In the English version, and 308 pages in the French version.
97. Lance Armstrong, *Every Second Counts*, p. 81.
98. *Ekstra Bladet*, October 23, 2001.
99. Nucleo Anti Sofisticazione.
100. Lance Armstrong, *Every Second Counts*, p. 201.
101. Nanograms per milliliter, given that the average value for an adult is 3 to 9 ng/ml.
102. *Le Midi-libre*, July 23, 1999.
103. *Le Parisien*, July 16, 1999.

Authors' Note

After leading such an enquiry, we were impatient to get the reactions of Lance Armstrong, his family, friends and the people concerned because the information we gathered contradicts the US Postal leader's declarations.

This is why we contacted Lance Armstrong and the other protagonists of our investigations directly. We did this some weeks before publication in order to allow the people concerned to reply in a meeting, an interview, a fax or an e-mail. Unfortunately, despite the importance of the issues raised, nobody found the time to reply. Bill Stapleton, the lawyer in charge of Lance Armstrong's interests, finally asked us to send all the questions relating to members of US Postal to him. We did this immediately. First of all, he simply responded by warning us that legal proceedings may be taken and then at the last moment he asked us to extend the deadline. Despite the technical problems this posed, we agreed. Finally, a few hours before this new deadline was to run out, he told us that he would send us a written reply the next day. We decided to wait for this reply, given the importance of the matter.

We waited in vain.

We very much regret that neither Lance Armstrong, nor any of the other protagonists we approached took advantage of the time we had given them. In an effort to be honest, we have included Lance Armstrong's opinions on each of the subjects treated, when available.

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