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Cycling News and Analysis

News for July 18, 1999

Tour news

Christophe Bassons: "I was alone in my own team"

"At the end of his nerves" Christophe Bassons cracked. The rider from the Française des Jeux team who is the clean skin of the professional peloton, left the Tour de France on Friday morning, after having "understood" that he "was alone in his own team".

Bassons explained in Le Parisien, the French newspaper which has been running a daily diary by Bassons since the beginning of the Tour: "On Thursday after I finished, I learned that the LCI wanted to interview me. A rider from my team came up from behind and said to me - Pay attention to what you are going to say... I have been feeling a sense of isolation for several days and in the company of 170 riders it is a difficult situation to cope with. But from that moment on I realised that I was alone in my own team."

Bassons noted that he had "upset certain teams" with his earlier statements and said that he knew that "personally, that mean't that they would never have allowed me to win a stage. They would always work against me no matter what. But he said that they also made me understand that this was also the case for my own team members."

The rider wrote in this column that his team manager Marc Madiot had tried to make him change his mind about retiring from the Tour. Madiot considered that "instead of stopping dialogue about doping it would have been better to have open discussions about it." But from his perspective, Marc Madiot "was not able to understand that I was alone in the middle of everybody and that was difficult for me."

He also reproached several other riders who did not answer the questions of journalists about doping. "4 or 5 riders would have been enough. I would then not have had as many questions to answer... I was ill at ease when I told the TV that it was not possible to win a stage of the Tour without using drugs." He actually used the phrase "à la pédale" which literally means "on pedals alone."

In his column on Thursday, Bassons wrote that leader Lance Armstrong approached him and suggested that he leave the race. "Armstrong told me: Why don't you just go away?"

According to Christophe Bassons, there had been one day where a number of

riders wanted to rebel against the drugs. This was the day when Lance Armstrong won the stage from Le Grand Bornand to Sestrières. "And there was also the performance of Stéphane Heulot on the stage of l'Alpe d'Huez which put a little happiness back in the team and all was forgotten."

Questioned in Le Parisien, Jean-Marie Leblanc did not think that the retirement of Christophe Bassons made him a "martyr" Leblanc said: "As a matter of fact, I think there is a bit of self-promotion by Bassons out of the whole thing."

Leblanc continued: "The rider upset his fellow riders in the peloton and hinted that the progress we have made to clean up the sport was unsuccessful. He irritated the peloton by using his tongue to get media attention instead of his legs."

Lance Armstrong has been forced to respond to a campaign of innuendo in parts of the French press about what might be fueling his success. Armstrong has categorically denied taking banned drugs, crediting his success to hard work, preparation and good luck.

Jean-Marie Leblanc said on Friday that the results from a third set of blood tests - which included race leader Lance Armstrong and his US Postal Service team - turned out negative.

PFC test available

According to the French sportspaper L'Equipe the UCI will announce that they have found a test to detect the presence of PFC (perfluorcarbon) which they consider is a more dangerous product than EPO.

The use of PFC raises the red blood cell count and allows the user to achieve better results in endurance sports. The is used by doctors in trauma cases when their is no blood plasma available. The president of the UCI anti-doping commission, Leon Schatenberg said: "The test for the presence of this product is based on an alcohol test using breath rather than blood."

The UCI has reached an agreement with all the teams to conduct the test on all riders during the rest day on Monday in Saint-Gaudens. If the UCI detects the use of PFC it is currently unable to act because there are no sanctions legislated. The exercise is being used as an experiment for future use.

Only five complete teams left

After Ivan Gotti's retirement at the feed zone during Stage 11 there were only 5 full teams left in the Tour. The teams who still have all 9 riders are: Telekom, Lotto-Mobistar, Festina, Banesto and Big Mat-Auber 93.

Americans getting interested in cycling

With Lance Armstrong in control of the race after the first 11 stages, more members of the American press are appearing in the press centre each day.



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Bassons won't judge Landis and Armstrong

By: Cycling News Published: February 2, 2011, 16:23, Updated: February 2, 2011, 22:40 Edition: [Second Edition Cycling News](#)
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Former Tour outcast says he was "lucky" not "courageous" to refuse doping

Former French rider and proponent of cycling "à l'eau claire", Christophe Bassons, told *Cyclingnews* on Wednesday that he "hopes Lance Armstrong can live with the consequences" of the ongoing federal investigation into the seven-time Tour winner and his erstwhile US Postal team.

Bassons, who clashed with Armstrong during the 1999 Tour over the Frenchman's outspoken views on doping, was reacting to comments by Floyd Landis in an interview with the *Sunday Times's* Paul Kimmage published earlier this week. In the article, Kimmage cited Bassons as someone who rejected the drug-taking that Landis saw as a necessary evil to fulfil his ambitions in the Tour de France.



Lance Armstrong and Floyd Landis on the US Postal team [view thumbnail gallery](#)

Landis wasn't familiar with Bassons's story, but seemed impressed by what Kimmage told him.

"It seems to me like he tried to do what I considered as option C as I was thinking this stuff through and figured it was not worth my time, especially in the United States where Lance was now a big superstar and nobody knew who I was," Landis said.

"I'm impressed. I don't know how many guys would [have the strength of character not to dope] but there's not a lot... I don't know [Bassons]. I would like to know him though."

Now working for the Agence française de lutte antidopage (AFLD) in the Aquitaine region of south-west France, Bassons said today that Landis's admiration was "kind but misplaced".

"I don't think I was courageous not to take drugs," the former Festina, Française des Jeux and Jean Delatour rider told *Cyclingnews*.

"To me, courage is all about overcoming fear, and I was never scared. I was just lucky - I'd had a balanced upbringing, lots of love in my life, and no void which made me want to dope. Refusing to take drugs was easy for me, whereas other people have things missing in their lives which mean that's not the case. Doping is always a response to a void, a need - whether it's for money, or success, or love, or something else. That's why it's a mistake to fight the war on doping in terms of health - because, if you actually analyse it, doping responds to a need there too, because you can be healthier doing the Tour de France on drugs than without anything."

Bassons says that, while the public, media and authorities view doping in terms of "legal" and "illegal", an athlete will often superimpose his own ideas of what is legitimate and what is not. Landis, for example, told Kimmage that, for him, doping was a means - the only means in a sport allegedly riddled with corruption - to realize a Tour de France dream.

"I don't know why Landis had that dream, why he needed that, or indeed why he lied for all those years - you'd have to look at his upbringing, his values - but there's always something behind it," Bassons argued.

"Everyone has their own sense of legitimate and illegitimate, which is different from what is licit and illicit. For example, I might think it's legitimate to drive my car at 90kph in an 80kph zone, if me being late means that my son will walk out into the school playground and not see his dad. For Richard Virenque, doping was legitimate because, for some reason, he needed the love and admiration of the public. For some riders from Eastern Europe it's legitimate because they need money for their families - which is hard to condemn. Or a teenager might take steroids and go to the gym to pump iron because he's uncomfortable with his body. In that case, doping serves his need - it perpetuates it too, but as far as the kid is concerned it solves his particular problem..."

It's this philosophy which leads Bassons to play down talk of his heroism. And yet, in many people's eyes, his words and actions throughout his short career amounted to precisely that.

On the morning after Armstrong's emphatic solo victory on the first alpine stage to Sestriere in the 1999 Tour, Bassons cast doubt on the legitimacy of the [American's performance in his daily column](#) for *Le Parisien*. Later that day, Bassons

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claimed, Armstrong rode alongside him in the peloton to relay a terse message. "He said it was a mistake to speak out the way I do and he asked why I was doing it," Bassons recalled later. "I told him that I'm thinking of the next generation of riders. Then he said "Why don't you leave, then?"

Armstrong later corroborated the story. He also added: "[Bassons] accusations aren't good for cycling, for his team, for me, for anybody. If he thinks cycling works like that, he's wrong and he would be better off going home."

Bassons duly left the race before stage 12, mentally exhausted. He retired from the sport, aged just 27, two years later.

Prodigiously talented, not to mention successful, in his amateur days, you'd think that he might now harbour some bitterness about a riding career which ended so prematurely. But you'd be wrong - both about that, and about whether he bears any personal malice towards those like Landis, who cheated and lied for years, or towards Armstrong.

"I don't like to judge or criticize anyone - not Landis, not Armstrong - because everyone has their own reasons for acting the way they do," Bassons reasoned.

"I don't care what anyone does, as long as they don't try to stop me from living my life, or doing my job, which is what bothered me about Armstrong. But, again, I won't judge. With him, I think it's obvious there was a need for success. He didn't have a relationship with his father, and his upbringing wasn't easy, then I think what was already a hard character probably became more and more entrenched in those ways as he got a bit of success with triathlon and then in cycling, plus money and adulation..."

He continued: "The one thing I would add about Armstrong is that I'm not sure he's as proud of the person he is today as I am of myself. Whatever you do in life, you have to accept the consequences of your actions, like I accepted the consequences of my decision to get out of cycling, without looking back. So I hope that he has the mental resources and the money to deal with the consequences of what he's done all these years, I really do. But I also hope that the truth comes out. And I don't envy Armstrong, that's for sure..."

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Asked finally whether he would welcome any communication from Landis, Bassons didn't hesitate. "Avec plaisir," he said.

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Bassons and Simeoni say Armstrong probe is overdue

By: Daniel Friebe Published: June 14, 21:28, Updated: June 14, 21:46 Edition: [First Edition Cycling News, Friday, June 15, 2012](#)

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American's old foes nonetheless welcome USADA efforts

Two men who clashed infamously with [Lance Armstrong](#) during his reign as the [Tour de France's](#) dominant rider, Christophe Bassons and Filippo Simeoni, today welcomed news that Armstrong will [face doping charges](#) from the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA).

Bassons said that USADA's action was "important" but also long overdue. "It's a shame now that it's coming 15 years after it all happened. It's a shame because the evidence was there for years. I knew all along what was happening, so this doesn't change anything for me. I don't need fifteen pages of documents to tell me what I knew already," Bassons told *Cyclingnews*.

Simeoni had similarly mixed feelings. The Italian said the possibility of Armstrong being condemned for doping left him "cold". Simeoni also "can't understand why suddenly now they're investigating him, when for years he was allowed to do whatever he wanted."

Armstrong last night dismissed the investigation as a "witch-hunt". "I have never doped," he affirmed in a statement.

Bassons and Simeoni had of course tackled Armstrong about doping, in their own ways, long before this latest round of allegations. In 1999, Bassons was riding the Tour de France for La Française des Jeux but also penning a daily column for *Le Parisien*. After writing that the peloton had been "shocked" by Armstrong's stage-win at Sestriere, Bassons was confronted by Armstrong on the road to Alpe d'Huez the next day and invited to stop his innuendo or else leave the sport. Two years later, sure enough, Bassons quit professional cycling at age 27. He now works for the French Ministry of Youth and Sports.

Today Bassons expressed his hope that anyone found guilty in the USADA probe will be banished from cycling. He also, though, partly supported Armstrong's claim that the seven-time Tour champion is being singled out, while those who have given evidence against him seem set to escape without penalty for their own misdeeds.

"I can understand why they're offering plea bargains. History tells us that, unfortunately, that's the only way people will talk. It also provides very valuable intelligence when they do that," Bassons said. "What is wrong is giving them complete immunity in return for information. When there's a crime, there has to be a punishment. If there's not, what's happening here sets a dangerous precedent.

"As for Armstrong's entourage, if found guilty, they can't be allowed back in to work with teams in the future," he continued. "In general I'm against making doping a criminal offense, except when there is trafficking involved, but there's no reason why we can't rid the sport of people who have facilitated doping on this scale."

On the UCI's role in the affair, and in particular allegations that they were complicit with what USADA is calling the US Postal team's "conspiracy", Bassons called for a radical rethink of sports federations' role in anti-doping.

"It's that old chestnut: you can't have the body in charge of promoting a sport also policing it. Give responsibility for anti-doping to WADA or national anti-doping agencies. But not to the federations," he argued.

Filippo Simeoni was involved in his own notorious spat with Armstrong at the 2004 Tour de France. Two years earlier, Simeoni had testified before an Italian magistrate that doctor Michele Ferrari had advised him to use EPO and testosterone in 1997, a claim that prompted Armstrong to brand Simeoni an "absolute liar" in an interview with *Le Monde* in 2003. The following year at the Tour, Armstrong thwarted Simeoni's breakaway attempts and allegedly threatened to "destroy" the Italian in a mid-race exchange on stage 18.

Simeoni now owns two bars in Sezze, between Rome and Naples. The 40-year-old claims to have "left cycling behind completely", although he happened to be riding his bike when *Cyclingnews* reached him today.

While he applauded USADA's efforts, he also said that whatever comes of the investigation will bring scant consolation.

"This all leaves me a bit cold now. I've taken myself out of that world completely," he said. "I just can't understand how



Armstrong instructs Filippo Simeoni to return to the peloton on stage 18 of the 2004 Tour de France.



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justice has taken this long. There was always evidence, but nothing was done. Is what they've got that much more crushing now? Armstrong was allowed to do whatever he wanted for years. He was a superhero, untouchable. Now this. I suppose it just shows how the balance has shifted; before, I think there were forces greater than our understanding working to protect him; now there's probably also a reason why they've decided to take him down.

"We'll see how it goes," Simeoni summed up. "I prefer not to dwell too much, because I have too many regrets if I do. This whole business really cut me down in my prime. Now it'd be nice to just get justice, although I still fear that this could rumble on for months if not years."

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Bassons: Armstrong's illusion of control is paramount

By: Cycling News Published: August 28, 09:46, Updated: August 28, 19:38 Edition: [Second Edition Cycling News, Tuesday, August 28, 2012](#)

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Retired adversary not surprised by American's lack of fight

Christophe Bassons was once ostracized for his comments regarding the performance of Lance Armstrong says he now feels "sorry" for the man that has been stripped of his seven Tour de France titles.

"And the worst part is that he is always so sure of himself, and is still not embarrassed to have cheated," said Bassons in an interview with [Le Monde](#).

While riding the Tour de France in 1999, Bassons, riding for La Française des Jeux wrote about his experiences in a daily column for [Le Parisien](#). In one such column, he announced he had been "shocked" by Armstrong's stage-win at Sestriere. The Frenchman was then confronted by Armstrong where he was told to either stop his line of commentary or leave the sport. Bassons retired from cycling two years later, aged 27.

Bassons said he was not surprised that Armstrong, explaining that he was tired of defending himself, [chose not to fight](#) USADA's allegations of doping and conspiracy

"The illusion of control is paramount," Bassons told [Le Monde](#) of Armstrong's [statement](#). "Armstrong, through his financial resources and his political support can afford to behave like that. He lives only to put himself above mortals. I am more sorry for him than anything else. This need to feel superior, to crush the competition, certainly has its source in his past."


Many current members of the professional peloton and management have declined to comment on the latest developments in the long-running Armstrong saga, and as far as Bassons is concerned much of the silence is due to fear.


"Armstrong has always seen himself as the boss," said Bassons. "But I think he did not exercise the same authority as Bernard Hinault in his time. Many cyclists including the French thought and think like me. However, they reflect on their careers and know very well that it is very easy to lose as a cyclist. If you break the law of silence, you can assume that you will never win a race again."


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Christophe Bassons signs autographs during the 1999 Tour de France.



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Excerpt from Wikipedia on Bassons

Doping

Bassons became known during the 1998 doping Festina scandal, when the discovery of a carload of drugs being driven to the team's riders in the Tour de France led to evidence that doping was widespread in the team. In September 1998, the newspaper France Soir published statements made to the police. Two convicted riders, Armin Meier and Christophe Moreau, said that Bassons was the only rider on the team not taking drugs.[2][3]

Jean-Luc Gatellier said in L'Équipe:

It's true he's not one of them and he hasn't come out of the same mould. It's true that he refused to 'load the cannon' (the pretty expression used by those who take EPO) these past years, it's true that Christophe Bassons doesn't belong to the family of cheats and the corrupted.[4]

Moreau's and Meier's court statement brought attention to a rider who had never acquired it through his racing. He wrote in Vélo, a French monthly, that riders who spoke out against quarterly medical checks imposed by the sports ministry after the Festina trial were hypocrites. He said: "That makes me laugh when I hear they're asking for changes to the tests. The truth, however, is that they are obliged to change their behaviour. They talk about 'two-speed cycling'[5] But me, for three years, I've been the second speed. They have ruined three years of my life as a racer and I never said anything."[6]

The interest that the Festina trial brought to him led to an invitation to write a column during the 1999 Tour for Le Parisien, a newspaper in the same corporate group as the Tour de France itself. Ian Austen wrote in Procyling:

On the whole his columns were largely innocuous if entertaining looks at life in the peloton. If anything, he sometimes went out of his way to dispel doping rumours. After the stage into Blois, which passed at record average speed, Bassons warned readers: 'Don't get any ideas about the record speed. With a wind like we had, it's normal to ride this fast.' But two columns stuck out. After Lance Armstrong showed that not only had he recovered from cancer, he'd risen to the top of the pack, Bassons wrote that his performances had 'shocked' the peloton.

Bassons said Armstrong rode up alongside on the Alpe d'Huez stage to tell him "it was a mistake to speak out the way I do and he asked why I was doing it. I told him that I'm thinking of the next generation of riders. Then he said 'Why don't you leave, then?'"[7] Armstrong confirmed the story. On the main evening news on TF1, a national television station, Armstrong said: "His accusations aren't good for cycling, for his team, for me, for anybody. If he thinks cycling works like that, he's wrong and he would be better off going home."[8][9][10][11]

Bassons was shunned by other riders. Giving a television interview at St-Étienne, he said, a passing rider in his own team said: "Watch what you say!"[4][12] Bassons said: "I started feeling isolated. In the middle of 170 riders, that's a tough way to live."[12] Riders shunned him or at best nodded.[4] He cracked, saying he had not wanted to leave the race but his nerves could not stand it anymore.[4] He said:

The [team doctor] comforted me. We often talk together about the problem of doping and we share the same ideas. I confided in him and I cried [j'ai chialé]. I got to sleep but a bit after midnight I could no longer sleep because of my worries. I went into the corridor, I phoned my coach, Antoine Vayer, and

Pascale, my wife. At 5.30am I had my breakfast and I packed my case. I crossed with Marc[13] and he said I was letting down the team. He said a rider could leave the race if he cracked physically but he couldn't accept that one can crack mentally. I said goodbye to everyone but one rider didn't look at me and refused to shake my hand. That hurt.[4]

The reporter Jean-Michel Rouet wrote:

Sometimes he was congratulated on his courage, as Daniel Baal, the president of the FFC[14] at the start at Sestrieres. But more often, others waved their fist [on le montrait le doigt], looked elsewhere, if they didn't just insult him. He has a few friends and a heap of enemies. His solitude was the living proof that nothing fundamental has changed in the morals of the milieu. Christophe Bassons died at the stake [est mort au bucher], burned by his passion. On official communiqués, he left two words: non partant.[15] The peloton had already forgotten rider number 152.[16]

The sports minister, Marie-George Buffet, said: "What a strange role reversal. Rather than fighting against doping, they're fighting its opponent." She wrote to him to sympathise, saying that it was time someone spoke out.[17]

Bassons' colleagues in the Française des Jeux team refused to share their prizes with him. Normally teams pool their winnings and share them out by the number of days a rider has survived the race. One rider, Xavier Jan, said: "Christophe Bassons rode only for himself and didn't at any time work for the overall good of the team." It had nothing to do with his comments about doping, he said.[18] Thierry Bourguignon, part of another team but earlier a member with Bassons of Force Sud, confirmed: "I was the only one to talk to Bassons... He doesn't listen to anyone. Bassons is an individualist. Even in a race he doesn't easily lend a hand. He rides for himself."[19]

Bassons raced again, riding in Germany and Belgium. He said: "I felt a lot of tension. Some didn't talk to me. Others pretended nothing had happened, which is worse. Some say it's just youthful folly, but I feel more adult than them. I'm not the only clean rider but there aren't many who can say 'I don't take drugs'. For most riders, their health is the last of their concerns."[20]

He moved to a smaller team, Jean Delatour, and then stopped racing.