

# ***Is Armstrong Guilty?***

BY: Michael A. Aun, CSP, CPAE Speaker Hall of Fame

Web: <http://www.aunline.com>

Toll Free: 1-(800)-356-0567

Seven-time Tour de France champion Lance Armstrong denied ever taking performance-enhancing drugs, in response to a report published by the French daily *L'Equipe* that he was proven to have taken an endurance-boosting hormone during his first Tour de France triumph in 1999. Is Lance Armstrong guilty? Is he believable?

With a splashing headline "*Armstrong's Lie*" the newspaper reported that Armstrong's use of the banned blood booster erythropoietin (EPO) was revealed in tests by a French laboratory of frozen urine samples taken during his first Tour triumph.

Armstrong is said to have been tested more than any athlete in history. What's important here is the process? Was Armstrong treated fairly by the press? After all, it was a biased and bitter French press that proclaimed "*Armstrong's Lie*" in bold headlines.

Says Armstrong on his website statement that "I have no way to defend myself" against the latest allegations, since no additional samples of the 1999 urine remain to be tested in any attempt to replicate or contradict the laboratory's findings.

"The witch hunt continues and [L'Équipe] article is nothing short of tabloid journalism," Armstrong added.

It's hard to believe the newspaper, at this late date, has challenged the validity of Lance Armstrong's first Tour de France bicycle-race victory in 1999. Just as hard to believe is Armstrong took a performance-enhancing drug -- EPO, which increases production of red blood cells -- that year. Tests for that drug were not developed until 2001.

The newspaper *L'Equipe* reported the 7-year-old urine samples bear evidence of EPO. Armstrong, of course, denies the charge, but Jean-Marie Leblanc, tour director, seems to be taking it seriously.

**It's easier to support Armstrong than the allegation. Here are four interesting questions:**

- 1. How is it that the tainted samples have shown up at this late date?**
- 2. Who can say with certainty that the samples weren't altered in some way?**
- 3. Armstrong was recovering from cancer and taking medicine at the time. What effect might that medicine have had on the samples?**
- 4. Armstrong has strung together seven straight Tour de France victories. It strains credulity he cheated on the first race and then won six more with no help -- and in faster times than 1999.**

**Armstrong's denials are credible. L'Equipe's charge sounds like sour grapes aimed at a truly superb athlete and person.**

**My son, Jason, is a graduate student at Northern Michigan University in Marquette, Michigan. He was on a scholarship there in an effort to make the US Olympic team in weightlifting.**

**NMU trains Olympic athletes in weightlifting, wrestling, boxing and short track speed skating. Athletes in all these sports are randomly tested as frequently as Olympic officials desire, whether it's at a competition or in the middle of the night in a dorm. First-time offenses result in a two year suspension. Second-time offenses lead to lifetime expulsion from further competition.**

**Non Advanced Notice (NAN) drug testing has been in place for some time now. The higher up you go on the "athletic food chain," the more often athletes can expect to be tested for everything from steroids to Sudafed.**

**Perhaps if this kind of policy were in place in the Tour de France, we wouldn't be having this debate today. But then again, the bitter French press would still be crying sour grapes.**

**General George Patton may have expressed it best. "I'd rather have the German army in front of me than the French army behind me."**

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