

# SPORTS

THE BATTALION

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## Armstrong's lead stays at 4 minutes

LES DEUX-ALPES, France (AP) — For Lance Armstrong, every second counts in the three-week Tour de France.

Spanish rival Joseba Beloki surprised him briefly in Tuesday's 15th stage — the longest of the race at 140.43 miles — by surging ahead in the final stretch.

Such a late challenge could only have taken a few seconds off Armstrong's big overall lead, but even that was too much for the American.

He gave chase and crossed the line just behind Beloki, clocking the same time. His overall advantage of 4 minutes, 21 seconds over Beloki was unchanged, and he remained on course for a fourth straight title.

"Les Deux-Alpes, it's not too hard, it's not good for attacking," Armstrong said after the stage, which Colombian rider Santiago Botero won in 5:55:16.

Armstrong was ninth, 6:41 off the pace.

The mountain stage from Vaison-la-Romaine in the southern Provence region to this ski station was the first in the Alps this year. But it wasn't as hard as the two earlier legs in the Pyrenees — both of which Armstrong won — or the trek to the top of the Mont Ventoux, in which he extended his lead.

Also, it was much easier than Wednesday's stretch from Les Deux-Alpes to La Plagne, which features three exceptionally difficult climbs.

Armstrong prefers to be aggressive and attack in the

harder stages, in which rivals are less likely to match his pace. At the Plateau de Beille in the Pyrenees and on the Ventoux, the Texan left Beloki stranded as he sprinted to the summit.

The ride to La Plagne takes Armstrong over the Col de la Madeleine mountain pass, which he tackled last year in one of his biggest stage wins.

Memorably, he grimaced in apparent pain during that climb, then sprinted over the last stretch to L'Alpe d'Huez. He later acknowledged he had bluffed his rivals into thinking he was in difficulty.

Botero's win was his second in this Tour. He stunned Armstrong to win the ninth stage, an individual time trial.

However, Botero is notoriously inconsistent. He finished a whopping 15 minutes off the pace in Sunday's climb up the Ventoux, and is seventh in the overall standings, 11:31 behind Armstrong.

"Today (Tuesday) everything went perfectly, but I'm very disappointed I lost so much time on my 'off' day," Botero said.

Belgian rider Mario Aerts was second on Tuesday, 1:51 behind Botero, and countryman Axel Merckx was third, 2:30 off the pace.

French rider Christophe Moreau dropped out after crashing early in the stage and cutting his lip. The Credit Agricole leader, who placed fourth in the Tour two years ago, had a string of crashes in the first week and was 41st overall when he quit.

## A&M chosen for NCAA meet

### Aggies will host 3rd NCAA championship since 2001

By Dallas Shipp  
THE BATTALION

Texas A&M has been chosen to host another national championship. This time, it is the 2004 women's swimming and diving championships.

The Aggies hosted the men's tennis national championships in the spring and the 2001 men's swimming and diving championship. The meet will be the third national championship event held on A&M's campus

in a four year period, something very few schools can lay claim to. The event will also be the first ever women's national championship event hosted by A&M in any sport.

"I'm very excited about getting the opportunity to host the NCAA Championships," A&M head coach Steve Bultman said. "Particularly since it is an Olympic year."

Although he takes heat from many in the Aggie community, athletic director Wally Groff is

largely responsible for the facility improvements.

The tennis center moved from the older facility near Kyle Field to the state-of-the-art Varsity Tennis Center on West Campus. The swimming and diving teams have moved from the outdoor pool at Deware Field House to one of the premier natatoriums in the nation in the Student Recreation Center.

The soccer, track and softball fields are all under renovation projects right now as well, which will improve their attractiveness to the NCAA committees in the future.

Hosting large events like this also helps recruiting a great deal. Not only do recruits get to see the facilities but they also get to watch the home team compete in a high profile meet with the home crowd at its best.

"I think people realize that we have a great facility," Bultman said. "We are definitely telling the recruits that we are hosting this event and it will only help us."

"It will help the guys in their recruiting too because they are coming back to Texas A&M for the NAAs again. Three or four years down the road we may want to bid for the men again."

At the 2001 Men's Swimming and Diving

Championships, nine American and eight NCAA and U.S. records were broken in front of more than 10,000 fans. The only site to host a larger crowd over the three-day event was in 1986 when Indianapolis drew 11,775.

"It definitely helps having the home pool advantage," Bultman said. "I've been [at A&M] for three conference meets and the two we have had at home we have done very well. We know the facility and like the pool and I think that helps a lot."

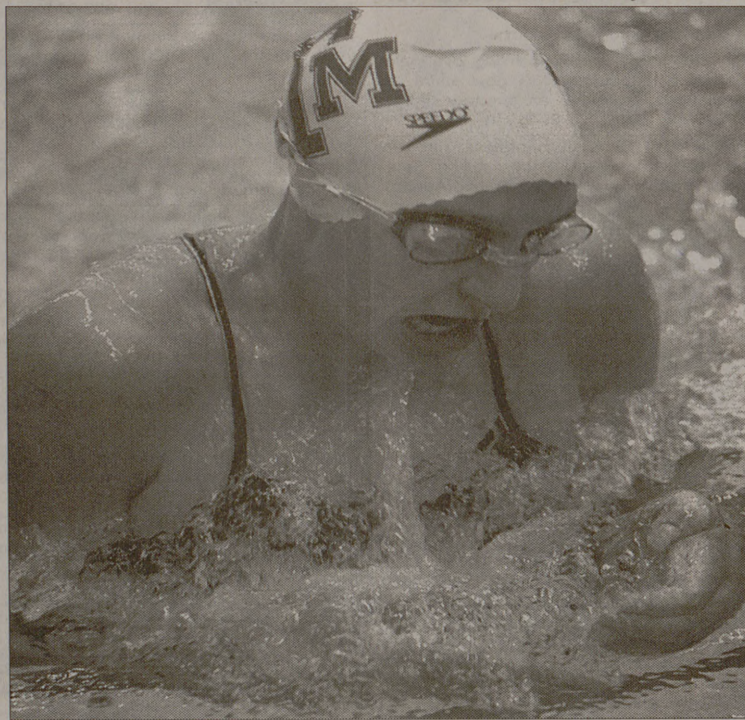
"There is a little more pressure at home because you want to do well in front of your home crowd," Bultman said. "But I think the crowd support more than makes up for it."

Assistant women's coach Kristen Hill said the success of the 2001 men's event played a huge roll in attracting the 2004 women's championship.

"The NCAA committee was very impressed with the great meet our athletic department put on," Hill said. "With so many men's records broken in 2001, the pool is well-recognized as one of the fastest pools in the country. Our facility is state of the art and tough to beat."

**"I'm very excited about getting the opportunity to host the NCAA Championships."**

— Steve Bultman  
A&M women's swimming coach



FILE PHOTO • THE BATTALION

Texas A&M will host the 2004 NCAA Women's Swimming and Diving Championships at the Student Recreation Center natatorium. The event will be the third national championship A&M has hosted since 2001.

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