

SPORTS

THE BATTALION

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Golden Boy

Lance Armstrong wins unprecedented sixth straight Tour de France

By John Leicester
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Lance Armstrong raced onto the crowd-lined Champs-Élysées as a yellow blur, bathed in the shimmering light of a 24-carat, gold-leaf bike, a golden helmet and the race leader's yellow jersey. Earlier, he let up on the pedals long enough to sip some celebratory champagne. Nothing but the best for cycling's best.

Armstrong rode into history Sunday, winning a record sixth Tour de France and cementing his place as one of the greatest athletes of all time.

Never in its 101-year history has the Tour had a winner like Armstrong, who just eight years ago was given less than a 50 percent chance of overcoming testicular cancer that spread to his lungs and brain.

His streak of six straight crowns has helped reinvigorate the greatest race in cycling, steering it into the 21st century. And the Tour, as much a part of French summers as languid meals over chilled rose, molded Armstrong into a superstar.

Taking advantage of the leisurely pace of the final stage, Armstrong sat up in the saddle and held up all five fingers on his black-gloved right hand and the index finger on his left.

"It might take years. I don't know. It hasn't sunk in yet. But six, standing on the top step on the podium on the Champs-Élysées, is really special," he said.

The ride into Paris and its famous tree-lined boulevard was a lap of honor Armstrong savored with the champagne. Even Jan Ullrich, his main adversary in previous years, gulped down a glass

offered by Armstrong's team manager through his car window.

"The last laps there, I thought, 'Ah, I want to get this over with,'" Armstrong said. "But then I thought to myself, 'You know, you might want to do a few more laps, because you may not ever do it again.' And you can't take it for granted."

With the Arc de Triomphe in the background, Armstrong put his yellow bicycle cap over his head during the raising of the American flag and playing of "The Star-Spangled Banner." It might be his last time on the podium, at least for a while. Armstrong has said he might skip the sport's showcase event next year.

Belgian rider Tom Boonen won the final sprint, with Armstrong cruising safely behind with the trailing pack to claim his title. Armstrong's winning margin over second-placed Andreas Klöden was 6 minutes, 19 seconds, with Italian Ivan Basso in third (6:40). Ullrich was fourth (8:50), his worst time.

Armstrong opened a new page for the Tour in 1999, just one year after the race faced its worst doping scandal, ejecting the Festina team after police caught one of its employees with a stash of drugs.

Armstrong's victories and his inspiring comeback from cancer have drawn new fans to a race that has been won five times by four other riders. His professionalism, attention to detail, grueling training regimens and tactics have raised the bar for other riders hoping to win the three-week cycling marathon.

"He's changed the Tour forever," fellow American rider Bobby Julich said. "He has set the blueprint for success, and he deserves all the suc-



Lance Armstrong rides past U.S. flags on Champs-Élysées avenue during the final stage of the Tour de France.

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cess that he is getting."

Armstrong joked and chatted with teammates who wore special blue jerseys with yellow stripes. They stretched in a line across the road with their leader for motorcycle-riding photog-

raphers to record the moment. The team was the muscle behind Armstrong's win, leading him in grueling mountain climbs, shielding him from crashes and wind, and keeping him stoked with drinks and food.

Aggie graduate takes aim for gold at Olympics

By John Lowery
THE BATTALION

About 15 miles southwest of College Station, a little past Snook, down long winding rust-colored roads hedged with corroded water tanks, Connie Smotek stood posing with her shotgun under the shimmering afternoon sun.

As a photographer snapped photos of the A&M graduate who is heading to the Olympics this August to compete in women's skeet shooting, a curious jackrabbit approached Smotek from behind. Not intimidated by Smotek's 5-foot-6-inch frame that stands only a foot or two taller than her shotgun, the animal didn't realize the precarious situation he put himself in by approaching a nine-time national champion who, in her free time, practices blasting skeet with pin-point accuracy. But who's to blame the uninformed bunny; would any of us recognize a skeet shooting Olympian?

"Not so much in the general public," said Smotek on the frequency of shotgun sport athletes being recognized. "We go to Europe in the areas where we compete and people know who we are — especially in Italy because shotgun sports are more an everyday activity and they're so widely televised. No, we'll never get the recognition Lance Armstrong gets, but people in the communities where we frequent tend to recognize us."

Being involved in a sport where the majority of mainstream exposure is from the 1987 duck hunting video game for Nintendo is not a major concern for the two-time Olympian. It's abundantly clear in spending only a small amount of time with the down-to-earth Texas woman that fame or national attention is not on the forefront of her mind. Smotek is simply passionate about shotgun sports and teaching others about them.

Smotek was the first female member of the 4-

H Sportsmen Club, the largest club of its kind in the nation. She is still actively involved in the club, helping children develop the skills necessary to compete in her sport. Her credentials are long and impressive, including a bronze medal from the 1989 World Championships, five national skeet championships and being a member of the 1982 World Championship team. She was also named USA Shooting's female shotgun athlete of the year prior to her skeet championship victories in 1991 and 1992, when she set a women's skeet world record of 196/200 at the 1992 World Cup in Mexico.

This summer, Smotek said she would like to add an Olympic gold medal to her list of achievements.

"In '92, I was one of six women to compete with and against men in the skeet even," said Smotek of her prior Olympic experience in which she finished 25th. "In 2000 women have their own skeet and trap events, so this will be the first time to compete with my peers."

In preparation for this Smotek said she maintains focus through practice.

"Lots of shooting, lots of mental training, lots of visualization," Smotek said. "Trying to be as prepared as possible for any and everything that could happen, learning to deal with the hype of the games, handling the ups and down and learning to be flexible because you don't know what's going to become an issue at the Olympic Games. Typically that's where athletes get in trouble: with the hype of the games. Otherwise it's just another day of practice,



BRIAN WILLS • THE BATTALION

Connie Smotek takes a break from practicing for the Olympics. Smotek will be participating in her second Olympic games.

another day at the range."

Smotek believes these mental preparation and strategy will give her the edge on getting gold, which is a step in the right direction for the growth of her sport.

"Success at the international level and media coverage of the game at an international level is a huge thing," Smotek said.

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Aggies earn Big 12 honors

Texas A&M senior wide receiver Terrence Murphy and junior defensive back Jaxson Appel were selected by the media to the Big 12 Preseason All-Conference team.

Murphy, who established a school record last season with 1,538 all-purpose yards, was named to the offensive squad as a kick returner. Murphy earned the team's offensive MVP distinction in 2003 along with first-team all-Big 12 honors. Murphy's kickoff return average of 27.2 yards per return led the Big 12 last year.

Appel established a school record for defensive backs last year with 135 tackles and was named to the all-Big 12 second team. He started all 12 games at free safety while just a sophomore and was selected A&M's defensive MVP.

Golfers named as scholars

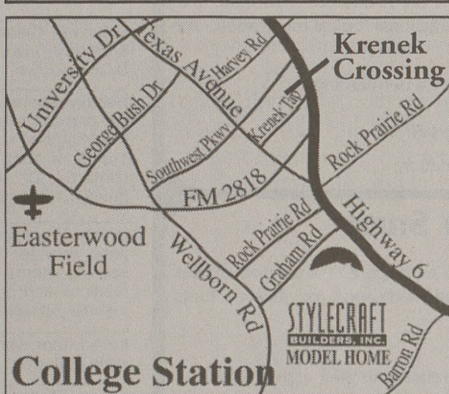
Three members of the Texas A&M women's golf team were recently named to the 2003-04 National Golf Coaches Association All-American Scholar Team.

Senior Nicole Melton, junior Brenda Norris and sophomore Christa Spedding earned the award, which requires recipients to maintain a minimum GPR of 3.5 while competing in at least 66 percent of their team's competitive rounds.

Melton earned second team all-Big 12 honors to lead the Aggies to a second-place finish at the Big 12 championships and a 23rd place finish at the NCAA Championships. Norris earned her second consecutive Academic All-American title, while Spedding became only the third freshman to receive the award. It is the first time in A&M history that three athletes have been named to the Golf All-American Scholar Team.


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