

Admiring Armstrong

Americans should recognize Texan cyclist as the epitome of heroism

The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly." Theodore Roosevelt's comment could apply to Lance Armstrong, who recently won the Tour de France for his sixth time, the only man in history to have done so. In a time when most public figures typically serve as poor role models — an adulterous ex-president peddling his memoirs, rap stars selling the "thug" life as glamorous and various artists glorifying a classless life of depravity — Armstrong stands as a shining monument to the glory of heroism and triumph.



MIKE WALTERS

"I believe that the man who works the hardest is the man who deserves to win," said the 32-year-old Texan. It's a simple statement, but it's accurate. You won't hear Armstrong talking about luck or grace — he trains 12 months out of the year, and earns every bit of his victory.

It would be amazing just knowing that he had won the Tour six times, but his victory over cancer is just as remarkable. Only eight years ago he was diagnosed with a deadly form of testicular cancer that spread to his lungs and brain, and he was given a less than 50 percent chance of living through it. But even then, Armstrong made it a positive thing for his life. When asked about the ordeal, he told The Associated Press that it served as a "wake up call" to remind him that everyone has "an opportunity in life and in sports. In that sense, it was a good thing for me."

The firmness of his beliefs and his consistent, unabashed honesty shone through when someone asked him, at a Stanford panel his cancer foundation sponsored, how his belief in God helped him through as a patient. "Everyone should believe in something," he replied, "and I believed in surgery, chemotherapy and my doctors."

Cancer certainly wasn't his first introduction to hardship. His mother was 17 when he was born, his biological father left them only two years later and he was later abused by a stepfather. But rather than use those hardships as an excuse to limp along through life on charity, whining about how disadvantaged he was, he turned to cycling to channel his emotional pain into a physical exertion that has led him into the pages of sports history.

Sadly, as with all heroes, there are those who are shameless. Greg LeMond, formerly America's greatest cyclist, has publicly accused Armstrong of using EPO to fill his blood with oxygen-rich red blood cells, allowing him to master the mountains on the Tour. Knowing there will always be critics, Armstrong seems to take even those accusations in stride. "Armstrong gets tested for every known drug in his system about as often as rain falls in the Northwest," Oregonian columnist Kurt Robinson said. "To go through rigorous chemotherapy treatments, drugs that push the body to limits unimaginable, then to take performance-enhancing drugs would be senseless."

The only drug Armstrong lives from now is his own passion and his motto, "Live Strong," which has been emblazoned onto yellow wristbands he sells to raise money for his cancer foundation.

The fact that he incorporates the best technology says something important, too. His bike team uses the best and most updated equipment, including wind tunnels, biological monitoring of training and diet and the best bikes to race with. The mastery of nature through the use of tools is one of the most important things that makes man's life on Earth a possibility, and Armstrong uses this philosophy to help him train and ride for success.

Given the adversity Armstrong has faced — from a poor upbringing to cancer and accusations — to think of people demanding handouts and reparations seems an insult to what Armstrong proves is possible to a man of determination. He embodies the true American ideal — an undaunted individual who makes his own way through hard work.

"Man is not made for defeat," Ernest Hemingway once wrote. "A man can be destroyed but not defeated." Armstrong has shown that he refuses to be either. For those who may feel like their dreams are out of reach, he is a fantastic figure who can inspire them to greatness and achievement, if they only have the will to choose such things.



Mike Walters is a senior psychology major. Graphic by Gracie Arenas

MAIL CALL

A&M admissions are not racist

In response to Mike Walters' July 27 column:

In his column, "Too abstract for Aggieland," Mr. Walters manages to insert a casual assertion of racism in the University's admissions policies. Half of our freshmen are admitted by top 10 percent high school class rank, another third are admitted by virtue or proper curriculum, sufficient class rank and sufficient SAT score, and another sixth are admitted by individual review in which race is, by University policy, not used.

Similarly, race is not, by policy, a factor in admissions decisions for transfer or graduate students. Perhaps Mr. Walters missed the controversy caused by the University's decision last year, in the aftermath of the Supreme Court decision on the Michigan case, to not use race as a factor in admissions decisions.

Words have power. With that power, the press also has responsibility. Assertion of racism is serious business — such assertions should not be made in passing and without substantive factual support.

William L. Perry
Vice Provost

Bush embarrasses White House

In response to George Deutsch's August 3 column:

Let's be honest, most readers would rather have the wife of a presidential candidate use the phrase "shove it" than the vice president use the "F" word and be proud of it. More instances of embarrassment that this administration has brought upon itself include the proclamation of "Mission Accomplished," the statement that America will find WMDs in Iraq and Bush's requirement to have Cheney by his side before being questioned by the 9-11 Commission. As for Heinz Kerry's remarks long ago, there are a couple of items that Republicans love to forget about: Bush's use of cocaine in college and his conviction of driving drunk in 1976.

Finally Mr. Deutsch mentioned the theatrics of the Democratic National Convention. More of a "production straight out of Hollywood" will be at the Republican National Convention; the kind that Republicans have used before. In fact, noting Bush's less-than-stellar performances in public speaking, Republicans will need theatrics to hide their lack of talent.

Andy Herreth
Class of 2004

Student athletes represent A&M, must be held to high standards

As representatives of Texas A&M, Aggie football players are held to a higher standard than most students. Unfair as it may be, their actions reflect on the entire University, especially the student body. For this reason, Coach Franchione's dismissal of Nick Rhodes should go without question, and steps should be taken to prevent further embarrassments.

Since the beginning of his first football season in Fall 2003, Coach Franchione has had to deal with several legal mishaps involving his players; Rhodes, of course, being the most recent. There was also the incident last March involving Cole Smith and Geoff Hangartner. Hangartner was arrested after failing a sobriety test and charged with driving while intoxicated. Smith received a citation for public intoxication. Prior to that were the two arrests of Tate Pittman in October and November of 2003. The first was for driving while intoxicated, the second for indecent exposure.

While a player is placed under mandatory suspension if he is charged with a felony, dealing with misdemeanor charges is left to the discretion of the head coach. Pittman was suspended indefinitely from the team for violating the University's code of conduct. He chose on his own accord to leave the University. Smith and Hangartner were suspended until they fulfilled certain requirements including community service, multi-cultural counseling and an alcohol awareness course. Nick Rhodes received two charges of assault, which led to his dismissal by Franchione. Although his decisions may seem harsh, in each case the action taken was necessary to avoid criticism and to discourage other players from behaving in similar ways.

For the sake of A&M's reputation, each case must be handled without bias or favoritism. According to a report on CoachFran.com dated March 22, 2004,



JIM FOREMAN

Franchione uses three phases of disciplinary action — probation, suspension and dismissal. In some cases the first phase may be skipped. In extreme cases the first two may be skipped. Since Franchione has made his methods very clear, players should be well aware of the consequences of their actions.

In the case of Smith and Hangartner, immediate action was essential due to the police report that received national attention. In that report the officer stated that witnesses claimed the players were yelling racial slurs at the passengers of another vehicle. Whether the allegations were true, had the players not been disciplined, Aggies would have been marked as racists.

According to Collegesports.com, the University of Miami recently signed a new recruit, Willie Williams, only to find out that he had a long history of felonies and misdemeanors. Had the university run a criminal background check, Williams would never have been considered.

Unfortunately, like the University of Miami, A&M does not do criminal background checks, primarily because most new recruits are still under 18, and therefore their records are inaccessible. One would think universities would be able to gain access to such information, and steps should be made to enable universities to do so. As it is now, recruiters do speak to the player's family, friends, school counselors and church ministers to get a feel for his character. A good gesture, but one has to wonder if recruiters might be tempted to look the other way on a few minor issues in exchange for a good player.

Lt. Mark Langwell of the College Station Police Department said the number of arrests involving football players has not varied significantly over the past few years, nor is it excessive when compared to the total number of A&M students arrested in College Station. Of the 10 play-

ers arrested, few of them were on major charges. In fact, many of A&M's players should be commended for their positive influence. In the eyes of the media, good deeds go unnoticed. Scandals always make the headlines, and the headlines determine A&M's image. Therefore actions should be taken as soon as possible to prevent future disturbances.

Currently the Athletic Department requires student athletes to take a drug and alcohol awareness course and requires random drug testing. Unfortunately, these actions do little to influence the athletes' abilities to make good decisions, and more needs to be done. Poor judgment seems to be the major error of each of the football players who were arrested in the past year. If something is not done players will continue to get into trouble.

Luckily, Franchione and his staff are looking into a program called "Building Champions with Character." The program will teach players how to handle situations and to stay out of trouble. CSPD is also talking to the Athletic Department about an ethics training course for student athletes. Both programs will be necessary to keep players under control.

It would seem the Athletic Department and Franchione are handling players' indiscretions rather well, and preventing them is a work-in-progress. However, one's behavior, being an act of free will, is solely established by the individual. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the player to represent A&M both on and off the field, which is why the Athletic Department must join the athletes in putting their best foot forward.

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Jim Foreman is a junior mechanical engineering major.

