



Armstrong, photograph near his Aspen home on Nov. 10, 2013



Lance Armstrong

by JOE LINDSEY

with EMILY SHUR



ISSUE



"My life is a lot more public now," says Armstrong. "The Gulfstream is gone. I'm on JetBlue and United."

PARENTAL
VISORY
CIT LANGUAGE

THE MAG: What's life like for you these days?

ARMSTRONG: It's obviously changed drastically. I'm talking more from a mediating standpoint. Twelve, 15 months ago, I was working full time on the [Livestrong] foundation, working full time competing in triathlons. Now, seemingly almost overnight, it's all vanished. So it just freed up a lot of time and simplified my life. Of course, the other side is the complications of that. It takes up a lot of mental energy to negotiate the minefield of lawsuits.

When did it start to change?

The tipping point was Nike—Nike cutting ties with me in a very strong-worded, forceful way, a very public way. After that, everybody left.

How many sponsors did you lose in one day. Forbes estimated it at something like \$150 million in

future revenue lost. What was that day like?

It was upsetting but not surprising. I told myself that at some point they'll all potentially be gone.

What was your reaction to the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency's "reasoned decision"? Did you read it?

[Laughs] No, I've never read it, but I know enough from certain stories or interviews or lawsuits to know basically what is there.

But you understood enough to know it was going to change things irrevocably?

Yeah, but it went in phases. I don't remember when the reasoned decision came out exactly, but then a week or two later, Nike decided to cut ties, and that started the dominoes.

Livestrong was a really big domino.

A big one.

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The biggest?

Certainly for me, leaving the foundation was the most emotional. I understand sponsors making decisions. Those are business decisions—there's a lot of people, consumers to deal with, the media to deal with. And people like to pick on the foundation, but the work that was done—and is continuing to be done—is great work, and regardless of what anybody says, it wasn't a cover for Lance, it wasn't a shell, it wasn't a shield.

You spoke to the employees there after the reasoned decision fallout. What did you tell them?

It was brief. I talked to them just before I drove to the hotel for the Oprah interview [in January] and I said, "I'm going to go talk to her and talk about some things that people have been asking for a long time, and I'm sure there'll be fallout from that and I'm sorry for that, and I'm sorry to them and the organization." And that's been the biggest issue—that this hurt the support the survivors had. I think back to someone who was diagnosed in 1999 and this whole story they believed in. And they fought for me, whether it was online or in a hallway or a café or a bar. They had my back. And now they got egg on their face.

What do those people say to you now?

It's interesting: My life is a lot more public now. The Gulfstream is gone. I'm on JetBlue and United. So I spend a lot of time on airplanes with people and in terminals or just traveling around and going to restaurants or whatever. The interaction I get on a daily basis is positive.

Why do you think that is?

I think people are more decent than we give them credit for. I can sense when somebody maybe wants to say something. But they don't. And I'm not saying they won't—and I'm not bragging. I'm just saying no one has ever gotten in my face and said, "You're a fucking schmuck," or, "You're a fraud." You give people a private room and a computer and a keyboard and they go crazy. So far, things have been pretty dang supportive in person. But I know that isn't accurate.

What were your goals going into the Oprah interview?

I didn't have any goals. I was going to sit there

the interview issue

and answer her questions honestly. I think she felt challenged.

How so?

I think people thought she wouldn't give a tough interview, not ask hard questions.

She still gets criticized for that.

I thought the first five minutes got her out of that trap.

But people felt she missed chances for follow-ups.

Yeah, but that's the cycling fan saying it's not enough. If you ask me questions about what I did in 2001, I'm not going to answer your questions. If the governing body of the sport decides to have a complete and comprehensive effort to try to address and learn and understand everything, then that's when I'll answer questions. But this isn't the time and place to answer those questions. If the mission is really to address the issue, not singling out individuals, then let's do that [at a truth and reconciliation commission]. In that setting, ask the question, I'll answer the question.

If you could go back to 1992, when you turned pro, would you make a different decision?

This may not be a popular answer, but I don't think I would've made a different decision in 1995 [the start of Armstrong's EPO use]. I would've made different decisions from 1999 to 2005 [during his Tour de France title run]. I would have made a very different decision in 2008 [when he announced his comeback].

Meaning not to come back?

Correct. If I don't come back in 2009, we're not sitting here today. The comeback was the bridge to the past. The impression we're left with is that there was a blood bag hanging six months ago or a year ago, when there was not. There was in 2005 [his last Tour win], but not after that.

Going back to 1999 [after the Festina doping scandal], I was put in a unique position. And again, I'm not justifying my lying; it was wrong. I was winning the Tour de France the year after Festina. There were going to be questions. It could have been Yosemite Sam winning, and he would have been asked a lot of questions. And if he's winning the Tour in 1999, he's crossing the line [by doping], for sure. I think that person does the same thing I did, to a degree.



I don't know anybody who at some press conference gets asked, "Are you clean?" and answers: "I'm glad you asked me that. And I'm not." And inevitably I was asked that question more than anyone.

My excuse, if I'm allowed to give an excuse—which is inexcusable—is that I was defending myself and I was defending my sport, which was on life support [after Festina]. I was defending my [U.S. Postal Service] team. I was defending the foundation. In a weird way, I had no choice. I wanted those things to thrive and survive. Now, where I crossed the line was where someone just kept pushing the issue or was more outspoken with questioning my cleanliness. Those are monumental mistakes that I made. I would love to go back to 1999 when the journalist from *Le Monde* got in my face [about Armstrong's cortisone positive]. I would have just backed down. But that wasn't me. I was born and raised a fighter and just not smart enough to have that switch to go from, "Okay, you're in the race, you got these guys on the ropes, fucking throttle 'em," to, "You're in the press conference; this is not your domain, just back off." I didn't have that switch.

Do you think that would've worked?

It did for other people and continues to work for other people. My story that we're dwelling on, it's given cover to everyone.

So the focus on your story has been so all-consuming that it has distracted us from other people who should be talking about their doping?

Yes, the shadows are huge. And by the way, no one is raising their hand [to talk] now. And again, I'm not playing the pity card. My story was so big, and the momentum and attention was so big, I deserve all that. When your tree is that big, it's windy up there.

Do you think you've been targeted, maybe not unfairly but to the exclusion of others?

We can't deny that there's been selective prosecution. And because of that, there's been selective honesty.

So what's the danger of that?

I'm mostly to blame, but this story and the momentum has been so big, and the down side of it has been so big that it has given cover to almost anyone. Listen, with all due respect to Travis [Tygart, CEO of USADA], if you're going to say that [the Postal team] was the most sophisticated doping program in the history of sport, you better study the other ones. If there are 20 teams and you study one, you can't make that claim. Give me the T-Mobiles, the ONCEs, the CSCs, give me the Kelmes, give me all of them and then let's evaluate. To study one and make that accusation is so irresponsible. You can't fucking do that.

How long will it take to resolve all of the lawsuits against you?

Years. I've done my best to do the right thing in every case. I've tried to negotiate and settle one of them. I want to move on with my life.

Can you participate in a truth and reconciliation commission before those are resolved?

I think so. I think we all feel strongly that there would be a unique set of circumstances I would participate in. The UCI [International Cycling Union] said the other day that Lance Armstrong would be treated like any other athlete. I'm sure that's true. So we'll just wait to see. It's the only place I'm going to talk.

Are there conditions on that participation?

Only the conditions that are set out for everybody else.

Does your lifetime ban from competition in a sport come into play? Would you like to see it reduced or eliminated?

Where did I say that publicly? That's been widely reported because Travis said that. I never said I want to race again or have my ban cut. It's not about competition. People dwell on this, but I'm not 22. I'm going to be 43. Oh, I want to go run a slow NYC marathon? No.

People question whether you understand why you were singled out, that it wasn't just for doping.

Yeah, I totally understand that. I think in terms of doping—I'm talking about the dozen guys who were trying to win the Tour—we all knew what everybody was doing. [The Postal team] was more conservative, and that's the reason we were never going to be caught. This is a story because I was a bigger asshole. Because I was more litigious. Because I was more combative. Those are all subheadlines. But the real reason is that my story was that big. And I've heard from a lot of people who say, "You made all the money, you got all the fame; you deserve this." And I hear that, and I understand that people think that way. But it's not consistent with what USADA has said. USADA has said, "If we're presented with the evidence, we have to act in order to protect the rights of clean athletes." You know as well as I that there were no clean athletes. There were none.

Well, very few.

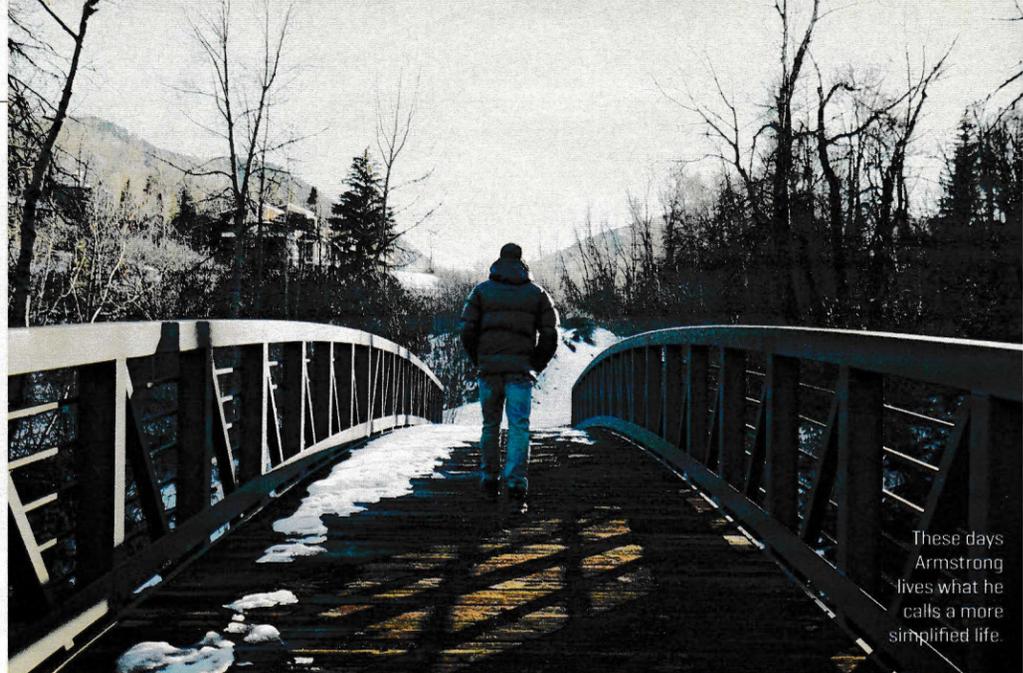
Yes, very few. So again, if we're going to be honest [*pounds table*], that's not honest! If we're going to be honest, then just say: "He's an asshole. We had to go after him. He tested positive for being the biggest asshole in the world." Fair. I can live with that. To say that he cheated his competitors? Ask them! Ask my competitors.

The narrative now is that while yes, you were the biggest asshole in the world ...

I'm not sure I was the biggest asshole in the world, but I definitely played one on TV.

... the perception is that you were devious, you attacked people, you lied pathologically. How can you start to regain trust?

No. 1, I totally understand there is a tremendous lack of trust. I have no credibility. It will take a long time to gain any of it back. And I may gain none. But I'll do what I can, for as long as I can and have to, to get back to doing the things that I want to do. And it's not—at 42 years old—to go try to win the Tour de France. That's not what I'm asking for. I still do a lot of things in private settings that I don't talk about, with [cancer] survivors who are just struggling, that I think are appreciated. But to get back to a place where you start to have a more significant impact is going to take time. People are going to have to forgive and start to trust again before I can go work for Livestrong again or any organization. And every day, I run the risk of: Is it one step



These days Armstrong lives what he calls a more simplified life.

forward, three steps back? Or three steps forward and one step back?

Nobody's ever come up to my face, but I read my Twitter flow. I've had people send me Mellow Johnny's jerseys [Armstrong's bike shop in Austin], saying: "I bought these for years, I supported you, I believed you. I fought for you. I can't wear this anymore." I understand what that is. And I just have to recognize that and try to make amends with certain groups. There's the group that was most deeply affected, that I was horrible to. I've done whatever I can do there, in my view. Then there's cycling fans. Then there's this following of survivors and their friends and loved ones, and then there's the general public. The cycling part, I don't know what to do. The cancer part, I need to work very hard on that; it means the most to me. The general public just evolves as they evolve.

In recent interviews, you've given some different answers from what you gave to Oprah. People can take that as, "This guy's still not being honest." Well, that was a major theme after Oprah: "This guy's still lying to us."

It's, "He's still only telling part of the truth." And you know, in many ways that might be true. You're there for an hour. I can't give you 15 years' worth of stories in an hour. You're trying to compress this into an admission and an apology in one hour. But at the same time, you've got a grandmother from Duluth going: "Holy shit, blood bags? Doping? What?" *Way* too much. And then you've got the [cycling audience] saying, "No, no, you were not nearly specific enough about this, this and this ..." We need a truth and reconciliation commission to tell all of that.

What do you want to get back to in life?

Well, first and foremost to resolve or settle any and all legal matters. And along the way I have to look after myself and my family. Over time—and it doesn't have to be Livestrong—I have to get back to work in that community. Regardless of all that's happened and the lies that were told, I'm still a cancer survivor. It's still the thing that always meant the most to me and that I did fight for in going too far. I'd love to have some level of trust and credibility, even on a small level. I'd like to get back to serving other people. It's not up to me, though. I don't have the standing or level of trust in the public, or the energy, quite honestly, to start my own thing again. I have to wait for that community to say, "Hey, Lance, come over and help us out."

You feel you have to be invited back?

Yes. I can't invite myself, and I can't rush it or force it. And the legal part of it is a big deal because the best strategists in the world would say: "Just go away. Just disappear for a while. Literally, don't be heard from, don't give interviews, don't tweet." And in all fairness, part of why I'm sitting here today is I *can't* go away. Any time there's any legal issue, it's a major story. It's in the press, and people are reminded of it and it's a fight. It continues to live on. You've got the federal government that wants \$100 million [in a lawsuit for Postal sponsorship dollars]. That's a news story, believe me. And there are other cases. So that has to die down in order to begin this period of isolation.

What if the invitation doesn't come?

Well, if it doesn't come, then I'll be sad about that. I refuse to believe it won't come. But the level of betrayal may be so high that it never comes. That will fucking knock me to the core. I

THE
INTERVIEW
ISSUE



AT LA
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NICK FOL
KEVIN WA
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