

The Dallas Morning News

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Tour champs gear up as allegations swirl

Leslie Snyder

The U.S. Postal Service team, headed by Tour de France champion **Lance Armstrong**, begins preparing for a run at a third straight Tour win next summer with a training camp starting Friday in Austin.

The main emphasis is on working in new team members, "closing out a successful 2000 and starting a new chapter," said team spokesman Dan Osipow.

But not too far in the background is the specter of a French investigation of allegations that the team may have violated rules involving banned substances or the performance-enhancing process of blood doping.

The Postal Service team said it still hasn't had any official notice of a formal inquiry and called the allegations aired on French TV "baseless." A statement from team general manager Mark Gorski says "the facts will unconditionally support our assertion that the team meets or exceeds all of the standards" set by cycling's governing bodies.

Osipow said he couldn't comment specifically on the investigation, since it's now a legal matter. But he said Armstrong's squeaky-clean reputation - and the team's zero-tolerance approach to violations - will prevail in the end. "They're implicating him on his success," Osipow said of Armstrong.

Such was the case during the 1999 Tour, when suggestions surfaced in the French media that Armstrong, on his way to his astounding, post-cancer-recovery win, must have been doing something illicit.

The line of reasoning went like this: It's barely believable that he's even racing after his cancer ordeal, much less winning. Armstrong and the team had strong words for those

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allegations at the time, and followed with an in-your-face Nike commercial early this year.

"Everybody wants to know what I'm on," Armstrong said in the ad, which showed him undergoing routine post-race drug testing as well as training. "What am I on? I'm on my bike six hours a day ... what are you on?" the ad concluded.

Then there was another Tour de France victory this past summer, with less strident questioning of how it was possible. But the current investigation shows the controversy is far from over.

"That [Nike] commercial was never more relevant," Osipow said Wednesday. Still, he said the French inquiry won't be a distraction to the team, which is putting its focus on next year's racing season.

Earlier this year, the Postal Service team acted on its zero-tolerance policies when second-year pro Benoit Joachim came under investigation after a non-team race - the national championships in his home country of Luxembourg.

Joachim, who was released from the team, later was cleared of banned-substances violations, which Osipow said stemmed from an over-the-counter medication.

"Some people say we have egg on our faces" for removing Joachim from the team, but Osipow says it's just proof of how seriously the team takes the rules.

10.) BRIEFLY

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CYCLING

France won't destroy samples

French sports minister Marie-George Buffet says she can't comply with a request from cycling's governing body to destroy Tour de France riders' frozen urine samples because judicial authorities want them for an investigation of Lance Armstrong's team. The Texan, who won the 1999 and 2000 Tours, has repeatedly denied taking banned performance-enhancing drugs, and U.S. Postal Service

The Dallas Morning News

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BRIEFLY

Compiled by Matt Wixon From wire reports

CYCLING

Armstrong again denies drug use The product at the core of doping allegations against **Lance Armstrong's** team in the Tour de France was banned Tuesday by the International Olympic Committee. Armstrong, meanwhile, said he might not compete in next year's Tour if charges of drug use continue. The IOC medical commission banned Actovegin, containing extracts of calf's blood. Armstrong and the team have repeatedly denied using any banned drugs. "I'll start by saying that we are completely innocent," Armstrong said on his Web site Tuesday. "We run a very clean and professional team that has been singled out due to our success. I will say that the substance on people's minds, Activ-o-something [Actovegin] is new to me."

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LANCE ARMSTRONG: In the wake of another charge of illegal drug use against him and his U.S. Postal Service Cycling Team, our two-time Tour de France champion said last week that he was so upset he just might boycott the 2001 tour. The best way to answer the allegations, however, would be to keep testing negative for banned drug use and keep on beating the naysayers

The Dallas Morning News

December 18, 2000

Armstrong to defend Tour de France title, manager says

Associated Press

Just days after **Lance Armstrong** threatened to skip next year's Tour de France, his team manager said the champion planned to try to ride for a third straight title.

Armstrong vented his frustration last week with an ongoing investigation into the drug Actovegin when he suggested he might stay home from next year's event.

But U.S. Postal cycling team manager Mark Gorski said Armstrong will be back.

"Lance and [coach] Johan Bruyneel have assured me that our goal remains the same - to defend the yellow jersey in the 2001 Tour," Gorski said. "This will continue to be our team's main competitive focus, and we will enter the 2001 season with a goal of winning cycling's greatest event for the third consecutive year."

The French prosecutor's office is continuing its investigation into whether Postal Service riders used Actovegin or other possible illegal substances while riding in the Tour.

Gorski said in a statement Saturday that the squad's doctor had legal permission to use and prescribe a drug during July's race that has since become the subject of an international doping scandal, the Austin American-Statesman reported Sunday.

Gorski said the French medical control agency - Agence Francaise de Securite Sanitaire des Produits de Sante - authorized the team doctor to bring Actovegin into the country for the three-week race.

On Tuesday, the drug Actovegin was placed on the banned substance list by the

International Olympic Committee in Lausanne, Switzerland. The IOC determined that the drug, which is manufactured in Norway and contains extracts of calves' blood, can be used to improve the circulation of oxygen in the blood, similar to the effects of the banned blood booster erythropoietin (EPO).

The doctor had Actovegin in his medical supply bag to treat severe skin abrasions caused by crashes. Gorski said the drug also was used by a staff member to treat diabetes.

Gorski said in a statement: "Since the preposterous rumor continues to fester in the international press, I want to clearly state that none of the nine riders representing the U.S. Postal Service Pro Cycling Team at the 2000 Tour de France used Actovegin."

The investigation into the Postal Service team was prompted by an anonymous letter stating that a French television crew had witnessed what it described as suspicious behavior of people allegedly connected with the U.S. Postal Service team during the Tour.

According to the letter, members of the TV crew followed two men thought to be connected to the U.S. team who were driving a vehicle with German license plates. The men dumped two trash bags into a bin. The crew took the bags, which it said contained medical compresses, packaging from foreign products and medicine, including Actovegin.

As required by Tour rules, Armstrong was tested each day he wore the yellow jersey, which signifies the race's overall leader. He has never tested positive for a banned substance, but the French media has openly speculated that Armstrong must have been taking something illegal after being treated for advanced testicular cancer.

The Dallas Morning News

January 5, 2001

French court proceeds with Armstrong drug test Tour de France winner has denied cheating

Verena von Derschau Associated Press

French courts have moved ahead with plans to test urine samples taken from **Lance Armstrong** and his teammates during last year's Tour de France, a judicial source said.

The urine samples have been undergoing analysis to determine whether the riders took performance-enhancing drugs, according to the source, who is close to the investigation and spoke on condition of anonymity. Three experts have been designated to perform the tests, and judicial officials are waiting for the results.

In December, French Sports Minister Marie-George Buffet refused to comply with a request from cycling's governing body to destroy the frozen urine samples because judicial authorities wanted them for an investigation of Armstrong's team.

Armstrong, a Plano native and current Austin resident, came back from testicular cancer to win the 1999 and 2000 Tours. His rapid ascent to the top of the cycling world after battling cancer led some to suggest that he must have been doing something illicit. Armstrong has repeatedly denied taking illegal substances, and U.S. Postal Service officials have said the team respects anti-doping rules.

Armstrong has intimated that he and the U.S. Postal Service team have been targeted with allegations because of their success.

Based on an anonymous tip, judicial authorities opened a preliminary investigation in November into whether the team used banned substances during the Tour.

The urine samples were taken from Tour riders in July and frozen in anticipation of International Olympic Committee approval for an EPO urine test developed by a French

laboratory.

EPO, or erythropoietin, enhances endurance by boosting the production of oxygen-carrying red blood cells. The substance was at the heart of the drug scandal at the 1998 Tour de France.

Although the IOC approved a combined blood and urine test for the Sydney Olympics, it has not approved a urine-only test.

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