



Tour of California may stop in S.C.

Bicycle Races 7-4-08

Organizers of premier cycling race entering negotiations with city

By JULIE JAG
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — County residents might want to pay a little more attention when the Tour de France cycling race begins Saturday.

Come February, many of those professional cyclists could be peddling past their front doors.

Santa Cruz is a finalist to host a stage of the 2009 Amgen Tour of California pro bike race, city leaders announced Thursday.

"We've been pitching ourselves for a couple of years now as great city. Now they're expressing interest," Santa Cruz Mayor Ryan Coonerty said. "We're trying to work through the details to make this happen."

The roughly 650-mile race down the California coast has blossomed to become perhaps the nation's most competitive stage race. The ocean views and the difficult terrain rac-

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Santa Cruz's Benjamin Jacques-Maynes races in the time trials of the 2008 Amgen Tour of California Feb. 17 in Palo Alto. Organizers for the 2009 tour are entering into contract negotiations with the city of Santa Cruz to host a stage finish.

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The Tour of California draws competitors from all over the world, such as Vincent Jerome of France, who competed in the Tour last year.

Race

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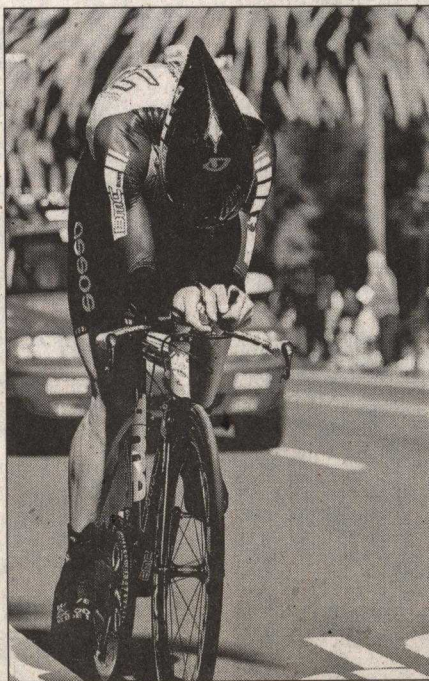
ers encounter as they head south in a series of city-to-city races, or stages, has helped the tour draw teams and riders from around the globe, including many of the frontrunners in the Tour de France.

In 2006, American Floyd Landis won the Tour of California with Team Phonak five months before claiming the yellow jersey in the Tour de France. Landis has since been stripped of his Tour de France title after being found guilty of doping.

Santa Cruz has petitioned to host a stage finish for three of the Tour of California's four years. Previously, the city has not fit into the organizers' plans — leaving cycling fans to travel to the San Francisco area, San Jose or Seaside to glimpse the cyclists.

This year, however, the Tour of California is expected to expand from eight stages to nine. And tour organizers are serious enough about including Santa Cruz to want to enter into contract negotiations with the city.

At its meeting Tuesday, the City Council plans to grant city staff permission to enter into final negotiations with Tour of California organizers, Coonerty said. During those negotiations, the city and tour organizers will work out details such as the exact route the cyclists would follow, street improvements to be made and the number of meals, hotel rooms and other services the



Anthony L. Solis/Contributed photo

Santa Cruz resident Taylor Tolleson competes in the time trial of the 2008 Tour of California Feb. 17 in Palo Alto. City leaders are hoping the world-class cycling race will make a stop in Santa Cruz next year.

Council will have to approve the city's share of the cost — likely to range between \$75,000 and \$95,000, though some can be offset by

part of the route.

Matt Twisselman, the coordinator of Santa Cruz's bid to host the Tour of California, said he expects the route to be announced later this month.

"If we are selected, it would be a big plus for the community," Twisselman said.

Twisselman said Santa Cruz stands to recoup far more than it spends on the tour in tourism and publicity. Last winter, the tour brought in an estimated \$100 million and 1.6 million spectators to its 14 host cities.

Seaside, 40 miles to the south, is one of the host cities closest to Santa Cruz in size and distance. Jill Anderson, the assistant city manager there, said the city has not studied the specific economic impact the tour has made on Seaside during its two years as a stage start. Still, she said, the benefits have been noticeable.

"It's been a great chance for the city of Seaside to welcome visitors to Seaside that it otherwise might not have gotten to," she said. "It's definitely been a positive experience."

Twisselman said he expects nothing less for Santa Cruz — if it becomes an official stage.

"My hopes for this is, if we get it, that this is an event that a lot of people can get behind," Twisselman said. "These are the best pro racers in the world, and it's a good sport and one that has a lot of interest in Santa Cruz."

Sentinel staff writer Genevieve Bookwalter contributed to this report.