

TOUR OF CALIFORNIA

Mr. Live Strong

For better or worse, Lance Armstrong casts a giant shadow over cycling

Bicycle races

By WALLACE BAINE
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A poster advertising the Tour of California bicycle race features a photo of a long line of close to 100 cyclists snaking down a picturesque coastal road. Above them, hanging in the hazy sky like an Aztec sun god, is an enormous ghostly image of a smiling Lance Armstrong.

In terms of Armstrong's standing in his sport of choice, the poster has it about right. No one — not Tiger, not Kobe, not A-Rod — dominates his field like the 37-year-old Armstrong, at least in the U.S. where almost all casual sports fans can name one professional cyclist, and hardly any can name two.

SEE ARMSTRONG ON A2

Organizers offer advice on where to watch and how to get there

By GENEVIEVE BOOKWALTER
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SANTA CRUZ — Organizers have two words for anyone wanting to watch the downtown finish of stage two of the Amgen Tour of California: don't drive.

Pedal a bicycle, walk or skateboard. Take the bus or carpool. But with limited space and up to 30,000 people expected downtown, it could be a difficult day to park anywhere near the Front Street finish line, organizers said.

"Just ride your bike. That's the best way to do it," said Matt Twisselman, chairman of the race's local

SEE WATCH ON A2

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Lance Armstrong has single-handedly brought the sport of cycling to the forefront in the U.S.

AP FILE PHOTO

Local racer hot on Armstrong's heels as Tour kicks off

By JULIE JAG
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SACRAMENTO — Andy Jacques-Maynes held off his asthma attack long enough to finish the prologue in his first Tour of California on Saturday. But the professional cyclist from Capitola couldn't hold off Lance Armstrong, Levi Leipheimer or Fabian Cancellara.

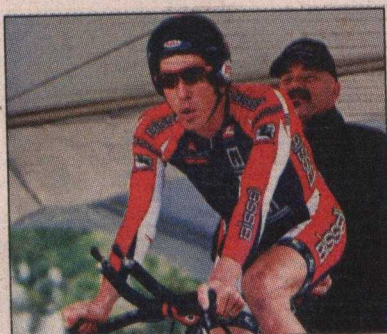
Cancellara of Switzerland won the 3.8-kilometer opening sprint in 4 minutes,

32.9 seconds. Among the last to start and with the threat of rain growing stronger with each racer, he streaked around the crowd-lined Capitol Park at an average of about 30 mph. Leipheimer, a local favorite out of nearby Santa Rosa, took second at 2 seconds back and David Zabriskie was third.

No one drew more cheers or more attention, however, than Armstrong.

SEE TOUR ON A2

Ben Jacques-Maynes prepares to start his time trial during the prologue of the Tour of California in Sacramento on Saturday.



LYNE LAMOUREUX/
CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

ARMSTRONG

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Now, Santa Cruz becomes part of the Lance Armstrong story, hosting the finishing leg of the second stage of the Amgen Tour on Monday. This year's tour marks Armstrong's return to the cycling circuit in the U.S. Armstrong's first race since announcing his return to the sport last September was the Tour Down Under in Australia in January. Now, he'll be one of the competitors to cross the finish line in downtown Santa Cruz, all as prelude to another shot at his signature event, the mighty Tour de France.

To say that Armstrong's story is improbable is to say water is wet. His domination of the Tour de France — winning seven consecutive years from 1999 to 2005 — is one of the great achievements in the history of sports. In the Tour's 100-year-plus history, no one else had won it more than five times. Yet, as amazing as it sounds, Armstrong's domination of the Tour de France ranks only second in the list of daunting challenges he's met in his own life. In 1996, Armstrong was diagnosed with testicular cancer, which had spread to his lungs and brain. His recovery spurred his involvement in fighting cancer through his organization Livestrong, and symbolized by the ubiquitous yellow bracelets worn by cancer survivors and their supporters.

"His approach to everything he has done reflects a kind of tenacity and strong will," said Aptos cancer survivor Gary Williamson, an Armstrong fan before his diagnosis of colon cancer two years ago. Williamson and his son Brian have raised more than \$25,000 for Livestrong as part of their effort to climb 14 mountain peaks higher than 14,000 feet.

"Lance Armstrong was the reason to follow cycling just as Tiger Woods is the reason to follow golf," said Williamson. "It's Lance's drive and his pursuit of excellence over time that's appealing more so than the sport itself."

Armstrong has also been pursued by lingering allegations that he has taken illegal performance-enhancing drugs. The allegations, particularly in the

'Lance Armstrong was the reason to follow cycling just as Tiger

Woods is the reason to follow golf.'

GARY WILLIAMSON, cancer survivor

European press, have been persistent and specific. But Armstrong has never tested positive for any illegal drug, and has thus far eluded the accusations that he's a dooper.

Armstrong fans have, for years, suggested that the doping allegations stem more from jealousy and an European resentment of Armstrong's dominance than anything Lance has done.

"Any time anybody's on top like Lance is," said long-time fan Tom Farmer of Santa Cruz, "you're going to hear that. But nothing has ever stuck to him. I don't believe it has anything to do with doping. I think he has genes that a lot of people don't have, and his ethic in his training regimen is very strong. He believes in suffering."

Still, with disgraced fellow cyclist Floyd Landis — who won the Tour de France in 2006, but was stripped of the title when he failed a drug test — in this year's Tour of California, and with new revelations of steroid use surfacing in baseball against superstar Alex Rodriguez, Armstrong has not yet outlasted the swirling rumors of drugs.

But to those who respect Armstrong, it's all useless chatter. His stature in the world of cycling and his influence in popularizing the sport cannot be overstated.

"Lance has had a huge impact on the popularity of the sport," said Carmen D'Alusio of Corralitos, a manager of two women's bicycling teams.

Certainly to fans who've had some experience with the gantlet of surviving cancer, Armstrong's exploits on the bicycle are more than just the gifts of an extraordinary athlete and competitor. They make for a powerful metaphor for the robust survival instincts needed to beat back illness and death, and to make the long uphill climb ahead not just something to endure, but a moment of triumph.

WATCH

Continued from A1

organizing committee.

The Tour of California rolls into Santa Cruz on Monday, which should be a thrill for tens of thousands of fans but could be a headache for those who do not plan ahead on transportation, organizers said. The event is the largest of its kind on the continent and is generating even more excitement with the return to cycling of Tour de France champion Lance Armstrong.

Once spectators arrive at their favorite viewing spot, Twisselman said, the best idea is to stay there. Driving somewhere else, he said, could take more time and cause more frustration than it's worth.

If passionate fans must see the riders whizz by twice, Twisselman said, a good idea is to watch cyclists turn off Highway 1 onto Bonny Doon Road, then ride a bicycle downtown and beat them to the finish line.

"That's probably the best way," Twisselman said. "Once the riders get up to the top of Bonny Doon Road they're going to really be coming down fast. It's going to be hard to see them in more than one location."

For those stationed around town who can't see the finish, Twisselman said, giant TV screens will broadcast it from the nearby Lifestyle Festival and on the corner of Front, Pacific and Water Street in front of Jamba Juice.

Twisselman's additional advice?

"Wear a jacket. Goretex," he said. "Come out rain or shine. It's a once in a lifetime opportunity to see these guys come into our town."

TOUR

Continued from A1

Behind heavy crowd support that was both chalk-marked on the streets and crackling through the air, the seven-time Tour de France champion from Texas finished 10th in 4:37.

That time beat out Ben Jacques-Maynes, Andy's twin brother, by just 1 second. The sixth racer on the course, he held first for a short time before eventually dropping to 13th overall. Brother Andy finished 23rd in 4:42.

"You just get out there and go and go," said Ben Jacques-Maynes, whose

specialty is time trials. "You get in a bigger gear and see if you can win it."

"The guys right in front of me are world class," he added, noting Cancellara is the defending Tour of California champion and a Tour de France stage winner, as is Leipheimer. "That's pretty good company to keep."

With five of eight Bissell Pro Cycling riders placing in the top 25 Saturday, the Jacques-Maynes brothers may be able to keep that company for the rest of the nine-day, 750-mile tour. Last year, Ben finished 16th in the general classification.

Then again, the brothers will be looking to shake the peloton come Monday when the tour rolls into their

backyard. The 115-mile Stage 2 begins Sausalito and finishes in downtown Santa Cruz. It's a stage win both Jacques-Maynes have admitted they crave.

First, though, they have to make the trek from Davis to Santa Rosa. It's a 107.6-mile race expected to be made even tougher by strong winds and rain.

"What it's going to take is a guy who's mentally strong," said Andy Jacques-Maynes. "It's going to be really hard. Everyone going to cross [the finish line] with that haunted look on their face."

Andy Jacques-Maynes looked relaxed and ready for more as he cooled down under a team tent post-race.

Moments earlier, he hadn't been so composed.

During the final sprint to the finish, he felt his lungs seize up in an asthma attack.

"I crossed the finish line totally gassed," he said.

Luckily, he anticipated it — the attacks have become more common since he seriously injured himself, including collapsing part of his lung, in a cyclocross accident last year — and a team aide met him at the finish line with inhaler in hand. But even that couldn't put a damper on his first Tour of California race.

"A huge crowd, lots of people, fast racers," he said, "I'm really happy to be a part of it."

