

The Wheel Deal

Thousands descend on Santa Cruz County as world's best bicyclists tear into town

Bicycle Races

2/17/09



Astana team rider Levi Leipheimer of Santa Rosa hears the cheers from the crowd as he's escorted to the victory stand in Santa Cruz on Monday after finishing second behind Garmin rider Thomas Peterson but securing his spot as the overall leader of the Tour of California after two stages.

DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

MORE INSIDE



LOCAL BOYS | SPORTS, B9
Mixed bag for Jacques-Maynes; Ben shines early, Andy crashes out



THE RACE | SPORTS, B9

Race officials applaud city's efforts while cycling fans marvel at the sport's elite

By J.M. BROWN

jbrown@santacruzsentinel.com

SANTA CRUZ — Thousands of cycling fans intent on catching a glimpse of Lance Armstrong and other world-class riders gathered along the wet roads stretching from Bonny Doon to Santa Cruz on Monday to witness the Amgen Tour of California's arrival.

Skies that dumped sheets of rain overnight and throughout the morning turned sunny by 2 p.m., when rider Thomas Peterson crossed the race's Stage 2 finish line at Front and Cooper streets in 5 hours, 6 minutes and 20 seconds. The race's overall leader, Levi Leipheimer of Santa Rosa, finished close behind in second place.

After leaving Sausalito at 8:30 a.m., crossing the Golden Gate Bridge and traversing the streets of San Francisco, riders barreled south across three counties, straddling the stormy Pacific



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

A mixture of hail and rain falls on spectators as they await the cyclists near Pine Flat and Empire Grade roads Monday.

coast to reach the intersection of Highway 1 and Bonny Doon Road pushing up Pine Flat Road and about 12:45 p.m.

Cyclists crawled up the steep,

SEE RACE ON A2



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Watsonville's Ben Jacques-Maynes, second from right, works in the lead pack in Stage 2 of the Tour of California on Monday as the race enters Santa Cruz County on Highway 1. The blue skies were fleeting, though, as rain and hail greeted the riders in Bonny Doon.

RACE

Continued from A1

down Empire Grade Road, winding their way past UC Santa Cruz toward downtown for one of the city's largest events in recent years.

However, it was a disappointing day for Watsonville's Andy Jacques-Maynes, who dropped out of the race and was taken to Dominican Hospital after being injured in a crash involving more than a dozen riders, including Armstrong. The seven-time Tour de France victor returned to the race shortly after the 12:30 p.m. collision, finishing 13th in Stage 2 and moving up to fourth in the overall rankings.

The extent of Jacques-Maynes' injury was unclear Monday night. Twin brother Ben Jacques-Maynes, who graduated from UCSC, finished 28th in Stage 2 and 26th overall.

When told of the Jacques-Maynes accident, spectator and 10-year cyclist James Russell, 40, of Santa Cruz, said, "It's very unfortunate. He is a local cyclist and he wants to pull out a strong finish."

Fans from around the Bay Area and throughout the country packed Santa Cruz County to watch the colorful stream of cyclists whiz through the second stage of the eight-day race from Sacramento to San Diego. The race resumes today from San Jose to Modesto.

Santa Cruz police said the downtown crowd swelled to 10,000 by mid-day and everything went smoothly.

Andrew Messick, president of AEG Sports, which puts on the race, said he was so impressed with the reception in Santa Cruz he would consider bringing the race back "without a doubt."

"From the race's perspective we had a great experi-

'For a first-time city, the reaction that we got from the people in Santa Cruz was tremendous. We felt as though the race had been here for many years before. Obviously there's a lot of passion for cycling here.'

ANDREW MESSICK,
AEG Sports president

ence," Messick said. "We feel like the combination of the physical beauty of this area, the support of the community, our partners at the local organizing committee, all of them were fantastic. Just the potential of great bicycle racing all make Santa Cruz a superb place."

Messick said he did not expect the estimated 10,000 people who gathered to watch the finish on Front Street, crowding on top of buildings, leaning out windows and lining the railings of parking garages.

"If the weather had been great and it had been 80 degrees, I would have," Messick said. "But it was a bit of a rough start to the day, it was cold and it was wet initially, and we weren't expecting huge, huge crowds."

"For a first-time city, the reaction that we got from the people in Santa Cruz was tremendous," Messick said. "We felt as though the race had been here for many years before. Obviously there's a lot of passion for cycling here, and I think the local organizing committee did a superb job of finding ways to engage the community and get people excited about our event."

Sandi and Matt McDonell,

cycling fans from Oakland, arrived at 7:30 a.m. to secure seats at the finish line, where rain pelted the streets intermittently.

"All the U.S. greats are going to be here. This is like the greats of the greats in our own backyard," said park ranger Matt McDonell, 37. "It's incredible to watch. Forget baseball and football."

About 150 spectators lined the sides of Highway 1 at Bonny Doon Road, armed with cameras and cowbells as they huddled beneath a canopy of umbrellas. Many parked alongside the highway and rode their own bikes up the road to catch a better view of the main pack of cyclists, known as the peloton.

After waiting as long as three hours, spectators had only a few minutes to catch the action.

Jim Kosinski, 73, of Aromas, said "I got my camera up to take a picture, and they were gone. I basically didn't see it. I guess I'll have to go home and look at my pictures to actually see the race."

About a quarter-mile up Bonny Doon Road, a drainage culvert plugged up, forcing excess water and mud onto the road and temporarily flooding it. Crews used a giant pump to vacuum as much of the water as possible off the road before riders arrived, but the mud remained, making for a slick and hairy turn on the initial descent.

"With the storm, we had a lot of rock slides on Highway 1, and I didn't want a bicyclist to fall on my territory," said Caltrans supervisor Russell Ellingworth, 59, of Watsonville. "So we went all the way to the county line and swept off the storm aftermath."

Hundreds lined Pine Flat Road and Empire Grade as cyclists rounded the mountains before descending into Santa Cruz.

Hank Moeller, a longtime Bonny Doon resident, said he hasn't seen the edges of the road in more than 50 years.

"If they cleared the roads for the race every year, it would be great," Moeller said.

Miles below, High Street residents Paul and Stacie Wenger hosted a driveway barbecue for friends.

"We were like, wow, they are going to come right by our house. We'll just have a party and watch them come by," said Paul Wenger, 35.

Two miles east, Thomas Dios, 46, an avid cyclist from Salinas, brought 17-year-old daughter Caitlin out to Depot Park to watch the peloton as it made its way downtown. Schools were not in session Monday due to the Presidents Day holiday.

"It's the only chance to see the guys riding in the Tour de France," Dios said.

Caitlin said her favorite rider is Armstrong because of the cancer survivor's work to raise awareness and research dollars to battle the disease.

"He is a big inspiration," she said. "It's nice to see someone with that profile do the right thing."

Heather Boruta of Santa Cruz also brought her daughters, 4-year-old Sophie and 2-year-old Poppy, to Depot Park.

"Of course, everybody is out to see Lance, but I also want to see the local brothers," Boruta said of Andy and Ben Jacques-Maynes.

Using yellow chalk, 9-year-old Genevieve Plageman of Santa Cruz drew a sign on the sidewalk greeting Armstrong as he rode into town.

"He's inspirational and shows you should never give up," she said.

Genevieve Bookwalter, Isaiah Guzman, Shanna McCord, Jennifer Squires, Ian Stewart, Ramona Turner and Alia Wilson contributed to this report.