

<div class="zemanta-img"> <p class="zemanta-img-attribution"><a href="http://commons.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Mont\_ventoux\_summit.jpg"></a>The Tour De France is a sporting event beyond all others. For three weeks, cyclists hammer through the Pyrenees and Alps on their way to Paris. Throw in a team time trial, a couple of individual time trials ♦ and it becomes, without a doubt (at least for me), the most challenging sporting event in the world. [note: that doesn't include single day events, of course!]</p> </div> <p>For seven years (1999-2005), we watched Lance Armstrong dominate the Tour. After his last win in 2005, he took a short 4 year hiatus, returning to professional cycling earlier this year at age 37. For those of us in Austin, it was a fantastic seven years. Armstrong did more than hold his own for three weeks. We got to see glimmers of what I call ♦ classic Lance ♦ ♦</p> <p>♦ standing up, ♦ dancing on the pedals ♦ as commentators Phil Liggett and Paul Sherwen always used to say. He came into stage 20 with a tenuous hold on third place. The stage up <a class="zem\_slink" title="Mont Ventoux" href="http://maps.google.com/maps?ll=44.1666666667,5.283333333333&spn=0.1,0.1&q=44.1666666667,5.283333333333 (Mont%20Ventoux)&t=h" rel="geolocation">Mont Ventoux</a> was nothing short of epic this year, with Andy Schleck putting in attack after attack, hoping to get Armstrong to crack so that his brother Frank could move up in the overall standings on the day before riding into Paris.</p> <p>As you can see, the climb up Mont Ventoux is nothing short of, well, phenomenal. Twenty-one kilometers ♦ 13 miles ♦ of climbing at an average of a 7% grade. But even that is deceiving ♦ as parts of the climb go to 10% and more. The last two kilometers rise up to 9.5%!</p> <p>But Lance countered all the attacks and found himself ending the day in third place. The next day saw him finishing on the podium in Paris ♦ after being away from sport for 4 years and racing athletes that are, in many cases, 10 to 15 years his junior.</p> <p>Nothing short of phenomenal? Not if you're Alberto Contador.</p> <p>And <a title="Contador - I will never admire Armstrong" href="http://www.cnn.com/2009/SPORT/football/07/27/cycling.contador.armstrong/index.html?eref=rss\_mostpopular#cnSTCText" target="\_blank">this</a> is what has me shaking my head this evening:</p> <p><em>♦ Even if he (Armstrong) is a great champion, I have never had admiration for him and I never will.</em></p> <p>Hold on a second. Isn't the day after the Tour finishes the time at which you graciously accept the attention, the applause and admiration from the world on a job well done? No, apparently not. What happened to simply smiling and walking away? Or having a certain degree of respect for, oh, a SEVEN time winner that survived testicular cancer prior to doing so?</p> <p>It makes my head spin. It was almost like reading the smack talk from the likes of Terrell Owens or any number of professional football and basketball players of this era.</p> <p>I ♦ will be the first to profess that Contador ♦ s performance on the bike was stunning. At this particular moment in cycling history, there is nobody that climbs the way he does. But what happens when he doesn't have a team loaded with fantastic riders (such as Astana) or when he doesn't have the best team director in the world (Johann Bruyneel)? I suspect we will see his true colors as a champion unfold before our very eyes ♦ perhaps on the slopes of Alpe d ♦ Huez or some similar mountain pass.</p> <p>If this was Texas football, the quote would be torn from the newspaper and posted on the training room wall ♦ until game time next year. </p> <p>But it IS Texas cycling ♦ see you in 2010,

Alberto.</p>