

http://commons.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Lance_Armstrong_2005.jpg Sunday 7/25/2010 was a sad day for Austin and for the cycling world. It marked what many expect to be the official end to [Lance Armstrong](http://www.lancearmstrong.com/ "Lance Armstrong")'s distinguished cycling legacy, his farewell day in his final [Tour de France](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tour_de_France "Tour de France"). <p>It was an unlucky 13th Tour de France for Armstrong. He had a tire puncture at a highly inopportune moment on the cobblestones. He also had more crashes in this one Tour than he'd suffered in his previous 12 Tours combined. It was not an easy go of things for Armstrong in his final dance through the French countryside. But as they say, c'est la vie, non?</p><p>We've already heard talk of whether or not [Alberto Contador](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alberto_Contador "Alberto Contador") could possibly eclipse Armstrong's record seven Tour de France victories. He's currently on top of the world cycling, and he looks to have a strong future ahead.</p> <p>But there are some huge contrasts which serve to bring one recurrent theme to the forefront. Alberto Contador is no Lance Armstrong and for oh so many reasons. Contador could indeed be the next great Tour de France champion. But right now, he's got a lot to learn and much of it, as Lance would say, is not about the bike. It's about the man.</p> <p>What made Armstrong so special? And how could Contador take a few notes for the future?</p> <p>1. Dominance. Let's start with dominance of the race itself. Great champions know how to dominate an event when needed. Contador won this year's Tour, but didn't win a single stage in the process. I think that makes you one of seven that have accomplished that feat. That puts you in the same category as Greg LeMond the anti-Lance himself. Lance hammered his opposition when he needed to do so. As for Contador, you really just don't get that sense of dominant performances for which Lance will be remembered.</p> <p>2. Etiquette. Great champions have a deep respect for their competitors and for the event itself. The Tour also has a thing called race etiquette, those things being rooted in some degree of chivalrous, gentlemanly behavior in the throes of battle. Let's start with Contador's [http://www.allanbesselink.com/rhubarb/279-tour-de-france-2009-did-he-really-just-say-that](http://www.allanbesselink.com/rhubarb/279-tour-de-france-2009-did-he-really-just-say-that "Tour De France 2009: Did He Really Just Say That?")>comments about Lance Armstrong in last year's Tour. I'd say they were a little ridiculous. But this year's I'll pass you when you're in trouble, then say I never knew is a load of crap. Andy Schleck, the leader of the race at the time, had a mechanical problem and had to stop spinning as his chain slipped off. Contador flew past [Alexandre Vinokourov](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Vinokourov "Alexander Vinokourov"), then continued his attack and blew by Schleck while he was sorting out his mechanical miscues. At first he claimed that he didn't know it had happened. Maybe the first clue was when you glanced over and noticed that Schleck wasn't moving his legs. Contador gained 39 seconds due to Schleck's misfortunes which is, in the end, the margin of victory in this year's event.</p> <p>This contrasts with the race behaviors we have seen from

Armstrong. Let us not forget the day not so long ago when Armstrong stopped in the middle of the stage to make sure that [Jan Ullrich](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jan_Ullrich "Jan Ullrich"), his main rival for many years, was ok after a horrific crash off the side of the road.

Adversity. Armstrong had a rough 13th Tour. Although he probably set a record for the number of crashes survived in a Tour de France, he showed a willingness to push onward when all was lost. It wasn't about the bike it was about carrying on when the challenged faced him, much like he did with testicular cancer. He even jumped into the break on Stage 16 in the Pyrennes, only to find himself overpowered at the finish. Contador, on the other hand, has yet to really face adversity on the Tour. He has yet to really dig deep to find that something extra in a time of need. Maybe I am wrong, but I don't get the sense that Contador will stare down adversity in quite the same way, nor will he be as mentally tough in the process.

Nonetheless, time will tell if he truly becomes a great champion and if he surpasses Armstrong's seven Tour de France wins.

The 2010 Tour de France will be remembered as Lance's swan song. When he found himself at the head of the lead group in the Pyrennes in Stage 16, we saw glimpses of the Lance of old. But sadly the stage wasn't the best for Armstrong, ending on a descent (with the real risk of a group sprint) instead of a summit finish. He jumped out in the mass sprint of 10 riders, but he just didn't have the extra gear that he had had once before.

But the one thing that I found most stunning about that stage wasn't that he didn't win. That wasn't it. It was the post-stage interview. As Armstrong was interviewed, and as he pondered the questions before answering, you got to see the look of a man that was really exposed, finally, to his cycling mortality. You saw the face of a man that was coming to the conclusion, in full public view, that his better cycling days had passed him by. It was a touching display from an incredible athlete. It must have been so difficult to not only not win the stage, but to come to the realization that this was indeed his last hurrah.

This year's event reminded us of his cycling mortality and of his legacy. And it goes far beyond just the record seven Tour de France wins. His legacy is about more than just the wins. It is about [LiveStrong](http://www.livestrong.com/ "Livestrong") and cancer survivorship.

I tip my hat to Armstrong, for providing us with not only many great years of cycling memories, but in showing us what is possible. And, perhaps even more important, in showing us grace in the process.

Lance, we will miss you every July, but I personally look forward to your first Ironman, and your return to Austin as just one of those people that make this city so amazing.

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