

The many facets of the Lance doping revelations (part 1 & 2)

Part 1- Does historical context matter?]

There's an active conversation regarding the doping issues surrounding Lance Armstrong in a Frequent Flyer discussion group (of all places!); below is someone's comment regarding today's disclosures, and my reply underneath.

More broadly, I've read through a few of the affidavits, and even I'm a little surprised by how widespread the doping was. I figured all or nearly all of the GC contenders were doping, as well as some of the top domestiques, but now I get the impression that it was practically the whole peloton.

I think a broader argument can be made; an argument that it's not just about who gets the win during the Lance years, but how differently we are handling the dopers of the recent past to the longer past. Nobody's asking for Merckx, Anquetil and Indurain to vacate their wins (tough to ask Anquetil, since he's dead, and he's the most-obvious since he made statements about his own ethics regarding doping that were rather damning). Nobody seems to even be asking them questions about their own racing rituals.

How can we say how they would have acted under the glare of the media light that is upon Lance? Not that Lance hasn't done far more than the others to attract attention in the first place, but still, what happens if you, point blank, ask Eddy Merckx if he doped during the TdF? And if he says no, where does that leave you?

One thing is obvious; there's a degree of toxicity to sport at the highest levels that defies the imagination. I'm not sure how we get around that. We can do better and better testing, and I do believe that the current standards, which basically legalize doping up to a certain level... a relatively-low level by historic standards... are an improvement. But genetics are going to be the next big thing. What happens when parents can choose characteristics for their offspring? How many would desire procedures that might improve strength and/or mental powers by 10%? What if that procedure is nothing more than selecting just the right sperm cell for fertilization? Say you could, out of a million candidates, find some that are clearly more destined for greatness than other. Is that cheating?

If we think this is bad, I'm thinking the future is going to be even messier.

Part 2- Is it wrong to feel any sympathy towards Lance's situation?]

It's not wrong to feel sympathy towards Lance, if you're so inclined. I can think of few politicians whom I despised as much as Richard Nixon, and yet I felt sorry for him at the end. Even though his (and Lance's) situation was entirely of his own doing.

In Lance's case, I feel sorry that he'll likely have his 7 TdF wins erased, even though they were, in fact, wins. He played the game by the prevailing "rules" of the day, and won. Just as nearly everyone else apparently did.

We don't actually know what was offered behind closed doors, but from what they did to Levi, we can assume they didn't offer anything remotely favorable. I am, well, shocked that the "deal" they offered Levi included a requirement that he pay back nearly all prize money he earned during a 7-year period, or else he cannot race again. Obviously, he'll be retiring. But what sort of deal is that? You come clean about what happened years ago, in an environment where it was clearly the norm, you name names, and then they ask for millions of dollars because that's what they're going to extort from you to clear your name so you can race again????!!

So yes, after reading about Levi, I'm more than a little doubtful that Tygart offered anything worth considering to Lance in exchange for coming clean. And that creates a bit of sympathy on my part.