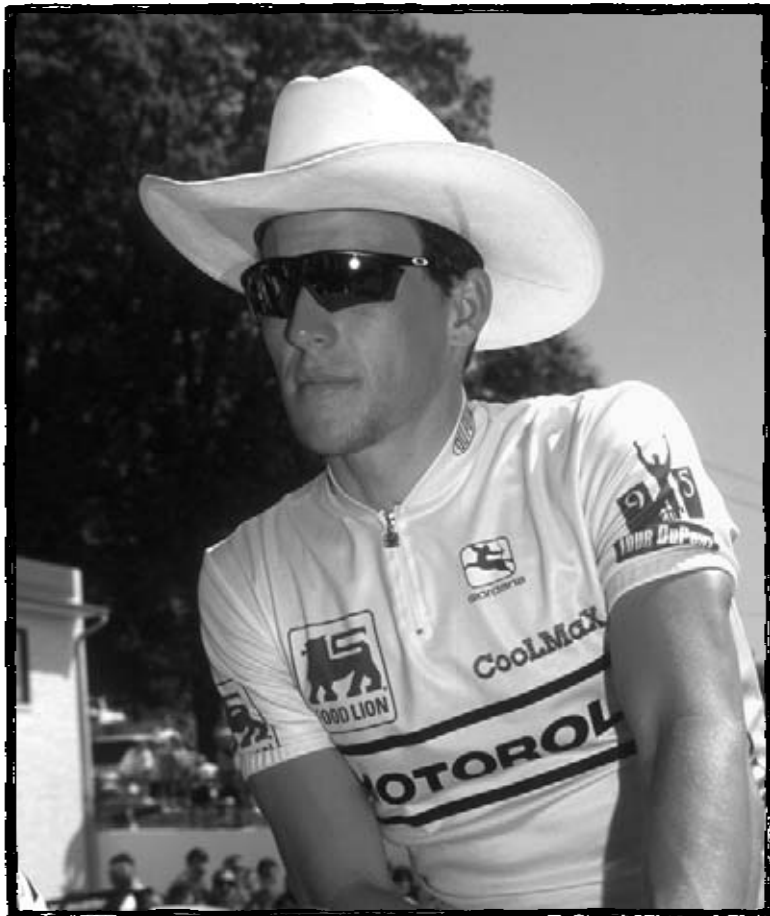


# Lance Armstrong

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# Lance Armstrong



Written by Kira Freed

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Level T Leveled Reader  
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Lance Armstrong celebrates his seventh Tour de France victory with his children: Luke, Grace, and Isabelle.

## **Introduction**

Lance Armstrong is perhaps the greatest cyclist of all time. He is one of the most celebrated and recognized athletes in the world. He is a hero for his amazing successes in the sport of cycling, including winning the Tour de France seven times! But this is not the reason why his name has become a household word. He is known outside the world of cycling for being a gritty, courageous young man who made an amazing comeback from the edge of death. He was given less than a 50 percent chance of surviving advanced cancer. Yet, he fought his way back to good health using the same grit and courage that had served him so well in his cycling career. This is his story.

## **Early Life**

Born in Plano, Texas, in 1971, Lance was raised by his mother, Linda. His ability as an athlete was apparent from an early age. At 13, Lance won the Iron Kids Triathlon, and he became a professional athlete at 16. Eventually, he lost interest in the swimming and running components of the sport as he became more focused on cycling. By his last year of high school, cycling had become Lance's passion. It was becoming clear that it would be his future.

During Lance's senior year in high school, he qualified to train with the U.S. Olympic team hopefuls in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The difficult training schedule nearly kept him from graduating from high school. But thanks to private tutoring during the final weeks of the school year, he graduated with his class.

## **Getting Serious about Racing**

After graduation, Lance was finally able to devote himself to full-time cycling. In 1989, he qualified for the Junior World Championships in Moscow. He competed as an amateur for several years. During that time, he developed

his skills as a cyclist and also began to experience life beyond the small-town world in which he had grown up. Only two years after devoting himself to cycling full-time, he was the U.S. National Amateur Champion. He continued in amateur competition through the 1992 Olympic games in Barcelona, Spain.



Lance  
on Team  
Subaru  
in 1991



AMPIONS challenge of CHAMPIONS ch



Lance wins  
the Challenge  
of Champions,  
a triathlon  
held in  
Monterey,  
California,  
in 1991.

Lance became a professional cyclist in 1992. His first race was in Spain. It was a rude awakening after his many, seemingly effortless successes in amateur competition. He finished the race in last place, 27 minutes behind the winner. Another cyclist might have been discouraged enough to quit racing, but not Lance. The experience fueled his determination to overcome anything that got in the way of his success.

Lance with race leader Stephen Swart before starting the 1992 Fitchburg Longsjø stage race in Massachusetts, which Lance won.



Lance wins his first stage in the Tour du Pont in 1993.

## **Success at Last**

The following year of his cycling career, Lance's determination bore fruit. He won 10 titles in 1993, including U.S. Pro Champion, World Champion, and a stage victory in the Tour de France. He rode for Team Motorola, an American team that was ranked among the top five teams in the world.

Over the next two years, Lance's successes continued. He won the 1995 Tour du Pont and won a significant stage at the 1995 Tour de France. He also won the Spanish race that had been such a challenge for him when he first had begun to race professionally.

In 1996, his successes continued. He again won the Tour du Pont and won other important races. He seemed to be on top of the world.



Lance competes in an individual time trial in the 1996 Tour du Pont, a stage race held in the eastern United States.

## Illness Strikes

Then, in October 1996, severe pain forced Lance to quit riding. Medical tests revealed that he had advanced cancer. It had spread to several places in his body, including his lungs and brain. Lance says that he knew something was wrong with his health three years before he was told he had cancer. Asked why he waited so long to seek treatment, he admitted to being hardheaded. His determination to push himself as an athlete, along with a difficult training regimen, had caused him to ignore the pain and keep going. Looking back, he realized that he had ignored many of the warning signs. Perhaps the cancer could have been caught before it had spread. Now he could no longer ignore it.



Lance at the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, the summer before he was diagnosed with cancer

Doctors gave Lance only a 50/50 chance or less of surviving. One doctor assessed his chances at only 20 percent. Lance was very frightened, and he was in severe pain. But he still had the fierce determination that had served him so well in his cycling career. He was committed to staying positive and to not giving in to his fears. With the support of his mother and close friends, he searched for the best medical team he could find. He found doctors who not only believed he could recover from the cancer, but who also believed that he might race again. He underwent three surgeries soon after learning he had cancer. Then he began chemotherapy.

During this time, Lance was flooded with the support and love of family and close friends. This helped lift his spirits, even though he was weak and very ill from chemotherapy. Miraculously, the chemotherapy began to work, and Lance began to recover from cancer. As he did, his hopes of racing bicycles returned. He began to train again on his bicycle only five months after learning he had cancer.

During the hardest months of his illness, Lance had a lot of time to think about his life. Before the cancer, life seemed simple for him—it was about competing and winning. After discovering that he had cancer, he learned that things he had taken for granted could be taken away, especially his health. He learned to be grateful for his health and for the support of loved ones. He learned to value more than just cycling. Not only was he a competitive athlete, he was also a man who was grateful for the blessings in his life.

### **Giving to Others**

Lance's gratitude prompted him to form the Lance Armstrong Foundation ([www.laf.org](http://www.laf.org)) to benefit cancer research and to support cancer patients. From the beginning of Lance's experience with cancer, it became important to him to help others. The foundation provides information, services, and support to cancer patients. In addition, it encourages cancer patients to have a positive attitude and to think of themselves as survivors, not victims. The foundation works to reduce the fear associated with cancer and to build hope in patients and their families.





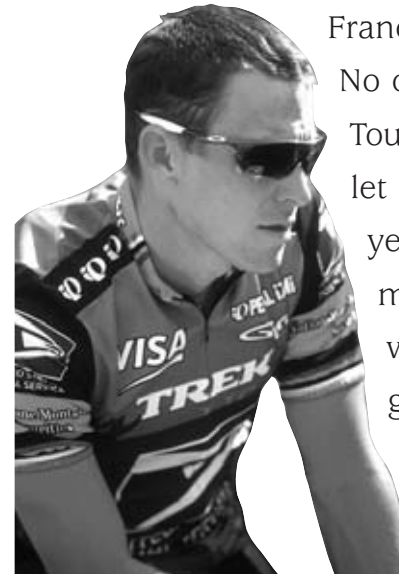
1998 Ride for the Roses

## Return to Racing

Lance recovered from cancer. He returned to professional cycling in May, 1998. His first cycling victory was a race that was part of the Ride for the Roses, a weekend benefit for the Lance Armstrong Foundation. Before that win, Lance nearly quit cycling. He wasn't ready, and a race in bad weather in France made him rethink his choice.

Lance's return to professional cycling was not a smooth road. When he learned he had cancer, he had been on a French racing team. The team had doubts that he could recover the strength and success he once had. They took him off the team when they learned about his illness. Lance was disappointed. But after only a few months, he joined the United States Postal Service Pro Cycling Team. The team's faith in his ability to make a comeback boosted his determination.

Lance soon returned to his winning ways. In 1999, less than three years after fighting off cancer, he won the world's most prestigious bike race — the Tour de France. He went on to win the Tour de France for the next six years.



No one had ever won the Tour de France seven times, let alone in seven straight years. His seven victories made him one of the world's all-time greatest athletes.

Lance joined the United States Postal Service Pro Cycling Team in 1998.

## How Lance Does It

The Tour de France, according to some people, is the greatest endurance event of all time. And some say that Lance Armstrong is the greatest endurance athlete of all time. So what makes Lance so much better than anyone else?

His mother says he doesn't excel by "sitting on the couch eating potato chips." Lance trains very hard. Eight months before the Tour de France, Lance increases his training routine by pedaling up and down roadsides for more than eight hours a day.



Lance on the victory stand for the 2004 Tour de France.



The Tour de France finishes in Paris.

But, for Lance, his ability to excel is about more than hard work. Despite having had cancer, Lance has an extraordinary body. His heart is larger than the hearts of most people. The average heart pumps about five gallons (20 liters) of blood per minute. Lance's heart pumps up to nine gallons (34 liters). His lung capacity is twice that of the average person, meaning that he can send twice the amount of oxygen to his body's cells than you or I can. He also has more red blood cells than the average person. Red blood cells carry oxygen to other cells in the body. These cells use oxygen to burn food and make energy. Lance's muscles are also special. They do not tire as fast as the average person's muscles. He can exercise longer and recover more quickly than most athletes.

Training, an extraordinary body, and a competitive spirit filled with determination make Lance a very special athlete. Lance has proved that he is not a quitter. When it comes to overcoming the odds, Lance is the best. After all, who would have thought that one man could win seven straight Tour de France victories?



Lance competes in an individual time trial wearing the Tour de France race leader's yellow jersey.

## Tour de France Terms

- breakaway** A rider or group of riders that speeds up to escape the peloton and gain time in a race
- peloton** The main pack, or group, of riders
- stage race** Usually a multiple-day race where there is a race each day. The times from each stage are added together to make up the overall time.
- time trial** A stage where, one at a time, an individual rider or team races against the clock



A small part of a Tour de France peloton of over 180 riders races through the French countryside.



The top three finishers in the 2001 Tour de France share the podium: 2nd place Jan Ullrich (Germany); 1st place Lance Armstrong (United States); and 3rd place Joseba Beloki (Spain).

### **Tour de France Facts**

- The Tour de France started in 1903. It was the first of the big European tours (stage races).
- It has been held every year since 1903 except during World War I and II.
- Over 95 percent of the race takes place in France. Over the years, the route has included many neighboring countries. The race always finishes in Paris.
- The terrain of the race varies from hot flatlands in France's interior to some of Europe's highest mountain passes. The weather ranges from

summer heat that melts the tar on the roads to the chilling winds and constant snow.

- The Tour de France is a 20-plus stage race ridden over approximately three weeks. Average daily rides are 150 to 180 km (90 to 108 miles).
- The Tour de France originally started as an amateur event for individual riders. Then it turned into teams of riders from different nations. Now each team has riders from many countries. In recent years, about 20 teams of 10 riders each have competed every year.
- Bicycle racing is a team sport with team strategy. Each team has a team leader who is the strongest rider. Other specialty riders (such as climbers and sprinters) are responsible for helping the team and protecting the team leader's standing.



The U.S. Postal Service Team competing in a team time trial

## Winners of Three or More Tours de France

- Philippe Thijs, Belgium ('13, '14, '20)
- Louison Bobet, France ('53, '54, '55)
- Jacques Anquetil, France ('57, '61, '62, '63, '64)
- Eddy Merckx, Belgium ('69, '70, '71, '72, '74)
- Bernard Hinault, France ('78, '79, '81, '82, '85)
- Greg Lemond, United States ('86, '89, '90)  
Lemond is the only American other than Lance Armstrong ever to win the Tour de France.
- Miguel Indurain, Spain ('91, '92, '93, '94, '95)
- Lance Armstrong, United States ('99, '00, '01, '02, '03, '04, '05)



Lance races with second-place finisher Jan Ullrich of Germany, his most serious competitor in the Tour de France.

## For More Information

. . . **about Lance Armstrong**, visit:

- Lance Armstrong online  
[www.lancearmstrong.com](http://www.lancearmstrong.com)

. . . **about the Tour de France**, visit:

- [www.letour.fr](http://www.letour.fr)
- [www.velonews.com](http://www.velonews.com)
- [www.cyclingnews.com](http://www.cyclingnews.com)

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- USA Cycling: [www.usacycling.org](http://www.usacycling.org)
- American Cycling Association:  
[www.americancycling.org](http://www.americancycling.org)
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Union): [www.uci.ch](http://www.uci.ch)

