



REED ALBERGOTTI AND VANESSA O'CONNELL

WHEELMEN

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THE TOUR DE FRANCE,
AND THE GREATEST
SPORTS CONSPIRACY EVER

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G O T H A M B O O K S

told Ritter about his hopes of being able to compete again. That fall, Ritter called Travis Tygart, whom he hadn't previously met, explaining that he knew Lance wanted to get back into sport. "Is there any reason to talk to Lance? Is there a possibility of some kind of reconciliation involving anything other than a lifetime ban?" Ritter asked Tygart. Tygart told Ritter there was hope. Under the World Anti-Doping Code, athletes can get as much as a 75 percent reduction of a ban if they provide the kind of substantial help to anti-doping authorities that enables them to build cases against others. From there, Lance asked his lawyer, Tim Herman, to pick up where Ritter left off.

Herman called Tygart and offered to dispatch Lance's legal team to USADA's headquarters in Colorado Springs to meet with him. Tygart said he wanted Lance himself to come. When Herman pushed back, Tygart said he'd be willing to discuss the plan with Armstrong in person, but he was tired of dealing with Armstrong's legal attack dogs. He would only schedule a meeting if Armstrong showed up and talked with him, face-to-face.

At least one of Lance's lawyers, John Keeker, was opposed to the meeting. Keeker, who was proud of his work in getting Armstrong's criminal investigation dropped, thought the meeting could only hurt, possibly undoing his good work. But Armstrong's legal team had been divided over how to handle USADA's allegations from the beginning. Mark Fabiani supported the idea of a meeting, as did Tim Herman, who hoped that if Lance agreed to it, USADA's Tygart might be willing to send a letter to the Justice Department suggesting they abandon the possibility of picking up Floyd Landis's whistleblower lawsuit. Armstrong decided to go with his gut and take the meeting.

Neither Armstrong nor Herman wanted to meet with Tygart at USADA headquarters in Colorado Springs, where they'd surely be noticed, so they asked Ritter if he would allow the December 14 meeting to take place at his CSU offices in downtown Denver. Ritter agreed, as did Tygart. Having sold his private jet, Lance chartered a plane to Colorado, bringing Anna and his two youngest children along, so they could spend time with Anna's parents in Boulder.

The meeting began without Lance present. Tim Herman was going to scope out the situation to determine whether it was worth the disgraced cyclist's while to take part. In addition to Herman, there was Tygart, who had come in from Colorado Springs; Bill Bock, who had come in from Indiana;

Bill Ritter; and St. University of Texas between the two German doping panels committee with the world of meeting and place

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Bill Ritter; and Steven Ungerleider, a psychologist and visiting scholar at the University of Texas who had suggested that he could serve as an honest broker between the two sides. Having written a book on the state-sponsored East German doping program in the 1970s, and served on the education and ethics committee with the World Anti-Doping Agency, Ungerleider was familiar with the world of doping control. He even brought a copy of his book to the meeting and placed it on the table.

The meeting had a down-to-business feel. There was no spread of food or even coffee for the participants, just bottles of water. But Bock and Tygart wanted Herman to know they were concerned about Lance's well-being. They had actually been shocked at the magnitude and velocity of Lance's downfall, and they had talked with each other several times about how Lance was dealing with it emotionally. Lodged permanently in the back of their minds was the memory of Antonio Pettigrew, a track athlete who committed suicide on an overdose of Unisom sleeping pills in 2010, at age forty-two, two years after losing his gold medal following a USADA doping ban.

Herman, who seemed to consider himself something of a father figure to Lance, said Lance was doing fine but that he'd be a lot better if he could get back to competing in triathlons. He said that Lance would be willing to come in and talk, to lay it all out on the table, but that in exchange he wanted to be back competing within a year.

Tygart and Bock explained that such a quick return was impossible within the rules of the sport. But they tried to make a case for other reasons for Lance to come clean. "There are many more benefits to getting on the side of the truth than simply competing in sport," Bock said. "Doesn't he want to leave a legacy of helping to repair the sport?" Coming clean to USADA would be part of the repair, and they also suggested that Lance arrange to meet with people like Floyd Landis and Greg LeMond to make amends.

Herman said he understood. He, too, was concerned about Lance's legacy and reputation. But Herman wanted something more tangible from USADA: help with the whistle-blower lawsuit against Lance. Tygart and Bock agreed that if Lance provided details about his past doping, they'd be willing to write a letter to the Department of Justice explaining that Armstrong was playing a role in cleaning up the sport. They couldn't guarantee one way or another

that it would affect the whistle-blower case, but it might help. At that point, Herman agreed to call Lance, who said he'd join them in an hour. Bock and Tygart went across the street to a deli for coffee and muffins and then came back to the meeting room, where they all waited.

About ninety minutes later, Lance walked in, wearing a baseball cap and a North Face parka. His facial hair was grown out, almost to the point of being a beard. He looked nothing like the famous clean-shaven athlete with the beaming smile and the buzz cut.

Lance spoke as if it were a foregone conclusion that he had doped. He didn't bother denying anything, but he didn't offer any explicit details, either. He referred to what Ungerleider had written about the systematic doping of athletes in the former East Germany and said that whatever he had done was nothing compared to that. Tygart, who was meeting Lance for the first time, noticed that all the people surrounding him seemed to be coddling him, which had probably allowed him to infer that he could avoid the ban completely. It became clear to Tygart that none of Armstrong's lawyers had given him the "come to Jesus" talk—the kind of frank discussion with no sugarcoating that appraises the client of the true dimensions of his predicament. Lance seemed to be laboring under the false impression that he could still get out of this mess with minimal damage. He said he would be willing to talk about others who might have helped him dope. But in exchange, "You have to give me a fair punishment." That "doesn't have to be six months, but a year." Tygart actually began to feel sorry for him. Lance still thought he could take charge of the situation, but this was one of the few times in Lance's life when he was no longer in control of his fate.

Tygart told Armstrong that he had already had his chance to come clean and he'd blown it, that, at best, if he gave full cooperation, the ban would be eight years. The offer was so far from a sweetheart deal that it didn't seem to create much of an incentive for Armstrong to talk. He'd be forty-nine before he could compete again in elite competition. Lance tried to convince Tygart that he was just another rider on the US Postal team, that he had done what was required of him by a sport in which doping was rampant. In fact, he said, every sport has similar problems, including the National Football League and Major League Baseball, but those athletes hadn't been singled out by USADA.

As the discussion wound down he stood accused of offenses that marked by nearly fifteen years of c anyone who told the truth.

Equally un-budging, Armstrong own redemption. Armstrong said ciliation commission," laying out lieved such a plan would put so would have no choice but to allo responded: "That's bullshit! Peop get back to competition." Lance : tioned races. And with that, the r refusal to budge on the eight-yea: ested in hearing what Lance had a shorter ban.

Tygart was livid. A few week to US Attorney General Eric Ho Justice Department join in Lan: recent sport-related federal crim ernment would have some reluc other sports case. This situatio: already done the work in the spo his representatives have admitte of doping is no longer an issue' mains unresolved is the massiv who are outside USADA's juris

With the holidays approaching with Anna and their children. designed course, swam in the l tional Park. He seemed to be t clearly things had changed, inc: sponsors. Now when he went f

(continued from front flap)

blood doping as an accepted practice and shows how Americans methodically constructed an international operation of spies and breakthrough technology to reach the top.

Lance Armstrong survived and thrived against nigh-insurmountable odds and built a team of unmatched accomplishment. But in the end, his own outsized ambition destroyed it. At last exposing the truth about Armstrong and American cycling, *Wheelmen* paints a living portrait of what is, without question, the greatest conspiracy in the history of sports.

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REED ALBERGOTTI is a white-collar crime reporter for *The Wall Street Journal*. He is also the son of a fanatic amateur cyclist who served as the director of cycling competition in the 1984 Olympics. An accomplished bike racer himself, Reed speaks the sport's odd language and follows its strange customs.

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VANESSA O'CONNELL, an award-winning reporter at *The Wall Street Journal* for seventeen years, has covered stories about tobacco, alcohol, guns, insider trading, and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. She has a knack for exposing the nature of corporate America and how it sometimes manipulates the score in making its money.

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