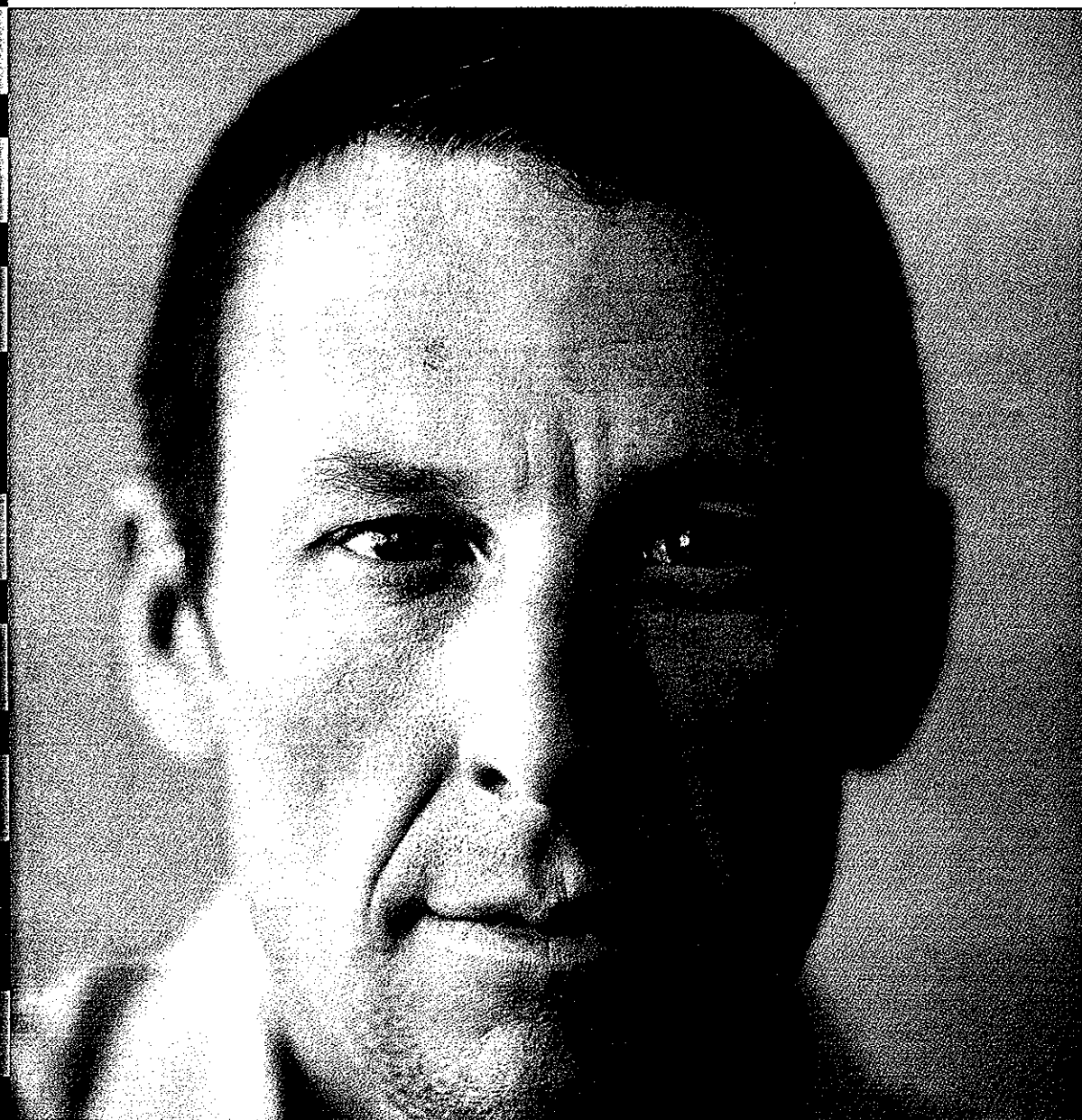


JULIET MACUR

OF THE *NEW YORK TIMES*



CYCLE OF LIES

THE FALL OF LANCE ARMSTRONG

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could mean that he'd have to pay the Postal Service \$120 million out of his pocket.

Bad enough, the money. Worse, the lifetime ban from sports. He had expected to start a second career in triathlons, but USADA's order made that impossible. He wanted to get the ban lifted or at least mitigated. His complaint to anyone who would listen: *Why should teammates like Vande Velde and Hincapie get six months while I get the death sentence?*

Tygart said USADA might reduce the ban in exchange for information about people in cycling who facilitated or condoned his doping. From USADA's perspective, Armstrong would have to give up big names that the antidoping agency suspected were involved in his doping scheme: Verbruggen and McQuaid at the UCI, Bruyneel, Stapleton, the team owner Thomas Weisel and others involved with USA Cycling. As Armstrong hesitated, at least one advisor told him to come clean for the simplest of reasons: Americans were a forgiving bunch.

That man was Steven Ungerleider, a visiting scholar at the University of Texas, a sports psychologist and an antidoping expert who had written a book on the East German doping machine, *Faust's Gold*. Ungerleider had met Armstrong through a friend, Armstrong's lawyer Tim Herman.

Herman had enlisted Ungerleider, who had extensive experience working with Olympic athletes, to be a volunteer consultant in the matter and help talk to Armstrong about coming clean. Ungerleider spoke with Armstrong about how his confession would unburden him and how it would be beneficial for his children in the long run. He suggested that he look the public straight in the eye and say, "Look, I really fucked up. Please don't hurt my foundation."

Armstrong wanted to know two things—how he could rebuild his reputation and how he could mitigate his lifetime ban from Olympic sports. Ungerleider told him that he could turn around his reputation in a second if he came clean. Telling USADA everything should be a part of that deal, he said.

If Armstrong confessed to the antidoping agency, it could help the sport of cycling and USADA might reduce Armstrong's suspension. It would be good for both parties, Ungerleider said. Armstrong could set an example for other riders to come forward with their own doping tales. The entire sport would come clean and start anew.

They went back and forth for days. Armstrong: "Oh no, these motherfuckers are out to destroy me. They are sleazebags out to destroy me, my home and my children."

UNGERLEIDER: "You need to trust the system."

ARMSTRONG: "Why did they break out that report on me? It just ruined me."

UNGERLEIDER: "You left them no choice. If you had come forward in June, it would have been another story."

ARMSTRONG: "Screw them."

UNGERLEIDER: "You should give back your Olympic bronze medal. It would be a gesture of good faith."

ARMSTRONG: "Fuck you, I'm keeping it."

In the end, Ungerleider helped broker a meeting between Armstrong and Tygart. They met on Friday, December 14, 2012, at noon, at the former Colorado governor Bill Ritter's office in downtown Denver. Ritter agreed to host the gathering because he was a cycling fan who years before had befriended Armstrong.

They gathered in a conference building. Armstrong was late for the show. When he finally walked in, he was unkempt and unshowered. He was a mess, a person said. No wonder his friends saw that Armstrong was in a bad way. How he was handling the aftermath of the scandal. His friends saw that Armstrong was drinking alcohol for solace. Even though he was doing something to hurt himself, he had collapsed and how quickly.

Herman, Armstrong's lawyer, had to help him navigate the situation. Tygart was there to speak on Armstrong's behalf. Ungerleider was there to speak on Armstrong's behalf, though everyone knew he was a neutral party.

For a few minutes, everyone was silent. *your flight? Did you find the evidence?* But Armstrong couldn't remember Tygart, his nemesis, for the first time.

"Travis, you're a motherfucker. The shit you put in that report. You're putting me in the same category as the Bernie Madoff of sports. You're putting me in the same category as the ruined and destroyed lives! He was a mess, a person said. No wonder his friends saw that Armstrong was drinking alcohol for solace. Even though he was doing something to hurt himself, he had collapsed and how quickly.

He began to cite certain examples from which he disagreed, speaking from memory. He mentioned that program "the most sophisticated in cycling history. "It's the most sophisticated in cycling history. How about the East Germans?"

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They gathered in a conference room on a quiet floor of the building. Armstrong was late, worrying everyone that he wouldn't show. When he finally walked through the door, he looked unkempt and unshowered. He looked like "Robinson Crusoe," one person said. No wonder his close friends had been worried about how he was handling the aftermath of the USADA report. Those friends saw that Armstrong was depressed and that he had turned to alcohol for solace. Even USADA was nervous that he'd do something to hurt himself, based on how quickly his kingdom had collapsed and how quickly the public had turned on him.

Herman, Armstrong's lawyer, was there to help Armstrong navigate the situation. Tygart was there with his colleague, Bill Bock. Ungerleider was there as someone who had been authorized to speak on Armstrong's behalf. Ritter were there acting as a neutral party, though everyone knew he was buddies with Armstrong.

For a few minutes, everyone exchanged pleasantries. *How was your flight? Did you find the building OK? Anyone want coffee?* But Armstrong couldn't remain civil. He was face-to-face with Tygart, his nemesis, for the first time.

"Travis, you're a motherfucker," he said. "I can't believe that shit you put in that report. You know that's all garbage. You called me the Bernie Madoff of sports? [Which he hadn't, actually.] You're putting me in the same category as that motherfucker! He ruined and destroyed lives! He's like Adolf Hilter!"

He began to cite certain points in the USADA report with which he disagreed, speaking as if he had committed them to memory. He mentioned that the report had called his doping program "the most sophisticated and professionalized" in sports history. "It's the most sophisticated doping program ever? C'mon, how about the East Germans?" He pointed to Ungerleider's book

on the East German doping machine, which Ungerleider had placed in front of him. "Fuck, they were doping *children!* They were *real* criminals doing real harmful things to people! That's not at all what we were doing!"

To Herman, who had grown close to the troubled star, Armstrong was both a client and a de facto son. He grabbed Armstrong's arm and said, as if talking to a toddler, "Lance, remember we talked? You have to be nice." Herman smiled. "All right, Lance, you feel better now? Are you OK, buddy?"

Bock interrupted. "Lance, we just want to tell you how much we appreciate your coming here. It took a lot of courage for you to come. We're here to help you and help you restore yourself in the community. We don't know what we're capable of doing about your lifetime ban, but we're here to start the conversation."

"What kind of promises can you make?" Armstrong asked.

Tygart answered, "None, right now, but we need to take baby steps."

Armstrong was set off again, "Why the fuck am I here? This is fucking bullshit! I knew Travis would do this!"

Herman put a hand on his shoulder, telling him he should just let it all out, if he wanted to. Embarrassed, Armstrong fell quiet.

In the next several hours of the meeting, they discussed how Armstrong could rid himself of his lifetime ban. He wanted to, he needed to, get back into triathlons and bike races, and to race in running events like the Chicago Marathon. (Three months before, he had been denied entry into that marathon because of his suspension.)

Tygart said he could possibly lower Armstrong's suspension to eight years, if Armstrong gave USADA enough information about the people who'd helped him dope and helped him avoid

detection. Tygart said the years, if he got the cooperation of the USADA Doping Agency in determining who to point fingers at. It was the perfect opportunity for Tygart, he loved, to leave a positive perception of him, Tygart said.

Tygart said USADA would be more lenient and could put in a good word for Armstrong's case. Former governor Ritterman, including himself, and said if he cooperated.

Armstrong grew introspective for a whole era of cheating that was part of a toxic system and was dismantled. "At the end of the day, it's all about the medals and dead bodies. I know."

But if Armstrong was willing to accept that he would receive a ban that his teammates had received for the same scenario: two years.

When Tygart said the sanctions which would be needed to be approved by the board, his voice rose: "You don't hold the power, *one person who holds the key*"

"I don't need to work for you," he said. "I'll just go on my own and that will pressure you and only one who can clean up

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detection. Tygart said the ban could be even less, maybe four
years, if he got the cooperation of the UCI and the World Anti-
Doping Agency in determining his ban. He encouraged Arm-
strong to point fingers at those people who facilitated his doping.
It was the perfect opportunity for him to give back to the sport
he loved, to leave a positive legacy and start changing the public's
perception of him, Tygart said.

Tygart said USADA worked closely with the Justice Depart-
ment and could put in a good word for him in the whistle-blower
case. Former governor Ritter mentioned the power in the room,
including himself, and said they could help Armstrong, but only
if he cooperated.

Armstrong grew introspective. He said he was unfairly blamed
for a whole era of cheating in cycling. But he allowed that he was
part of a toxic system and admitted that the culture needed to be
dismantled. "At the end of the day," he said, "I can get you skel-
etons and dead bodies. I know where all the bodies are buried."

But if Armstrong was going to talk, he wanted a guarantee
that he would receive a ban that was exactly the same ban his
teammates had received for talking: six months. Worst-case sce-
nario: two years.

When Tygart said that wasn't really a possibility—that any
sanctions which would vary from the World Anti-Doping Code
needed to be approved by WADA and the UCI—Armstrong's
voice rose: "You don't hold the key to my redemption. *There's only
one person who holds the key to my redemption, and that's me!*"

"I don't need to work with you, I think I can do this on my
own," he said. "I'll just go out and tell the public what I know,
and that will pressure you guys to give me a lesser ban. I'm the
only one who can clean up the sport!"

He mentioned that the UCI was going to form what was being called the "Truth and Reconciliation Commission," a program that would allow riders to talk about all the doping they'd done and who'd helped them do it, in exchange for immunity from prosecution by antidoping authorities. *He would give his information to them and his ban would be lifted, right?* (Wrong: The UCI backed out of a commission, though in late 2013 there was talk to establish another one.) He didn't need USADA—he was Lance Armstrong, for God's sake, and he could fix things himself.

As the meeting went into its fifth hour, Armstrong seemed to realize that his aggressive posture was getting him nowhere. He softened and said that the ban would kill him. He wasn't allowed to even run with his kids in USA Track & Field-sanctioned races in Austin. He was a man who thrived on testing himself against others in an athletic arena. Basically, he told USADA, the ban meant that he couldn't be Lance Armstrong.

"I can't get up in the morning without knowing that I have something to live for," he said. "For me, that's training and competition. I'm not training because I enjoy it—I'm training because I have to. I need to train more than just to stay in shape—I need to know that I'm going to compete. This has been my whole life. I've been a competitive athlete my whole life. I need to know that you will help me back into competition."

For a moment, nobody said a word. Armstrong had just laid it out for them. He wasn't just asking for a mitigated ban. He was begging for his self-esteem, his identity, his life.

Ungerleider, the psychologist, later told Tygart: "I hope you guys got that memo. What he's trying to say is that you are taking away his coping mechanisms. This is who he is as a human being. Any way he can get back into it, with a 10k or a swimming

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race, that might be healthy and give him the skills to cope better
in life. I'm not asking you to do anything, I just want you to be
aware of that."

With Armstrong seeming to lean toward confessing to US-
ADA, the parties arranged another meeting in Austin for a week
later. Armstrong went back to Texas to bide his time until then.
When he did not receive a written guarantee that his ban would
be reduced, he refused to meet again.

A little less than three months after the USADA report came out,
Armstrong called his longtime friend Oprah Winfrey. Both were
in Hawaii. Armstrong was there with his family during a self-
imposed exile from the United States mainland. *Could he come
over to her estate in Maui and have lunch?* He had a business pro-
posal for her. She jumped at the chance.

Armstrong trusted Winfrey. She had been an admirer and had
worn a Livestrong yellow band, had even sold the bands on her
Web site. She had hosted the Armstrongs, including his mother, at
her house for dinner. (Armstrong had grown closer to his mother
since his divorce from Kristin in 2003, but their relationship, at
times, was still strained.)

He and Sheryl Crow had gone on her talk show when they
were still a couple in February 2005, and it had been nothing
but positive. Winfrey asked Crow, "Is he a big romantic?" Oh,
yes, she answered. Armstrong's mother, Linda, appeared also, and
Winfrey cooed, "The thing that I love about Linda is that she was
a single mom."

Weeks before their meeting on Maui, Winfrey had reached
out to Armstrong to ask if she could interview him on her strug-
gling Oprah Winfrey Network (OWN), and he declined.