

The Chairman's Corner

By Jon Blank

Since it is difficult to set the tone at the outset of a new chairman's tenure, I wondered how to begin this series of articles for the newsletter. Fortunately, today's juicy headlines prompted my first missive as NC LMSC Chair. Lance Armstrong's doping controversy and his impending confession seems to be everywhere on the information spectrum. In what will be old news by the time this note is electronically published, Armstrong apparently seeks video redemption for misdeeds by OWNING up and confessing on the Oprah Winfrey Network.



Like almost everyone, I was a huge fan of Lance Armstrong, as I eagerly eyed the video feed of the Tours de France in the early 2000s. His uplifting saga inspired so many – conqueror of metastatic cancer triumphant at the pinnacle of endurance athletics. He truly elevated his sport and even more so, transcended the sports pages to become a celebrity of the first rate. Unfortunately, like so many others, this hero/idol has now shown himself to have feet of clay.

What is interesting to me about this sad situation is that the use of performance enhancing drugs was so widespread, that apparently almost all of the athletes on the professional bike Tour “doped” - so much so that not to “dope” was actively discouraged. It was a conspiracy of all, with Armstrong both chief enforcer and chief beneficiary. It's no wonder Armstrong so sanctimoniously denied his illegal acts for so long, protecting his reputation and livelihood. Now, is he just another high-profile liar?

How does this relate at all to US Masters Swimming, one might ask. It's this: before he was the world's greatest cyclist, Armstrong was a top-ranked triathlete and an excellent competitive distance swimmer. After retiring from cycling, Armstrong began to train for triathlons and swimming competitions again. He paid his USMS membership fees and became a Masters Swimmer. He even tweeted to his legions of fans in early 2012 that he planned to compete at USMS Nationals.

The Greensboro Short Course USMS Nationals was a superbly run, very fast meet with many standout swims and storylines. Just imagine how Meet Directors Don Gilchrest and Hill Carrow would have welcomed the national media interest in our corner of the sporting world. Instead, Armstrong found himself stripped of his cycling awards, denounced by the man on the street and media pundits alike for his hypocrisy. He didn't show up for Nationals.

Here's a question, then: should USMS allow someone who admitted to use of banned substances as a professional athlete to compete in our amateur events? Email me your thoughts, and I'll share your perspectives and the points of views of your NCMS teammates in my next Chairman's Corner.