



Lessons From Lance

Article by Sonni Dyer

We all saw it.

The past July images are still fresh in our minds. Only now, we have the “Monday-morning-quarterback” advantage of seeing just how history was made when Lance Armstrong won his 6th consecutive Tour de France.

In fact, that’s the great thing about watching history. You have the advantage of knowing the summary of bullet-points that resulted in a momentous event.....or, as Paul Harvey likes to tease, “*The REST of the story.*”

Like him or not, we (as endurance athletes) can look at Lance’s accomplishment and glean insight into some core principles in reaching our OWN pinnacle.

Principles like:

1) Improvement in your game does **NOT** come by doing one thing 20% better. It comes by improving 20 things 1% better.

Lance’s attention to meticulous detail is legendary. From his scouting of the stages, to his diet, to the teammates he chooses, to his equipment, and especially his training. Very little was left to chance. In fact, The French media complains that he’s made the Tour *boring?!?!?* (That can be a compliment coming from a ‘surprize-thirsty’ French journalist.)

“But”, you may say, “*I REALLY need to improve my swim by 20%*”. [That’s a fair observation.] Then do like Lance and break a discipline (like the SWIM in our example) down into 20 parts that you can incrementally improve each in.

Improve your navigation by 1%. Improve your hand-entry by 1%. Improve your rotation and balance by 1% each.....etc....

The devil is in the details.

2) Build a plan that focuses on **YOUR** targeted eventsand then be disciplined enough to stick to that plan.

Here they were, two weeks before the Tour had begun, questioning Lance at a press-conference about how he had managed to lose **2 minutes** (!!) in a short uphill Time-Trial to Spaniard, Iban Mayo.

As the panic-laced questioning flew, Lance remained confident in his plan.....in the cycles of stress and recovery prepared for him. He didn’t deviate. He didn’t alter his approach at the last minute. He didn’t jump in “one last race” to gain confidence.

Lance understood the “where” he was in his training and KNEW that the best from his body, the TAPER, was still yet to come.

Moral of the story for the rest of us: Have a plan. Stick to that plan. Cycle periods of stress and recovery. Don’t over-race (causing under-training). You won’t have great feeling legs every time out.....so don’t try to. And finallyTRUST your taper.

**Coaches note: And don’t alter your plan until you’ve had an opportunity to fully realize it’s effect on your taper and race. Then, tweak it for NEXT time. Bit by bit, you’ll learn more and more about yourself.

3) Keep composure in the face of adversity. In fact, EXPECT adversity.

Picture this. You’re riding your bike up one of the toughest climbs in the world with nearly a million rabid fans screaming. Some cheer you. But others spit in your face, write slander about you on the road, and shout obscenities your way. This was the scene on the famous Alp De ‘Huez climb of the 2004 Tour.



What did Lance do? He expected it.

As a coach, I'm amazed that I still get e-mails from some of our athletes saying that they're feeling "tired and lethargic" in training for an event like an Ironman. I often want to reply, "Please assure me that you didn't think you could train for an 140mile race without feeling tired and fatigued at some points."

Adversity is part of the process. Water stagnates when it stays still.

When you have a poor workout or race, go back to your training log and attempt to USE the experience to learn from it. You can **ALWAYS** learn more about your own physiology from races that went wrong than from races that went perfectly.

Expect adversity.....and then create the expectation to improve *because* of it.

4) Realize that it's not just about you.

The visual image of a post-stage Lance with his arm around Benjamin Noval, consoling him, after Noval had fallen off the pace of the team during the Team Time Trial Stage is one that I will never forget.

Far stronger than the shots of Lance giving victory salutes w/ hands in the air, is the picture of him with his arms around a rain-drenched, lesser known teammate Letting him know, "It's ok. We all have bad days."

The lesson for us?

Triathlon **IS** a team sport. (If you don't believe me, ask your spouse next time he/she gets up at 5am to leave with you for a race.) Your family members are your teammates. Your coach is your teammate. Your training partners are your teammates. Who you buy your gear and equipment from are teammates. Who's race you attend.....they are your teammate.

If you understand that "**who**" you're really racing against is YOURSELF and the performances that YOU'VE had in the past.....**anyone** helping you improve and break through to new levels is a teammate. Even your closest competitors.

I, like many triathletes, used to be pretty anxious in the moments just before the mass swim start. My swim-mantra was "*Just get me to my bike. Just get me to my bike.*"

Then, one race-morning, I realized that I was improving, not in spite of, but **BECAUSE** of the challenge of swimming amongst the flailing arms, legs, and churning water. Slowly but surely, I began to **embrace** the swim-starts and view the competitors as a wave of open-water swim coaches whose sole purpose was to challenge me to get better and better.

Thanks for the lessons in endurance, Lance. We enjoyed the clinic.

Coach Sonni Dyer

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