

Armstrong accused of doping

Cycling

REUTERS, Paris

Seven-time Tour de France winner Lance Armstrong has denied ever taking performance-enhancing drugs following a report in French newspaper L'Equipe that he had used the blood-boosting drug EPO.

Tour de France executive director Jean-Marie Leblanc said he felt let down by Armstrong after L'Equipe alleged the American had taken the banned drug in 1999, the year he first won the world's greatest cycle race.

Armstrong, who recovered from testicular cancer to become the most successful rider in the Tour's history, has been forced to rebut several doping allegations during his career and he repeated on Tuesday that his sporting successes were 'clean'.

"I will simply restate what I have said many times: I have never taken performance-enhancing drugs," the 33-year-old, who retired in July, said in a statement on his personal website.

L'Equipe, saying it had access to laboratory documents, reported on Tuesday that six of Armstrong's urine samples collected on the 1999 Tour de France showed "indisputable" traces of EPO (erythropoietin).

L'Equipe published what it claimed to be a results sheet from the laboratory which appeared to show six figures revealing traces of EPO. The newspaper also published documents from the French cycling federation showing exactly the same figures under Armstrong's name.

The Chatenay-Malabry lab said in a statement that the samples they tested did not have names attached and they could not confirm if any of the samples were Armstrong's.

The lab said all test results had been sent to WADA, the agency in charge of the fight against doping in world sport, on the condition they did not use them to take disciplinary action.

Despite the lack of proof and Armstrong's denials, cycling officials expressed disappointment.

"I remain cautious and slightly circumspect but this is troubling and I feel disappointment inside me, like many sports lovers must do," Leblanc told French radio station RTL.

Asked if he felt let down by Armstrong, Leblanc said: "Yes".

International Cycling Union (UCI) president Hein Verbruggen told Reuters: "We have to wait and see if this is true."

"Only then will we be able to ask ourselves whether there should be any legal action and whether this is a

further blow for cycling.

"I have to say this is not pleasant but, for the moment, it only involves Lance Armstrong and France."

There were no tests to detect EPO, a drug that increases the level of red blood cells and endurance, in 1999.

However, samples from the 1999 Tour were kept and have been recently retested by the specialist anti-doping laboratory in Chatenay-Malabry outside Paris.

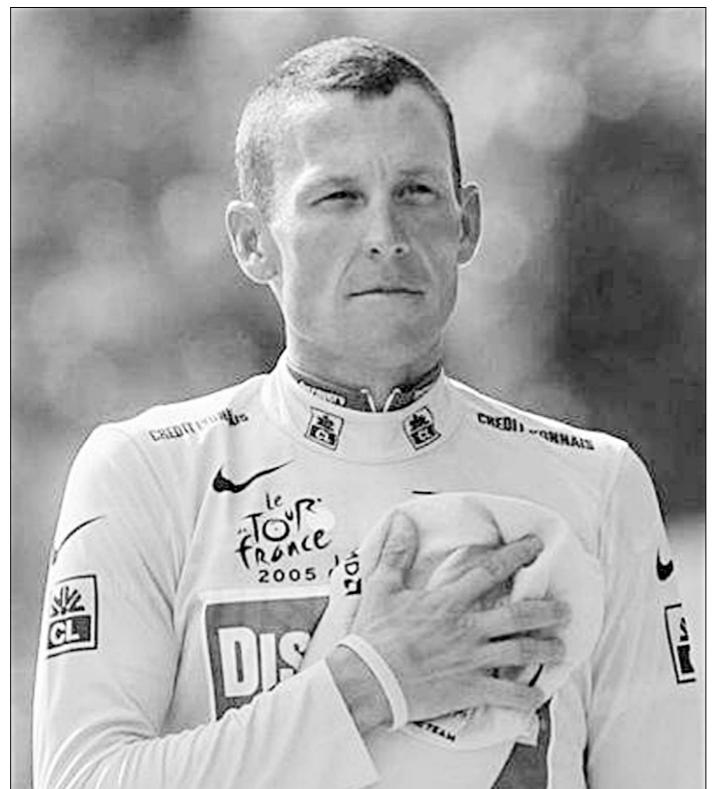
The World Anti-doping Agency

doping, was published on the eve of the 2004 Tour.

The leader of the US Postal team, which became the Discovery Channel team this year, he lost a Paris court case in 2004 when his request that the controversial book should include his denial of drug-taking was turned down.

"To all the cynics, I'm sorry for you," Armstrong said after his final Tour triumph in July.

"I'm sorry you can't believe in miracles. This is a great sporting



LANCE ARMSTRONG

(WADA)-accredited lab, which developed the test to detect EPO, started retesting last year samples that had been taken between 1998 and 1999 and frozen. The new tests were part of a scientific research programme.

A spokesman for WADA said the latest research results from the French laboratory had arrived at the Montreal-based organisation on the French sports ministry or the UCI.

Despite being in a class of his own in recent years, Armstrong could never win over French fans or journalists. "LA Confidential", a book on his life containing accusations of event and hard work wins it."

Armstrong said in his statement of denial on Tuesday: "Unfortunately, the witch hunt continues and (L'Equipe's) article is nothing short of tabloid journalism."

"The paper even admits in its own article that the science in question here is faulty and that I have no way to defend myself."

"They state: 'There will therefore be no counter-exam nor regulatory prosecutions, in a strict sense, since (the defendant's) rights cannot be respected.'

The American retired after winning his record seventh Tour de France in July. Before winning his first Tour in 1999, Armstrong won a battle against testicular cancer, undergoing two operations and four bouts of chemotherapy.

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"We've talked about that a lot. We know that we have to increase the intensity throughout the whole, from the day of the last (third) Test ... through to the last ball of the series."

"I've always said Michael Kasprowicz is in domestic cricket in Australia is the hardest bloke for me to face. He always tends to go across the left-hander. I've always found him a handful in first-class cricket, as I do in the nets."

But Langer added he'd also been impressed by Tait. "He's a bit like Shoaib Akhtar or a wavy Brett Lee."

"You need the courage to stand still facing him, he's a different sort of bowler. When he's bowling that fast and he's bowling yorkers like he can, he's obviously a real strike bowler and a great prospect."

The battle to be his replacement is between the Shoaib Tait, an out-and-out fast bowler who has the backing of Australia great Dennis Lillee, and the greater control of Michael Kasprowicz.

Langer, a gutsy left-handed opening batsman, said that with express paceman Brett Lee already in the team, Australia needed to think



PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE DAILY STAR
Bangladesh Olympic Association president and Army chief Lt Gen Moeen U Ahmed called on State Minister for Youth and Sports and patron of BOA Fazlur Rahman at the latter's Secretariat office on Tuesday.

Owen snubs Everton

BBC ONLINE

Everton have failed with a bid to sign England striker Michael Owen.

The Real Madrid forward, 25, looks likely to leave the Bernabeu and has been linked with a return to Liverpool as well as a move to Manchester United.

Boss David Moyes, who also said Everton had a £10m bid for Feyenoord's Dirk Kuyt rejected, stated: "We have been in contact with Michael and his advisers."

"Unfortunately he does not see Everton as a team he would choose at this present time."

Despite finishing fourth in the Premiership last season to earn a Champions League place, Moyes admitted he has found it hard to attract new players.

He added: "We offered £10m for Dirk Kuyt and that was rejected on 1 August by Feyenoord."

Making a bid for Owen is daft. He obviously wasn't going to come. It just makes the board look silly.

"I am trying to reassure fans I am in for most of the big names."

"We do have money to spend if the right players are available - but getting them in is the problem."

Owen spent much of his first season at Madrid coming off the bench.

And he has found himself even further down the pecking order at Real following the signings of Brazilian strike pair Robinho and Julio Baptista.

BBC ONLINE

Argentine football hero Diego Maradona has said he is unrepentant about using his fist in a controversial goal against England in the 1986 World Cup.

Speaking on his TV show, Maradona said the intervention, which he nicknamed "The Hand of God", was justified.

"The truth is that I don't for a second regret scoring that goal with my hand," he said on the programme.

The footballer apparently defended his goal as his response to Britain's claim to the Falkland Islands.

He said he wanted to let Argentines and the whole world know the truth about a key moment in football history.

Maradona scored the goal by punching the ball into the net during a jump as goalkeeper Peter Shilton leapt into the air towards the ball.

From the referee's angle it looked as though Maradona had headed the ball into the back of the net.

After scoring during the quarter-final match, Maradona said the boys came over to celebrate.

"They were quite timid. They came over to embrace me but it was as if they were saying: 'We've robbed them', he said.

"But I said to them: 'Whoever robs a thief gets a 100-year pardon.'

The player was apparently referring to the Falklands War, fought unsuccessfully by Argentina against the UK to take control of the islands it claimed as its own.

Maradona's show is called La Noche del Diez (Number Ten Night) - a reference to the Number 10 shirt Maradona wore for the national side.

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