

A Benevolent Cheater

Lance Armstrong, a hero to millions, and a disgrace to just as many, undoubtedly made an enormous difference in the world. He was an inspiration to others, as well as a powerful foe. In 1996, Armstrong was diagnosed with advanced testicular cancer, which later spread to his lungs, abdomen, and brain. Armstrong was given less than a forty percent chance to live. Yet, he was back to cycling and won the Tour de France seven times later. He had made the impossible possible, until recent findings and his own confessions confirmed that he had illegal help in achieving his titles. All of the good deeds he had done in his life were cast into the shadow, as the elaborate cheating scandal came into view. Lance Armstrong deceived the public by founding Livestrong, which helped inspire and aid those going through cancer, but also shattered this positive image by doping to enhance his cycling performance.

Livestrong is a foundation that helps people with insurance challenges, treatment concerns, fertility preservation, emotional support, clinical trials, and educates people about their options for free. Since its creation in 1997, Livestrong has helped more than 2.5 million people affected by cancer. Armstrong has raised more than \$470 million dollars in total, helping people in the fight against cancer to become survivors. Most of the money goes towards grants, educational programs, and patients in need to financial aid. Doug Ulman, President and CEO of the nonprofit organization, says, "We are incredibly proud of his record as an advocate and philanthropist". Armstrong continues to be Livestrong's most generous provider, and has funded many research programs too. While personally going through cancer treatments, Armstrong realized how many people couldn't get the care they needed. In order to help his fellow survivors and their loved ones, he created a foundation for the sole purpose of helping them create new lives for themselves and giving them hope. For example, Gabriel, a twenty-year-old acute myeloid leukemia survivor, was diagnosed with this disease when he was just two. He didn't have insurance because of the expenses of college and hadn't had any check-ups for almost three years. Gabriel was finally introduced to Livestrong, where a navigator helped him find an inexpensive insurance, and connected him to an organization that offered financial assistance. The navigator also helped him in applying for two scholarships, which Gabriel ended up receiving. All of this help made a huge difference in his life and he was extremely grateful that there were people who were genuinely dedicated to helping him make sure he was healthy. Livestrong has helped many other people like Gabriel, overcome various challenges that come with dealing with cancer. The organization that Lance Armstrong founded has changed the way the world looks at cancer: from a death sentence to a disease that can be defeated. Little did his coworkers know, that Livestrong was just a front to a very dishonest man.

Though Armstrong seemed like the perfect combination of inspiring athlete and humble humanitarian, a very flawed picture of himself was discovered recently. He denied having doped many times in court and under oath in past years, making strong statements that he never took performance-enhancing drugs. Furthermore, he used his influence and wealth to counter any accusations or attempts to expose him. He sued a masseuse of the team and a former teammate, Frankie Andreu and his wife, Betsy Andreu, who stated they overheard him talking to a doctor about the illegal substances. Armstrong kept his secret hidden for many years, but finally revealed them in an interview with Oprah Winfrey. He admitted that his "competition cocktail" consisted of testosterone, EPO, blood transfusions, and cortisone. He justified his actions saying he was "leveling the playing field" because he was at a disadvantage due to his cancer. The fact that he thought he could bend the rules and lie to everyone just because he had undergone severe treatments, contradicts the entire philosophy that he presented to the

world. He declared that he was “a survivor – not a victim,” while he struggled with cancer against crushing odds. Why then, did he feel the need to degrade himself and resort to cheating? By taking drugs, Armstrong conceded that it was impossible for a cancer survivor to win the Tour de France, or any other contest, without being dishonest and getting extra support. Instead of doing the best he could, he decided to take drugs because of a “ruthless desire to win” at all costs. Many things in his life have been going downhill from his interview. Armstrong’s long-time sponsors, such as, Nike, Anheuser-Busch, and Trek Bicycle have left him, refusing to be associated with such an athlete, and citing the USADA findings to terminate their contracts with him. They will no longer continue to support him in any of his endeavors. Armstrong also resigned from his position in the Livestrong Foundation. Stepping down from his leadership role showed he acknowledged that the majority of people would never listen to him again. This completely different side of Lance Armstrong was a shocking revelation to the whole world, and will not be forgotten anytime soon.

People have many diverse opinions about Armstrong after hearing about what he did. Some people chose to forgive him for his actions, taking into account all the things he did to benefit humanity. Bob Denton, an admirer of Armstrong, living in Tucson, Arizona, remarks, “Really, compared to the life and death issues of cancer that Lance has embraced, cheating in the Tour is small potatoes”. The signature yellow wristband became Denton’s beacon of hope and inspiration in overcoming his own cancer. During races, he looks to it for strength and energy. Amy Wadsworth, a breast cancer survivor, praises Armstrong, stating, “He didn’t give up when he was stared in the face with cancer. He kept going and encouraged many other survivors to do the same”. Many people, who went through the same thing he did, empathize with him. They feel that fighting for his life and motivating others to fight for theirs was more important and had a bigger impact than cheating during the races. Others, who are big sports fans or cyclists themselves, value honesty very much. Caden Brody, 49, and a two-time cancer survivor who lost his brother to leukemia, states that all of Armstrong’s good deeds were cancelled out. “Unfortunately, he undid everything, in many ways by his sociopathic need to bully, win, play mind games, and he used cancer as a cloak to cover his sins”. An extreme point of view from a CNN user, “jackiero” expressed his biting opinion, commenting, “As an avid cyclist and a cancer survivor who used cycling to aid in my recovery, I am disgusted by this man.” He also wrote, “He was an inspiration until I learned that he was just like all the other chemically induced sports stars who rake in millions and millions”. Even his close colleagues, who worked with him in Livestrong, didn’t know about his doping scheme and released a statement saying they were greatly disappointed in him. Lance Armstrong will have to work very hard to get back in the good graces of the people he cares about, and even then, he might never because of his tremendous betrayal to them.

Many athletes have done great things for people and many others have also cheated and lied. However, none have helped millions overcome a deadly disease or cheated in seven major competitions in a row. Lance Armstrong inspired humans across the globe and became an international champion. Everything he did was on a large scale, so the reaction to him lying about the races was just as big. He hid behind his foundation, Livestrong, and lied to everyone who respected and looked up to him. He presented an impeccable appearance to the whole community, but behind the scenes, he revealed his true character – an unethical athlete, just wanting to win. As the saying goes, the bigger they are, the harder they fall, and Lance Armstrong certainly did.