

A reputational mass-crash for the Tour de France?

MANAGEMENT DECISIONS

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Actions & Decisions

Short-term actions by Tour de France organisers

When the US Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) first announced the accusations against Lance Armstrong, the Tour de France organisers, Amaury Sports Organisation (ASO) were very careful commenting the accusations. They released their statement that they would wait for an outcome from USADA and UCI before making any comments about the incident:

"We are still waiting for important decisions to be taken by the competent authorities with responsibility for this matter, which are USADA and the International Cycling Union, before issuing any further comment."

- Amaury Sports Organisation official statement

When the 1000-page report was released by USADA, which accused Armstrong of leading the most sophisticated, professionalised, and successful doping programme that sport has ever seen. Actions needed to be taken regarding Armstrong's seven victories of the Tour. The UCI, which is the sport's governing body had the final say on Armstrong's penalty. However, before the UCI made their final decision, the Tour organisers ASO commented that they want to leave the records blank but did also give indications that they do not want to reassign Armstrong's seven victories to other Tour participants. The complicating factor was the difficulties in finding a clean replacement, many men who stood at the podium with Armstrong had either been convicted, accused, or suspended for doping violations. Tour the France director Christian Prudhomme commented only days before the UCI decision:

"There won't be a winner, the formal decision will be taken by the UCI on Friday, but for us, it's very clear. We want to leave the Palmares blank. The USADA report accuses a system and an era. This era must be remembered as an era without winners."

- Tour de France director Christian Prudhomme

Only days after Mr Prudhomme's statement, UCI decided to ban Armstrong from the cycling sport for life and strip him of all his Tour de France titles, between 1998-2005, as well as not reassign his titles to any riders. A decision that entirely coincided with the organisers ASO.

Concerning the decision of UCI stripping Armstrong of his Tour titles, actions were also taken regarding the prize money Armstrong won during his seven victories. ASO demanded Armstrong to repay seven years' worth of prize money, estimated to £ 2.4 million. The organisers ASO based their claims on the UCI rules, which states that when a rider is disqualified, he must return the prize money back.

In 2013, only one year after the Armstrong scandal, the 100-year anniversary of Tour de France took place. ASO invited over 500 riders who completed at least one edition of the Tour to celebrate the 100th edition of the race. Everyone who has finished the Tour has been invited to attend the “Giants of the Tour” ceremony, except Armstrong. However, ASO representatives refused to comment why Armstrong was not invited. Additionally, the head of UCI at the time Pat McQuaid was replaced after the Lance Armstrong doping scandal due to the allegations made against the former UCI president’s involvement in the scandal.

Overall ASO, were careful to comment on the Armstrong doping scandal, and was rather silent, compared to other stakeholders affected by the scandal. One can wonder if the ASO strategy has been to erase the past rather than confront it?

Long-term actions

The last couple of years, Tour de France director Mr Prudhomme and UCI have made huge steps towards the fight against doping, increasing and implementing testing measures in the Tour. In the presentation of the itinerary of the 2015 Tour de France cycling race, during a news conference in Paris, Mr Prudhomme stated:

“There are already a lot of measures -- just look at what cycling is doing compared with other sports.”

- Tour de France director Christian Prudhomme

Doping control - Agreements between the French Agence Française de Lutte Contre le Dopage (AFLD) and the independent, but UCI-funded, Cycling Anti-Doping Foundation (CADF) was established to maximise the efficiency of the control system, where the focus was more on qualitative than quantitative aspects. The agreement is a huge step towards fighting doping since in the past the UCI and AFLD have fought over the anti-doping controls at Tour de France. With the UCI defending their right to manage anti-doping controls in international races, and AFLD refusing to collaborate with UCI and insisting that they had the authority to administer the anti-doping controls at the Tour de France.

Independent Reform Commission (CIRC) - actions were taken by UCI and supported by ASO, to put the cycling sport under scrutiny, by ordering the Independent Reform Commission (CIRC) to do an independent investigation of the sport concerning doping. The CIRC report showed that doping was less prevalent but had not been completely eradicated with some riders still abusing corticoids and using micro-dosing to avoid detection. Tour de France director Mr Prudhomme commented the report saying:

“It shows that there have been improvements in a world that is not perfect. But the fight against doping is a permanent fight.”

- Tour de France director Christian Prudhomme

Cooperation with the pharmaceutical industry - According to ASO, one of the accomplishment compared to previous years, is the collaboration with the pharmaceutical industry in 2015, with according to the ASO, Mr Prudhomme is a great leap forward which will bring quick results.

Requests to withdraw elite licenses - The UCI took actions towards doping in 2015, by requiring the licence commission to strip one of the World Tour elite teams Astana of their licence, which would hinder them to race the Tour de France, because of recent doping scandals of riders in the Astana team.

In previous years and the light of the Lance Armstrong doping scandal, ASO, the Tour de France organisers have been under pressure to take actions concerning doping tendencies within the Tour. As a result of the measures taken by ASO and UCI, we can see a decrease of doping cases since 2012, post-Armstrong scandal. Data shows that none of the top 10 finishers between 2012-2015 in the Tour de France has been doping, which demonstrated that the anti-doping efforts made in the Tour are giving a positive effect.