

3Qs: What's next for Lance Armstrong?

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Road racing cyclist Lance Armstrong, who won the Tour de France a record seven consecutive times after beating testicular cancer in the late 1990s, has reportedly admitted to using performance enhancing drugs in an exclusive interview with talk show host Oprah Winfrey. Credit: Dreamstime

Road racing cyclist Lance Armstrong, who won the Tour de France a record seven consecutive times after beating testicular cancer in the late 1990s, has reportedly admitted to using performance-enhancing drugs in an exclusive interview with talk show host Oprah Winfrey. Part one of the two-part interview will air at 9 p.m. EST Thursday night on the

Oprah Winfrey Network and will be simultaneously streamed live on Oprah.com. Northeastern University news office asked a trio of experts to examine Armstrong's apparent decision to come clean some 18 years after doping allegations initially surfaced.

According to reports, the Justice Department is likely to join a whistle-blower lawsuit against Armstrong, alleging that the cyclist defrauded the U.S. government by lying about his use of performance-enhancing drugs. What are the legal and financial consequences of his reported confession?

Roger Abrams, the Richardson Professor of Law in the School of Law, and an authority on sports law:

Lance Armstrong certainly has need for some good lawyers and some terrific public relations professionals. The whistle-blower lawsuit is just one of the legal challenges Armstrong will face; he will be a regular visitor to our nation's courts over the years to come.

There are a series of legal cases, both pending and foreseeable, that present significant exposure to Armstrong. His "admission against interest"—as lawyers refer to them—will alter the focus of the cases from "Did he do it?" to "What does his admission actually mean?" A great deal depends on what exactly Lance admits to have done. There have been significant stakeholders in the Armstrong industry, including the sponsors of his cycling teams and insurance companies that paid off bonuses. They can claim they were defrauded by Lance, but the U.S. Postal Service, for example, made back triple its investment in the Armstrong cycling team. In any case, it will take some period of time for all the cards to be played.

After the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency released a 1,000-page report accusing Armstrong of masterminding a doping scheme, one journalist remarked that the cyclist was "the king—better at doping than he was at pretending to win bicycle races through grit and determination." How do you think the media's perception of Armstrong will change in the aftermath of his reported confession interview with Oprah?

Charles Fountain, an associate professor of journalism in the College of Arts, Media, and Design, and an expert in sports media and journalism:

While it is difficult to predict where a news story like this is going to go before any his interview with Oprah airs, one near certainty is that the Oprah interview will be one of the most watched and written-about news interviews in modern memory—think Nixon-Frost, absent the historical import. In the near term—however the Oprah story plays out—you're likely to see a lot more of the self-righteous, "Shame! Shame! Shame!" comment from columnists and bloggers that we've been seeing since the USADA report came out last fall. And there'll be ample opportunity for such comment because the spate of lawsuits promised and already filed is going keep Armstrong in the news for years to come.

Long-term, where this story goes depends largely on Armstrong. If he retreats behind the gates of his mansions in Texas and Hawaii, the story won't move much from where it is right now. But his talking now suggests that he wants to continue to lead a public life, and his quest for redemption promises to be an even better story than the cancer-survivor, cancer-fighter, cycling-champion* chapters of his life were. We love stories of redemption—successful, failed, on going; it won't matter at all

from a news perspective. All will be irresistible, particularly with a celebrity of Armstrong's magnitude.

Several sports pundits have speculated that Armstrong's reported confession to doping would compel the World Anti-Doping Agency to lift his lifetime ban from sports, including sanctioned marathons and triathlons, in which he has become known for competing. Why do you think Armstrong has apparently finally come clean?

Dan Lebowitz, the executive director of Sport in Society, a Northeastern University center:

I believe there are many reasons why Lance Armstrong has reportedly decided to confess to using performance-enhancing drugs. First, the World Anti-doping Agency's investigation into his PED use and blood doping is at a crescendo of such great intensity that the story can be considered ubiquitous. In many respects, there is nowhere else for Armstrong to hide. Secondly, with regard to the vigilance of the WADA investigation, there is the very likely possibility of an impending prosecution, perhaps grounded in the belief that Armstrong not only mandated and coordinated team-wide complicity specific to drug use, but also used his international icon status as an intimidation and enforcement tool. Thirdly, Armstrong has a reported net-worth of \$100 million. Here, again, there is the pending possibility of multiple lawsuits and great economic exposure.

Given the dark cloud of these three issues, Armstrong probably felt compelled to come clean in the belief that doing so might result in some sort of blanket leniency, in possible legal proceedings, both criminal and

civil, and in terms of the court of public opinion. There is no question that his legacy has been monumentally tarnished, but his confession, particularly through such a celebrity vehicle as an Oprah Winfrey Special, is clearly his attempt at a first step on the road to redemption. The list of celebrities, athletes, politicians, business people, and others whom have gone from victorious to vilified could fill endless volumes. Still, we remain at heart a forgiving populace. This explains the equally long volumes of comeback and redemption stories. In all, I'm certain that with this confession, Armstrong hopes to end up in this category.

Provided by Northeastern University

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