

The Armstrong Affair: the USADA deplores the ICU's "control and influence" over the independent commission

By telling all, Lance Armstrong could well up get some mud on the ICU

by Stéphane Mandard

The head of the International Cyclists Union (ICU) Pat McQuaid and his predecessor Hein Verbruggen must be feverishly awaiting Lance Armstrong's confessions, to be broadcast Thursday evening January 17 in the United States. Ever since Oprah Winfrey, the high priestess of American talk show hosts let it be known that, yes, Armstrong had admitted on camera that, yes, he had doped during his career, murmurs are growing louder that the former seven-time winner of the Grande Boucle could also get some mud on the ICU and its directors by his great truth offensive.

"The ICU will not make any comments regarding Lance Armstrong until it has had the chance to see his interview with Oprah Winfrey," the Federation responded Tuesday in a communiqué. "If the assertions being made are shown to be correct, we would strongly encourage Lance Armstrong to testify before the Independent Commission that was inquiring into allegations made against the ICU in the context of the recent decision made by the USADA regarding Lance Armstrong."

The independent commission referred to was set up by the ICU October 26, after the USADA released a report accusing Lance Armstrong of having put together the most sophisticated doping program in history, in order to determine whether the rider had benefitted from Federation complicity all those years. According to our sources, the USADA wrote to the Commission's representatives Monday January 14 to complain about the ICU's attitude and to alert the representatives that the USADA did not intend to take part in the Commission's scheduled January 29 session in London. In effect the USADA considers that at this time "the Commission is incapable of cleaning up its sport."

In its message—which Le Monde has seen—the American anti-doping agency deplores "the control and influence the ICU has over the Commission." It notably reproaches the Federation for having contacted potential witnesses, and even having briefed former collaborators before the Commission had been able to hear their testimony.

*[From Marc: a note on one ambiguity here: When Mandard writes "former collaborators," does he mean "collaborators with the UCI" or "associates of Lance Armstrong?" I think the word chosen more suggests riders who have previously cooperated with the UCI than former Armstrong teammates.]*

"Amnesty Program"

Also according to our sources, the president of the USADA, Travis Tygart, had a meeting the weekend of December 15, 2012 in Denver, Colorado with a member of the Commission, Malcolm Holmes, an Australian jurist who has worked with the Sports Arbitration Tribunal in Lausanne, Switzerland since 1995. It was after this meeting that the head of the USADA set his conditions for cooperation with the Commission: full publication of the Commission's final report and the setting up of a "truth-and-reconciliation amnesty program" in order to

round up the greatest number of witnesses by permitting riders, in particular, to make confessions without risking suspension.

Members of the Commission, as well as other interested parties (the World Anti-doping Agency and the movement Change Cycling Now) have agreed to incorporate these two crucial points. But not the UCI. For now, the Federation reserves to itself the right as to whether or not to make public the Commission's report, due June 1. And in a message dated January 10, the Federation responded that anything like a reconciliation program should be set up at the level of sports as a whole, and not just cycling.

For the USADA, this refusal in itself constitutes an obstruction to the work of the Commission. The American anti-doping agency says for instance that it knows of a number of riders who are ready to testify, but who will not do so if they are not given the assurance of an amnesty. We will soon know whether Lance Armstrong will be among them.

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