

NEW STYLE DOMINATION



2002 TOUR DE FRANCE RESULTS

1. Lance Armstrong (US) 3,282km in 82h05'12" (39.882kph)
2. Joseba Beloki (Sp) 7'17"
3. Raimondas Rumsas (Lith) 8'17"
4. Santiago Botero (Col) 13'10"
5. Igor Gonz. de Galdeano (Sp) 13'54"
6. José Azevedo (Por) 15'44"
7. Francisco Mancebo (Sp) 16'05"
8. Levi Leipheimer (US) 17'11"
9. Roberto Heras (Sp) 17'12"
10. Carlos Sastre (Sp) 19'05"

ARMSTRONG'S STAGE WINS:

- St 00: Luxembourg ITT (2nd Jalabert)
- St 11: La Mongie (2nd Beloki)
- St 12: Plateau de Beille (2nd Heras)
- St 19: Macon ITT (2nd Rumsas)

MOUNTAINS CLASSIFICATION

1. Laurent Jalabert (Fr) 262pts
4. Lance Armstrong (US) 159pts

SPRINT CLASSIFICATION

1. Robbie McEwen (Australia) 280pts
6. Lance Armstrong (US) 119pts

« Raimondas Rumsas and Joseba Beloki (with Lance, left) were on the Parisian podium but the American never let them get close to the yellow jersey.

ONLY WEEKS BEFORE THE START OF THE 89TH TOUR DE FRANCE Lance Armstrong had seen an end to an official investigation into allegations that he and his US Postal team were involved in doping practices. It was little more than a farcical affair that was conducted by public prosecutor François Franchy that spanned 18 months.

The enquiry began in November 2000 after a French television crew filmed team staff depositing a 'suspicious' package in a bin away from the hotel where Lance and his crew were staying during that year's Tour. "There comes a time when, without wanting to be paranoid, you have to wonder about the motives and objectivity of some people," was how Armstrong responded to the probe.

The American was winning in a time of deep suspicion and, like the rest of the riders, he was under the microscope.

After 17 stages of the Tour in 2002 there was little doubt who the winner was going to be. Armstrong had won the prologue and two successive mountain stages in the Pyrenees. With three days to go he held his traditional press conference with a handful of print journalists in a hotel in Sallanches. As usual questions about doping were asked. He understood why.

"It's an epidemic that's going to spread," said Lance about doping before reminding those present that he hasn't failed any of the plethora of tests he has been obliged to take. "There are champions and record breakers that will never be vindicated."

Armstrong's reign comes at a time when there are more controls for more products than ever before. And after the 1998 Tour and the infamous Festina Affair, cycling has led the way in the fight against doping. And the rider who can share some of the credit for rescuing the world's biggest bike race has survived all the investigations unscathed.

One man who mounted a challenge to Armstrong in July 2002 was Raimondas Rumsas. The Lithuanian finished third overall and a day after the Tour concluded his wife was caught carrying a cache of drugs from France to Italy. He's done little of note since the time trial in Macon, where he finished 52nd behind the rider in the *maillot jaune*. But Raimondas was singled out by Lance as a rider worth keeping an eye on – even in a race where he didn't believe he was pushed too hard.

"It's fair to say there have not been many attacks," Lance admitted during the interview in Sallanches. "[But] I always worry about the others... guys like Rumsas."

The leader of the Lampre team was indeed consistent but like virtually all the pre-race favourites in 2002 he was never prepared – or capable – or taking on Armstrong when it really mattered. The US Postal team was stronger than ever before and they dictated how the Tour would be raced from day one.

It was a dominant display but one that rated scant mention three years later when Lance was asked to summarise the emotions generated by his six victories. He listed the favourite moments of the Tours from 1999 to 2001 but when he reached 2002 he stumbled. "Uh 2002... no highlights of 2002."

His chance to redeem himself and win on Mont Ventoux was stolen from him by Richard Virenque who escaped early and held off the late charge by Lance and co. And Armstrong was beaten in the first individual time trial but still, you'd think that four stage wins and a fourth successive title may provide one fond memory but the Texan seemed sincere when he offered his negative appraisal.

Perhaps he had grown tired of the cynicism that surrounded his success. Maybe his recollection was clouded by the euphoria of knowing he was about to create history. Or could it just be that 2002 was a year he would rather forget?

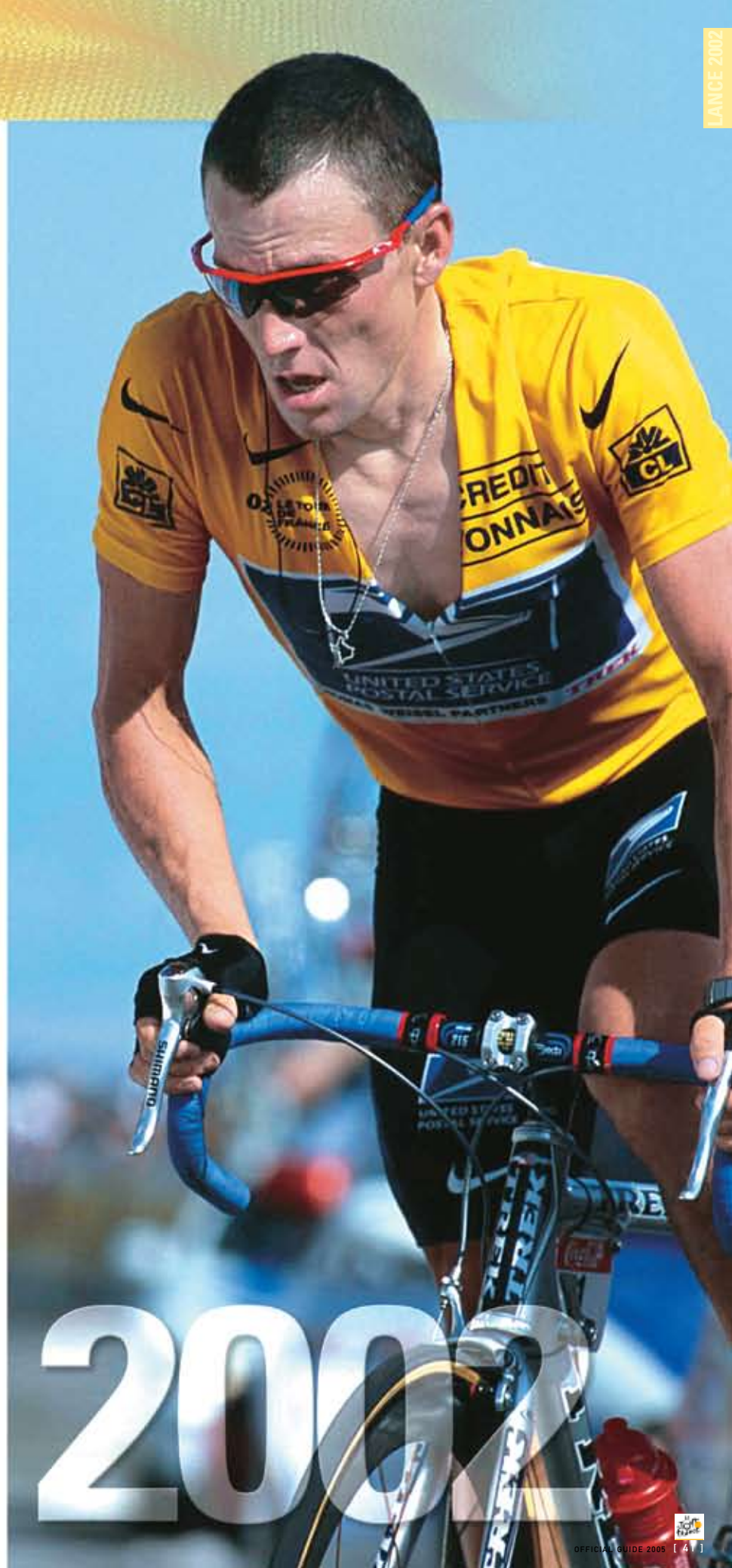
US POSTAL TEAM: Lance Armstrong (US) 1st; Viatcheslav Ekimov (Rus) 58th; Roberto Heras (Sp) 9th; George Hincapie (US) 59th; Benoît Joachim (Lux) 89th; Floyd Landis (US) 61st; Pavel Padrnos (Cze) 69th; Victor Hugo Peña (Col) 73rd; José Luis Rubiera (Sp) 22nd



On the final climb of stage 11, Lance was well supported by his Spanish US Postal colleague Roberto Heras. The pair eliminated every challenger with the exception of Joseba Beloki on the Col du Tourmalet. As they approached the finish in La Mongie the intention was for Heras to be given the chance to win a stage... but when Beloki refused to accept defeat Armstrong bolted ahead to ensure he nabbed both the stage win and the valuable time bonuses (above). At Plateau de Beille (above centre) Armstrong got to savour the victory in the stage that again went past the memorial for Fabio Casartelli. If this tradition continues expect to see the American throwing another salute in stage 15 this year.



At the start of the final stage the leaders of the various classifications posed for photographers (right). In a festive atmosphere Armstrong chats with a rival for the future, the Best Young Rider of 2002 Ivan Basso while King of the Mountains Laurent Jalabert looks on. The yellow, white and polka-dot tops had already been decided. The winner of the green jersey, however, was yet to be determined. Robbie McEwen held his focus from the start and became the first Australian to win the points classification.



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