



Santa Clara Magazine » Summer 2008 » Speed racers

**FEATURES**

From the editor

Letters

Mission Matters

Bronco Sports

In Print

SCU Alumni Association

Class Notes

In Memoriam

Bronco Profiles

Alumni Calendar

SCU Event Calendar

After Words

Parting Shot

**ISSUE ARCHIVE**

Send a Class Note

About Santa Clara Magazine

Contact Us



# Speed racers

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**Cycling legend Greg LeMond comes to SCU to weigh in on the ethics of doping in sports—and whether cycling can recover from the scandals now dogging it.**



*Man in blue: LeMond in '89 as he wins the World Road Cycling Championship. On the left is Sean Kelly of Ireland, on the right Dmitri Konichev of the U.S.S.R. A few weeks earlier, LeMond also won the Tour de France.*

*Photo: Courtesy Greg LeMond*

**In 1986 he became the first American to win the Tour de France. Then, after a devastating hunting accident in 1987, Greg LeMond recovered to win the Tour title again in both 1989 and 1990. He has been honored as the best cyclist in the world. He has also been an outspoken critic of doping in sports.**

**On Feb. 17, in a program hosted by the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics and co-sponsored by the Commonwealth Club/Silicon Valley, he came to SCU's Leavey Center for a conversation with Gwen Knapp, a sports columnist at the *San***

*Francisco Chronicle*, about how cycling might restore its integrity after the host of doping scandals in the last year. Below are edited excerpts.

## LeMond makes his case

**Greg LeMond:** Most humans are born with the moral sense of what is right and what is wrong. But many will justify cheating by stating, "Everyone is doing it; why shouldn't I?"

Well, not everyone is cheating. And those who compete by the rules are the ones being cheated. The price that an honest rider pays is not being rewarded for their full potential; riders who are not taking drugs also pay a price with their health.

There's a lot of discussion about the health dangers of drugs in sport. But doing a three-week Tour de France against people that are juiced up—statistics show a power increase of about 30 to 40 percent, which is impossible to keep up with, even for the most talented athletes in the world.

If you choose to compete in a sport, there is a set of defined rules under which you're agreeing to compete. By bending the rules, you undermine the integrity of the sport, your own integrity, and the integrity of those who might not have wanted to take drugs but do so because they want to keep up.

There are always new drugs, there are always new experiments. And in cycling for the last 15 years, there's been a lot of pushing the limits. Over 100 amateur and professional athletes have died.

This isn't about one rider, this isn't about individuals; most of these people racing started off like me, at 14 years old, with a passion for cycling, with a dream of going to the Tour de France. The sickness is at the highest level. You're persuaded that you can't do without drugs, and you're convinced that it's healthier, actually, to take drugs.

My hope is that the disasters in cycling are going to lead to a cleaner sport. But I still believe more drastic changes need to be taken. I still don't think they get it.

**Gwen Knapp:** Under medical supervision, do you think performance-enhancing drugs would be beneficial in elite sports, given the assumption that most elite athletes do take performance-enhancing drugs?

**LeMond:** The rules are in place that you can't take testosterone, even a small amount; you can't take a blood supplement—you're cheating. Does that change five years down the road? I hope it doesn't. If everybody's starting the Tour de France clean,



*Jersey boy: LeMond shows off some Bronco biking team formalwear presented by SCU student and cycling club president Robert Lorenzen, center, and advisor James Reites, S.J.*

*Photo: Charles Barry*

everybody's going to finish the race.

**Knapp:** Is there any way that medical supervision could be backed up by testing if you set limits?

**LeMond:** You'll probably never get rid of 100 percent, but there are ways to get rid of 98 percent of it. But it requires outside-the-box thinking.

First you have to separate the drug testing from the federations, the events, and the riders, who all have a conflict of interest. Corruption is well-known in sports—from the International Olympic Committee accepting bribes from cities to the U.S. Olympic Committee hiding positives for American athletes.

There's rumors of corruption of the International Cycling Union (UCI), the governing body. They take control of the vials that you urinate into and deliver them to the lab. Everybody's blaming the lab as corrupt. If there is corruption at the UCI, the manipulation is between the change in custody from the urine to the lab.

In the future there has to be an independent organization, like the World Anti-Doping Agency, that has no interest in the sport—zero interest. They don't care if it's the top guy that goes down or the bottom guy. They don't care if the Tour de France loses sponsors, they don't care if a team goes out of business. Right now, the riders don't trust the system.

I do believe that there should be a criminal aspect of doping. When I hear, "Let's legalize it"—what does that mean? If you legalize it for professional athletes, why shouldn't a high school kid just be able to go down to the local drugstore and get a year's supply of growth hormone?

**Knapp:** What can the public do about doping?

**LeMond:** Cycling is one of the most beautiful sports in the world. The beauty of it is the human drama of it. It goes back 100 years. People admire and are awed by the competitiveness, the struggle. But when it's all artificial, and you don't know...

I don't see a whole lot of struggling in the last couple years.

I'd get done with the mountain stage and take 25 minutes to say, "Give me some time to recover." And I'm watching riders get off their bike, and 15 seconds later, it's like they just went out for a Sunday ride.

I don't want people to stop watching cycling and loving cycling. But people should open their eyes.