

**“The Fastest Bicycle Rider In The World”
“It’s Not About The Bike”**

A journey in strength, courage, endurance, sacrifice and the Indomitable determination to overcome!

It’s July 3, 1999 and the opening prologue of the 86th Tour De France. Considered by many to be the greatest and most grueling athletic event in the world, not to mention the Greatest Bicycle Race in the World.

Each contender possesses a single minded objective; to wear the Yellow Jersey in Paris. A symbol of individual achievement that is unsurpassed in any other sport.

This year, 1999, like never before is expected to attract the largest worldwide audience in tour history as Lance Armstrong of Austin, Texas, against all odds lines up to compete against the best in the world as he attempts to rewrite cycling history by returning from a near death experience with cancer, to capture the most heralded title in the cycling world.

Lance wins the opening prologue impressively and three weeks, 20 stages and 3,686.8 kilometers later Lance rides triumphantly into Paris as the undisputed 1999 winner of the prestigious **Tour De France**.

How did he do it? How did he defy death? How did he overcome the ravishes of cancer and rise to the pinnacle of his sport?

Let’s now roll the calendar back one hundred years. It’s August 10, 1899 on a sweltering hot day in Montreal, Canada, host city for the world 1 mile bicycling championship. Favorites to are two American rivals, Tom Butler of Boston and Marshall “Major” Taylor, a native of Indianapolis, now living in Worcester, Mass. The field of competitors is a virtual who’s who in the cycling world, attracting the largest crowd to date to attend such an event on the North American Continent. The events are hotly contested with amazing displays of strength, speed, cunning and agility, however at the conclusion of the competition Marshall “Major” Taylor is crowned the World Champion, thereby becoming the first **Black Athlete** in any sport to win a World Professional Championship.

How did he do it? How did he rise above the narrow mindedness of racism? How did he overcome exclusionary practices? How did the son of a former slave garner the intestinal fortitude to keep competing amid frequent and unending verbal and abusive threats of bodily harm?

How did they do it?

These are but two examples of the broader spectrum of our ability as Human Beings to at times achieve unbelievable feats, often against extraordinary odds and circumstances.

The much publicized accomplishments of Lance Armstrong and Marshall "Major" Taylor are not only a source of eternal inspiration but also an encouraging study of the Human Spirit and how an individual through sheer guts and determination can prevail in situations with overwhelming odds.

The truth be known however, there is a second and equally important dimension that aides and empowers our natural ability and determination. For in spite of our natural and God given abilities and talents we seldom reach the height of our potential on our own, but, if only by chance, through the aide and intervention of others, who see in us our true potential and interacts to unlock those doors of opportunity that leads to higher achievement.

In short, we all have a responsibility, given occasion and opportunity to give back. To be a positive influence, a catalyst in the life of someone else. It may be a word or a deed; to a son or daughter, a neighbor's child, a kid in little league, it really does not matter, for the more we give the greater our reward. A reward we often measure by the degree of satisfaction we feel through the achievements of others to whom we have freely given with no expectation of return.

Each of us can quietly testify to the fact that our life would be quite different if not for inspiration, encouragement and positive support of someone perceived our true potential. It's so true that no one is an island unto themselves, and only through the assistance and intervention of others can we move beyond the limitations of today.

Quite often its that chance encounter that signals a turning point in our lives. I wonder, how different Heavyweight boxing might be today, if policeman Joe Martin, had turned a death ear to the boiling rage of 12 year old Cassius Marcellus Clay in 1953 after his bicycle was stolen.

Major Taylor and Lance Armstrong are two shining examples of how raw untapped potential through the positive influence and intervention of others can overcome obstacles and adversity to achieve the unachievable.

Marshall Walter Taylor was born on November 26, 1878. His parents Gilbert Taylor and Saphronia Kelter were both Kentucky natives. Marshall was one of the younger of 8 children. Although his family was extremely poor, from 1886 - 1891 Major Taylor was blessed with a relatively easy life when compared to his siblings. Gilbert Taylor, his father was a coachman for a very wealthy white family in Indianapolis. The Southard's family son, Daniel and Major were the same age and soon became best friends.

The Southards hired Major as a playmate for Daniel. While living with the Southards Major was the beneficiary of a good education, nice clothes and his greatest love, his very own bicycle.

Major's first experience with racism occurred while living with the Southards when he was not permitted to exercise and play at the Indianapolis YMCA because he was black. His friends were very upset, but even their powerful white families could do nothing about it.

In 1891 the Southards moved to Chicago and Major Taylor returned to live with his family.

While using his bicycle to deliver newspapers, Major developed extraordinary speed and strength and began to train himself to perform numerous tricks and stunts on the bike. He soon caught the eye of the owner of Hay and Willits Bicycle Shop who hired him to work at the shop and to perform his tricks outside to attract customers. Marshall Taylor dressed in a military uniform while performing tricks and thereafter was referred to as, The Major.

At the age of 13, with the insistence of Mr. Hay, Major entered his first amateur event, a 10 mile road race. Thousands lined the course and watched s Major crossed the finish line first and then collapsed with exhaustion.

In 1894 Walter Sanger, one of the greatest bicycle riders of the day, announced that he would attempt to establish a new track record at the Capital City Track in Indianapolis. At the same time he refused to compete against Major Taylor in this feat because he was black. Sanger established a mark of 2.18 and received a handsome bonus for his accomplishment.

Immediately following Sangers successful ride, a number of Major Taylor friends secretly slipped him through the dressing room and onto the same track. It was then announced that Major Taylor would attempt the same stunt. In an unbelievable blaze of speed before a packed house, Taylor beat Sanger's record by 7 seconds, an unprecedented feat for a sixteen year old. Soon after this accomplishment Major Taylor was banned from the Capital City Race Track and most major cycling events in the Indianapolis area.

Later that year through the encouragement and support of bicycle dealer H.T. Hearsey, Major entered a 75 mile bicycle race from Indianapolis to Matthew , Indiana. Because of many threats to his safety Major had to hide and secretly start the race after the main field had departed. As he soon caught up and began to pass the field the verbal abuse and threats escalated as it became a race for his life. Only his superior skills saved him as he finished one hour ahead of the second man. His victory won him a house lot in Matthews, Indiana worth \$3,000.00.

Shortly after this event Major entered the employment of one of the greatest riders that ever sat in a saddle, **Louis D. (Birdie) Munger**, who had recently retired from cycling. Munger coached, mentored, trained, guided and introduced Major to some of the most renowned cyclist of the era.

In 1895 Major moved to Worcester, Mass. With Munger and soon discovered that there was no apparent race prejudice as he had experience in Indianapolis.

Under the guidance of Munger, Taylor continued to overcome obstacles and excelled to the Apex of his sport. He became the National Professional Track Champion in 1900 and won 42 of 57 meets in Europe in 1902. Major's 1928 Autobiography "THE FASTED BICYCLE RIDER IN

THE WORLD” is a starling testimony of Determination and Triumph.

Marshall “Major” Taylor was Inducted into the U.S. BICYCLING HALL OF FAME IN 1989.

How did he do it? The Southards, Mr. Hay, H.T. Hearsey, Unnamed White Friends, Birdie Munger. Then, as today, we can’t run this Race Alone.

Lance Armstrong was born on September 18, 1971 in Plano, Texas. In Plano as in Texas, Football was King. Lance wanted to be a football player but lacked the necessary coordination. He decided instead to try swimming.

As a fifth grader Lance joined a local swim club. However his swimming skills were so weak that he was placed in a group of second graders. Although embarrassing this experience provided the inspiration for Lance to rise above his element. His swim coach, Chris MacCurdy, took a special interest in him and within a year Lance placed fourth in the state in the 1500-meter freestyle.

Soon he began to ride his bicycle to swim practice in the morning before school. That added up to 20 miles per day on the bike and 6 miles in the water.

At age 13 Lance responded to a flyer for a competition call Iron Kids. It was a Junior Triathlon. Although he’d never heard of a Triathlon, he won, by a lot.

At age 15 Lance begin competing in triathlon events against experienced older adults. His results were so impressive that he began to get recognized in the press.

By age 16 Lance was making about \$20,000 per year in competition, soon the business contacts and sponsorships begin to call.

It all nearly came to an abrupt end one spring afternoon as he glided through a four lane intersection with no helmet and failed to check for traffic. Smashed by a ford Bronco, Lance landed on his head and suffered a concussion and numerous other wounds. His mother and best friend Linda never left his side.

In 1990 Lance competed in his first international race in Japan under US National Team Coach, Chris Carmichael. His 11th place finish was the best ever by an American. This officially launched his professional debut as a professional cyclist.

Self assured, confident and inspired by the accomplishments of his idol, Greg Lemond, Lance felt that nothing could stand in the way of his ultimate dream.

To stand on the podium in Paris and become the second American to proudly wear the coveted Yellow Jersey.

Under the careful guidance and tutelage of coach Carmichael Lance became the talk of the cycling world as next Indurian, five time winner of the Tour de France.

From His Book, "It's Not About The Bike" Lance describes the next stage of his life.

October 2, 1996

Dr. Reeves snapped my X rays onto a light tray in the wall
My chest looked like a snowstorm.

"Well, this is a serious situation," Dr. Reeves said, "It looks like testicular cancer.

I have cancer?

Are you sure? I said.

"I'm fairly sure," Dr. Reeves said.

I'm 25. Why would I have cancer?

In our lives sometimes why questions seem to fall on deaf ears. For know one can adequately explain Why. Only after we have completed our journey does our vision become more clear and our perspective ever change.

After his successful recovery from testicular cancer Lance summarized his new perspective on life in his book.

" The truth is that cancer was the best thing that ever happened to me. I don't know why I got the illness, but it did wonders for me, and I wouldn't want to walk away from it. Why would I want to change, even for a day, the most important and shaping event in my life? Sometimes I think the biggest thing cancer did was knock down a wall in me. Before cancer I defined myself purely in terms of "winner" of "loser," but I don't have that kind of rigid vanity anymore. I've learned to be more thoughtful.

It's been often stated that to whom much is given, much is required. And that process begins first with our realization that we did not do it, what ever it is, all by ourselves. That we are all the beneficiaries throughout our lives of the kindness and often unwarranted favor of others.

As we all know Lance Armstrong not only fully recovered from his cancer but went on to realize his Special Dream, Sevenfold. **The new standard for the Tour De France will be forever embodied in the person of Lance Armstrong.**

How did he do it?

Coach MacCurdy, his Mother, Coach Carmichael, Dr. Reeves, The Cancer.

Without a doubt our most enduring and prolific qualities are shaped each day by People, Events, and Circumstances around us. If it is true that Virture is "The Quality of Moral Rightness or Excellence", then it serves us well that we should Pass It on to Another, Again, Again & Again.

Wendell Lynch

October 5, 2006
Hopkinsville, Ky.

Athenaeum Society

For they just might be the next “Fastest Bicycle Rider in the World”, for after all, “It’s Not about the Bike”.