

## Lance Armstrong – Tufts – 5/23/2006

Just to start, I have a little bit of news. I was thinking last night that seven Tours wasn't enough. I was thinking I would come back for number eight. For those of you who don't know, in cycling you have to have a team. It might appear to be an individual sport, but really it's a team sport. I am just happy to say that I have found a team and we actually have a jersey. [Armstrong reveals a Tufts cycling jersey.] You know, I have yet to meet the guys, but I hope they're up to the task. Where are they? There they are over there. [Armstrong points to members of the Tufts cycling team in the crowd.] Head straight to the human performance lab and we'll start testing the O2 maxes tonight before you hit the town. You've only got about six weeks until the start of the Tour...

That was all a joke. Seven is enough. There will never be eight.

You know, for a guy who barely made it out of high school, I find it incredibly ironic that I am standing up here as a doctor. [Armstrong was awarded an honorary degree prior to his address.] I would just ask that somebody send the photos to the principal at Plano East Senior High and let him know that I, in fact, graduated from Tufts and that he has to call me Dr. Armstrong now.

All joking aside, this is an interesting day for me. I have never done this before; I have never done a commencement speech. I have done a lot of speeches, but never one like this. I have to tell you that, as a 35-year-old, and you guys as, I suppose, younger people – maybe not all of us – we have a lot in common. You are graduating today and heading out into the world and will find new challenges and new difficulties and new horizons, and I am the same way. I have done professional sports for 20 years. I only know one thing and that is how to suffer on a bike. It's all over and now I have graduated to another level in my life in which I'll also face new challenges.

**"I chose active citizenship. And I challenge you all to choose that as well."**

— Lance Armstrong

You know, the story that gets told often – all the time practically – is the story of the victories and the story of the yellow jersey and the story of the top step on the podium. What gets lost sometimes is the story of cancer survival and fighting for your life and ultimately coming back. I love to tell the stories, of course, of winning. But in 1998, when I decided to come back, there really were no guarantees. I was a year and a half off the bike. I got back into the sport,

and as I mentioned, you have to have a team. Well, I barely found a team and I started to train and I figured that since I was so sick before – I had just done the Olympic Games in '96 – I figured if I riddled my body of all the cancer, I would come back on the bike and I would win immediately. I had abdomen, lung and brain metastases and [I thought], let's get rid of all that stuff [and] I'll win everything. I trained that way and I raced that way, at least I started to race that way.

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The sad news is, or the reality is, that I didn't win. I didn't win at all. I was completely disillusioned. I fell out of love with the sport. I fell out of love with the bike. I didn't like my job. I didn't like Europe. I quit and I came home in the spring of '98. That's a story that nobody tells. I was done with cycling forever. I proceeded to hang out with my friends, drink a few beers, play golf. I certainly was not living the life of a professional athlete until, one day, a group of friends sat me down and said, "You can't go out like this. You've got to get back on the bike, at least finish the year. You made a commitment to your team and to a whole population of cancer survivors that you'll try this. You have to at least finish the year."

So I did that and I went and found a remote training camp in Boone, North Carolina, with a coach and a friend. For eight days in the pouring rain, 40 degrees, I fell back in love with the bike. That was the start of the comeback and the rest is history there.

At the end of '98, I decided to try and focus on one thing: the biggest bike race in the world. I'm not sure how you go from not sure whether or not you want to do it to, "Why don't we just win the hardest bike race in the world?" But we did it. It was all about risk; it was all about taking chances. But at the same time it was an incredibly peaceful time because when nobody has any expectations of you, and you don't have many expectations of yourself, there's no risk. That was easy.

I look at life now and I look at the challenges that I face as a father, as an advocate, [and now as] a doctor. Those are real challenges and I long for the day when everybody says, "You know, you're damaged goods." Actually, I don't long for that day. But there was something peaceful about that. I was able to be in an environment that was incredibly low stress and truly make the comeback that we can all talk about today and I can reflect on in 20 years and be happy about.

In looking around the campus and talking to the president, I realized that [we are really similar]. Of course, I didn't know this when I was asked. Peter [Dolan, Tufts trustee] asked me to do this a few months ago and I thought, "Are you kidding? Austin to Boston – that's like a four-hour flight. That's work." But as I got to know the University and got to understand its beliefs and all the talk about education for active citizenship, I realized that we really are similar.

Now I have graduated from cycling. My education has been on the road. My education has been through illness. My education has been on a death bed. I realized that the only way to live life and to lead life is actively and as active citizens.

I finished chemotherapy in December of 1996, and, when I was leaving the hospital, my doctor pulled me aside. Just to let you know, I wasn't sure that I would ever make it to that day. I wasn't sure that I would come back for the one-year checkup. But Dr. Nichols pulled me aside and he said, "I want to talk to you about something. I want to talk to you about the obligation of the cured."

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I realized, at that time, that he was being very serious. I, of course, loved the idea that he wanted to talk to be about something that even mentioned the word "cure," thinking he might want to tell me he snuck me the secret stuff that works every time. But it was nothing to do with that. It was about how you walk out of the hospital, how you walk out of the building. Which side do you walk out on? Do you walk out the side as a private citizen that never shares his story [and] never gets involved, but hopes he lives and goes on and leads a normal life? Totally acceptable.

Or do you go out the other side of the building? And from the minute you walk out, you stand up and you say, "You know what, I'm a cancer survivor and I'm proud of it. It changed my life forever and I'm going to tell that story as long as I have to." While I say that I hope there comes a day when I don't have to tell that story anymore, I chose that side of the building. I chose that path. I chose active citizenship. And I challenge you all to choose that as well. Of course, remaining private and staying at home and being a true individual is also fine. But the group effort and the active effort is much better.

When I walked out of that building, I never thought that I would ever get back on the bike. I never thought I would come back. I never thought I would win a stage in the Tour, or one, or two, or seven. But it happened and it gave me the opportunity to stand here. It gave me the opportunity to stand in a lot of places and share that story and try to effect change for not just people locally or nationally, but people all over the world. I feel really blessed and humbled that I have been given that opportunity. Not all of us will have that opportunity on global level, but we'll all have that opportunity on a local level and especially in your homes.

A few years ago, or actually two years ago, Nike came to me and they said, "We want to make a yellow band for your cause." The funny part of it was that they had already made these yellow bands. They had made these bands for basketball players. For those of you who don't know, I was diagnosed with testicular cancer in 1996 – not something as a 25-year-old kid in Texas you really love to talk about. But they came to me and they said, "We actually have these bands and ironically enough they are called 'ballers.'" Because they make them for basketball players; that's a true story. [Nike said,] "And we want to make some yellow ones and put your flagship program, 'LIVESTRONG,' on there. We are going to make five million of them and give them to you and you can sell them for a dollar."

I wish you could have been in the room when we all sat around and joked about what we were going to do with 4.9 million yellow bands that say "LIVESTRONG." But the truth of the matter is that we went through five million quickly and 15, 20, 25, 50 and now north of 55 million yellow bands somewhere around the world. We could not keep up with the demand.

I think what this tells me is that people want to be active. Of course, we know that not all 55 million people wearing yellow wristbands that say "LIVESTRONG" care about cancer. The sad reality is that I see people smoking cigarettes wearing yellow "LIVESTRONG" wristbands. I know that they don't

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necessarily care about the cause. But, for the most part, most of these people care and they want to be involved. They want to be active.

For example, if I wanted to mobilize this group of people and create a "LIVESTRONG" army, let's just say that you, or we, were able to capture five percent of those people. We would have nearly three million people that said, "We care about this and we demand change and we want change. Cancer has to be a national priority and, Lance, we would like for you to try and lead this army." That will effect real change.

Just imagine that the president won the election in 2000 by 500,000 votes. He won in 2004 by about three million votes. If you had three million people or five [million] or, in a dream world, you had 10 million people that came together and said, "We care about it. It's affected me, or it's affected my family or it's affected my neighborhood or my workplace, and we demand change." Change happens forever. That's the power of the people and that's the reality of where we are mobilizing an army, being active citizens.

I tell people all the time – actually I don't tell people, my friends tell me, "Lance, what are you going to do now? You are a guy who races through every city limits sign with your friends. You are a guy who can't stand to lose at anything. What are you going to do now that you don't have sports to fill your life?" The answer is very simple. I've got something because of past circumstances that will be so much greater and give me such an opportunity to make seven tours look absolutely small. That's this idea of active citizenship and mobilizing an army of people that come together and effect change now and forever.

**"We all have good fights  
we need to fight."**

— Lance Armstrong

So I encourage all of you to somehow [be active]. It doesn't have to be a "LIVESTRONG" army, but there are armies of people and there are groups of people that mobilize all the time. I tell you it works, it absolutely works. I have seen it happen and it will happen in this country, too. Now is a difficult time in this country, in terms of politics and global affairs. We know that times are tight. It is up to us to make up the difference because we can't always rely on others to do it for us.

Having said all that, I just challenge you to find your own "obligation of the cured." You don't have to be diagnosed with cancer today or tomorrow or next year. But you might be because the numbers are startling. Or your mom might be or your dad might be. But somehow find it within you, if you can follow my drift, what it means, this obligation of the cured. Walk out that side of the building. Be active. Be involved. Be heard. Be aggressive. Be smart. Don't be afraid.

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I say this right alongside you, because I am doing the same thing. As I said, I knew one thing for 20 years and now I have to look out here and it's very different. So, let's do it together. As a 35-year-old guy speaking to some 20-year-olds, we can effect change all over the world and I'm excited. I'm excited. I tell people all the time that I love a good fight. We all have good fights we need to fight. So, good luck to you. I cannot thank you enough for letting me be here. I am still humbled. I am still in disbelief that I am here. But we can make a real difference. So thank you all very much. And, don't forget: live strong.