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TRIATHLON



Armstrong: Back to his Roots.

Linsey Corbin: Reformatted.

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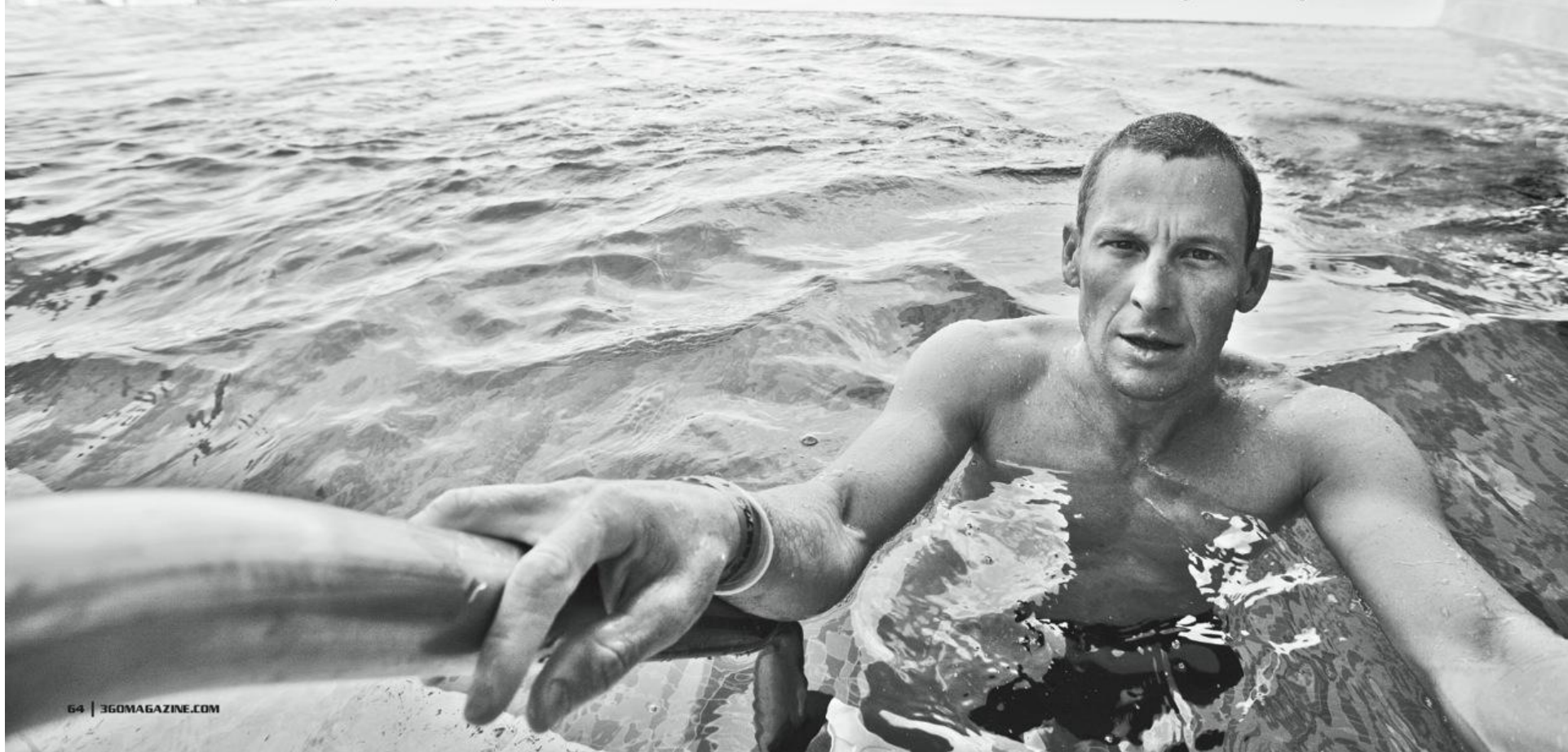
COMEBACK 3.0

A CONVERSATION WITH LANCE ARMSTRONG

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Lance Armstrong's athletic career has come full circle. A quarter-century ago he was a cocky teenage kid shocking the triathlon world with some stunning sprint-distance performances. When he saw no prospect of competing as a triathlete at the 1992 Olympics (the sport didn't arrive at the Games until 2000), he turned to cycling.

Armstrong became world pro cycling champion at age 21 and then a top contender in the spring classics. But, six months after he won the historic Flèche Wallonne classic at 24, in October 1996, he was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer.



After aggressive chemotherapy, and surgery to remove tumors in his testicles and brain, he returned to health, founded the Lance Armstrong Foundation to help patients cope with cancer, and made Comeback 1.0 in 1998. The result, as the world knows, was his winning a record seven consecutive Tours de France. After that final Tour victory, in 2005, he said that was it for his pro cycling career. Everyone else thought the same. But his competitive urges resurfaced, and he announced Comeback 2.0 in 2008. He returned to the Tour de France in 2009—and finished on the podium at age 37. His 2010 Tour wasn't quite as successful, mainly due to bad luck on an early cobblestone stage and three falls in one day as the race entered the Alps.

Armstrong began a third season with Team RadioShack in 2011, but rode only Australia's Tour Down Under in January before saying his athletic career was finally over. But was it? He began running some more—knowing that in the downtime before Comeback 2.0, he had run three decent marathons with minimal training, and beat his 2:50 goal with a 2:46:43 at the 2007 New York City Marathon. Armstrong also got back in the pool. And last August, he flew to the East Coast, planning to compete in an XTERRA off-road triathlon at Wading River on Long Island. But Hurricane Irene forced its cancellation, and his return to tri was delayed until September, when he placed fifth at the XTERRA in Utah. Then, a month later, he was riding in second place at the XTERRA world championship in Hawaii when he crashed, hit his head, and still came home in 23rd place.

Now, more than a year after his last pro bike race, the 40-year-old Armstrong is again setting the tri world alight, this time as a potential Hawaii Ironman competitor. Comeback 3.0 really began on February 12 this year, when he competed at the Ironman 70.3 event in Panama City, Panama, and finished second, in 3:50:55, only 43 seconds

behind 2004 Olympic champion Bevan Docherty of New Zealand.

Armstrong traveled to Panama as a celebrity, creating media buzz and finding himself the center of attention with the locals and the age-groupers. In some ways, it wasn't that different from his first major international triathlon, in St. Croix, 24 years ago. Then, as a teenager, he was chaperoned by Scott Eder, who Armstrong said was "a sort of coach meets agent meets big brother."

Eder told me about that time in Armstrong's life: "Lance was gregarious, very cocky, very crazy. He was 16, but he thought he was an adult, and he was mature for his age. He wanted to do the adult things, though, and if they were having a party, and there was alcohol, he wanted to get in the back door."

As for Armstrong, he said this about his first taste of big-time triathlon: "I was pretty stoked that I had sponsorship and was able to see the world and win prize money. I also knew it was a big help to my mom because money was tight, and I was earning enough to pay for all my stuff—plus some."

Eder added: "Lance was in over his head at St. Croix, though he did well

on the swim and bike legs." Armstrong was indeed strong on the 2-mile ocean swim, and near-60-mile cycling loop that contained St. Croix's infamously steep climb, The Beast. But it was tri superstars Mark Allen and Mike Pigg who finished 1-2 that day.

When I asked Allen about the teenage Armstrong, he said: "He was fairly brash. He just said what he was gonna do, and he did it—not like a lot of guys who say stuff but don't do it. He would create this ripple wherever he went. There was always so much energy around him."

There still is.

Comeback 3.0, Armstrong's true return to triathlon, has only just begun. To discover what's motivating him this time, how he's preparing himself and what lies ahead, I talked to the Texan shortly after his return from Panama. This is how the conversation went.

So it's another comeback. A comeback to triathlon. How did it feel jumping into the water that Sunday morning in Panama? You know, I had a little preview of things last fall when I did those XTERRA events. Those were very nerve-wracking, getting back into



the water in massed-start events, and just trying to make sure that the race started off well. But in Panama I didn't feel nervous at all in the swim. I think I've realized that the swim, while it's not irrelevant, it doesn't make or break a race. So I tried to be as relaxed as possible for that and know that the race really starts when you get on the bike.

And you're a good swimmer

Well, I grew up doing it, so I'm a fair swimmer. I'm not an Andy Potts-caliber swimmer. I was never going to be an all-American, but I can hold my own.

One thing different from when you started, back then you raced for money, you did it for dough, as they say. Now you don't need the money, so where's your incentive coming from?

Well, a couple things. One, I'm enjoying it. I'm having fun going through the process of training and preparing, and just getting re-immersed in triathlon. That, I am enjoying. Two, like everything else I've done the last few years, this has got a good Livestrong component for the foundation and for all the work that we're doing. That makes it valuable for the organization. But having said that, if I didn't like it or I wasn't having fun, it would be the wrong thing to be doing.

But once you get in the race, you want to win, you don't just want to compete—like you did at the New York Marathon for a couple of years.

Those marathons, I was just pack fill. This, I'm approaching a little differently. It's probably safe to say that I'm approaching it just like I would've with cycling. I didn't know what to expect in Panama, so I didn't have any illusions of grandeur. I just tried to be conservative in the race, feel it out and just learn. But once I got into the race and got off the bike with a bit of a lead and started to feel good on the run, and realized the heat had taken its toll on a lot of the guys, then I started to think to myself, 'Way ... I might win this thing! That would be crazy!' (laughs) Of course I didn't, but that's okay. I wasn't

disappointed with the performance. I was still surprised and excited.

What about the bike you rode in Panama? Was that different from what you would ride in a Tour de France time trial?

The bike itself is the same except there's no restrictions on position. The bike is the same Trek Speed Concept that I rode for a couple of years there Well, it's a different size, first of all, which is nice. I can get away with it, because there's no rule where the seat has to be ... and the seat is different. It's one of the Trek triathlon seats, so it's got a ... it's a little more friendly on the nose of the seat for that forward position.

In a triathlon, you've got someone riding a few bike lengths ahead of you. It's not drafting, but is it a psychological help compared with riding a time trial at the Tour?

Yeah, it's interesting. You're about 5 miles per hour slower than you would be in a Tour de France time trial. That feels like a lot. And the drafting rule is 10 meters, so you're not really getting a draft allegedly, although some guys will tell you at 10 meters, depending on the conditions, you're still getting something. I don't know exactly, but I do know psychologically you may not be drafting but you're basically pacing off the other guys. Psychologically, that's a lot easier than being the one on the front and not knowing exactly what's going on behind you.

There were a few times in the [Panama] race that I was out in the front, basically alone, and I remember thinking, 'What the hell is going on back there? Am I riding away? Are they pacing off me?' You don't want to keep looking back. That part is hard. Ironically enough, the flatter, windier courses are tougher on bikes. A hillier course can be tough but there's so much roll on the downhills, and you roll right back into that draft zone, that they almost stay together more on the hillier courses ... whereas if it was flat and



crosswind you would have a very tough time holding power. It's better to just power it up and keep a steady effort.

On the run, you looked very comfortable running, not straining—running within yourself. Do you have a stride coach or a run coach?

Well, I've definitely consulted with a lot of people, one of which is Alberto Salazar, the other Jimmy Riccitello; and then just doing a lot of running on a consistent basis, and with a group, and running with just fast people, watching them, watching their stride ... intense runs where it's easy for the

stride to break down. That, the last two months, has been my main focus. Just trying to get that stride down consistent on the run, stay injury free.

The last 5k [in Panama], I broke down a little and got back on my heels a little bit and the shoulders looked a little ... I started to look a little tired—which, in fact, I was! But I knew I was ready to run right around sixes [6-minute miles]. So when I got off the bike, I just said, 'Okay, I'm just gonna run this pace, which I know I can do, and either get passed by a lot of guys, or maybe they're tired from the heat and the hilly

bike course and I'll hold on.' For Bevan Docherty to run 1:12 in that heat, man? Phew! If you can run 1:12 in 95 degrees off the bike you deserve to win.

Well, he is a two-time Olympic medalist and he's never been beaten at this distance, so that counts for something. Yeah. Yeah. When he was coming, there was nothing I could do. If I tried to lift my pace, the chances or the risk that I go into a full-body cramp and just standing on the side of the road were too great, so I didn't wanna ... I was gonna be happy with second, and if I'm standing there

cramping up and you get passed by four people, then that's not good.

What sort of shoe were you using? Obviously Nikes, but compared with what you used to run in when you were a teenage triathlete I'm sure the shoes are very different. What sort are you using? Flat soles or what?

I train in a full-on, heavy Nike training shoe called the Vomero, and I run that with an orthotic, as well, for some added protection; but the racing flat is—I don't think that flat is released yet—the midsole is a Lunar midsole, a very popular format



for them, and I ran it without the orthotic as there's not a lot of room in the racing flats. But, I mean, it's very light, but also gives me a ride that It's a soft ride, it's not a hard ride.

Did you read the book *Born To Run*? Ha-ha-ha No, but I tell myself I'm gonna read it.

What's coming up for you next? My next [triathlon] is in about six or seven weeks in Galveston, TX—that's a 70.3 there that I'll do. Then I've got another six or seven weeks off, and I race again in Florida. But in the meantime I'm just gonna keep doing what I've been doing, which is staying real consistent on the run I think I've got to. To be honest, I haven't been riding very much. I've sort of missed a ride here and there The Livestrong U23 team was in town, so I rode a little bit with them. But I think I've got probably 50 more watts of threshold just with a few weeks of training, just add-up dates and getting back on the bike, harder, longer shit. I think I've quite a bit of room to improve on the bike just because I've been neglecting it. And at the same time keeping the run going. So if I can do that, I can ride faster and get off [the bike] fresher. Which is my goal.

Sounds like a good goal. Yeah I've got training camp [in late February] at Solvang with those [U23] kids, so I'm going up for that; and then my kids have got spring break, so we're going to Kona for that. I'll be 10 days in Kona, which'll be nice, to train out on the [Hawaii Ironman] course yet another time. And then I'll be in Kona in June again—assuming I qualify, which I'd like to do—and then I'll be there before The Big One.

A lot of people were expecting you [in Panama] to ride away from everybody on the bike. Did you ever feel that you could have gone faster if you were there to win the race rather than just to test yourself? There's no doubt that that's possible, but you won't run very well. First and foremost, that was an educational experience for me. I

needed to just sit in there and get a feel for how this works. My main goal before the race was that I had to have a good experience. I did not want to ride too hard, make nutritional mistakes, make mistakes on my effort or my wattage, and get on the run and be walking. I mean, that would have been a bad experience, physically and mentally. So I just stayed within myself, what I thought I could do I mean, shit, having said that I still did I mean, if you go and look at the Strava file, it was four hours above 170 heart rate. Boy! And the run for an hour and 17 minutes was at 180. It's not like you can go much harder than that on the bike. I mean, I was I told myself on the bike, 'Dude, I can't go much harder than this and still run.'

So when's your first full-distance Ironman? France. June 24. That's a hilly bike course in Nice. I'm going down there after I go to (watch) Paris-Roubaix with the (RadioShack-Nissan-Trek) team in April. I'm going to ride [the Nice course] then. But it's hilly, it's technical in terms of the downhill, and I suspect there is a fair amount of accelerations—so a lot of these corners are not exactly slow, but a lot of the time you're having to re-accelerate the bike out of the corners. So we're gonna have to make a call on what type of bike you ride. That's why we're going early.

But you know those roads anyway; you lived in Nice for a few years. You know, I do, but that side of the Var [River] I don't know that well. I know the other side really well, but that western side of the Var was a long way from where I lived.

What's your goal in Nice? You know, I think I need to have the same goal as Panama. I've never done a full [Ironman]. I need to have a good experience, I need to be smart on the bike, conservative, and make sure that that marathon is not a train wreck for me. Having said that, I mean, if I get fit enough, I think I'll be in contention. But I'm still gonna be conservative.

Going back to the heat. Obviously the heat is a big factor in Hawaii, and it was pretty hot down in Panama, did you have any bad effects from the heat? Well, other than just being miserable, which I think everybody was, I didn't have any drastic problems. But the truth of the matter is, Panama was a lot harder than Kona. I mean, Kona is 82 degrees and sunny every day. It gets hot on that pavement and stuff like that, but that heat and humidity in Panama, I don't think I'll see that the rest of the year. That was 95 degrees and high humidity. That's pretty tough! It was miserable.

So it sounds like you're making a successful comeback to the sport. Well it's a better start than I imagined, that's for sure. But look, man, I think the field [in Panama] was good, maybe better than people expected, but Craig Alexander runs low-2:40s off the bike. I'm not anywhere near that level right now. But I'm just gonna continue to do the events and try to learn what I can, stay consistent on the run, and hopefully stay injury free and see how it progresses. I'm more optimistic today than I was [before Panama], though. I will say that.

What sort of work for Livestrong are you doing around triathlons? Primarily, it's like with a lot of non-profits in these events, there's a fundraising component. We have allocated slots in all the races that I'm doing. We have four slots for Kona in 2012 and 2013 that are valuable. And WTC, which owns the Ironman races, made a significant contribution to the foundation right up front.

Sounds like you've got a busy season ahead. I hope you stay injury free and everything goes great for you. Well, I'll spend whatever I need to do in terms of time or money or resources to stay injury free. I mean, at 40, it's not enough to just get your weekly massage and hope that nothing happens. At this age, when you've cranked it up, I basically have full-time help that I've got to work with every day, just to keep everything moving forward. Otherwise, I'll break down. I'm committed. **360**