

# Coverage of Armstrong lets audience decide

Sports media love building up their heroes. They love tearing them down too.

It's all part of the cycle. That makes the tale of the latest cyclist to go through the cycle so interesting.

Lance Armstrong announced that he would no longer fight the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency's never-ending attempts to discredit him and his accomplishments. Many took this as an admission of guilt. Others saw this as a ploy to protect his brand ([read here](#)).

Is Lance Armstrong a fallen hero, in line with such fallen heroes as Joe Paterno, Tiger Woods, Kobe Bryant, and even Bill Clinton as [NPR](#) said, or is he the victim of a witch-hunt? [The Washington Post's](#) Sally Jenkins wrote that the USADA exposed itself as the true villain in this story. [The Seattle Times](#) took the other point of view, writing that by giving up the fight, Armstrong let all of us down. [Newsweek's](#) Buzz Bissinger wrote that he still believed in Armstrong; kind of like Santa Claus.

It wasn't that long ago that sports media were having this discussion about Joe Paterno. After the long-time coach at Penn State was implicated for not blowing the whistle on his friend, Jerry Sandusky, Paterno's life and legacy were reevaluated. Some defend the coach, others don't.

The rush is to make sure that judgment is passed down right now.

Heroes must remain heroic or they must fall.

It's hard not to do that in sports. The very nature of sports

assures the media of a passionate audience. Sports media coverage is meant, in many ways, to both nurture and inflame that passion. Sportswriters get to see athletes do things that amaze them. They saw that in Armstrong. Sportswriters get to see things that inspire them. They saw that in Armstrong.

It's hard not to build the heroes. It's hard to see what Armstrong accomplished and not gush. It's hard to see what he did away from the sport and not be inspired. That yellow Livestrong bracelet means something.

It was hard in 1998, when Sammy Sosa and Mark McGuire started hitting home runs. Baseball was still feeling the effects of the most damaging strike in sports history. The idea of steroid use was swept under the rug, even when androstenedione was found sitting right there in McGuire's locker.

The media defended their heroes then. And the media paid a price in credibility when the depth of abuse became known. Since then, the tide has turned. Athletes are fair game. The media declared its own war on drugs.

Now, the pendulum may be swinging back. Roger Clemens, a hero tarnished by drug rumors, fought back and was cleared of perjury. He followed that by pitching in a minor league game at 50. And with Armstrong, people look at the 500 plus passed drug tests and wonder how he could have doped if he was tested that often.

Is it time to start defending the accused? Or are the media doing their job in this case? The facts are there for the audience to decide. Columnists have weighed in on both sides. Some honor Armstrong and others, not so much.

They haven't been too hard on him. They haven't let him off easy either. This time, the media seem to be saying, "You decide."