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Postal officials downplay Armstrong-Ferrari link

By VeloNews Interactive wire services
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U.S. Postal cycling team officials vigorously defended the team's star rider Lance Armstrong over links to drug-tainted Italian sports doctor Michele Ferrari before the start of the Tour de France's first stage proper in St. Omer on Sunday.

Armstrong was quoted by Italian press on Saturday as saying he had sought the help of Ferrari - who has been charged with dope offences - with a view to an attempt on Chris Boardman's world hour record.

The revelation was picked up by French media on Sunday, leaving U.S. Postal team officials to field questions as Armstrong gears up for his bid for a third successive Tour de France.

However Armstrong's links with Ferrari - a former protégé and later competitor of disgraced Italian doping pioneer Professor Francesco Conconi - were played down by team director, Mark Gorski.

"From my perspective he (Ferrari) has done nothing wrong," Gorski told

reporters here.

"He worked with Lance in altitude training and I don't see any problem with that. There's always speculation about a lot of people, but here I don't really think there's any reason to be concerned."

Armstrong could attempt to break Briton Boardman's record this year, he

told *La Gazette Dello Sport*.

"Between now and the end of the year I'm going to try and break the world hour record. I will decide when after the Tour,

Tour de Store



and I'll count on the advice of Michele Ferrari - an expert in records."

Ferrari could stand trial if Bologna magistrates get their way. Prosecutors in the Italian city opened an inquiry into Ferrari in 1998 after suspicion fell on some of the riders he was associated with, including double world hour record holder Tony Rominger.

A number of big name riders were interviewed as part of that inquiry, including Italy's Mario Cipollini, Spaniard Abraham Olano and Armstrong's former teammate Kevin Livingston. Their testimonies, among others from the peloton, led to Ferrari being charged.

Ferrari was charged and a request was made for him to appear before magistrates this September.

In the same article Armstrong, the Tour de France favourite, expressed his surprise at charges against his Italian mentor, although he said the investigation into Ferrari's practices meant nothing.

"Ferrari's been following my progress since 1999, but it's only recently - with my desire to break the world record - that I've had more contact with him.

"I've never denied having contact with him but it's true that it's difficult for me to talk about him because, as soon as his name is mentioned, everyone immediately thinks the worst.

"He (Ferrari) has been tainted as the bad guy of cycling but I think there's a lot of confusion regarding his image."

A seemingly unaware Armstrong was then quoted as asking: "He's involved in all of the doping inquiries? Who's not, or who hasn't been in cycling? Even I've been subject of an inquiry in France and yet I know that I'm clean."

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