

I Believe
That

That I Believe

You Can't Believe

I Don't
Believe

That You Believe

*Everyone
Should Believe*

That You Believe

What I Believe

*Almost
No One Can
Believe*

Simply Because

Is Worth Our Belief

You Believe

In the Belief

of One
Man Who

Believes

You Will Always Believe.

WHEN IT COMES TO **TYLER HAMILTON**, THE MOST CONTENTIOUS—AND, PERHAPS, MOST IMPORTANT—QUESTION ISN'T IF HE'S GUILTY OR INNOCENT OF DOPING, BUT WHY EACH OF US HAS CHOSEN A SIDE.
BY CHRISTIE ASCHWANDEN ILLUSTRATED BY LOU BEACH

“Wake up, Christie!”

Wake UP!”

As he shouts, Tyler Hamilton’s father taps his fist on my forehead, as if knocking on a door. “Open your brain! Open. Your. Brain.” Bill Hamilton is a short, wiry man, and he has pushed himself so close that he’s showering me with spittle. His bushy, gray handlebar moustache brushes my nose.

It’s December 2006, and we are at a holiday party in Boulder, Colorado, thrown on behalf of the Tyler Hamilton Foundation. Though billed as a fund-raiser for the foundation, whose mission is to promote health and personal empowerment through cycling, this is clearly also a pep rally for Tyler. With his two-year suspension for blood doping finally completed, Tyler, the former Tour de France star, has just signed a contract with the Russian Tinkoff Credit Systems team. Tonight’s 50 or so attendees have come to send him off. Throughout the evening, people approach Tyler, pat him on the back and wish him luck. The mood is upbeat and feels more like a family reunion than a fund-raiser. Midway through the evening, foundation executive director Deirdre Moynihan presents Tyler with a photo, taken in September of 2006, signed by participants of the foundation’s MS-Global European bike tour. Tyler’s suspension, when it’s mentioned at all, is

referred to as “these two difficult years.”

Tyler’s father, Bill, was smiling, rather than shouting, at me until a few minutes ago. I had just shown him a group photo of Tyler, me and the rest of our 1993 University of Colorado cycling team. In the picture, we’re standing in Bill and Lorna Hamilton’s living room. We’ve just won the national collegiate championships at MIT, and Bill has thrown us a celebration bash at his Marblehead, Massachusetts, home.

Bill located me in the photo, then tilted his eyebrows and asked, “Where’s Quinn?” Quinn was a member of our five-man, five-woman team. I pointed him out.

Butting his chest toward me, Bill shouted, “He is a persona. Non. Grata!”

When I asked why, Bill’s voice became louder still.

“Because he’s. Not. A. Believer!” His voice exploded and a few eyes glanced our way.

“Why not?” I said. I knew without asking that to be a Believer meant to believe that Tyler had never doped—that he’d been falsely accused and convicted.

“Because he’s jealous!” Bill said, as if stating the obvious. He explained that Quinn, along with a Boulder athlete who had called Tyler a doper in his blog, had come to their guilty verdicts via envy.

That is when I got Bill’s blood really boiling.

“Well, Bill,” I said, “I don’t know how to tell you this. But I’m not sure I’m a Believer either.”



From the moment the Phonak cycling team announced in September 2004 that Tyler Hamilton had tested positive for blood doping, he has denied all charges of cheating with passion and unflagging insistence—a personal, heartfelt defense that’s inspired an equally ardent group of supporters. Though the intensity and numbers of his followers have increased and diminished along with his fortunes in the three years since then, a core group that has become known as the Believers has never wavered in its faith.

At the time of his positive test, Tyler stood at the pinnacle of his career. He’d won an Olympic gold medal in the Athens time trial, and though he’d crashed out of that summer’s Tour de France, he was expected to challenge Lance Armstrong in 2005. And in the two previous years, a series of epic performances had elevated him to near-mythical status. In 2002, he finished second in the Giro d’Italia despite racing with a fractured shoulder. Afterward, a dentist had to cap molars Tyler had worn down as he raced, clenching his teeth in pain. In 2003, Tyler broke his collarbone in the first stage of the Tour de France but continued riding and, in Stage 16, broke away and soloed for 142 kilometers to win the stage on his way to finishing fourth overall. Along the way, he’d also established a reputation as the nicest guy in the peloton.

“Lance is untouchable, but Tyler is everyman,” says Deirdre Moynihan, executive director of the Tyler Hamilton Foundation and, along with Tyler’s friend and professional skier Chris Davenport, the founder of the website BelieveTyler.org that was quickly formed to raise legal defense funds, some of which came from sales of “I Believe Tyler” T-shirts and buttons. For Tyler, “everything is a struggle,” says Moynihan. “Nothing comes easy, and that’s how we all live our lives.”

Tyler’s ongoing struggle for his reputation began in September 2004, when he faced a setback no amount of teeth grinding could surmount. He was notified that he’d tested positive for blood doping, once at the Olympics earlier that summer, and a second time after his win on Stage 8 of the Vuelta a España in September. A new test had been developed to detect blood transfusions, and Tyler was the first to return a positive. He hired a lawyer and recruited scientists from Harvard and MIT to testify on his behalf during the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) arbitration hearing that would decide his fate. The Olympic test was thrown out after the test lab accidentally destroyed the backup sample, known as the B sample, that’s required to confirm a positive result. But in April 2005, after sorting through the evidence and hearing multiple days of testimony from Tyler and experts on both sides, the USADA arbitration panel decided 2 to 1 against him and handed out a two-year suspension for the positive test result at the Vuelta. Tyler appealed to sport’s version of the U.S. Supreme Court, the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), but in February 2006 the court unanimously rejected the appeal.

In June 2006, as Tyler was approaching the end of his suspension (which had started not when he lost the appeal in February but back in 2004 when the result was reported), he was linked to the Spanish doping scandal known as Operación Puerto. Evidence turned up in a raid of the office of Spanish doctor Eufemiano Fuentes allegedly included records from 2003 that purportedly showed that Tyler had taken a long list of banned performance

enhancers such as EPO, human growth hormone, steroids and transfusions of his own blood. The investigation is still pending, but, in May of 2007 Tinkoff pulled Tyler from the start list of the Giro d’Italia and later suspended him until the case is resolved.

To the Believers, each new revelation about Tyler’s involvement in the doping scandals, each test, each explanation of the science and each court verdict are not evidence of guilt but further proof of a conspiracy designed to take down their hero.

“The system is designed to break the individual, not believe in him,” says Barry Kinman, a 51-year-old fan and lawyer in Paso Robles, California. Kinman insists that a system that relies on drug tests for evidence is fundamentally flawed: “It’s putting too great a weight on the cutting edge of science.” Kinman has never met Tyler, but he says, “I feel like this guy has acted like an innocent man, and I haven’t seen anything in the process to show otherwise. It’s very hard to lie. That’s why, people who do law for a living, you get back to feelings. What’s your gut? My gut is there’s no way this guy lies.”

My gut told me the same thing. In the first days of Tyler’s saga, I took an assignment from a science magazine to explain the technology behind the new test that had nabbed Tyler. I was eager to dig into the story. I’d cheered when Tyler won an Olympic gold medal the previous month, and I was expecting to find proof that would confirm what my heart told me was true—the Tyler I’d known in college was not a liar. But after plowing through five journal articles and interviewing a half dozen scientists, many with no link to cycling or the anti-doping agencies, I was forced to an uncomfortable conclusion: The test looked solid.

However, since then, I’ve felt tiny pangs of doubt. How could anyone who wasn’t innocent deny, deny, deny in the face of such strong evidence? And when Christian Vincenz was convicted in 2004 of extortion for attempts to blackmail Tyler’s Phonak team, I couldn’t help but wonder if there was something to the spy-novel conspiracy theories perpetuated by some in Tyler’s crowd. What if someone really was out to get him?

Scanning through Tyler’s online guestbook one day, I read pages and pages of fan letters, filled with words like “believe,” “faith,” “hero” and “legend.” While at first glance these Believers seems hopelessly naive, their passion and resolute certainty fascinated me. What did they know that I didn’t.

I begin my investigation at the Tyler Hamilton Foundation’s Sunshine Hillclimb in July 2006. I learn of the event at the last minute from a friend who has signed up, and I decide to go watch the show.

THE BELIEVERS SEEM HOPELESSLY NAIVE, BUT THEIR PASSION AND RESOLUTE CERTAINTY FASCINATED ME. WHAT DID THEY KNOW THAT I DIDN’T?

The 9-mile course ascends Sunshine Canyon, one of Boulder County's steepest climbs and one Tyler knows by memory—his \$1.275-million home sits 6 miles up the canyon. At the finish line, a handful of people scurry around in black T-shirts with the word BELIEVE written in bold white letters across the chest. I will soon discover that nearly everything associated with the foundation is plastered with this slogan—from the official jerseys to the carbon Parlee Z3c bikes that big donors receive as gifts to the souvenir jerseys and T-shirts on sale at events.

Moynihan, who was the THF's founding executive director until she resigned in July of 2007, is the ringleader of today's race, darting around the finish area, talking to race marshals on the radio and directing volunteers. A large woman with vivacious, curly brown hair, Moynihan possesses a sense of drama honed by her professional training in theater. Part pit bull and part teddy bear, she's the kind of person you love when she's on your team, and loathe when she's not. She's Tyler's fiercest and most vocal defender, the Dick Pound of the Believers. She signs off her e-mails with a single word—Believe!

In the first weeks after Tyler's positive test was announced, "believe" meant one thing: Believe Tyler is innocent. Since then, as Tyler will tell me later when we sit down for a formal interview, the word has evolved into a broader motto: Believe in the power of the bike. "The bike can do a lot of amazing things for you," Tyler says, "whether you're somebody with MS or you're someone suffering over the last two years like me."

He launched his eponymous foundation in January 2004, before his involvement in doping scandals, with the mission "to provide opportunity and access for individuals affected by multiple sclerosis and aspiring young athletes with a passion for cycling." When news of his positive test broke, Moynihan says, he quickly contacted her to say that the foundation had nothing to worry about. "He called me to let me know that he would never do that to me," she says, adding that she's known him for 10 years. "My life is personally and professionally wrapped up with him. I've never questioned him. I never had to. I don't think he could look me in the eye if he'd done it."

Moynihan gives me an earful when she learns I'm writing this article. She says the media has mishandled Tyler's case, and lets me know that if I demonize him there will be hell to pay.

Today, Tyler appears above reproach. Rather than crushing the small field of racers, he is pacing Steve Ackerman, a paraplegic riding a handbike, up Sunshine Canyon, and the race announcer calls out updates on the duo's progress over the loudspeaker. A handful of racers start to trickle in. Only 40 or so riders have shown up, and the race fee, which had first been advertised at more than \$100, has dropped to less than \$50 on race day. Still, when

"MY LIFE IS PERSONALLY AND PROFESSIONALLY WRAPPED UP WITH HIM," SAYS HIS FOUNDATION'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR. "I'VE NEVER QUESTIONED HIM."

Ackerman finally crosses the finish line, surrounded by Tyler and a posse of riders in THF gear, I cheer, along with the few other spectators. "Now this is what it's all about," Moynihan shouts. I can't help but feel moved. It's a bitch of a climb, and this guy did it on a handbike. After the race, Ackerman tells me that today's ride is nothing extraordinary for him—he recently finished the six-day, 419-mile Ride the Rockies tour, which ascends five mountain passes on its way across Colorado, and his around-the-world bike ride will be featured in an upcoming film.

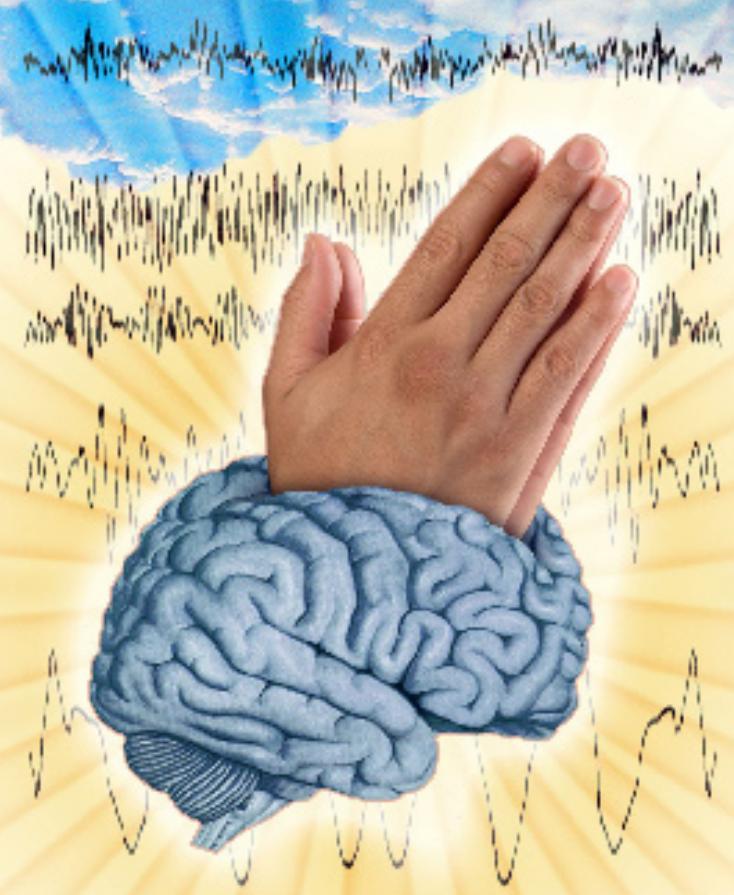
At the awards ceremony I catch my first close glimpse of Tyler in nearly a decade. He's much thinner than I remember, but otherwise unchanged. He has freckled skin, and his baby-blue eyes and oversized ears give him a puppylike presence. He says only a few words to thank everyone for supporting the foundation. His earnest, slightly awkward manner makes him seem more like someone's little brother than a world-class sports star. He gives each age-group winner a hug or handshake, and Moynihan presents the race winner with a stuffed golden retriever. "You know how the winner of the Tour de France gets a stuffed lion?" Moynihan says. "Well, the winner of this race gets a stuffed golden retriever, because we all know that the Tyler Hamilton Foundation is all about Tugboat and Anchor and Tanker."

For much of his pro career, Tyler's beloved golden retriever Tugboat served as his mascot, an emblem of the hero's heart and authenticity. When Tugboat became sick and had to be euthanized during the 2004 Tour, Tyler wore the dog's tags around his neck as a talisman, creating the kind of human-interest story that lands athletes on magazine covers. Tyler and his wife, Haven, brought home puppies Anchor and Tanker a few months later.

I pick up a dog tag engraved with the word "believe" at the next THF event I attend—a two-day bike ride in Northern California in October 2006, where I meet more than two dozen of the Believers, including Curtis Brown and his wife, Cindy. The Browns live in Phoenix and have been involved in the THF since Cindy went online a few years back and donated a few hundred dollars. To her surprise, Tyler called to thank her. "If you send \$500 to the Lance Armstrong Foundation, you might get a computer-generated letter, you wouldn't get a phone call from Lance," says Curtis. "To have Tyler make a personal phone call like that was really quite special." Since then, the Browns have become even bigger supporters, and Curtis serves on the board.

Known as Cardio among his riding buddies, Curtis has the sculpted legs of a dedicated cyclist and a reputation for making other riders suffer. "I'm maybe more than just fairly competitive," he says, "and I recognize that in Tyler, and I think he recognizes that in me. I consider him a really good friend."

When I arrive at the bed-and-breakfast where a group of us is staying during the California Challenge, the Browns and several of their friends are sitting around drinking beers. Curtis and a handful of other guys have ridden five hours, with Tyler, to get here from San Francisco. While Ty cleans up, the other guys deconstruct the details of the ride—which gears Tyler used on the climbs, what he ate and the clothing he wore. They note that during a midride stop, while everyone else loaded up on snacks,



The Science of Belief

Why we all want to have faith in something

An increasing number of researchers are studying belief not as psychology but as physiology, and some of them are concluding that human beings are hardwired for a capacity to believe. There's no better arena to examine this than the one in which the founding tenet exists with zero scientific proof and relies solely on faith: belief in god.

Science generally tells us how and why things happen in the physical world; religion seeks a metaphysical explanation: Why are we here? Neurotheology, sometimes called biotechnology, is an effort to blend the two and understand the physiological basis of spirituality.

Andrew Newberg, M.D., is an assistant professor of radiology at the University of Pennsylvania and author of the book *Why We Believe What We Believe*. He used a brain imaging technology called single photon emission computed tomography (SPECT) to examine brain activity in meditating Buddhists and Franciscan nuns deep in prayer.

In his experiments Newberg anticipated—and found—heavy brain activity in the frontal lobes, which are responsible for concentration. But the scans also showed a near-total lack of activity in an area of the superior parietal lobe, located high in the back of the brain, near the skull. Termed the orientation area, it processes external stimuli and is believed by scientists to control information like our sense of self, both metaphysically and in the real world. For example, it helps control the ability to ride a bike close to other cyclists and not bump into them. During meditation or prayer “a lot of that information is blocked,” says Newberg, “and you arguably lose your sense of self and experience feelings of oneness and connectedness with the world.”

Scientists know that precise sections of the brain, such as Broca's area, control specific functions such as language, and linguists theorize that all human language features similar rules and structures. We're all wired to learn language the same way. From there, it's not much of a leap to the idea that we're also biologically predisposed to a belief in a higher power—whether because God exists or because, facing our own mortality once we developed self-consciousness, we had to invent him.

Despite all we've learned in the past decade, in the end the study of belief—whether in a creator or Tyler Hamilton's innocence—ends up at the same impasse. When Newberg showed his test data to observers, he was struck by how religious people viewed his work as confirmation of God's existence and importance in their lives, while atheists took it as proof that God was “just in the brain.”

Either you have faith, or you don't.—*Joe Lindsey*

Tyler nibbled only a few bites of lemon bar, downed with a sparkling soda. They remark on how thin and fit he looks. There's an obvious thrill to their banter—what Tiger Woods fan gets an opportunity to play golf with his hero? These guys just did a five-hour ride with an Olympic gold medalist.

Later, Tyler comes down and the jokes fly. Cindy Brown, a tall, sassy blonde with a razor-sharp wit, sends good-natured jabs Tyler's way, and he returns the antics, though with less skill. At one point she jokes that if he's not careful, they're going to make him do some public speaking, a task they've decided is not his strong suit. “Better let Haven do the talking,” Curtis jokes.

Tyler's wife, Haven, possesses a graceful, high-society beauty that adds a touch of elegance to Tyler's plainness—Laura Bush to Tyler's George W. The next morning, Haven is the last person to arrive at breakfast, perfumed and coiffed. She does not ride a bicycle, but she drives a mean pace car. She's exceedingly pleasant and polite and never wanders off point. Before she married Tyler, she worked in advertising and she has the polish and restraint of a top-dollar public relations professional.

Tyler seems to enjoy the attention, but he doesn't parade around like a star. He makes a concerted effort to talk to each person individually and he treats all of us like friends. We're the in-group—insiders to the sport we all love.

The next day about 40 cyclists, most donning BELIEVE jerseys, set off on a 66-mile ride along the coast and through redwood forest. Tyler rides alongside us, setting an easy tempo, joining the pacelines that inevitably form, and taking care to attend to each rider's needs. On a twisty descent, he stops at the top to warn us of the tricky corners to come, and makes the descent with a rider who is fighting MS-related symptoms. Moynihan, a talented photographer, drives the sag wagon and stops frequently to shoot photos as we zoom by.

The more time I spend with Believers, the harder it becomes to think that Tyler is guilty. For one thing, I can't help but like these people. I love Cindy Brown's sense of humor and I enjoy the riding companions I've met. I notice that every word the Believers use to describe Tyler—genuine, kind, giving—is a reflection of themselves. I even find myself liking Moynihan, despite our rough start. She has an endearing rawness and passion, and I come to see that her aggressive defense of Tyler stems not solely from the \$85,000 she earns annually running the foundation. She genuinely believes the guy.

It's midnight and we're barreling down California's coastal highway in Tyler's rented SUV. It's just the three of us—Tyler driving, me sitting shotgun, and Haven in the back seat. We've spent the evening at the THF California Challenge's fireside soiree, recounting the day's ride, swapping stories about our dogs, and reminiscing about our days on the University of Colorado cycling team. It's like the intervening years never happened. Tyler is the guy I knew back then—modest, kind, obliging. We've each knocked back a beer or two, and for a moment I forget that I'm here as a journalist.

I know, in the back of my mind, that if ever there was a good time to ask Tyler the burning questions, this is it. But I cannot bring myself to do it. I feel like a jerk for even entertaining the



THE TRUTH I, I WANT TO BELIEVE TYLER, AND NEVER MORE SO THAN AT THIS MOMENT. I HATE THE THOUGHT THAT HE COULD BE THE CHEATER THE FACTS SUGGEST.

Have Faith, Get Fast Belief isn't just an abstract moral concept—it can also help you drop your friends!

As one of North America's most dominant cyclists during the 1990s, with a silver-medal-winning ride at the Atlanta Olympics, Brian Walton knows the power of imagery. He so relied on his psychological cue, a wolf, that he had a picture of one tattooed on his ankle. "It symbolizes the lone wolf. The leader of the pack," says Walton, who now operates Cadence Cycling Center in Philadelphia. He's not alone in his belief in belief. Research on imagery and visualization shows that when we imagine ourselves performing a motor skill—like sprinting for a city-limit sign—our brain triggers the same neurological pathways as when we actually, physically, perform that skill. Other studies show that by simply visualizing yourself improving specific cycling skills, you can gain tangible physical improvements. Here are five ways to make your belief in yourself pay off.

SYSTEMATIZE: "You need to know enough about the situation to create a specific visualization," says Unites States Olympic Committee sports psychologist Kirsten Peterson. Instead of visualizing yourself climbing, use a specific hill—grade, length, even the texture of the pavement—from an upcoming race.

MAKE IT VIVID: Create an image of the situation in your mind as vividly as possible. Draw on experiences from your past to recreate the details. "When we ask people if they can see the experience in their mind's eye, usually they can—because it sucks," Peterson jokes.

USE YOUR SENSES: Employ all five senses to recreate the situation in your mind—your hands squeezing the handlebar, your breath getting heavy, the smell of sweat beading on your nose, the clicking of gears. "Include anything that helps increase the vividness," Peterson says.

GET A CUE: Use a word or specific vision to propel yourself past the obstacle. For example, Peterson says a cyclist might say the word "move," then visualize surging over the top of the hill first. (Walton once taped the word "more" to the back of his teammate's saddle during a team time trial.)

PRACTICE: "Just like a physical skill, imagery effectiveness takes practice," says Peterson. Try employing imagery sessions daily for about five minutes at a time.—*Ian Dille*

thought that he could be a fraud. All evening long, he's treated me like the long-lost friend I want to be, and I've responded reflexively in kind. To confront his denials now would make me the bad guy. It's easier to relax, soak up his kindness and believe.

But that's only part of my hesitation. The truth is, I want to believe Tyler, and never more so than at this very moment. I hate the thought that he could be the cheater that the facts suggest. I am not ready to face what it would mean for Tyler to have the capacity to look Curtis Brown and Deirdre Moynihan and even his own father in the face and lie. I want to believe that the Tyler before me is the Tyler from college—upstanding, admirable, honest. I want to believe that no friend of mine would ever cheat, that if Tyler were a phony I'd have detected it back then. But most of all, I want to believe that an ordinary guy, one of us, can succeed at the highest levels of cycling without turning to the dark side.

So I don't ask him if he did it. Instead, I sit back in my seat and enjoy the ride. Later, something else comes to me: I most want to believe in the moments when I see myself reflected in Tyler. Though I never reached the heights Tyler achieved, like him I've lived in Europe while pursuing a sport (for me, Nordic skiing) at an elite level. During that ride in Tyler's SUV, we talked about the strict rituals of the athletic life and suddenly I was thinking of my own experience with French anti-doping forces.

It was February 2003 and I had just finished second in France's most prestigious Nordic ski race. While American forces marched toward Baghdad and the U.S. Congress indulged in "freedom fries" I was peeing into a cup and handing over my athletic career to a French woman I'd never before met. I was clean and welcomed the opportunity to prove it. But part of me couldn't help wondering: If the test did come back positive, how could I possibly prove my innocence?

When I researched and wrote the article about the test that convicted Tyler, I concluded that the science was sound. But I also knew that the test is a little like a radar detector—solid technology that depends on a competent protocol and operator to function properly. At the hearings, Tyler's lawyer argued that the test wasn't ready for prime time. D. Michael Strong, executive vice president of the Puget Sound Blood Center in Seattle, testified on Tyler's behalf, and while he admits that, "I'm probably very conservative about validation," he argued that someone's career should not be put on the line with a test whose rate of false positives was not precisely known. Scientists testifying for USADA argued that there was no evidence that false positives existed, but conceded they had not done the exhaustive, expensive studies to prove it. While there was some

KAREN HUDAR, DIAGNOSED WITH MS 10 YEARS AGO, RIDES WITH A WATER BOTTLE PAINTED WITH THE WORD BELIEVE. "HOW CAN YOU NOT BELIEVE HIM?" SHE SAYS.

indication that Tyler might have received a blood transfusion, the test did not prove this with 100 percent certainty, Carlo Brugnara, a professor of pathology at Harvard Medical School, who also testified for Tyler, told me.

In a way, those who base their judgment of Tyler on science are casting their lot with a tiny measure of faith, as well. They are convinced that if they can just obtain enough information about the case they can determine with certainty what really happened. But science only provides data; people must interpret the numbers. To believe the science, you must have faith in the interpreters, and it is in that tiny gap between fact and faith that uncertainty lives. Those who believe Tyler rely less on data or their interpretation than on faith writ large.

One afternoon I was listening to an interview with Stuart Stevens on National Public Radio. Stevens is an avid cyclist, and a staunch Tyler believer, and I was set to interview him a few days later. In his life off the bike, Stevens works as a media strategist for the Republican Party and during the NPR interview he opined, "It's a year where it's better to believe than to think. That is the President's greatest strength, is that people believe that he is sincere." He was talking about the midterm elections, but he may have just as well have been talking about Tyler.

Believe in Tyler's honesty and integrity, and you have no need to think through the stacks of arbitration documents and scientific papers. The 34-page CAS ruling outlines the arguments on both sides, and with terms such as "secondary antibodies" and "antigen populations" it's not easy reading. It takes a dedicated person, perhaps an obsessed one, to sift through all the evidence and assess the arguments in light of the facts. The average person simply does not have the will, the time or the background to fully consider the evidence, so for most, it comes down to a simple question: Do you believe the positive tests and the decision of a panel of arbitrators who sifted through the evidence and the arguments on both sides and concluded that Tyler was guilty, or do you believe the man himself?

For the Believers, that choice is easy. Again and again, I hear them utter the same words—honest, genuine, trustworthy. Curtis Brown uses the word "genuine" to describe Tyler at least a dozen times during our first conversation. "When you meet him, you know immediately that he's a genuine guy," Brown says. "He wants to know how many kids you have, their names, how old they are. This is a guy who has a genuine interest in people." Brown and others say they know Tyler's telling the truth, because he looked them in the eye and he said he didn't do it.

Besides, they say, Tyler couldn't possibly keep up a lie for all this time. "There's no way someone could pretend his innocence for every second of every day for two years," says Phyllis Vala-

vane, a fan who met Tyler after a stage of the Tour one year. "Your whole life can't be focused on 'how am I going to live this lie?' You would trip up somewhere along the line."

Many of the Believers point to Tyler's work with THF as evidence that he's not the type to dope. "The integrity and dedication that he's given to a cause like mine—I can't imagine a guy like that cheating," says Mike Zimits, who was diagnosed with MS nine years ago. "I'm not a kid, I'm a 44-year-old Wall Street guy, and I believe he has integrity."

Karen Hudar rides with a water bottle hand-painted with the word "believe" in bright letters. She was diagnosed with MS 10 years ago, and since then, she's completed several of the National MS Society's bike rides. I meet Hudar at the California Challenge. She is the beautiful girl next door—earnest and cheerful, with sparkling blue eyes and an enormous smile. She's strong on the bike and shows no outward signs of MS. When I ask her if it's possible that Tyler could be guilty, she looks at me as if I asked whether the world was flat. "How can you not believe him?" she says. Hudar, who speaks with a slight twang, lives in Houston and considers Tyler part of her extended family. "I can't turn my back on him—he's part of the MS team," she says.

Tyler's dedication to the MS cause, he says, was inspired by the mother of his first agent, Lyle Fulkerson. Though he can't remember her name during our interview, he knows she suffered from MS. In 2004, the THF raised \$368,478 and gave \$35,476 of it to the National MS Society. It has also delivered small donations to other causes—\$500 to the Eldora ski club and \$8,100 to a Spanish junior-development team in 2005. But most of what the foundation does is, to speak generally, to help people discover the power of the bike. Some of these efforts have included providing bike gear to a movie star with MS and sending Tyler around the world to ride with juniors and people with MS.

"When they say 'Let's go climb Alpe d'Huez, we know you can do it, and we're here with you,' that's an incredible feeling," says Zimits. "I'm thankful to him for helping guys like me see it doesn't have to be over because you got sick."

Most people overestimate their ability to sift truth from lie, says Paul Ekman, a professor of psychology at the University of California, San Francisco, who has tested about 15,000 people in his lab over the years and found that people detect falsehoods about 55 percent of the time—only slightly better than chance.

That's understandable to Mark Gorski, who is no expert on psychology but has spent time as both a racer and racing fan. "I'm not drawing any conclusions about Tyler, but I do think that, in general, people want to believe something," says Gorski, who after racing professionally spent time as general manager of the U.S. Postal Service Team. "But people who rationalize their opinion based upon what Tyler says, frankly, are being very naive."

According to Ekman, our judgment becomes even more clouded than typical when we have a personal stake in believing a person. "We're actually more accurate [at detecting lies] with strangers," he says. We might have a subconscious tendency to believe someone we feel we know because if we turn out to be

wrong it doesn't just reflect on the deceiver but on us. "There's a lot to lose about your own ability to judge people, and your own regard for a person who is willing to deceive you," says Ekman.

What's more, says Ekman, though we all know humans are complex beings we can't help but reduce our perceptions to black and white on some level: Everyone wants to pal around with Bono; who among us would want to make friends with Kenneth Lay? But either man is capable of deception—or honesty. "We'd like to think that people who would lie to us or take advantage of us must be bad in every other respect, and that's not true," Ekman says. "People are more complicated than that. Hitler loved dogs and was kind to children."

As I interviewed the Believers and non-Believers, I started to feel as if each group arrived at its verdict not through the facts, but instead looked to the facts for evidence of its position. Non-

Believers view Tyler's capacity to ride through pain as proof that he's partaking of illicit aid, while Believers see it as a manifest example of his character. "The way he suffers, through whatever it is—there's no drug that's going to help that," says Bryan Larsen, a junior racer from Placerville, California.

Likewise, the accidental freezing of the B sample that disallowed the positive result in Athens is either a lucky break that allowed a cheater to keep a gold medal, or the sign of an inept—or corrupt—testing process that can't be trusted. "We know for sure that the test at the Olympics was a total disaster because they froze the B sample. The specifics of how they mishandled it is not really relevant," says Stevens, the Republican-party media strategist, adding that a system with the power to strip an athlete of his career must have no room for error. As we talk about the complexities of belief, Stevens says, "Many of the arguments you would use against this are the same arguments that people make against the death penalty." Then, after a pause, he says, "I'm completely

The Tyler Timeline

2004

AUGUST 18
Stunning ride in Olympic time trial delivers first cycling gold on the road for America in two decades.



because it is untestable, but the Vuelta sample is positive. Hamilton again vows innocence and begins assembling defense.

2005

MARCH 2
Three-day hearing before the American Arbitration association ends. In a statement on website, Hamilton pronounces himself "optimistic."

APRIL 18
In 2 to 1 decision, arbitrators suspend Hamilton for two years for blood doping.

SEPTEMBER 8
Hamilton goes before Court of Arbitration for Sport to appeal suspension—in unusual set of circumstances, CAS adjourns hearing to allow more time for Hamilton to prepare.

DECEMBER 2005
IMAX movie *Wired to Win* opens. The film initially followed Hamilton at 2003 Tour de France, but was delayed and recut to minimize his story after guilty verdict and now focuses on Francois de Jeux's Jimmy Caspar and Baden Cooke.

2006

JANUARY 10
Hamilton goes before CAS again.

FEBRUARY 12
In 3 to 0 verdict CAS rejects appeal; 34-page ruling examines and rejects all of Hamilton's

defenses and outlines that, in 2004, Hamilton had numerous red flags on doping tests and at one point even discussed them with the UCI. CAS does backdate suspension to September 22, 2004, when Phonak sidelined him from competition.

MAY 23
Spanish police raid a hematology clinic and apartment in Madrid, uncovering more than 100 bags of blood and other evidence in Operación Puerto investigation, the most significant doping scandal to ever hit the sport.

JUNE 26
The Spanish daily *El Pais* publishes information it says links Hamilton to Puerto, including detailed doping diaries and payment claims for a Rider 4142, which the paper claims is Hamilton.

JUNE 28
CAS dismisses the Russian Olympic Committee's appeal to strip Hamilton of gold medal in the time trial.

AUGUST 20
The Danish daily *Politiken* publishes an extensive "doping diary" for Rider 4142, alleging that he actively doped on 114 days of the 2003 season.

SEPTEMBER 22
Hamilton formally returns to competitive status, although he twice raced the Mount Washington Hillclimb during

suspension and also competed in one unsanctioned criterium in Boulder, Colorado.

NOVEMBER 11
Hamilton's first race since his suspension: the Silverman Triathlon, where he turns a 4:33 time in 112-mile bike leg on relay team sponsored by his attorney, Howard Jacobs.

NOVEMBER 13
Hamilton signs contract with Tinkoff Credit Systems, a new Pro Continental team.

2007

FEBRUARY 7
Hamilton starts his first UCI race in more than two years, the Etoiles des Bessegés stage race in France. He finishes 22nd.

APRIL 30
Gazzetta dello Sport publishes new Operación Puerto allegations, based on a 6,000-page dossier that *Gazzetta* contends links Hamilton and Tinkoff teammate Jorg Jaksche to bags of blood found in the Puerto raids. Hamilton issues no public comment, but his team



manager, Omar Piscina, says that he will not suspend the racer and Hamilton is still on a short list of riders for the Giro d'Italia.

MAY 9
Tinkoff reverses its earlier statements and suspends Hamilton and his new teammate Jorg Jaksche, preventing both riders from starting the Giro d'Italia. The day before, Ivan Basso admitted he was involved in Puerto, but contends he only attempted to dope. Other riders, including Michele Scarponi and Jaksche, would later confess their involvement in Puerto.

JULY 10
Hamilton announces on his website that he is suing Tinkoff in Italian court over contractual issues. Hamilton contradicts team owner Oleg Tinkoff (who told *CyclingNews.com* in an interview, "To me, he is fired.") and says he was offered a contract "with very different financial terms than my existing contract. Since I did not think this was fair, I did not agree." Hamilton says the suit was to be heard at the end of the month. As of press time, no decision had been announced.

EPILOGUE:
Hamilton denies any connection to Puerto. He remains licensed and able to race, but is no longer listed on the Tinkoff website and has not competed since the Tour de Georgia in April.

inconsistent with this, because I support the death penalty.”

Belief doesn't only filter information. It also has the power to reshape facts that get in the way of what we want to be true. I was reminded of this while revisiting memories of the CU cycling team with Erik Schmidt, who had coached there while Tyler and I were both students. Erik had served as a ride leader for the California Challenge, and at the Saturday-night fireside party we had a chance to catch up.

Had we been on the stand in a courtroom, Erik and I both would have sworn that he had been my cycling coach back when I was on the CU team. But as we reminisced and swapped stories and pinned down dates to go with each anecdote, we came to the unbelievable conclusion that our memories were, in fact, false: We never had an official coach-athlete relationship. We came to this realization only because we began to banter about the date of our trip to nationals with Tyler. I said it was 1993; he was sure it was 1992. Eventually, we sorted out that he had last coached the team at nationals in 1992, and I had joined the team in 1993.

The falsehood that he had coached me, which we'd each independently come to accept as fact, wasn't an intentional lie, and it wasn't an important one, but it illustrates how easily our brains meld messy truths into a coherent narrative. Erik had never been my coach. But in 1993, my first year of bike racing, he had tagged along on some of our training rides and served as a mentor to me. During some part of the process of trying to retain that memory, each of our brains had separately created the same, largely false narrative to embody the essential truth that the collegiate team had brought us together.

Over dinner at the California Challenge, I'd been asking Tyler some routine questions. "What year did you graduate?" I asked, more curious as an old college buddy than a reporter.

He said, "Oh, I never graduated. But it would have been 1994." That he dropped out of college to go pro did not strike me as unusual, and we moved on to other topics. Then, while researching this article, I came across a statement Tyler had made to VeloNews in September 2004. He was defending himself against the doping allegations, explaining that he would never do something as dangerous and stupid as blood doping. He told VeloNews, "I'm not saying I'm a genius, but I have a college degree. I'm pretty smart. I don't take risks—I take educated risks."

Tyler, the guy who insists he could not tell a lie, and whose Believers base their faith in large part on their acceptance of that part of his personality, had lied publicly, and in a most self-serving context. It wasn't a small lie either. It was one that, in many instances, has ruined careers and ended in resignations. Yet, because of what had happened with Erik, I instantly understood how Tyler might have convinced himself that he was telling the essential truth: He was close to graduating. He easily would have finished school if he hadn't gone pro. He is more educated than most elite cyclists.

I began looking closer at Tyler's statements through the years. At the Mt. Washington Hillclimb on August 19 of 2006, Tyler told reporters that he intended to compete at the world championships in September, just days after his suspension ended. When

I called to verify the fact with USA Cycling, the governing body that selects the Worlds team, the representative on the phone literally laughed. The qualification process requires a signed petition for consideration from anyone not earning an automatic berth (via results from the current year). The deadline for petitions was August 11, and Tyler hadn't filed one.

The Operación Puerto revelations show another potential example of how a truth might be constructed from falsehoods, and lies might be in some sense honest. The "doping diary" taken as evidence in the raids allegedly show Tyler was scheduled to use several illicit performance enhancers; but the only transfusions he was slated to get were of his own blood—a technique known as an autologous transfusion, which wouldn't have been detected by the tests at the Olympics and the Vuelta.

Some experts and close followers of the case believe that Tyler mistakenly was injected with someone else's blood (a homologous blood transfusion), which triggered the positive. "I don't think he ever intentionally did a homologous blood transfusion," says Jonathan Vaughters, director of the Slipstream cycling team and a former teammate of Tyler's on the U.S. Postal Service team. "It's pretty clear from the evidence that's out there right now that he was intentionally doing autologous blood transfusion. Probably the doctor made a mistake and correctly typed the blood but didn't actually give Tyler his own blood," Vaughters says. "He probably looks back and says, 'No, I wasn't doing homologous blood transfusions' and convinces himself that he's innocent. That allows him to say, 'No, I never did this,' and to say it with conviction. He really does believe it himself."

When I ask Tyler and Haven about this theory, they scoff. The media is always coming up with crazy theories, they tell me.

I ask many of the Believers how they would feel if Operación Puerto produces evidence, that even they consider irrefutable, that Tyler doped. Most say they would not fundamentally change their opinion. "If Tyler Hamilton broke a rule, it wasn't intentional or he was on a program that they're all on," says Curtis Brown, the THF board member. "I'd be initially shocked, but I'd feel bad for Tyler. To have to go back and to face your family and your support group, and to say, 'Oops, I had you guys all out singing the tune, and it was the wrong tune.' I think that would be a tragedy for him personally."

Tragedy is the thing on my mind at Tyler's send-off party as I listen to Bill Hamilton yell about conspiracies and a system that's "totally corrupt." Bill has no choice but believe, I realize, remembering something lying expert Paul Ekman told me: "The main reason lies succeed is that the target colludes to over-

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MOST BELIEVERS SAY THEY WOULD NOT FUNDAMENTALLY CHANGE THEIR OPINION IF THERE WERE IRREFUTABLE EVIDENCE THAT TYLER DOPED.

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look any flaws because often facing the truth is very uncomfortable. Who wants to discover their spouse is unfaithful, or their son is using hard drugs? We believe what we want to believe.”

Looking at Bill, witnessing his passion for what he believes, I'm struck again by a question that's stuck with me from the beginning: If Tyler is not lying only to the public, but also to the people closest to him and recruiting those loved ones to perpetrate that lie, can he still be a good person?

When I pose the question to Vaughters, he pauses for a long while, then says, “That's a tough question. I don't know if he's necessarily a bad person. I don't want to say that he's crazy but I really think that it's almost like a pathological condition.” Tyler

has put himself in a position where he can no longer tell the truth, says Vaughters. “His parents taught him that you have to be fair and you have to always be a gracious winner and a good loser. He must feel like, if I ever tell the truth no one will ever care for me again, including my parents. If that's the case, is lying being a nasty, mean, cold person or is it just trying to save the last little bit of love that you have in your life? I don't know.”

The morning after the THF send-off party, I meet Tyler and Haven at Vic's coffee in Boulder for an hour-and-a-half interview. I finally ask the questions I couldn't cough up in California. He looks me in the eye and tells me he's never taken EPO, never done a blood transfusion. I'm not sure if it's the EPO confessions made by his former teammates, the ongoing scandals and ejections from the sport, the last round of Operación Puerto revelations, or simply the way he fidgets when I ask him if he's ever done any injections and he tries to convince me that everyone in Europe takes their vitamins via a needle, but I find myself struggling to believe. At the same time, I'm convinced that Tyler believes he's telling me the truth.

After the interview, we walk out to the parking lot, and on impulse, I give Tyler and Haven a hug.

After the interview, we walk out to the parking lot, and on impulse, I give Tyler and Haven a hug.

A hug. What the hell was I thinking? On the long drive home, I beat myself up about my unprofessionalism. A journalist isn't supposed to hug sources, especially in a story like this one, full of conflict and criticism.

As I crest Vail Pass and begin the descent to my home on the other side of the Continental Divide, I suddenly understand the hug.

In the end, the choice to believe or not isn't about Tyler. Standing there after the interview, I faced a choice about the kind of world I was going to believe in. Down one path lies a place where the freckle-faced boy next door can dedicate himself to the most beautiful sport in the world and succeed without selling his soul. Down the other: a world where my ability to judge character has failed me and where someone I admired is a cheater capable of looking me in the eyes and lying. Even as I stood there, thinking, “He did it,” it was not the place I wanted to go.

The hug was not really a hug; it was my last grasp at a fairy tale. **B**

Bio note true even when it seems that sport has turned against him. Down the other: a world