

Will Livestrong Stay Strong?

The Livestrong Foundation was founded in 1997 by professional cyclist, Lance Armstrong.¹ Soon after the formation of the organization, originally founded as the Lance Armstrong Foundation, it received recognition as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization by the IRS. As the organization became more firmly established and grew in notoriety, it shifted its focus from testicular cancer survivorship to the field of general survivorship for all individuals affected by cancer. In the 15 years since its establishment, the Livestrong Foundation has raised nearly 500 million dollars that has gone towards the creation of community survivorship programs, education for survivors and their families, grants, advocacy and partnerships with national leading cancer organizations.

Much of the organization's success can be attributed to the efforts, professional success and popularity of its founder, Lance Armstrong. However, in recent months, numerous allegations and reports of illegal doping have tainted the cyclist's image. Early in 2012, the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) officially filed charges against Armstrong alleging illegal doping practices throughout the course of his highly successful years of competition in the Tour de France cycling tournament.² After announcing a refusal to move forward with arbitration to combat the charges, Armstrong received a lifetime ban from participation in the sport and was stripped of his seven Tour wins. As a result of the charges Armstrong has also lost many of his well-known sponsors, including Nike, RadioShack, and 24 Hour Fitness.³

¹ See <http://www.livestrong.org/>

² See <http://www.usada.org/media/sanction-armstrong8242012>

³ See http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/22/lance-armstrong-oakley-sponsor-tour-de-france-titles_n_2001534.html

Due to the negative repercussions and undesirable press coverage surrounding Armstrong, the Livestrong Foundation has made changes within its structure in an attempt to separate itself from the issues faced by its founder. Most notably, Armstrong voluntarily stepped down as chairman of the organization and subsequently removed himself completely from the Board of Directors, severing all ties with the management of the organization. The Board's former vice chairman has stepped into the leadership role vacated by Armstrong. Also, although the organization has been informally known as the Livestrong Foundation for years, it has recently filed paperwork with the Texas Secretary of State to make the name official and eliminate the former name, the Lance Armstrong Foundation.

Although steps have been taken attempting to limit damage, there are still questions about what is in store for the future of the organization. There have been rumors of an impending IRS investigation into the Foundation's finances; however, no formal announcement has been made, or steps taken, pursuing this possibility. Furthermore, research shows that since the beginning of the incident in August 2012, donations are in fact up when compared to the same period from the prior year. Also, despite the fact that sponsors such as Nike have severed ties with Armstrong, no sponsors have removed support from Livestrong or announced plans to do so.

Members of the Livestrong Foundation are hopeful for the Foundation's future and attribute their hopes to the fact that the organization has become known for its purpose and programs instead of for its founder. In the 15 years of its existence, the Foundation has become something more than simply the man who founded it, and the members hope its success and presence will stay strong despite the Armstrong scandal.

Nicole Cloudsley
November 26, 2012