Tour de France Module

The Tour de France is the biggest cycling race in the world, composed of 21 stages across terrain all over France. Cyclists compete for 3 weeks to see who can secure the Yellow Jersey or Maillot Jaune and win the General Classification of the race. The General Classification (GC) is the overall competition of the Tour de France where riders compete to see who can finish all 21 stages with the least cumulative time. Riders battle through the mountains and hills of France to gain time on rivals and earn the privilege to wear the yellow jersey. Because the Tour has such prestige and difficulty, cheating has always been a factor in the race. The winner of the first Tour de France, Maurice Garin, was disqualified from the 2nd edition of the race after being found to have used trains and cars to aid him reaching the finish line. In fact, 11 riders were disqualified along with Garin in 1904, and the subsequent winner Henri Cornet also being accused of hitching a ride in cars. This was not the only form of cheating in the Tour, as there have been several different eras of performance enhancement and other changes in the sport. Testing at the tour is done after each stage, where the stage winner, stage runner-up, overall leader, and 2 random racers are all tested.

1903-1950: Amphetamines

During this period, there was no restriction on performance enhancing substances as riders would commonly use amphetamines and strychnine to aid their performance. Performance enhancement was not restricted in any way by the race organizers.

1950-1965: Transisiton

The tour began to take an anti-doping stance and began to discourage the use of performance enhancement. No testing or restrictions were used at this time.

1965-1990: Steroids

The tour began to test riders for performance enhancers in 1965 but did not hand out very severe punishments for violations. Tests for amphetamines became far more effective at this time so people began to stray away from them. The most common performance enhancers used at this time were steroids. Several Tour winners tested positive for steroids during this time but did not have results rescinded. Riders were given a time penalty if they were caught doping instead of receiving a ban. Some champions later admitted to doping during the race, but some were never caught.

1990-2010: EPO

As other drugs became detectable by testing, Erythropoietin also known as EPO, became widely used. EPO is used by people suffering from anemia to increase red blood cell production, which is beneficial to athletic performance. EPO was used as testing improved as the drug is not able to be detected, only the results of increased red blood cells. Testing during this period shifted to being more frequent and happening during training, not only the Tour itself.

2010-Present: Clean

Since Alberto Contador was caught doping in his 2010 victory, later given to Andy Schleck, no winner of the Tour has been caught doping. (Chris Froome, 4x Tour Champ was caught using salbutamol but was cleared of any doping use). The Tour is beginning to move past the days of Lance Armstrong and doping controversies, or riders are learning to hide their doping better.

These eras of cycling had vastly different results, with different technologies and strategies to win the race. This leads to interesting results when comparing across the eras of cycling, especially looking at different doping techniques.