

Tahoe threatend with Santa Rosa as '12 Amgen race start city

By John Schumacher, Sacramento Bee

Imagine having eight days to showcase California to friends or relatives who come visiting every year.



Where do you take them? Which places are left out? How is the itinerary changed each year to keep the visits fresh and interesting?

Heading into its sixth year, the Amgen Tour of California pro bicycling race keeps trying to answer those questions, with officials eager to tweak the route to keep riders challenged and interested.

San Jose is the only city to host a race stage all six years. Sacramento has served as a host city for the past five.

With the route constantly changing, though, and with dozens of cities applying to host stages each year, no one takes for granted they'll remain in the Amgen lineup.

Fifty communities sought host spots in this year's race, set for May 15-22.

Santa Rosa, hometown of three-time Amgen winner Levi Leipheimer, was left out this year but will host the overall start of the race in 2012, committing a reported \$580,000 to secure that role.

That effort makes folks elsewhere nervous. Starting the race in Santa Rosa could cause Sacramento to be bypassed. Lake Tahoe officials also are concerned, after working long and hard to land the 2011 overall start only to discover that

honor for 2012 already is locked up.

“Everywhere I go, I tell people, ‘Don’t expect this is an automatic every year,’ ” said John McCasey, executive director of the Sacramento Sports Commission. “ ‘Don’t get smug about great concessions and great crowds. Don’t get smug we’re the state capital. But don’t doubt for a second those things don’t matter.’ ”

McCasey said tour officials told him early in the race’s existence they would change venues and routes, mixing it up and making it unpredictable.

Sacramento has ample hotel space, a major gateway airport to the region and proximity to Lake Tahoe. But with Santa Rosa, San Francisco and San Diego among communities not in the 2011 race, McCasey and others are bracing for the year they’re left out.

“It’s going to come, just like it came with Santa Rosa this year,” McCasey said. “I think we would be disappointed, but I think we want this race to be successful on a long-term basis.

“The win-it-all-every-time mentality doesn’t work on this tour.”

Carol Chaplin, executive director of the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, said she’s not sure how her area fits into Amgen’s future plans after landing a spot in the race for the first time.

The tour’s growing international prestige has ratcheted up competition to participate, she said, and continuing to change stage routes has made the race more interesting.

“What we thought we brought to the table is the Alpine environment that was similar to the Alpine environment of European races so well-established,” Chaplin said. “It is a little stressful to think this could be a one-time shot.”

Read the whole story