

Opinion: Ding-Dongs, burgers and a diet for champion cyclists

By James Raia, Sacramento Bee

Five years ago, teammates Chris Horner and Levi Leipheimer rode together for several miles in an uphill breakaway at the Amgen Tour of California. The riders' skills, showcased high in the San Gabriel Mountains, defined cycling's beauty but with a bizarre chunk of irony.

Confident and fit, the two riders pedaled in unison. They mastered the short, steep switchbacks to the Stage 6 finish near the 10,000-foot peak of Mount Baldy. Leipheimer, a three-time event winner, surged and won the stage. Horner finished second and the next day won the tour title.

Then, strangeness ensued. A disciple of clean living and meticulous preparation, Leipheimer called out Horner, his antithesis. Horner, the "Everyman's Rider," is a proud proponent of eating junk food.

Leipheimer said Horner would become a serious cyclist only after curtailing his penchant for hamburgers, soft drinks and candy bars.

A year later, Leipheimer, a Lance Armstrong accomplice, was suspended for his admission to doping throughout much of his career. He hastily retired.

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