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Amber Neben

A DISAPPOINTMENT AT HER FIRST OLYMPICS DIDN'T KEEP AMBER NEBEN FROM BELIEVING SHE COULD BE ON TOP OF THE WORLD AND MAKE A GOLDEN COMEBACK

Few athletes can say they've been through as many ups and downs in their careers as 2008 World Champion cyclist Amber Neben. While redemption seems to be a fitting term for her now, since becoming a full-time competitive road racer in 2002, the Southern California native has faced every obstacle possible. When we last caught up with Neben in 2007*, she had overcome injuries and a steroid suspension (the result of a tainted electrolyte), to become the first American to win the Tour de l'Aude in both 2005 and 2006, the women's toughest road race.

She finished the 2007 season with a fourth place finish in the World Championship time trial, but soon after faced an untimely bout with skin cancer.

"I've had a number of challenges along the path of my athletic career," says Neben. "I certainly haven't understood all of them—however, I've never doubted that the Lord would bring something positive out of each, and this was no different."

Thankfully, the melanoma hadn't entered her lymph nodes. She was able to recover from surgery just in time to prepare for the 2008 season with her European team based out of the Netherlands.

Later during the summer of 2008, she achieved a life-long dream of making the Olympic team.

"The magnitude of being an Olympian hit me right before the opening ceremonies," she says. "As we walked under the stadium, before we came out of the tunnel, the chant U-S-A began inside. It was the same chant that as a kid growing up I'd hear while watching the games on TV. That was the moment I got the chills and had to hold back the tears."

Unfortunately, during the road race two days later—with only 10K remaining—Neben dropped a chain on her bike and was forced to pull off to the side of the road, which meant her shot at a medal was over. But instead of letting it get her down, Neben spent the time between the Summer Olympics and the September World Championships in Varese, Italy, focused on one of her favorite Proverbs: "Lean not on your own understanding." (Prov. 3:5)

"The night before [Worlds], the Lord put the David and Goliath passage and the idea of going into battle in the name of the Lord God Almighty on my heart," she says. "I wouldn't say I knew I was going to win, but I was confident and more relaxed going into the race. I wanted to be sure I left it all on the table."

Neben certainly earned a place in history, winning the biggest race in cycling. "It was the last eight years in the making," she explains. "That's why I was so emotional on the awards stand—because I knew what it meant and everything I went through to get there." 🏆

—JENNA SAMPSON



▲ **Amber waves of grin:** U.S. cycling star Amber Neben celebrates her gold medal after winning the time trial at the World Championships in cycling in Varese, Italy, on Sept. 24, 2008. Neben beat Austrian Christiane Soeder and German Judith Arndt.

To follow Neben's 2009 season, visit www.amberneben.com.

*This is a follow-up to an August-September 2007 feature.

