

Justice Served...on a Platter

For the last few months we kept hearing rumors about the Armstrong investigation – the case was strong, indictments would be sweeping, doping was the least of his crimes. But then, at 5pm Friday before Superbowl weekend, André Birotte, US Attorney for the Central District of California, released a terse statement closing the investigation without further comment. As the media scrambled back from their weekend plans to write a story they never expected to write, we're left to wonder why the investigation was scrapped, and why the announcement was timed to ensure it would get the least amount of coverage possible.

Some speculated that the government's case simply wasn't strong enough, especially coming on the heels of the Bonds and Clemens cases. But then Charles Pelkey **reported** that Novitzky and other investigators only learned of the decision 30 minutes before it was announced. We've also heard rumors that witnesses were scheduled to appear before the grand jury next week. If the investigative team was so blindsided by the decision, it's doubtful that Birotte made his decision based on the merits of the case.

So what does that leave us? Did Armstrong's hiring of Mark Fabiani finally pay off? The anonymous provocateur **@theraceradio** tweeted, "Those (who) wonder why Fabiani and his business partner Chris Lehane were hired now you know. In the White House Lehane worked daily with Clinton's Lawyer Lanny Breuer....who is now head of the Fed's Criminal division." Or maybe the truth is less insidious. Maybe Birotte just didn't have the stomach to take on a popular sporting hero in an election year.

Tinfoil hat wearers will also note that Armstrong met with Barbara Boxer earlier this year. Coincidentally, Boxer had championed Birotte's appointment this year. And earlier in the week Livestrong donated \$100,000 to Boxer's pet charity Planned Parenthood.

Meanwhile, Armstrong released a brief statement but remained strangely quiet on Twitter, which is odd considering that earlier on Friday he saw fit to taunt former Sports Illustrated reporter **Selena Roberts** on his **@juanpelota** account. If he gloated about Roberts' departure from SI, how could he not crow about the dismissal of a case that threatened his very freedom?

Could it be that he realizes he isn't in the clear yet? First of all, the Italians have been cooperating with Novitzky. They've been waiting for him to proceed while they held

off on prosecuting Michele Ferrari. With the Armstrong case closed, they might now move on Ferrari. Revelations from that case could prove very damaging to Armstrong's reputation. And of course, USADA has pledged to continue its investigation as well.

Secondly, and this is the big one, Birotte's decision may be reversed. If he made his decision for purely political reasons, he's surely facing a department wide revolt right now. And if he was worried about prosecuting a popular sporting figure, he probably wouldn't want to be perceived as showing favoritism towards the rich and powerful either.

And this is where you come in.

This is Birotte's email address: andre.birotte@usdoj.gov. Send him an email if you think criminals shouldn't escape prosecution if they're wealthy and connected. Let him know that the government shouldn't encourage whistleblowers like Landis and Hamilton to speak up against an immensely powerful figure, only to pull the rug out from under them. Tell him he shouldn't unilaterally negate two years of Novitzky's hard work. Get the word out on Twitter, Facebook, smoke signals, whatever. Feel free to post all of this on your site or blog. If this investigation was quashed for political reasons, it is our job as fans of our sport to make our voices heard.

