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That's our Floyd!

Landis' Pennsylvania hometown celebrates victory

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FARMERSVILLE, Pa. (AP) -- As Floyd Landis crossed the Tour de France finish line Sunday, his devout Mennonite parents were riding their own bicycles home from church.

Paul and Arlene Landis were so confident their son would win the cycling's greatest race they didn't have to choose between going to church and watching it on TV at a neighbor's house.

"I'm glad we didn't have to make that choice. Church is very important to us," Arlene Landis said. "We felt in our hearts he was going to win. He is not one to take second place."

The couple and their neighbors in this tiny hamlet in the heart of Pennsylvania Dutch country were celebrating Sunday after Floyd Landis' unlikely victory, which keeps cycling's most prestigious title in American hands for an eighth straight year.

At Farmersville's only intersection a short distance from the Landis home, neighbors scrawled: "Floyd Landis, World Winner of Tour de France 2006, -10:00 to +.59, USA." Cyclists and motorists alike snapped photos of the message, spraypainted in gigantic yellow letters, that referred to the huge time deficit Landis overcame to win the Tour.

Well-wishers also flocked to the Landis home, a white farmhouse bordered by cornfields in Farmersville, a rural crossroads of a couple dozen homes just outside the borough of Ephrata in eastern Pennsylvania.

Sunday, the home was festooned with green and yellow balloons, the colors of Landis' Phonak team. On the front lawn, signs showcased the divergence of cultures -- "To God be the glory" and "Floyd's the man."

Inside, visitors found a Phonak jersey signed "To Dad" and a Le Tour de France chocolate and vanilla layer cake with green and yellow icing, baked specially by Landis' mom for a celebration later Sunday night.

The attention "just really humbled me," Arlene Landis said. "I think this is terrific."

All who visited, friend and stranger, were greeted warmly by Paul and Arlene, who questioned their 30-year-old son's obsession with cycling when he was a teenager and were saddened when he chose to leave the Mennonite fold.

On Sunday, they said they felt "joy" at his victory and hoped he will use it to glorify God.

"People in any profession who do their best are often lifted up as examples, and I want his life to be a life of integrity and an example to young people," Arlene Landis said.

Landis bought his first mountain bike at age 15 at Green Mountain Cyclery, a local shop. He won the first mountain bike race he entered. Two years later, in 1993, he was crowned a junior national champion. At age 20, he decided to move to southern California to train full time.



Paul and Arlene Landis have reason to smile with their son's victory.

AP

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All along, he told friends he would win the Tour de France someday.

After a disastrous ride Wednesday in which he plunged to 11th place, Landis put himself back into contention Thursday with a once-in-a-lifetime ride in the Alps.

Arlene Landis, who has walked to a neighbor's house each morning to watch the Tour, said she felt the hand of God in that performance.

"I just feel like that was given to him not to lift him up but to show God gives strength in the face of disappointment," she said.

As Landis rode the final leg to Paris on Sunday, his parents attended 9 a.m. Sunday school and 10 a.m. worship at Martindale Mennonite Church, a conservative congregation of about 400 people.

Floyd's name wasn't mentioned, not even as a joy or prayer request, and congregants seemed ambivalent about his success. Landis, the second of six children, was raised in this church, whose members live simply and eschew the larger culture.

"We are disappointed with the lifestyle he lives, but I love him as a friend and care about him," said a church member, Nelson Weaver, 34.


One of Martindale's pastors, David Sensenig, said recognition of individual accomplishment is frowned on in Mennonite faith. Nevertheless, he said Floyd Landis was still the talk of the congregation.

"Winning the race isn't the big deal," Sensenig said. "It's what he does with the results, with the fame and fortune. He can use his influence for the betterment of the church, of Christ."

Paul Landis said he sees the victory as a chance to spread the Gospels and looks forward to meeting people he never otherwise would have met.

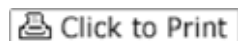
"I want to hear their victories and their sorrows, and we can encourage each other," he said.

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