

Turkey makes Mark Cavendish a winner again after a 3-year drought

Mark Cavendish (Deceuninck-Quick Step) moved into the lead of the 56th Presidential Tour of Turkey after taking his first win three years after stage 3 of the Dubai Tour. He outsprinted Jasper Philipsen (Alpecin-Fenix) and André Greipel (Israel Start-Up Nation) in Konya.

“It’s incredible, it’s really really nice to be a winner again”, an emotional Cavendish reacted after the finish. “I’ll never get tired of that feeling. We didn’t really have to take lessons from yesterday’s finish because one guy went down and it messed up the sprint for everyone. Actually we didn’t do exactly what I wanted with the guys. We ended up too many guys. We’re only with six riders here and Fabio [Jakobsen] is not capable to be in the finale. So we had to be conservative and we didn’t do it really. But everyone committed which is the main thing. Shane Archbold got me further than yesterday. Alvaro [Hodeg] could guide me in the last kilometre. Riders were looking at me in the last corner. Jasper Philipsen had a small gap [with 200m to go] but I managed to win. Thank you to Deceuninck-Quick Step team. Patrick [Lefèvre] gave me the opportunity to come back. The Tour of Turkey isn’t the Tour de France but to beat Jasper and André [Greipel] is not easy.”

Three riders broke clear after the flag off: Samuele Zoccarato (Bardiani CSF-Faizané), Meindert Weulink (Ablock CT) and Vitaliy Buts (Salcano Sakarya). They were reinforced by five more attackers up the category 2 climb located after 24km: Artyom Zakharov (Astana PT), Juan Antonio Lopez Cozar (Burgos BH), Josu Etxebarria (Caja Rural-RGA), Szymon Tracz (Nippo-Provence-PTS) and Mexican national champion Ulises Castillo (Wildlife Generation). Buts crested first before Zoccarato, Weulink and Etxebarria. He was also first at the category 3 climb at km 68.6, beating Castillo and Zoccarato. A gap of 1’30” was recorded at half way into the stage. It went up to 1’45” but the peloton kept the escapees on a leash with Australian rookie Sebastian Berwick leading the pack for Israel Start-Up Nation for a very long time.

As most of the sprinters teams worked towards a common goal of a bunch gallop in Konya, it was back together with 10km to go, Castillo and Tracz being the last to be caught. Philipsen looked like having it as he launched his sprint 200 metres before the line but he had to settle for second. “I thought I was going to win”, the young Belgian said. “But in the finale, Cavendish came over so yes, it’s disappointing. I had a really good lead out so it’s just my fault that I couldn’t finish it off. It was a super strong team but I wasn’t good enough to cap it off.”

Greipel, who won in Konya in 2016, commented after making the top 3 of a TUR stage again: “I’m satisfied with the work of the team, let say. But I didn’t do my best sprint today. I was beaten by better sprinters than myself. However the team did a really good job with the lead out train. Of course, Alpecin-Fenix as well... We found each other and at the end the better ones won. It’s good to see that the old guys are still up there.”

Artyom Zakharov, leader of the Beauties of Turkey primes, said: “It wasn’t an easy stage. I could feel the altitude. It was hard to breathe during the stage. I had one sprint to get this jersey. I’m a track specialist so it was better for me to target this sprint than the KOM.”

Vitaliy Buts, King of the Mountains, commented: “I went in the first group from the beginning because I was very motivated to go for the KOM. My goal will be to keep this jersey now. We’ll see tomorrow if there’s another opportunity to go and get some more points. It’s important for me to do well in this race because I ride for a Turkish team. The red jersey gives a good publicity to the team. I’ll try to do well till the end.”