

Froome takes Vuelta lead

Logroño

Chris Froome claimed his second stage win of the 2017 Vuelta a España to extend his overall race lead on Vincenzo Nibali to 1min 58sec with victory in the individual time trial on Tuesday.

Froome beat out Wilco Kelderman and Nibali in a time trial of exactly 47

minutes for the 40.2km 16th stage from the Navarra motor racing circuit to Logroño.

"It's an absolutely amazing feeling to extend my lead now and to be in this position," said Froome. "It's a great position to be in now, it's a good buffer, but the race isn't over."

The Briton, who is aiming to become only the third rider in history to win the Tour de France and Vuelta in the same year, now has just four competitive stages to defend his lead before Sunday's traditional parade around Madrid.

However, Nibali's impressive showing in finishing 57 seconds behind Froome on the day maintained his hopes of a second Vuelta win with a series of strenuous climbs, including Saturday's queen stage up the Alto de L'Angliru, still to come.

Kelderman's second place, just 29 seconds back on

Froome, moved the Dutchman 27 seconds ahead of Russia's Ilnur Zakarin into third overall.

Zakarin was fourth with Alberto Contador moving up to fifth in the general classification in his final race before retirement with fifth on the stage.

"I've had a good time trial and the most important thing is I think I have good legs for what remains of the Vuelta," said Contador.

Froome started slowly on the tarmac of the motor racing circuit more used to hosting events on four wheels than two as the Sky rider was 23 seconds down on Kelderman at the first check point after 13 kilometres.

Yet, the four-time Tour de France champion surged through the second sector to lead by seven seconds by the second check point and continued to extend

his lead all the way to the finish line as Kelderman faltered.

"I was just riding it at the speed I felt best," added Froome. "I wasn't really getting that many time checks from the car so I didn't really know where I was."

"Only coming into the last six or seven kilometres I found out that I was on track to fight for the stage. (It was a) really big relief and obviously super, super happy to be in this situation."

Wednesday's stage sees the race return to the mountains with a steep hors category climb to the finish of the 180.5km ride from Villadiego to Los Machucos.

"Tomorrow is going to be brutal," added Froome.

"Los Machucos from what I can see is a wall and a big, big GC battle for sure."

Ag2r throw out two riders for car tow

Madrid

French cycling team

Ag2r-La Mondiale were forced to withdraw two riders from the Vuelta a España on Tuesday after they were caught using a team car to gain ground.

Alexandre Geniez and Nico Denz were seen on videos released on social media holding onto a door and the roof rack

of the vehicle during Sunday's punishing climb up the Sierra Nevada.

"The management of the Ag2r-La Mondiale team has decided to withdraw Alexandre Geniez and Nico Denz from the Vuelta a España," the team said in a statement.

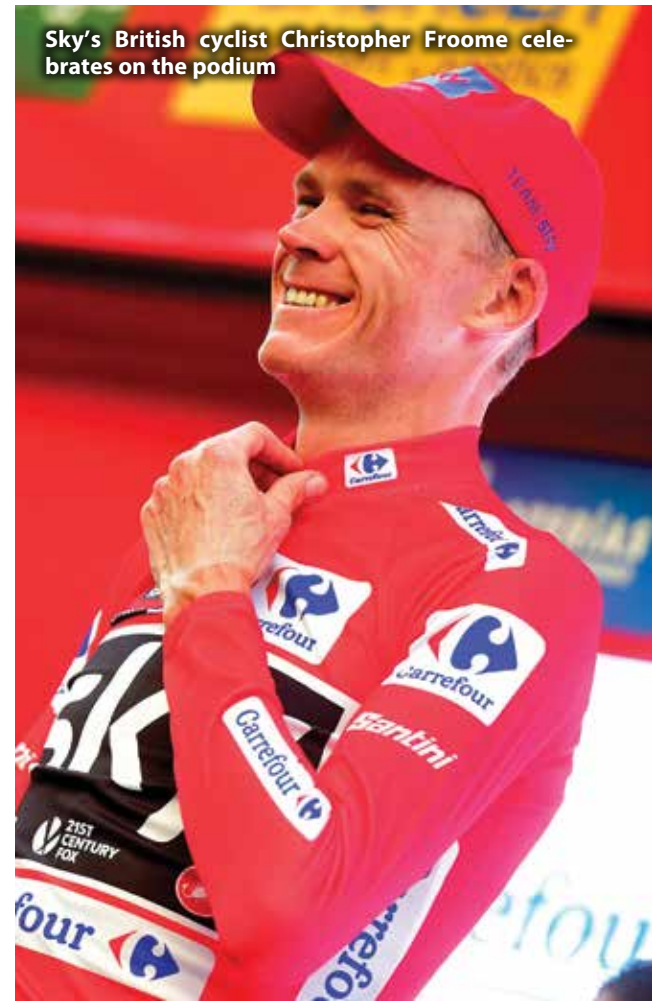
"The Ag2r-La Mondiale team sincerely apologises to the organisers and the public for the unsportsmanlike behaviour of our riders,

which is contrary to our values and our ethics."

However, it isn't the first time Ag2r have been caught in a car tow scandal as team leader Romain Bardet was thrown out of March's Paris-Nice for using a team car to allow him to make up lost ground from a crash.

Four-time Grand Tour winner Vincenzo Nibali was also thrown out of the Vuelta in 2015 for a similar incident.

Sky's British cyclist Christopher Froome celebrates on the podium



16th stage results

A 40.2km individual time trial from Circuito de Navarra to Logroño on Tuesday:

1. Chris Froome (GBR/Sky) 47min 0sec,
2. Wilco Kelderman (NED/SUN) at 0:29,
3. Vincenzo Nibali (ITA/BAH) at 0:57,
4. Ilnur Zakarin (RUS/KAT) 0:59,
5. Alberto Contador (ESP/TRE) 0:59,

Selected others:

22. Miguel Angel Lopez (COL/AST) 02:34,
26. Fabio Aru (ITA/AST) 3:03,
37. Michael Woods (CAN/CAN) 3:40,
45. Esteban Chaves (COL/ORI) 4:01

Overall

1. Chris Froome (GBR/Sky) 62h53:25,
2. Vincenzo Nibali (ITA/BAH) at 1:58,
3. Wilco Kelderman (NED/SUN) 2:40,
4. Ilnur Zakarin (RUS/KAT) 3:07,
5. Alberto Contador (ESP/TRE) 4:58,



Bahrain-Merida's Italian cyclist Vincenzo Nibali

England to host India in 2018 Test series

London

England will host India in a five-match Test series in 2018, the England and Wales Cricket Board announced yesterday.

The teams will play three Twenty20 matches in July, followed by three one-day internationals and then Tests at Edgbaston, Lord's, Trent Bridge, the Rose Bowl and The Oval.

England's schedule for the year also includes meetings with Pakistan, Australia and Scotland.

"A five-Test series against India is at the heart of next summer's international programme," said ECB chief executive officer Tom Harrison in a press release.

"Alongside these, England's white-ball contests against India, Australia and Scotland will give a fascinating guide to form ahead of the ICC Cricket World Cup, to be staged here in 2019."



Argentina's Lionel Messi gestures at the end of the 2018 World Cup qualifier football match against Uruguay in Montevideo, on August 31, 2017. The match ended 0-0.

Messi deal 'signed' by agent, says Barcelona's Bartomeu

Barcelona

Barcelona's under-fire president Josep Maria Bartomeu launched a counter-attack on his critics yesterday by insisting a four-year contract extension for Lionel Messi has been signed by the player's agent and father, Jorge Horacio Messi.

Barcelona announced an

agreement with the five-time World Player of the Year in July, but Messi himself is yet to put pen to paper amid rumours he is unhappy with the running of the club.

Messi's current deal expires in 2018 meaning he could leave Barca for free next summer.

"It is all agreed and signed," said Bartomeu in an interview with Barcelona-based daily Sport.

"There are three contracts: one with Messi's foundation, that is signed by the president of the foundation and the player's brother; a contract with Leo Messi's image rights, that his father and administrator of his company have signed; and the work

contract that Leo's father has signed."

When pressed on the delay in Messi signing the deal, Bartomeu claimed both the player and club's hectic start to the season was to blame and that it would be resolved within a month.

"There are no problems. All that is left is the protocol of the signature. We are calm," he added.

Bartomeu and his board have received fierce criticism for their handling of the recently closed transfer window as Paris Saint-Germain enticed Neymar away from the Catalan giants for a world record 222 million euros (\$263.7 million).