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WOUT VAN AERT SAYS "ARRIVEDERCI" TO RIVALS AT FIUGGI



ZACHARY SCHUSTER - JANUARY 15, 2017

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FIUGGI, Italy—Coming into Sunday's Telenet UCI World Cup race in Fiuggi, Italy riders were expecting an icy and technical challenge. Saturday's snow was gone, with temperatures hovering above freezing, but the ice remained beneath a layer of mud in the narrow, technical woods. The conditions caused racers to slip and slide their way through an afternoon on the grounds of the Fiuggi spa that was anything but relaxing.

With Mathieu van der Poel preparing for Worlds in warmer climes in Spain, Sunday's race was Wout Van Aert's to lose. The reigning World Champion and 2016-2017 World Cup leader lived up to the pre-race hype by dispatching an early challenge from Toon Aerts (Telenet Fidea Lions) and riding away to a comfortable win in the Italian countryside.

The Fiuggi World Cup was the first held in the boot-shaped country since the 2013 and 2014 Rome races. Fiuggi is a small town located 80km east of Rome that is famous for its therapeutic spa waters. The race was held at the Parco Termale dell'Anticolona, which houses a spa where visitors can bathe in the Acqua di Fiuggi. The town's waters first became popular after Michaelangelo credited them with curing kidney stones that were ailing him, and the town has been a destination for Italians ever since.

The talk on Saturday among riders was not about the Fiuggi course per se, but rather the course conditions. Snow and frozen precipitation left the course with patches of ice throughout the entire circuit. The ice was particularly treacherous in the woods, where the frozen veneer lied beneath a layer of mud created by the above-freezing temperatures.

if you are watching #fiuggi to put perspective on the woods section. It is like peanut butter on glass!

— Kerry Werner (@kerryw24) January 15, 2017

The Women's race, dominated by Marianne Vos, provided the men with a preview of the carnage that awaited them in the woods. Racers spent a good amount of their time in the woods running—and slipping and sliding—through both the uphill and descents.

Aerts with a Good Show Early

With the narrow woods looming as a tough challenge in the first lap, the top riders were keen on being among the first to get to the section. Wout Van Aert and Toon Aerts continued their pattern of strong starts by darting to the front of the race from the opening whistle.

Van Aert dropped to a mid top-ten position through the woods while Aerts kept up his fast start through the section. The Telenet Fidea Lion held a 10-second lead over an early chase duo of Clement Venturini (Cofidis) and Tom Meeusen (Telenet Fidea Lions) after a first trip through the woods that was much more tranquil than the women's jaunt.

One theme early in the race was Van Aert's strength in the woods. After his shaky performance on the ice at the year-opening GP Sven Nys, one question heading into Sunday's race was how Van Aert would handle the ice and mixed surfaces of the Fiuggi course. The World Champion rode several parts where other riders turned into runners and looked confident through the tough wooded sections early in the race.

Van Aert used his prowess in the woods to move into second during the second lap and then catch up with Aerts at the beginning of the third of nine laps in the flat section near the spa.

Van Aert Streaks Through the Trees

Toon Aerts has put himself at the front of the race as the only man standing between Wout Van Aert and victory several times this season. On Sunday his strong start and the sketchy conditions suggested the affair could be a repeat of his victory in Baal on New Year's Day.



Wout Van Aert ran away from the field in Italy. 2017 Fiuggi UCI Cyclocross World Cup. Elite Men. Italy. © C. Jobb / Cyclocross Magazine

After Van Aert made contact with Aerts at the start of the third lap, the two riders entered the woods together. While Van Aert looked confident through the section, Aerts looked relatively shaky. He was struggling to find sure footing on the running sections, and at one point was forced to run while Van Aert was able to stay on his bike.

Van Aert did not pick up a time advantage by staying on the bike, but the trip through the woods did show the section would be a strength for Van Aert and a weakness for Aerts.

After Aerts' struggle through the woods, both riders knew it would be in Aerts' best interest to be the first rider into the section on the next lap. Aerts attacked in the flats at the start of the next lap to try to get to the haunted forest first. The attack proved too early, and Van Aert countered with an attack of his own to grab the lead position heading into the first downhill segment of the forest.

The pressure of keeping up with Van Aert's pace would be too much for the Lion, and with Van Aert already opening up a gap, Aerts slipped and fell to allow Van Aert to run, and ride, solo off the front. At the end of lap 4, Van Aert held a 13-second gap back to Aerts and Michael Vanthourenhout (Marlux-Napoleon Games).



Wout van Aert wins the 2017 Fiuggi UCI Cyclocross World Cup and locks up the World Cup overall. Elite Men. Italy. © C. Jobb / Cyclocross Magazine

The lap 4 gap is all Van Aert needed to ride away with victory in Fiuggi. He held his lead to between 12 and 21 seconds for the remainder of the race and captured his second straight and fourth overall World Cup victory.

A Great Battle for Second

After Van Aert dispatched Aerts, the battle for second place again became the story of the race. Early in the affair, a chase group of six formed after Van Aert made his move to the front. Meeusen and Vanthourenhout distinguished themselves from the chase during lap three, and then during the next two laps, Vanthourenhout distinguished himself again and joined Aerts in the chase for second.

With four laps to go, Meeusen joined Aerts and Vanthourenhout as Marcel Meisen (Steylaerts-Verona) and Tim Merlier (Crelan-Charles) dangled nearby as potential heirs to the second-place throne. Vanthourenhout conquered the woods and open up a 10-second gap back to the other riders.

Disaster with Three to Go

As the race progressed, the course surface in the woods got greasier as some of the ice melted and the mud built up. Each pass through the woods became more dangerous, and with three laps to go, disaster struck in the chase for second.

The technical section in the woods began with a steep downhill flanked by several trees that led to a left-hand turn. Toon Aerts took the inside left line and lost control of his front wheel on the descent. He flew over his handlebars and fell shoulder-first into one of the trees holding the course tape.

Early leader @fiuggicross @ToAerts hits tree in awful crash, DNF. Looked like a collar bone or AC joint injury.

#TelenetUCICXWC pic.twitter.com/L6eI3rN1ro

— Cyclocross Magazine (@cyclocross) January 15, 2017

Medical personnel attended to him in place for several minutes before he left the course holding his left arm in a way that suggests he broke his collarbone. After the race, Aerts' fellow riders expressed concern for their fallen rival:

Super happy with my 8th place in Fiuggi! Crawling my way back to the top ☐ I'll keep working hard, to maybe still improve. #HopeToonIsOkay

— Lars van der Haar (@larsvanderhaar) January 15, 2017

Shortly after Aerts' crash, Vanthourenhout had a mishap that cost him his strong second position. He slipped out on a slick patch and his bike went into the netting. The triple M trio of Meeusen, Meisen, and Merlier caught him after the mishap and the blue-clad rider dropped back into fifth with his teammate Kevin Pauwels (Marlux-Napoleon Games).

Meisen Locks Down Second Place

Inside two laps to go, Marcel Meisen established himself as M Numero Uno. The German opened up a 10-second gap back to the other two chasers with a strong performance through the woods. He rode strong in the bell lap and closed the gap to Van Aert by over five seconds to take home second place.



German National Champ Marcel Meisen finished strong in second. 2017 Fiuggi UCI Cyclocross World Cup. Elite Men. Italy. © C. Jobb / Cyclocross Magazine

On the last lap, Meeusen stayed strong while Merlier faded. Lurking just behind was the perennial strong-finisher Kevin Pauwels.

Meeusen finished fourth at Valkenburg, Zeven, and Namur, while Pauwels took third at Zeven, Namur, and Heusden-Zolder, so the history of 2016 suggests Pauwels would catch Meeusen and take home the third podium spot.

Meeusen finishing fourth, however, was so 2016. Pauwels slipped on a corner near the end of the wooded section, costing him his chance to catch up with his fellow Belgian. Meeusen stayed strong through the finish to shake the fourth-place monkey off his back and grab the third podium spot. Pauwels finished fourth and Merlier fifth.

The American contingent at Fiuggi had a rough afternoon. Jeremy Powers (Aspire) finished 46th, Andrew Juiliano (Rock Lobster) 49th, Kevin Bradford-Parish 51st, and Kerry Werner (Kona) in 52nd.

Werner got off to a strong start, but suffered a couple of crashes that ended his shot at a strong finish,

"I crashed hard about three or four laps in which pushed me into the 30s then I really got rocked when I hit the tree that Toon [Aerts] broke his collarbone on," Werner told *Cyclocross Magazine*. "I sat off course with the spectators and medics for two minutes until I caught my breath—[it] knocked the wind out of me—then I continued on."



L to R: Meisen, Van Aert and Meeusen. 2017 Fiuggi UCI Cyclocross World Cup. Elite Men. Italy. © C. Jobb / Cyclocross Magazine

Van Aert Wins World Cup

With his victory, Wout Van Aert locked up the overall 2016-2017 Telenet UCI World Cup title. He won four races and finished second three times.

The last tune-up before the January 29 World Championships in Bieles, Luxembourg is the Hoogerheide World Cup next Sunday. Tune into *Cyclocross Magazine* for coverage of the season's last World Cup.

2017 Fiuggi UCI Cyclocross World Cup Results - Elite Men

Rank	Name	Team	Result
1	VAN AERT Wout	CRELAN - CHARLES	1:05:03
2	MEISEN Marcel		+00:18
3	MEEUSEN Tom	TELENET FIDEA LIONS	+00:27
4	PAUWELS Kevin	MARLUX NAPOLEON GAMES	+00:39
5	MERLIER Tim	CRELAN - CHARLES	+00:46
6	VANTHOURENHOUT Michael	MARLUX NAPOLEON GAMES	+01:12
7	VANTORNOUT Klaas	MARLUX NAPOLEON GAMES	+01:16
8	VAN DER HAAR Lars	TELENET FIDEA LIONS	+01:24
9	AERNOUTS Jim	TELENET FIDEA LIONS	+01:27
10	VAN KESSEL Corne	TELENET FIDEA LIONS	+01:42
11	VAN DER POEL David	BEOBANK - CORENDON	+01:49
12	ESTEBAN AGUANDO Ismael		+01:56
13	BAESTAENS Vincent		+02:08
14	WILDHABER Marcel	SCOTT-ODLO MTB RACING TEAM	+02:09
15	BOROS Michael	PAUWELS SAUZEN - VASTGOEDSERVICE CONTINENTAL TEAM	+02:09
16	ZAHNER Simon		+02:12

17	WALSLEBEN Philipp	BEOBANK - CORENDON	+02:15
18	ADAMS Jens	PAUWELS SAUZEN - VASTGOEDSERVICE CONTINENTAL TEAM	+02:34
19	PEETERS Rob	PAUWELS SAUZEN - VASTGOEDSERVICE CONTINENTAL TEAM	+02:44
20	BRAIDOT Luca		+02:44
21	CHAINEL Steve		+03:03
22	BOULO Matthieu		+03:08
23	WEBER Sascha		+03:12
24	SOETE Daan	TELENET FIDEA LIONS	+03:17
25	SWEECK Diether	ERA - CIRCUS	+03:27
26	VERMEERSCH Gianni		+03:30
27	SWEECK Laurens	ERA - CIRCUS	+03:46
28	HARING Martin	DUKLA BANSKA BYSTRICA	+03:47
29	SAEGESSER Severin		+03:48
30	VAN LEEUWEN Patrick		+03:54
31	WINTERBERG Lukas		+03:54
32	RUIZ DE LARRINAGA IBANEZ Javier		+04:03
33	BRAIDOT Daniele		+04:20
34	HERNANDEZ GUTIERREZ Aitor		+04:24
35	COMINELLI Cristian		+04:34
36	SAMPARISI Nicolas		+04:53
37	VANTHOURENHOUT Dieter	MARLUX NAPOLEON GAMES	+04:57

38	FALENTA Alois		+04:59
39	VENTURINI Clement	COFIDIS, SOLUTIONS CREDITS	+05:30
40	MOUREY Francis	FORTUNEO - VITAL CONCEPT	+05:41
41	FRANZOI Enrico		+05:45
42	CAPPONI Stefano		+05:55
43	SAMPARISI Lorenzo		+07:35
44	GODRIE Stan	CRELAN - CHARLES	-1LAP
45	SUAREZ FERNANDEZ Kevin		-1LAP
46	POWERS Jeremy	ASPIRE	-2LAP
47	TARAMARCAZ Julien	ERA - CIRCUS	-2LAP
48	VAN AMERONGEN Thijs		-2LAP
49	JUILIANO Andrew	ROCK LOBSTER	-2LAP
50	MALIK Michal		-2LAP
51	BRADFORD-PARISH Kevin		-2LAP
52	ANIA GONZALEZ Daniel		-5LAP
	AERTS Toon		DNF
	WERNER Kerry	KONA	DNF
	BOOM Lars		DNF
	VALDRIGHI Stefano		DNF
	NESVADBA Jan		DNF
	HEKELE Emil		DNF
	MCCONNELL Mark		DNF

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ITALY MARCEL MEISEN TOM MEEUSEN WOUT VAN AERT



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**Achilles Berlant**

congrats champ !!

**Patrick West**

Confirmed broken collarbone for Toon? Boo, he was just getting up to speed.

**Kerry Lee Werner Jr.**

At least I am in good company.

**Cyclocross Magazine**

And clearly, since it took you out, it's not your fault! ;-)

**Heather Angel**

Race time is not a good time to hug trees, Kerry

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