



Report

By Cycling News (/author/cycling-news/) January 15, 2017 3:01pm

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Van Aert takes victory in Fiuggi Regione Lazio

Toon Aerts crashes out

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Van Aert proceeds on foot (*Tim de Waele/TDWSport.com*)

World champion Wout Van Aert (Crelan-Charles) captured an impressive victory in Fiuggi, Italy during the eighth and penultimate round of the Telenet UCI Cyclo-cross World Cup. German champion Marcel Meisen (Steylaerts-Verona) nabbed a very surprising second place ahead of Tom Meeusen (Telenet Fidea Lions). European champion Toon Aerts (Telenet Fidea Lions) crashed out of the race and seems doubtful for the World Championships that Luxembourg will host two weeks time.

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Van Aert completed a long solo ride on a cold Sunday afternoon. Thanks to his win, the 22 year-old Belgian rider also secured the overall win in the 2016-2017 World Cup. "It was a super nice 'cross. The Italians are really mad about cycling. I'm glad to have been here. Now I can head to next week's race [the World Cup final in Hoogerheide] without stress. From this evening on I can focus on the World championships," Van Aert told Telenet Play Sports after his win in the Fonte dell'Anticolana park.

The circumstances in Fiuggi, in the Lazio region, were quite spectacular. The frost from the previous days and the higher temperatures from Sunday turned the twisting course into a very slippery challenge. The parts of the course that looped through some elevation with pine trees were extremely difficult. Most riders slipped away or crashed, but Van Aert remained flawless. "It was very special. The challenge was to stay upright and stay calm on the slippery sections; that worked out well," Van Aert said. In the absence of Mathieu van der Poel (Beobank-Corendon), who opted to stay in Spain for a training camp, Van Aert impressed by showing off his technical abilities on a slippery course.

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Early on, European champion Aerts wasted no time by taking a blistering start. He might have thought that Van Aert would avoid the risks, being nearly certain of the World Cup and with the Worlds coming up. That wasn't the case. Van Aert kept his cool after a good start. Aerts gained some ground, with Meeusen protecting his move in the chase group. Van Aert didn't find a lot of space on a course that was often singletrack, but halfway through the second lap he powered away. During the third lap the world champion bridged up with the European champion. He set a blistering pace and Aerts hung on for dear life. Early on in the fourth lap, Van Aert ran away from Aerts - who's a good runner - on a long uphill section. "Toon started fast. I felt that I was the best in the running section. That's where I first passed the others and then closed the gap with Toon. From there, it was a matter of doing your own thing and staying busy for an hour," Van Aert said.

Halfway through the race, Van Aert was solo in front with a bonus of nearly half a minute on five riders: Michael Vanthourenhout (Marlux-Napoleon Games), Aerts, Meeusen, Tim Merlier (Crelan-Charles) and Meisen. Pauwels was alone in seventh place at ten seconds from the chase group. Meanwhile, Laurens Sweeck (ERA Real Estate-Circus) punctured early on and had a complete off-day. The third-placed rider in the World Cup standings never felt comfortable in Fiuggi and rode outside the top-20.

During the second half of the race, Van Aert kept clocking steady lap times. He extended his lead up to forty seconds over a dwindled chase group of Meeusen, Meisen, and Merlier. Aerts no longer featured in the group. The 23-year-old Belgian rider crashed out of the race in the seventh of nine laps, while riding in third place. On the steepest drop of the course, Aerts lost his balance on the inside of the course and fell on his left side onto a tree. He immediately reached for his left shoulder. The crash happened in the same location where Alice Maria Arzuffi crashed heavily during the women's race. There was no cushioning on the tree to protect the riders. Aerts was transferred to a hospital with a possible collarbone injury.

Racing continued and during the penultimate lap, Meisen clocked the fastest lap time of the race. He charged forward in the chase group, while Vanthourenhout lost a lot of ground with a mechanical and lost out on a podium result. When hitting the final lap, Van Aert was 24 seconds ahead of Meisen. Van Aert held on to win with an 18-second gap, while Meisen would stand tall and capture his best-ever World Cup result.

"It's unbelievable. I didn't have a great start, which is important on this course, but it went really good. Technically, I had no problems and the short uphill climbs suited me. I was able to move up and then the podium was there. I couldn't believe my own eyes," Meisen told Telenet Play Sports. "Everybody was on the verge of crashing but I rode good lines and felt certain, also in the downhill runs."

Meeusen battled with Merlier and Pauwels for third place at 35 seconds. Meeusen salvaged the podium spot as Pauwels and Merlier struggled on the final slippery sections. "I'm very satisfied to finally get on the World Cup podium again. The expectations were high today. As soon as there's a bit of snow the eyes turn towards me. It was more physical than anticipated", Meeusen told Telenet Play Sports. "Aerts? I was there and heard him screaming after his crash. When a rider screams through the forest so that everybody hears it, you know it's not a good sign."

Michael Vanthourenhout was sixth. A few moments later, veteran Klaas Vantornout (Marlux-Napoleon Games) earned himself seventh place, fighting back from a distant 23rd place after the opening lap. Lars van der Haar (Telenet Fidea Lion) continues his comeback after injury with a solid eighth place. He finished ahead of team-mates Jim Aernouts and Corné van Kessel. With the final spots of the Belgian selection for Worlds still undecided, all eyes were on Tim Merlier, Jim Aernouts, Jens Adams (Crelan-VastgoedService) and Gianni Vermeersch (Steylaerts-Verona). Adams Merlier was fifth, Aernouts ninth, Adams eighteenth. Vermeersch briefly featured in the top 10, dropped back to 45th and then finished 26th, just ahead of Laurens Sweeck. Lars Boom (LottoNL-Jumbo) hoped to clinch a Dutch selection with a strong result – he sat in twelfth place after the third lap but then faded back and didn't finish the sixth lap, while riding in 31st place.

Next week, the final World Cup round is held in Hoogerheide, Netherlands. With Van Aert (530 points) already certain of the overall victory, and Pauwels (419 points) in a good position for second place, the battle for third place is on between Tom Meeusen (377 points) and Laurens Sweeck (373 points).

Results

# (Position)	Rider Name (Country) Team	Result	
1	Wout Van Aert (Bel) Crelan-Charles	1:05:03	
2	Marcel Meisen (Ger) Team Kuota Lotto	0:00:18	
3	Tom Meeusen (Bel) Telenet Fidea Lions	0:00:27	
4	Kevin Pauwels (Bel) Marlux-Napoleon Games	0:00:39	
5	Tim Merlier (Bel) Crelan-Vastgoedsservice	0:00:46	
6	Michael Vanthourenhout (Bel) Marlux-Napoleon Games	0:01:12	
7	Klaas Vantornout (Bel) Marlux-Napoleon Games	0:01:16	
8	Lars Van Der Haar (Ned) Team Giant-Alpecin	0:01:24	
9	Jim Aernouts (Bel) Telenet Fidea Lions	0:01:27	
10	Corne Van Kessel (Ned) Telenet Fidea Lions	0:01:42	
11	David Van Der Poel (Ned)	0:01:49	
12	Ismael Esteban Aguando (Spa)	0:01:56	
13	Vincent Baestaens (Bel)	0:02:08	
14	Marcel Wildhaber (Swi)	0:02:09	
15	Michael Boroš (Cze)		
16	Simon Zahner (Swi)	0:02:12	
17	Philipp Walsleben (Ger)	0:02:15	
18	Jens Adams (Bel)	0:02:34	
19	Rob Peeters (Bel)	0:02:44	
20	Luca Braidot (Ita)		
21	Steve Chainel (Fra)	0:03:03	
22	Matthieu Boulo (Fra)	0:03:08	
23	Sascha Weber (Ger)	0:03:12	
24	Daan Soete (Bel)	0:03:17	
25	Diether Sweeck (Bel)	0:03:27	
26	Gianni Vermeersch (Bel)	0:03:30	
27	Laurens Sweeck (Bel)	0:03:46	
28	Martin Haring (Svk)	0:03:47	
29	Severin Sägesser (Swi)	0:03:48	
30	Patrick Van Leeuwen (Ned)	0:03:54	
31	Lukas Winterberg (Swi)		
32	Javier Ruiz De Larrinaga Ibañez (Spa)	0:04:03	
33	Daniele Braidot (Ita)	0:04:20	
34	Aitor Hernandez Gutierrez (Spa)	0:04:24	
35	Cristian Cominelli (Ita)	0:04:34	
36	Nicolas Samparisi (Ita)	0:04:53	

37	Dieter Vanthourenhout (Bel)	0:04:57	
38	Alois Falenta (Fra)	0:04:59	
39	Clement Venturini (Fra)	0:05:30	
40	Francis Mourey (Fra)	0:05:41	
41	Enrico Franzoi (Ita)	0:05:45	
42	Stefano Capponi (Ita)	0:05:55	
43	Lorenzo Samparisi (Ita)	0:07:35	
44	Stan Godrie (Ned)		
45	Kevin Suarez Fernandez (Spa)		
46	Jeremy Powers (USA)		
47	Julien Taramarcaz (Swi)		
48	Thijs Van Amerongen (Ned)		
49	Andrew Juiliano (USA)		
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Van der Poel enjoying the sun and sand in Benicassim

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