

## **D-1: TOUR DE FRANCE PRUDENTIAL SINGAPORE CRITERIUM INFOS**

### **Key points:**

- ***On the eve of the second edition of the Tour de France Prudential Singapore Criterium, the riders of the Grande Boucle devoted their time to discovering the City-State and to a series of meetings with the media and the public.***
- ***Tadej Pogacar had an opportunity to speak about the route of the 2024 Tour; Chris Froome is also looking ahead to next summer, as is his very young compatriot, Joshua Tarling; and champions from four Asian countries are preparing to join the Critérium battle.***
- ***After a series of races for amateurs at the start of the day, the champions will be in action in a team time trial in the afternoon, followed by the Criterium's showpiece race: a 60-kilometre, 20-lap circuit through the heart of Singapore.***

### **TADEJ POGACAR: "MY HEART TELLS ME TO RACE EVERYWHERE"**

Although summoned by his team for a training camp, the Slovenian champion closely followed the presentation of the route of the 2024 Tour de France. As the subject is a recurring one in conversations at this time of year, it was only naturally that Tadej Pogacar was queried for his thoughts after discovering the programme for the 111th edition. *"It's a great route,"* begins the four-time white jersey winner, who will leave the Under-25 category next summer. *"I also realise that every year, I know more and more about the chosen climbs. All these names are becoming familiar to me. It's also unusual that the final stage is a time trial. I'll have to stay 100% focused for one more day.* Satisfied with the inclusion of two-time trials, which could represent decisive challenges, Pogacar doesn't seem to be panicking either about the mention of the 32 km of white paths introduced in the Troyes stage. And when informed that Jonas Vingegaard, his successor in the list of overall winners and two-time defending champion, has given the Tour map an 8/10 rating, his sense of guile, as much as his competitive spirit quickly kicks in: *"Whatever happens, the most important thing will always be to have strong legs and a good team... but I'm going to say 9/10".* The message has been sent because even if the UAE leader hasn't decided on his programme in detail, there is no question about his participation in the Tour de France: *"My heart tells me to race everywhere, but I know that's not possible".*

### **THE FOUNTAIN OF AMBITIONS...**

While the three majestic towers of Marina Bay Sands are the most visible symbol of the city, Singaporeans also have a particular fondness for the Fountain of Wealth, and not just because of its record 1,683 m<sup>2</sup> surface area. With its geometric shape inspired by the Hindu Mandala, the monumental structure underlines the harmony between the religions and diverse origins of the country's population. This location was selected as the focal point for the second edition of the Critérium. The headliners were invited to participate in a rather special recce, namely a confrontation on a "trishaw", Singapore's traditional tricycle. A solid team of veterans was put together, with Chris Froome, Peter Sagan and Mark Cavendish, to set a relay time over the three laps of the Fountain roundabout. But with a much more sophisticated technique for changing riders the time was lowered by 12 seconds by the trio of Jasper Philipsen-Giulio Ciccone-Tadej Pogacar, who thus took their first "victory" of the weekend. The small band of champions then made their way down to the lower level, the source of the fountain as it were, where visitors were invited to circle the mini-geyser three times while concentrating inwardly on a wish to draw good luck from it. No doubt, the riders' thoughts were turned to next July: *"I won't tell you anything,"* explained the 2023 Italian polka-dot jersey victor, *"but it should work because I will have ridden at least four Tours!"*

## **FROOME AND TARLING: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE**

In the build-up to the primary day of the Criterium, the programme created for the Singaporean public included a children's race sponsored by the oldest and youngest riders in tomorrow's international peloton, Great Britain's Chris Froome and Joshua Tarling. Listening to the four-time Tour winner talk about a possible comeback next summer, the motivation expressed was far from that of a 38-year-old "grandpa": *"Of course, it was hard to follow the Tour on television this summer, but it allowed me to reflect on what had been stopping me from progressing for some time, and I found a way forward. My position on the bike has changed since I switched teams and equipment, but I didn't realise it because I was primarily concentrating on my rehabilitation. I have redone all the settings identically, and I intend to raise my level of performance"*. Will it be to the point where I can once again compete with the best on the roads of the Tour? *"It's hard to say. It's been too long since I've really ridden with them at a decent level, and the current generation is really impressive. I would never have believed that a bunch of guys who had barely passed their twenties could win the Tour, and that's what happened"*. Joshua Tarling, at 1.94 m and 19 years of age, may not have the physique of a future winner, but he does intend to play a role in the Tour, and why not as early as next year? *"I dream about it, of course, and I was on the Champs-Élysées in the crowd waving a flag when Chris won his second Tour in 2015. I hope I'll be there next year because there are two fantastic time-trial stages, but I will also prepare for the Olympic Games, where I will try to win a time-trial medal."* In the meantime, the European champion in the event will wear the starred jersey tomorrow afternoon, which he won by clearly beating Stefan Bissegger and Wout van Aert in the Criterium team time trial. A first taste of the Tour de France.

## **STARS AND JERSEYS GALORE**

The day of discovering Singapore also included a short course in "Singlish", a local language that incorporates words from Malay and Chinese into English and ended with a presentation of the riders to the public, who were treated to a parade of the distinctive jerseys. The Tour de France jerseys, of course: Pogacar's white, Philipsen's green and Ciccone's polka-dot, but also Ivo Oliveira's Portuguese champion's jersey and Attila Valter's Hungarian champion's jersey. Some of the colours are much less familiar to regular cycling spectators, who have never seen the Korean champion's jersey at the Tour but will be able to see it tomorrow on the shoulders of Keon Woo Park. Neighbouring Malaysia will also be represented by its champion, Muhammad Nur Aiman Mohd Zariff, whilst the Thai team has called on the country's champion Noppachai Klahan as a last-minute reinforcement. Lastly, the Singaporean public will most certainly be cheering on their champion Yong Liang Mun, who has redoubled his efforts this year to earn his place in the Criterium: *"I wasn't good enough, but I've been training a lot, explains the 30-year-old who works in finance. And I managed to win the time trial and the road race at the national championships. I'm a massive fan of Pogacar; he's got class. It's an honour to race with him tomorrow, but I can't see myself beating him. I'm still going to try and get into the breakaway."*