

SPORTS
sports

Sky pull-out from cycling

Road-racing giant Team Sky will cease to exist as broadcaster pulls sponsorship

● Decision will bring to an end ownership of Team Sky in 2019

● Brailsford says team may continue with a new partner

AFP | London

British media company Sky yesterday said it would axe its sponsorship of cycling giant Team Sky after next season, ending a partnership that has delivered six Tour de France titles in the past seven years.

Team Sky have clocked up eight Grand Tour wins since their formation, but they have also been plunged into controversy for using special exemptions to administer drugs that can enhance performance.

The outfit, which has 322 wins in total since 2010, will operate for the last season as Team Sky in 2019 and could continue under a different name if a new backer is found, a Sky statement said.

"The vision for Team Sky began with the ambition to build a clean, winning team around a core of British riders and staff," said team principal Dave Brailsford.

"We are proud of the part we have played in Britain's transformation into a cycling nation over the last decade," he added.

"While Sky will be moving on at the end of next year, the team is open-minded about the future and the potential of working with a new partner, should the right opportunity present itself."

Sky's announcement closes an extraordinary chapter in cycling which began with the dream



Great Britain's Team Sky cycling team teammates ride during the 15th stage of the 105th edition of the Tour de France (file photo)

of creating Britain's first Tour de France champion -- which seemed overly ambitious at the time.

But Bradley Wiggins made it reality in 2012, before Chris Froome won four Tour de France titles and Geraint Thomas became Sky's third winner of cycling's landmark event this year.

From marginal gains to mystery package

Deep-pocketed Sky are known for Brailsford's meticulous and innovative application of 'marginal gains', the theory that many small advantages in areas as diverse as wind resistance, diet and sleep quality can add up to a significant improvement in performance.

However, Sky's image was clouded in the controversy over so-called therapeutic use exemptions, after a damning British parliamentary report

said the team crossed an "ethical line" by using the loophole to administer drugs to enhance performance.

The Commons digital, culture, media and sport committee report said MPs believed that triamcinolone, used to treat asthma, "was being used to prepare Wiggins, and possibly other riders supporting him, for the Tour de France".



Geraint Thomas and Chris Froome have worn a yellow version of the Sky jersey after the finish of the past five Tours de France

"The purpose of this was not to treat medical need, but to improve his power-to-weight ratio ahead of the race," it added.

Sky were also in the cross-hairs for a suspected anti-doping violation over a mystery package reportedly destined for Wiggins in 2011, although a UK Anti-Doping investigation concluded with no charges brought.

Sky was also caught in a long-running doping controversy that began when Froome returned an adverse doping test, for elevated levels of the asthma medication salbutamol, on his way to victory in the Vuelta a Espana in 2017. He was cleared 10 months later.

Sky began its involvement with the sport in 2008, when it successfully teamed up with British Cycling to increase participation and support the country's elite riders, who became a major force at world events including the Olympic Games.

McLaren enters into joint venture with Bahrain Merida



Bahrain Merida's General Manager Brent Copeland and rider Vincenzo Nibali with new jersey

Reuters | Manama

McLaren has entered into a 50 per cent joint venture with Bahrain Merida aimed at making the professional cycling team an internationally recognised brand at the top of the sport.

McLaren, in which Bahrain's sovereign wealth fund Mumtalakat has a majority stake, said yesterday that the deal would involve technical and commercial collaboration delivered through its applied technologies division.

"Racing, technology and human performance are at the heart of everything we do at McLaren," the company's chief marketing officer John Allert said in a statement.

"Cycling is something we've

been involved with in the past and have been looking at entering for some time. It is a completely natural fit for our skills and our ambitions."

The McLaren Group, which owns the McLaren F1 Team, has previously worked with Team Sky and British Cycling in the build-up to the London Olympics in 2012 through its applied technologies division.

The same unit was also involved in a technical partnership with American cycle manufacturer Specialized.

"The combination of our passion and vision for Team Bahrain Merida to be a winning team, with McLaren's expertise and dedication, is the perfect partnership," Bahrain Merida general manager Brent Copeland said.

Founded in 2017, Bahrain Merida is owned by HH Shaikh Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa and led by 2014 Tour de France winner Vincenzo Nibali.

No financial details of the deal were disclosed but McLaren said the long-term vision behind the partnership would be to elevate Bahrain Merida to professional cycling's top table.

50

per cent joint venture partnership has been signed by Bahrain Merida and McLaren

Langer ready for pacy track in second Test

AFP | Perth, Australia

Australia coach Justin Langer said yesterday he expected a pacy wicket at the new Perth Stadium for the second Test against India and declared "pretty boy" captain Tim Paine "ready to go" despite injury.

Australia are looking to avenge a 31-run defeat in Adelaide to level the four-Test se-



Australia's coach Justin Langer takes part in a practice session

ries but Langer admitted there was some uncertainty over the surface in Perth.

The Test will be the first played at the new stadium and Langer said it appeared the wicket was similar to the fast track which made its predecessor, the WACA, a haven for pace bowlers.

"I'm really fascinated and can't wait to see what the wicket brings," he told reporters. "There's only been one four-day game in its history."

"I went and watched a bit of the NSW versus WA game -- there was certainly some pace and bounce there. We've also seen some pace and bounce in it during the one-dayers and T20 game."

But he said neither team would know how the drop-in pitch plays in Test conditions until the match begins on Friday.

"Time will tell what the wicket brings... If we can get (WACA-style) pace and bounce) it'd be a great thing for Test cricket," Langer said.

Kohli engineered Kumble's exit, leaked email suggests



India's captain Virat Kohli (L) walks past coach Anil Kumble during the Indian team's training session (file photo)

AFP | New Delhi

The acrimonious exit of India's cricket coach last year was given a fresh twist yesterday as a leaked email suggested captain Virat Kohli had "fre-

quently" worked behind the scenes against him.

Former coach Anil Kumble quit over a rift with Kohli in June 2017, saying his relationship with the skipper was "untenable".

The Board of Control for Cricket in India has denied any division in the Indian camp.

But in a leaked email seen by AFP, a senior BCCI official wrote to board administrator Vinod Rai that Kohli "frequently sent SMSS to the CEO on which you acted and there was a change in the coach".

"Mr Kumble a legend in his own right was subjected to loss of face and made to look like a villain," added senior administrator Diana Edulji.

"He was gracious enough to move on for which I respect him. There also, rules were broken and I had raised objections back then."

Edulji's email originated from a separate controversy in the women's national team, where former coach Ramesh Powar fell out with one-day captain Mithali Raj.

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