

SPORTS
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Alaphilippe extends Tour lead

● Julian Alaphilippe stuns Geraint Thomas in Tour time-trial to extend his yellow jersey lead

● Alaphilippe extends lead over Thomas to 1min 26sec on stage 13

AFP | Pau, France

Julian Alaphilippe extended his overall lead at the Tour de France yesterday winning the 27.2km individual time-trial at Pau on stage 13 to keep the yellow jersey and send his home fans wild.

Defending champion Geraint Thomas was second while his Ineos co-captain Egan Bernal dropped down the overall standings and lost his best young rider's white jersey finishing way off the pace.

Thomas dropped 14 seconds on the French overall leader to slip to 1min 26sec adrift in the general classification after the baking hot race-against-the-clock around the Pyrenean town.

"If he carries on like this he'll win the Tour," the 33-year-old Thomas said at the finish line.

The Welshman then told British broadcaster ITV that Al-

“If he carries on like this he'll win the Tour. He's going incredibly well and is certainly the favourite or the one to watch at the moment. But there is a long way to go and a lot of hard stages to come

GERAINT THOMAS

aphilippe's barnstorming ride had taken him by surprise.

"He's going incredibly well and is certainly the favourite or the one to watch at the moment," he added.

"But there is a long way to go and a lot of hard stages to come."

"I just wanted to keep the jersey, but to win the stage, on this form, is just totally amazing," said Alaphilippe, the 27-year-old former soldier who is sending France wild with belief they can win a first Tour since 1985.

After the 80kph descent outside Pau with the sun making a strobe like flash effect as it flickered through the trees onto the blacktop, the packed holiday weekend crowds went wild as they realised Alaphilippe was



France's Julian Alaphilippe, wearing the overall leader's yellow jersey rides during the thirteenth stage of Tour de France

keeping pace on the narrow hill roads outside the town.

As Alaphilippe made the 18 percent slope ahead of the home straight the noise was deafening as the victory over time-trial specialist Thomas unexpectedly materialised.

Bernal finished 1min 26sec off the pace to drop down the rankings and lose his white jersey to Alaphilippe's teammate Enric Mas.

France's Thibaut Pinot was just behind these riders at 49sec,

looking happy and relaxed.

It was also a good day for top five pretenders Richie Porte, Steven Kruijswijk and Rigoberto Uran.

There were gasps and cries of horror when Belgian rookie Wout van Aert fell in the home straight after getting caught up in the barriers and twisted his leg before being taken away in an ambulance.

Today's stage 14 is a short 117km run over two Category 1 mountains with a summit finish

at the fearsome classic Tour de France destination the Tourmalet, which some translate as 'bad trip' and which is the highest mountain pass in the Pyrenees.

Pinot and his FDJ manager Marc Madiot have vowed to gain revenge there for getting left behind in the crosswind at Albi.

"There's a rage in him, and when the rage is on him he's good, Saturday we roll," Madiot said this week.

West Ham's Wilshere opens up on 'devastating' injury-hit season

AFP | Shanghai, China

West Ham United midfielder Jack Wilshere said yesterday that missing most of last season with yet another injury was "devastating" -- but he hopes a better year is to come.

The 27-year-old is widely mentioned as one of the most gifted England players of his generation but he has been plagued by injury throughout his career.

He left his boyhood club Arsenal last summer for a fresh start at Manuel Pellegrini's West Ham.

But after a promising start, the former England midfielder suffered a serious ankle injury and made just eight Premier League appearances.

Wilshere, who has 34 caps for England,

said: "I want to play a big part this season and play as many games as I can and help the team finish as high as we can."

Jack Wilshere



Dennis says quitting Tour was 'right decision'

AFP | Pau, France

Australian Rohan Dennis said his abrupt withdrawal from the Tour de France was the 'right decision' ahead of yesterday's time-trial, the discipline at which he is world champion.

Dennis won the 2018 world time trial road race at Innsbruck in November, beating Dutch ace Tom Dumoulin and world one-hour track record holder Belgian Victor Campenaerts in third.

The 29-year-old from Adelaide also won the time-trial in June's Tour de Suisse, finishing the race second overall behind Colombia's Egan Bernal.

The Bahrain Merida rider threw in the towel at the start of the Peyresourde, the first of two climbs on Thursday's 12th stage, after he had been busy trying to make the early breakaway.



Rohan Dennis of Australia and Team Bahrain-Merida rides during Stage 11 of Tour de France

Dennis released a statement overnight Thursday in which he did not address the reasons for his withdrawal during the 12th stage on Thursday but suggested they were not physical.

"I am very disappointed to leave the race at this point," said Dennis, who has won stages on all three Grand Tours.

"The individual time-trial tomorrow (Friday) had been a big goal for me and the team, but

given my current feeling it was the right decision to withdraw earlier today.

"I wish my teammates the very best for the remainder of the race and would like to thank all the Tour de France fans who cheered for me, at home and on the roadside, since Brussels."

"I will hopefully be back competing in this great race again over the coming seasons."

Gorazd Stangelj, the Bahrain Merida team's sports director, stopped his car during the race on Thursday and ran backwards to where Dennis had pulled up to try and persuade his rider to continue.

"He's the kind of guy who wants to have everything 100 percent and it's not easy to have everything 100 percent all the time," Stranjelj told reporters. "He's a special guy, let's say, all champions are."

Emery talks up leadership role for Holding amid Koscielny doubt

Reuters | Charlotte, North Carolina

Arsenal manager Unai Emery said on Thursday that he was planning for the potential departure of club captain Laurent Koscielny while mulling a leadership role for young defender Rob Holding.

Koscielny refused to join the Premier League club on their U.S. tour amid British media reports linking the 33-year-old French centre back with a move to Ligue 1 sides Girondins Bordeaux and Olympique Lyonnais.

Emery had labelled him an "important player" earlier this week but has now openly admitted Koscielny could leave.

However, the 23-year-old Holding could step up to be one of Emery's "five captains" -- all able to wear the armband when called upon, the manager said.

"I want

one English player in these five captains," Emery told a media conference in Los Angeles ahead of the International Champions Cup match against Fiorentina on Saturday.

"Last year (Granit) Xhaka, Mesut (Ozil) and Nacho (Monreal) were working as captains.

But after Aaron Ramsey and Petr Cech left - and possibly Laurent Koscielny - I will want more.

"An English player who grew up in our academy can understand the English spirit and Arsenal values. These are the qualities and more (we want).

"We are really happy with his (Holding's) progress. We need his performances as a centre back. (Before) he had his injury he was really playing with big performances."

The only other English senior players in the squad are Calum Chambers, who spent last season on loan at Fulham, and fringe right back Carl Jenkinson.



Rob Holding

Klopp committed to Liverpool as US tour kicks off

AFP | Chicago

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said he expects to remain at Anfield for at least three more years as the Premier League giants prepare to kick off their pre-season tour to North America.

Klopp, who successfully guided Liverpool to a sixth Champions League crown last month, was taken aback when asked to comment on reports suggest-

ing he may leave the club when his current contract expires in 2022.

"Wow! I don't think a lot of people get asked that question three years before the contract is expiring," Klopp said.

"We will see. Why should we think about this? At least three years - that's the answer. At least three years."

ESPN reported last month that Klopp was pondering



Jurgen Klopp talks to his team during a soccer practice session

a sabbatical when his Liverpool contract ends. Agent Mark Kocicke meanwhile has hinted that Klopp may be interested in taking over as coach of the German national team.

Klopp however was solely focused on preparations for the coming season on Thursday as the Reds begin a three-game US tour against Borussia Dortmund in South Bend, Indiana.