

Nielsen wins 15th stage

Geraint Thomas kept hold of his yellow jersey for another day

AFP | Carcassonne, France

Danish race debutant Magnus Cort Nielsen handed Astana their second consecutive victory when he won the 15th stage of the Tour de France in Carcassonne on Sunday.

Welshman Geraint Thomas, of Sky, maintained his 1min 39sec race lead over teammate and compatriot Chris Froome after a 181.5km ride from Millau in which the yellow jersey holder's rivals tried, but failed to launch a challenge.

Thomas and the main peloton soaked up futile attacks from Irishman Dan Martin (UAE) and Rafa Majka (Bora) before crossing the finish line just over 13 minutes in arrears on what, for them, was a comparatively easy stage ahead of Monday's rest day.

"I've been feeling pretty good. Days like today are always a bit funny because you don't really want to push. You want to recover as much as possible," said Thomas.

The 32-year-old Welshman, however, refused to speculate on whether he, and not Froome, will lead their charge over the following, decisive stages into the Pyrenees mountains.

"No honestly, I'm not thinking about that," added Thomas.

"I'm taking each day as it comes. I'm looking forward to the rest day, then the next stage, the next climb, and just keep on doing what we're doing."

Astana, meanwhile, took full advantage of what was set to be a transition stage ahead of three



Magnus Cort Nielsen sprinted to victory after being part of a breakaway

tough days in the Pyrenees starting from Tuesday.

Nielsen was one two Astana riders who fought hard to get in a breakaway group of 29 riders, along with compatriot Michael Valgren.

And when it came to the final kilometres, the race debutant seized the day.

Nielsen first underlined his ambitions 8km from the finish when he quickly countered Italian Domenico Pozzovivo's effort to break clear.

And two kilometres further on, Nielsen was quick to join Dutchman Bauke Mollema (Trek) and Jon Izagirre (Bahrain) when they left five of their breakaway companions behind.

A lack of cooperation in their

Nibali begins rehabilitation

AFP | Paris

Vincenzo Nibali is recovering from his Tour de France crash at home in Lugano, Switzerland, confident his fractured vertebrae will heal in time for him to line up at the Vuelta a Espana on August 25 and so target the world road race championships in Innsbruck on September 30.

Nibali collected a special orthopaedic corset on Saturday, which he will wear when standing, to ensure his vertebrae are held in the correct position.

The Vuelta a Espana starts in 35 days and Nibali hopes to recover in time for the final Grand Tour of the season.

"I've come back from worse injuries. Fortunately what happened doesn't seem to have compromised the final part of my season, the Vuelta and the world championships," Nibali confirmed to La Gazzetta dello Sport after returning home to Lugano from the Tour de France.

"I first need to rest up for quite a few days because there's nothing I can do while I'm still in pain."

Class standings from the 15th stage of the Tour de France, a 181.5km ride from Millau to Carcassonne:

Points:

1. Peter Sagan (SVK/BOR) 452 pts
2. Alexander Kristoff (NOR/EAU) 170
3. Arnaud Dømare (FRA/FDJ) 133
4. John Degenkolb (GER/TRE) 128
5. Greg Van Avermaet (BEL/BMC) 115
6. Andrea Pasqualon (ITA/WGG) 100
7. Julian Alaphilippe (FRA/QST) 89
8. Philippe Gilbert (BEL/QST) 84
9. Sonny Colbrelli (ITA/BAH) 76
10. Thomas De Gendt (BEL/LOT) 71

Team overall:

1. Movistar 188 h 47:32.
2. Bahrain at 7:10.
3. Sky 42:22.
4. Astana 47:43.
5. LottoNL 52:00.
6. BMC 1 h 17:38.
7. BMC 1 h 18:04.
8. Mitchelton 1 h 22:31.
9. AG2R La Mondiale 1 h 29:19.
10. Etixx 1 h 35:25.

wake meant the trio were allowed to build an insurmountable advantage over the closing kilometres.

But Nielsen, 25, was simply unbeatable after launching his sprint just under 300m from the finish, where Izagirre finished second and Mollema third.

"I knew I had the legs to win, and that I would be fastest at the line, but I still kept some powder dry in case," said the 25-year-old Dane.

It is Astana's second consecutive win on the race after Spaniard Omar Fraile capped an audacious attack on the final climb of stage 14 to triumph in Mende.



Andres Iniesta

Iniesta, Torres make J League debuts

Reuters | Kobe, Japan

Andres Iniesta and Fernando Torres made their much-anticipated debuts in Japanese soccer on Sunday, but both ended up on the losing side.

The Spanish pair recently joined J.League teams following illustrious careers in Europe.

Iniesta's signing for Vissel Kobe has been met with understandable excitement in Japan and the home crowd were given their first sight of the former Barcelona great when he came on as a second-half substitute against Shonan Bellmare.

Iniesta, in his first appearance since Spain's disappointing World Cup campaign, failed to make an impact, however, as Kobe lost 3-0.

The defeat means Kobe are in sixth place in the table, just past the halfway point in the Japanese league season.

Compatriot Torres, who left Atletico Madrid at the end of the Spanish season, also started on the bench for new club Sagan Tosu.



Left to right: Sreehas Ayyam Parambil with his brother Sreenkath, Eyad Alalawi with his daughters Fatima and Yara, and Mahmoud Mostafa Elsaby with his father Mostafa Elsaby

Coke brought world cup dreams to life

Manama

The winners of the Coca-Cola Company's 2018 FIFA World Cup promotion, who travelled to Russia to attend one of the matches, got together at the Coca-Cola Bottling Company to share their experiences.

The Under the Cap World Cup promotion on Coke cans was launched on April 1st and ran until May 12th 2018. It offered fans and consumers the chance to win a number of instant gifts, or the opportunity to participate in an online raffle for a chance to win a trip for two to the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia, on a weekly basis. Promotion embodied the Company's commitment to-

wards bringing people together through sport.

Football, one of the most popular games in sport unites global citizens, and the FIFA World Cup is an event that brings nations together in a celebration of sporting prowess and a beautiful game. As a long-term supporter of football on all levels, the Coca-Cola Company has had a long-standing relationship with FIFA since 1976 and has been an official sponsor of the FIFA World Cup since 1978, sharing in fans' passion and enthusiasm for the game.

Mohamed Akeel, Managing Director, The Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Bahrain, said of the promotion: "To be able to bring that joy and excitement

to fans and help their dreams come to fruition is incredibly important and rewarding for us."

Eyad Alalawi, one of the winners, said: "It was a great opportunity for my wife and myself to be part of the Coca-Cola delegation. We attended the match alongside 80,000 football fans and for a big football fan like myself, this was truly a remarkable experience."

Moustafa Alsaby, father of the winner Mahmoud Alsaby, said: "My son and I, couldn't be more grateful to the Coca-Cola Company for this once in a life time experience. We were well taken care of during the full trip, from the moment we departed and arrived back to Bahrain."

Neymar couldn't look at football after WC

AFP | Praia Grande, Brazil

Brazil superstar Neymar admits that after his nation's quarter-final defeat to Belgium at the World Cup he couldn't look at a ball and didn't want to see any of the remaining matches.

"I wouldn't go as far as to say I didn't want to play again but, I didn't want to see a ball, or to see any more football played," 26-year-old Neymar told AFP in an exclusive interview on Saturday.

The Paris Saint Germain forward was talking at his Neymar Praia Grande institute where the Red Bull Neymar Jr 5's (five-a-side-soccer) tournament was being played.

Dressed in a sleeveless t-shirt, with his six-year-old son Davi Lucca sat upon his knee, the striker was however in a relaxed mood as he explained his post-World Cup blues.

"I was in mourning, I was really sad about it, but sadness passes, I have my son, my family, my friends and they don't want to see me moping around. I've got more reason to be happy than sad," said Neymar, reflecting on his team's 2-1 quarter-final defeat to Belgium.

Asked about reports in Spain linking him with a transfer to Real Madrid the forward said "that's all speculation from the press."

"The guys who come up with these stories seem to know more about my life than I do.



Neymar



Neymar played futsal and street pickup games growing up in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and began his career playing for Santos's junior team when he was 11

I won't respond to this type of question because nothing happened," he scoffed.

The Brazilian superstar, who moved to PSG for a world record 222 million euros (\$264 million) last year, insists that the burden of expectation on his shoulders -- whether with

his club or country -- does not weigh heavily.

"No, all the great players feel pressure," he said.

"It's true that when it comes to me, there are double standards. I have been aware of this responsibility, not only for Brazil, but also in club football, since I was 17, 18 years old.

"I have prepared myself to handle this pressure and I know that when the results are not what they should be then that pressure increases."

Neymar has been hit by a barrage of criticism for theatrical rolling around after being fouled at the World Cup, but says he should have been better protected.

"People were faster to criticise the one being fouled than the one doing the fouling," he insisted.