

Tim Merlier is the strongest in Katowice

The Belgian confirms himself as one of the strongest sprinters on the international scene.

The general classification remains unchanged.

In his second participation, Tim Merlier secured his third stage victory by proving to be the best in Katowice and the strongest of his direct rivals, Jordi Meeus (Red Bull-Bora-Hansgrohe) and yesterday's winner Olav Kooij (Team Visma | Lease a Bike).

"I have to thank Ayco Bastiaens, who worked in front all day. I had to win the stage to repay him for his efforts. The guys made sure I was at the front, we set a strong pace and I attacked at the right moment. It was a difficult sprint, but I managed to win. It was very hot today, but I am happy to be back in Poland and to start the second part of the season with a win. The most important thing is to stay at the top level," said **Tim Merlier**.

The stage started and finished in Katowice, with much of the route taking riders across the hills of the Cracow-Częstochowa Plateau. Three riders escaped after the start: Polish champion Norbert Banaszek, Xabier Mikel Azparren (Q36.5) and Johan Jacobs (Movistar). The escapees set a fast pace and gained several minutes on the peloton. At the intermediate sprint in Jaworzno, Norbert Banaszek was the best, and he also won the sprint to Myslowice, taking the lead in the most active classification.

"Today's stage was very hot and very fast," said **Norbert Banaszek**. *"The three of us got into a breakaway and I only had one goal: to score points in two intermediate sprints. I did it and I am happy with myself. When you have a 40-second lead with 15km to go and twelve sprinters chasing you, you have no chance of holding on to the break. If we had at least a two-minute lead on the peloton, we could have made it and I would have certainly given it my all to finish. I know that tomorrow Michał Paluta and Marcin Budziński are going to attack on the climb and I'll try to finish calmly and be careful on Sunday".*

The only KOM in Ojców was won by Johan Jacobs, with Poland's Michał Paluta retaining the lead.

"The pace was really high today," said the **PZU King of the Mountains leader**. *"So much respect to Norbert Banaszek, who rode with good riders on the climb".*

Xabier Mikel Azparren (Q36.5 Pro Cycling Team) - the third member of the breakaway - won the special Decathlon prize in Bukowno. The breakaway fought bravely and led the stage for most of the way until the sprinters' teams took over and closed the gap with a few kilometres to go. It was not an easy day for the peloton, but the lack of radio communication made for an exciting race.

"During the grand tours, cycling is directed by the sport directors. It often happens that only the best climbers and sprinters win, and the rest of the peloton is deprived of the chance to show itself. The absence of radios gives more freedom. Without headsets, the possibilities are greater: if there had been a few more riders in the breakaway today, I think they would have made it to the finish. I'm sure there will be situations like this in the future, it levels the playing field a bit," said **Czesław Lang**, general director of the Tour de Pologne.

The victory was decided by a sprint finish at the Spodek Arena in Katowice, where Tim Merlier of Soudal - Quick Step was the fastest, confirming himself as one of the best sprinters. For the Belgian it was the third stage victory in the Tour de Pologne.

Jordi Meeus of Red Bull - BORA - hansgrohe and Olav Kooij of Team Visma | Lease a Bike, who won yesterday in Prudnik, finished in the next positions. His team mate, Jonas Vingegaard, retained the yellow jersey of ORLEN general classification leader.

Tomorrow's stage will be crucial for the outcome of the race. The riders will face a mountain stage from Wadowice to Bukowina Tatrzańska.