

Froome to peak for Tour de France final week

BY JULIEN PRETOT
REUTERS

BERN, Switzerland — Nairo Quintana is expected to be at his best for the final week of the Tour de France, which feature four stages in the Alps, but Chris Froome says he has never been better going into a grand tour decider.

“I feel more ready for the third week than I have been in previous editions,” Froome said on the second rest day of the Tour on Tuesday.

The Team Sky rider leads Dutchman Bauke Mollema by 1 minute, 47 seconds and fellow Briton Adam Yates by 2:45.

Froome’s main rival, Colombia’s Quintana, is fourth overall, 2:59 off the pace.

Wednesday’s 17th stage takes the peloton to a summit finish in Finhaut-Emosson, Switzerland, before an uphill time trial on Thursday, another mountaintop finish in Saint-Gervais Mont Blanc on Friday and a grueling mountain stage to Morzine on Saturday, ahead of Sunday’s parade to the Champs Elysees.

Although he is anticipating attacks from his opponents, especially from Quintana, Froome believes the first two weeks of racing have been particularly tiring.

“I am asked why guys didn’t attack two stages ago (in the 14th stage of Culoz) but Fabio Aru, Alejandro Valverde and Romain Bardet did. Other people are tired,” said the defending champion, who is looking to

become the first rider to retain his title since Miguel Indurain in 1995.

“I think that one of the main reasons we’ve not seen massive attacks is the level of fatigue. At the moment everyone is nailed.”

Quintana was on the attack twice in the Ventoux stage last week, but he was quickly reined in by Froome’s team mates, which made the Movistar rider look pretty much toothless.

Last year, Froome entered the final week with a 3:10 lead over Quintana, and the Colombian threatened a comeback in the final mountain stage to l’Alpe d’Huez, but it was too little, too late.

“Last year he made up a lot of time in the final week, and I expect he’s gonna be one of the main guys putting us under pressure these next few days,” said Froome, who is much less worried by his compatriot, the 23-year-old Yates.

“I wouldn’t look at him in the same light as Nairo Quintana. He’s quietly doing his thing. I wouldn’t expect him to attack in the big mountain stages,” he said.

Quintana and Froome will not have to worry about any challenges from one of the Tour’s top riders, Britain’s Mark Cavendish, who pulled out of the race Tuesday to manage his workload ahead of the Rio Olympics, his Dimension Data team said.

“After analyzing his workload from the previous stages and his current levels of fatigue, the team has sup-



Yellow jersey holder and Team Sky rider Chris Froome of Britain prepares for the start of the 16th stage of the Tour de France on Monday in Moirans-en-Montagne, France.

ported Mark leaving the Tour to give him the best opportunity to recover and prepare for the Olympic Games in Rio,” it said.

Cavendish claimed his 30th Tour de France stage victory and fourth in this year’s race in Saturday’s 14th stage but he will not now be starting stage 17 on Wednesday.

The Manx Missile, who has been back in the limelight after three below-par Tours, enjoyed wins on stag-

es 1, 3, 6 and 14 and is now four shy of the record held by Belgian great Eddy Merckx.

The 31-year-old Cavendish, who had not won more than three stages on the Tour since 2011, attributed his success in this year’s race partly to his track preparation for the Olympics.

“After an extremely enjoyable and successful couple of weeks at The Tour de France with Team Dimen-

sion Data, it is with great sadness that I took the decision today to leave the race,” Cavendish said in the South African-based team’s statement.

“After the heat and intensity of the previous stages, we analysed my fatigue levels and decided I’m at a point that would have a detrimental effect on my other big goal for the year, the Olympic Games,” he added.

As well as enjoying four stage wins, Cavendish also

wore the overall leader’s yellow jersey for the first time and carried the green jersey for the points classification into the first rest day in Andorra.

“Mark is really sad to leave the tour, we are committed to support him in his dream goal of receiving a medal for Britain at the Rio Olympic Games,” said team principal Douglas Ryder.

The Olympics start on Aug. 5.

Favre almost flunked out by physical

BY LARRY FINE
REUTERS

Brett Favre, who will be inducted as a first ballot Hall of Famer at the Canton, Ohio, shrine next month, set scores of NFL records during his 20-year career at quarterback, including a seemingly unbreakable Iron Man mark.

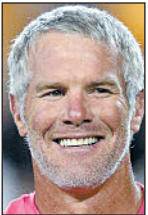
Yet the man who ended up playing 297 straight games (321 including playoffs) was nearly shut down by a failed physical exam before his career took off.

“I hurt my hip in the East-West Shrine (college all-star) game and was diagnosed with avascular necrosis of the hip, sort of like what Bo Jackson had, when blood supply is cut off to a joint,” Favre told a conference call on Tuesday.

Favre said the diagnosis turned many teams away ahead of the 1991 NFL Draft, where the University of Southern Mississippi quarterback fell to the second round, taken by the Atlanta Falcons with the 33rd overall pick.

“Atlanta a c t u a l l y went and did MRIs, X-Rays,” said Favre, who barely played his rookie season, throwing four passes without a completion, including two interceptions.

Green Bay’s first-year general manager Ron Wolf, who had admired Favre’s talent the year before when he was on the New York Jets staff, dealt a 1992 first-round pick



Brett

to Atlanta to obtain the fearless, strong-armed Favre.

“I was traded to Green Bay and was re-evaluated that year and was more or less flunked, if you will. Ron overruled that. He said ‘I’ll take whatever years he can possibly give us.’

“The debt of gratitude (I have) is forever payable. I’ve told Ron that over and over again. I had a conversation with him last night. We’re both always so thankful for each other.”

Favre’s jersey preceded him to Canton by 17 years, as the one he wore for his record-breaking 117th consecutive start at quarterback was put into a Hall of Fame exhibition in 1999.

Favre went on to play 16 seasons with the Packers. He played in two Super Bowls, winning one, and be-

came the first player to win three NFL MVP awards in a row during his Green Bay tenure.

“A wonderful story,” said Favre, whose irrepressible belief in his rifle arm prompted him to fire away at defenses, earning him the nickname “Gunslinger.”

“In his (Wolf’s) case by sticking his neck out there. Boy, what a gamble, and I’m forever thankful for that.

“And I know he has said over and over to me how thankful he is that it worked out, obviously.”

Iron Man Favre, who still holds a slew of NFL records including most passes and completions, started his first game in September 1992 and every game after that into January 2008.

Wolf was inducted into the Hall of Fame last year.

Durant

Continued from Page B5

way to play on our own. Obviously everybody’s going to have to sacrifice. If I played in Golden State, Oklahoma City or anywhere else, someone’s going to have to sacrifice. That’s just a part of basketball. I think that’s what makes basketball, a team sport, so great — that we all sacrifice for the greater good and that brings everyone together.”

“Sports is a way to get away from the real world for a second, and we provide that experience for them. I understand how they feel.”

KEVIN DURANT

Regarding his choice, however, Durant was single-minded.

“I just made a decision based on where I wanted to go,” he said. “It was simple as that. We can think about all the reasoning and what factored in, but it’s just simple: This is where I wanted to play basketball.”

The public reaction was mixed at best. Durant feared the worst, though he said he shouldn’t have.

“The two days afterward, I didn’t leave my bed because I was like, man, if I walk outside, somebody might just try to hit me with their car or say anything negative to me,” he said. “I just thought people would react to me a little differently. I never had this much attention, and so

many people who probably don’t even watch basketball came up to me and told me, ‘Congratulations. Good luck going forward.’ It’s crazy how big our game has gotten. The reach that it has is amazing.”

And he reiterated that he wanted to stay out of reach at first.

“I just stayed in. I was just trying to process it all,” Durant said. “I wanted to be around family and positive support. I felt different obviously. I mean, I’ve been somewhere for so long, and then to make a change like that that nobody knew was coming and nobody thought I would do, of course I didn’t know how I’d be received afterwards. But at some point, I just said, ‘Look man. Life goes on. Life moves on. I can’t hide forever.’ So I just had to face it.

“Having a chance to play in Oklahoma City for eight years and see the city come together and support the team, I understand. I understand where they’re coming from, and it hurt me. I was hurt for a few days because I know I hurt so many people in Oklahoma City by changing teams. So of course they’re going to say what they have to say because everybody’s emotional, and I understand that.

“Sports is a way to get away from the real world for a second, and we provide that experience for them. I understand how they feel. So I can’t really say anything to make them feel any different, but I can still go out there and be who I am as a basketball player and as a person — and, like I said, life moves on.”

Russia

Continued from Page B5

Sport. The CAS ruling is expected on Thursday, and the IOC said in its statement that it will take the ruling into consideration when making its decision on a collective ban.

Many observers have called for Russia to be completely banned from this year’s Olympics because of its elaborate, widespread doping program. Others, however, say a blanket ban would unfairly hurt certain Russian teams and athletes that were not implicated in any doping scheme.

The IOC also has appointed

a five-member disciplinary commission that will hand out punishments to the Russian Ministry of Sports officials who were implicated in the WADA report, adding that any official implicated in the report will not receive IOC accreditation to the Rio Olympics.

“The findings of the report show a shocking and unprecedented attack on the integrity of sports and on the Olympic Games. Therefore, the IOC will not hesitate to take the toughest sanctions available against any individual or organization implicated,” IOC President Thomas Bach said in the statement.

The IOC also announced that it’s provisionally withholding patronage of any

sporting event held in Russia, including the 2019 European Games, which were awarded to the Russian cities of Sochi and Kazan so long as the country addresses concerns uncovered in a previous WADA doping investigation. The IOC also will investigate every Russian athlete who participated in the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi and asked that all winter sports federations halt their preparations for major events scheduled for Russia, such as world championships.

The WADA report — which was spurred by a number of media investigations — found that Russia’s Ministry of Sport covered up positive doping results by hundreds of elite athletes in at

least 30 Summer and Winter Olympic sports, most prolifically in track and field and weightlifting, but also in swimming, cycling, skating, ice hockey and even table tennis. According to the investigation, the FSB — a successor agency to the KGB — devised a method to crack open supposedly tamper-proof sample bottles in an elaborate covert scheme at the 2014 Sochi Olympics to replace tainted urine of Russian athletes with clean urine.

Russian President Vladimir Putin decried the report’s findings as politically motivated but also said any official named in the report would be suspended while the government conducts its own investigation.

Murray

Continued from Page B5

role, but we just want to make sure the integrity of basketball as we all know it historically is being maintained.”

The National High School Basketball Coaches Association represents 33 states and boasts active relationships with the National Association of Basketball Coaches, the National Federation of State High School Associations, Women’s Basketball Coaches Association, the NCAA, NAIA and USA Basketball.

“What the association is trying to do is to establish relationships with all the governing bodies of basketball across the country at all levels,” said Murray. “With some of the bigger states the concerns are those third-

party influences getting involved, so we actually met with the national director of AAU and had some discussions with him, and he educated us, and we educated him about our concerns.

“A lot of the stuff is college-oriented these days, but it all starts with high schools and high school kids, and I think the feeling was that the high school coaches were getting squeezed out and people were more apt to listen to a third-party influence than the high school coach,” he said.

“The motives of the high school coach are pretty simple,” he added, “and that’s for the educational interests of the kids as opposed to some of these other people who have other motivations.”

Murray is one of six full-time executive board members, joined by several several board members emeritus who are founding fathers of the organization.

“The organization is made up of the leaders of the associations from all the different states, that’s why I’m there,” said Murray. “Some of the people in the room are still coaching, but many of them are retired, and what they do for their associations in their states is their full-time job, that’s all they do. They’re being paid \$40,000 or \$50,000 a year to run their association, and they have million-dollar budgets.

“It’s a different world from what we live in. The [Maine Association of Basketball Coaches] is strictly voluntary, we have just enough of a budget to get through each year,” he said.

Murray’s election to the National High School Basketball Coaches Association executive board not only reflects recognition for his work at the state level — he’s been the Maine Association of Basketball Coaches president for

eight of the last 10 years — but also provides the Maine high school basketball world another voice at the national level as well as direct access to information and feedback from other state associations.

“We’re all trying to help each other, so there’s a lot of sharing, particularly among states of similar size,” he said.

“North Carolina and Kentucky, although they’re big basketball names, their state high schools are very much like Maine, a lot of small, rural schools. You only hear about the big Division I programs there, but there’s a lot of smaller-school things going on, too, which is really what Maine is looking for, so there’s a lot of back and forth.”

Murray’s role with the National High School Basketball Coaches Association complements his work with the Maine Association of Basketball Coaches, which

may be best known for organizing the annual McDonald’s East-West Senior All-Star Weekend in Bangor after each high school basketball season as well as the related Mr. Basketball award and other postseason honors recognizing outstanding achievement in the sport.

The Maine Association of Basketball Coaches, formed in 1979, also maintains a website as well as arranging coaching workshops, networking opportunities and other activities to support its more than 200 members.

“What we’re trying to do more on a local level is just make sure our coaches see value in their membership and encouraging people to be more proactive,” said Murray. “There’s a lot of coaches who have a lot of things they have opinions about but aren’t sure how to make things happen, and there’s frustration in that sometimes, but we have a

governing body in the state, the [Maine Principals’ Association], that we work with along with the [Maine Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association] and other organizations.

“We try to work with people as opposed to being in opposition to them, and we advocate for what we think is best for the game,” he said.

Murray said his continuing behind-the-scenes support of high school basketball and his coaching brethren in particular represents a repayment of sorts.

“Basically the motivation for me is that after about 25 years or so of coaching I really feel like I’ve gotten a lot out of it. It’s been very, very good to me, the sport and my participation in athletics in general,” he said. “At my age and with my background and my experience it’s an easy opportunity to give something back.”