

= Cycling at the 2008 Summer Olympics ? Women 's individual road race =

The women 's road race was one of the cycling events at the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing , China . It took place on 10 August 2008 , featuring 66 women from 33 countries . It was the seventh appearance of an Olympic women 's road race event and featured a longer course than any of the previous six races . The race was run on the Urban Road Cycling Course (one of Beijing 's nine temporary venues) , which is 102 @. @ 6 kilometres (63 @. @ 8 mi) in its entirety . Including a second lap around the 23 @. @ 8 km (14 @. @ 8 mi) final circuit , the total distance of the women 's race was 126 @. @ 4 km (78 @. @ 5 mi) , less than half the length of the men 's race .

Heavy rain during most of the race made conditions difficult for the competitors . A group of five broke away during the final lap and worked together until the final sprint , where Nicole Cooke won the race . Cooke earned Great Britain 's first medal at these Games and 200th Olympic gold medal overall . Emma Johansson of Sweden and Tatiana Guderzo of Italy , finishing second and third place with the same time as Cooke , received silver and bronze medals respectively .

The race marked the first positive drug test of the 2008 Olympic Games , by María Isabel Moreno of Spain . She was scheduled to compete in this event and the time trial to follow , but left Beijing on 31 July , before the race . The International Olympic Committee said on 11 August that she had tested positive for EPO . This left 66 cyclists to compete , one fewer than in 2004 .

= = Qualification = =

The 2008 Summer Olympics marked the seventh appearance of an Olympic women 's road race event . Qualification for the race was restricted to three athletes per National Olympic Committee (NOC) for the 16 top @- @ ranked countries in overall Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) standings at 1 June 2008 , and a maximum of two athletes each for the countries ranking 17 ? 24 . An NOC with an athlete in the top 100 at 31 May 2008 received a place , which was taken from the countries ranked 17 ? 24 in reversed order , provided that these athletes qualified through the UCI World Tour rankings . Additionally , three places were available at the B World Championship for NOCs that did not qualify through the UCI standing ; Gu Sun @- @ Geun , Hae Ok @- @ Jeong and Thatsani Wichana secured Olympic qualification for their NOCs in this way , but only the first was chosen by her national committee to compete . The maximum quota of the event was set at 67 cyclists , and as of 5 June , 66 cyclists were qualified in this way . Although the Chinese and Austrian NOCs were allowed to enter three cyclists , they only entered two . This left three open positions : two were allotted to South Africa and New Zealand , based on their World Tour rankings , and the third was given to Mauritius by direct invitation . Only 66 of the 67 entrants began the race , as María Isabel Moreno of Spain left the country days earlier after failing a drug test .

= = Preview = =

Judith Arndt , the German rider who finished second at the 2004 Summer Olympics , was a strong favourite . Arndt had recently finished first at the 2008 Coupe du Monde Cycliste Féminine de Montréal , and her form in the months that preceded the race was excellent . Among other contenders were UCI Women 's Road standings leader , Marianne Vos of the Netherlands ; Briton Nicole Cooke , who said she had greater confidence in her team on this occasion than in 2004 , when she finished fifth ; and Noemi Cantele of Italy . The Australian team was considered strong : it included Sara Carrigan (the defending champion) , Oenone Wood (winner of the 2008 Australian Road Race) , and Katherine Bates , all of whom could work on each other 's behalf . Because the final leg of the course involved steep ramps , riders considered to be climbing experts (including Cooke , Vos , and Susanne Ljungskog) were favoured . Although not seen as a strong medal contender , one former champion participating in the race was 49 @- @ year @- @ old Jeannie Longo from France , who won the road race in 1996 and had competed in the inaugural event in 1984 , making this her seventh appearance .

Many cyclists expected tropical conditions during the race and adjusted their training to compensate

. For example , Marianne Vos prepared in El Salvador . Cyclists had also anticipated a problem with high levels of pollution in Beijing , but these did not appear to affect the results of the men 's road race . Although the pollution levels in Beijing on 10 August far exceeded the World Health Organisation 's safety level , the rain during the women 's race decreased the smog level .

In the men 's race , conducted the previous day , humidity and heat had taken the greatest toll on the athletes . To compensate for the expected warm weather , some female cyclists chose not to wear undershirts . This proved to be a misjudgment , as conditions were cooler in the Great Wall section than on the previous day ? 19 ° C (66 ° F) compared to 26 ° C (79 ° F) . Thunderstorms , bringing persistently heavy rain and strong winds , resulted in actual race conditions far different from expected . Other riders , such as Katherine Bates (who did not finish) , prepared by wearing cooling vests before the race and stocked up on ice packs during it .

= = Course = =

The race was run on the Urban Road Cycling Course (one of Beijing 's nine temporary venues) , which was 102 @. @ 6 km (63 @. @ 8 mi) in its entirety . Unlike the previous Olympic races , the start and finish were not at the same location . The early section of the race took place within central Beijing ; the gradient of this part of the race was relatively flat . After approximately 78 @. @ 8 km (49 @. @ 0 mi) , the riders reached the Badaling section of the Great Wall and began two loops of 23 @. @ 8 km (14 @. @ 8 mi) between the Badaling and Juyong Passes . The gradient increased at this point , as the Badaling Pass gained 338 @. @ 2 m (1 @, @ 110 ft) in elevation 12 @. @ 4 km (7 @. @ 7 mi) from the start of the circuit to the highest point , including ramps as steep as a 10 percent gradient . From there the cyclists rode over a false flat before descending a highway towards the Juyong Pass . The final 350 @. @ 0 m (1 @, @ 148 @. @ 3 ft) were a moderately steep climb , designed to ensure an exciting finale should several riders be grouped together at the end of the race . In total , the distance of the women 's race was 126 @. @ 4 km (78 @. @ 5 mi) , less than half the length of the men 's race .

The race 's starting line was at the Yongdingmen Gate , a remnant of Beijing 's old city wall , which is a part of the Chongwen District of northern Beijing . The route passed through eight districts : Chongwen , Xuanwu , Dongcheng , Xicheng , Chaoyang , Haidian , Changping , and Yanqing . Landmarks such as the Temple of Heaven , the Great Hall of the People , Tiananmen Square , the Yonghe Temple , and sections of the Great Wall of China were passed as the course journeyed from urban Beijing into the countryside . It passed the architectural features of the 2008 Olympics , including the Beijing National Stadium and Beijing National Aquatics Center (known colloquially as the Bird 's Nest and the Water Cube) . The course ended at the Juyong Pass in the Changping District . The course 's scenery was described by The Guardian as " visually sumptuous " .

Due to security regulations put in place by the Olympic organisers , spectators were not permitted to stand roadside along the course . Several prominent figures in cycling protested against this decision , including UCI president Pat McQuaid and two Australian riders , Stuart O 'Grady and Cadel Evans , who competed in the men 's race . McQuaid and O 'Grady felt that the absence of people along the course deprived the race of the atmosphere present at other cycling events , and said that it failed to take supporters ' wishes into consideration . Cycling Australia 's reaction to the cyclists ' complaints was to request that security restrictions be eased for the time trial to follow , but this plea was ignored .

= = Race = =

The race started at 14 : 00 China Standard Time (UTC + 8) , and was scheduled to last until 17 : 30 . The weather was unseasonably cool . It was cloudy and the roads were dry at the start of the race . The clouds brought steady rainfall midway through the race , making conditions challenging .

The race saw some incidents which caused riders to lose valuable time . Gu Sun @-@ Geun (South Korea) lost control of her bike , bringing others down with her . She eventually fell into a concrete ditch on the side of the highway . Natalia Boyarskaya (Russia) , who had built a lead of 59

seconds over the top of Badaling , had to stop to see which way to choose at a poorly marked intersection .

The chase for Boyarskaya was led by Christine Thorburn (United States) , who brought the lead down to 34 seconds prior to the final loop of 23 @. @ 8 km (14 @. @ 8 mi) . Emma Pooley (Great Britain) and Tatiana Guderzo (Italy) rode away from the bunch on the climb and caught Boyarskaya with 22 km (14 mi) to go , forming a three rider breakaway . The German team , with a steady pace , caught them soon after . Guderzo attacked with about 13 km (8 @. @ 1 mi) to go over the final summit . She was soon joined by Christiane Soeder (Austria) , Emma Johansson (Sweden) , Nicole Cooke (Great Britain) and Linda Villumsen (Denmark) . With 7 km (4 @. @ 3 mi) remaining , the group had gained 16 seconds on the main peloton . Marianne Vos (Netherlands) , one of the pre @-@ race favourites who was not in the leading group , hesitated before leading the chase together with other pre @-@ race favourite Judith Arndt . Cooke looked out of contention as the five came round the final bend , but she came around the other riders with 200 metres (660 ft) to go , claiming the gold medal with a clear margin . Johansson came in second and Guderzo won the bronze . Vos eventually led the bunch over the finish line , 21 seconds after the winner .

It was later revealed that Cooke had held back intentionally , as she was using lightweight tyres not suited to rainy conditions . The British women 's road team manager Julian Winn said " We were afraid someone might come down in front of her , so we told her to keep to the left . We knew she would chew them up after that . " Cooke 's victory was the result of meticulous planning , as the team had ridden the course before the race and formulated the winning plan .

= = Doping incident = =

The day after the race , an International Olympic Committee (IOC) spokesperson announced that Spanish rider María Isabel Moreno had become the first athlete of the 2008 Olympics to test positive for a banned substance . Moreno had provided a urine sample the day she arrived in Beijing (31 July) , but flew back to Madrid on the same day , after suffering a panic attack , and did not return to take part in the race . The urine sample tested positive for erythropoietin (EPO) . The IOC stripped Moreno of her Games accreditation , later referring the matter to the UCI which confirmed the positive result . A statement on Moreno 's website read that " she does not feel ready to justify or explain her reasons for leaving the [Olympic] village " .

= = Final classification = =

A total of 66 cyclists have been qualified in the event at these Games . Most of them are not expected to finish one @-@ day races , having worked in support for their teams (in this case , nations) to place riders with better climbing skills in good positions once the mountainous part of a course begins . Additionally , any rider lapped by the race leader on the Badaling circuit would be forced to stop , although this situation did not occur . The notation " s.t. " indicates that the rider crossed the finish line in the same group as the cyclist before her , and was therefore credited with the same finishing time .

Notes

Source : Official results