

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

The men 's road race , a part of the cycling events at the 2008 Summer Olympics , took place on August 9 at the Urban Road Cycling Course in Beijing . It started at 11 : 00 China Standard Time ( UTC + 8 ) , and was scheduled to last until 17 : 30 later that day . The 245 @. @ 4 @- @ kilometre ( 152 @. @ 5 mi ) course ran north across the heart of the Beijing metropolitan area , passing such landmarks as the Temple of Heaven , the Great Hall of the People , Tiananmen Square and the Beijing National Stadium . After rolling over relatively flat terrain for 78 @. @ 8 km ( 49 @. @ 0 mi ) north of the Beijing city center , the route entered a decisive circuit encompassing seven loops on a 23 @. @ 8 km ( 14 @. @ 8 mi ) section up and down the Badaling Pass , including ramps as steep as a 10 percent gradient .

The race was won by the Spanish rider Samuel Sánchez in 6 hours , 23 minutes , 49 seconds , after a six @- @ man breakaway group contested a sprint finish . Davide Rebellin of Italy and Fabian Cancellara of Switzerland , finishing second and third place with the same time as Sánchez , received silver and bronze medals respectively for the event . The hot and humid conditions were in sharp contrast to the heavy rain weathered in the women 's road race the following day .

The event was one of the earliest to be concluded at the 2008 Summer Olympics , taking place on the first day of competition . Concerns were raised before the Olympics about the threat of pollution in endurance sports , but no major problems were apparent in the race .

In April 2009 , it was announced that Rebellin had tested positive for Continuous erythropoietin receptor activator ( CERA , a third @- @ generation form of erythropoietin ) during the Olympics . After his B @- @ sample subsequently confirmed initial results , he returned his medal and repaid the prize money he had won from the Italian National Olympic Committee ( CONI ) while still maintaining his innocence . Cancellara and original fourth @- @ place finisher Alexandr Kolobnev were later awarded new medals corresponding to their updated finishing positions .

= = Qualification = =

Qualification for the race was restricted to five athletes per National Olympic Committee ( NOC ) , providing that these athletes qualified through the Union Cycliste Internationale ( UCI ) rankings , with the UCI ProTour considered to be superior to the UCI Continental Circuits . The number of qualification places allocated varied among the different UCI tours , which all maintain their own ranking system . Any NOC unable to fill its quota of athletes from the ProTour was permitted to enter athletes from one of the continental tours , and if that was not feasible , from the " B " World Championship . The number of places allocated to each tour were thus ( in descending order ) : 70 riders from the ProTour , 38 from the Europe tour , 15 from the America tour , nine from the Asia tour , five from the Africa tour , and three from the Oceania tour . Five entrants qualified through the " B " World Championships .

The final number of competitors was set to be 145 , but only 143 athletes started the race . Four cyclists were scratched from the race shortly before it took place . Damiano Cunego of Italy had not yet recovered from the injuries he sustained in the 2008 Tour de France , so he was replaced by Vincenzo Nibali . Portugal 's Sérgio Paulinho , the silver medalist at the 2004 event , was said to be in insufficient shape to race . After Russian Vladimir Gusev was fired by his professional team Astana for failing an internal doping check , he was replaced in this event by Denis Menchov , who later competed in the time trial . While training earlier in the week before the race , Switzerland 's Michael Albasini crashed and broke his collarbone ; there was not sufficient time to find a replacement for him .

= = Preview = =

= = = Pollution issues = = =

Prior to the opening of the Games , the International Olympic Committee was keen to play down the risk that athletes faced from pollution ; however , the organizing body considered re-scheduling of endurance events ( such as the cycling road race ) if the pollution levels were too high . Athletes partaking in these events can consume 20 times the amount of oxygen as a sedentary person . A higher level of pollution in the air could adversely affect performance , damage or irritate an athlete 's lungs , or exacerbate respiratory conditions , such as asthma .

Independent sources showed that pollution levels were above the limit deemed safe by the World Health Organization on August 9 . However , the cycling event went ahead as scheduled with no objections from the athletes . Fifty-three of the 143 cyclists pulled out during the race ; however , this is not unusual ( over half withdrew mid-race at the 2004 Summer Olympics ) . Post-race , a number of riders highlighted the punishing conditions , in particular the heat ( 26 ° C or 79 ° F ) and humidity ( 90 % ) , which were much higher than in Europe , where the majority of UCI ProTour races are held . Pollution , however , was not widely cited as a problem , though Stefan Schumacher of Germany , who had been considered an outside favorite for victory in the event , said the elements and the pollution played a role in his withdrawal .

== Pre-race favorites ==

Among the pre-race favorites was the entire Spanish contingent of riders . It included two winners of Grand Tours in Alberto Contador and Carlos Sastre , along with highly regarded countrymen Alejandro Valverde , winner of the 2008 Critérium du Dauphiné Libéré and the reigning Spanish national road race champion , and Samuel Sánchez , who had won three stages in the 2007 Vuelta a España . They also had 2008 Tour de France points classification winner and three-time world champion Óscar Freire available to work on their behalf . Valverde was seen as the strongest threat among the Spaniards . Other medal hopefuls included the defending Olympic champion Paolo Bettini of Italy , Germany 's Stefan Schumacher , and Australian Cadel Evans , twice a runner-up in the Tour de France ( 2007 and 2008 ) . It was thought that members of the overall strong squads from Germany and Luxembourg could also contend for victory . The German team contained Schumacher and many veterans of Grand Tours such as Jens Voigt to work in support , while Luxembourg had the Schleck brothers Andy and Fränk , along with Kim Kirchen , all of whom had worn leader 's jerseys during the 2008 Tour de France .

== Course ==

The Urban Road Cycling Course ( one of Beijing 's nine temporary venues ) was 102.6 km ( 63.8 mi ) in its entirety , and the men 's race was a distance of 245.4 km ( 152.5 mi ) , the longest in Olympic history . The race 's starting line was located at the Yongdingmen Gate , a remnant of Beijing 's old city wall , which is a part of the Chongwen District of northern Beijing . The course ended at the Juyong Pass in the Changping District .

The route passed through a total of eight districts : Chongwen , Xuanwu , Dongcheng , Xicheng , Chaoyang , Haidian , Changping , and Yanqing . The course 's scenery , described by The Guardian newspaper ( UK ) as " visually sumptuous " , included 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 , which were passed through as the course journeyed from urban Beijing into the countryside . It also passed the architecture of the 2008 Olympics , including the Beijing National Stadium and Beijing National Aquatics Center ( known colloquially as the " Bird 's Nest " and " Water Cube " ) .

The men 's race layout , which differed most significantly from the women 's in that it was over double its length , saw the riders make seven loops back-and-forth between the Badaling and Juyong Passes . The early sections of the race took place within central Beijing ; consequently , the gradient of this part of the race was relatively flat . At approximately the 78.8 km ( 49.0 mi ) point in the race the riders reached the Badaling section of the Great Wall , and began their first of seven 23.8 km ( 14.8 mi ) loops . The riders encountered an

increase in the gradient at this point , with the Badaling Pass gaining 338 @. @ 2 metres ( 1 @. @ 110 ft ) in elevation over a distance of 12 @. @ 4 km ( 7 @. @ 7 mi ) from the start of the circuit to the highest point . From there the cyclists rode over a false flat before descending a highway towards the Juyong Pass . The final 350 m ( 1 @. @ 150 ft ) of the race gave the riders a moderately steep climb to contend with , which was designed to ensure an exciting finale should several riders have been grouped together at the end of the race , as there were .

Due to security regulations put in place by the Olympic organizers , no spectators were permitted to stand roadside along the course . This decision proved to be controversial : several prominent figures in cycling , including UCI president Pat McQuaid and riders Stuart O 'Grady and Cadel Evans ( both Australia ) , spoke out against it . McQuaid and O 'Grady both 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 they were not .

= = Race = =

The men 's road race began at 11 : 00 local time ( UTC + 8 ) and within 3 km ( 1 @. @ 9 mi ) of the start , Horacio Gallardo ( Bolivia ) and Patricio Almonacid ( Chile ) formed a two @- @ man breakaway . They held a maximum advantage of 15 minutes , but were never really seen as a threat , and in fact neither went on to finish the race . With no single team willing to force the pace , a 26 @- @ man breakaway formed at the 60 km ( 37 mi ) mark , including Carlos Sastre ( Spain ) , Kim Kirchen ( Luxembourg ) , Jens Voigt ( Germany ) , Roman Kreuziger ( Czech Republic ) and Simon Gerrans ( Australia ) . Shortly after the race reached the finish line to begin the first of seven 23 @. @ 8 km ( 14 @. @ 8 mi ) loops , Gallardo was dropped by Almonacid . The lone Chilean leader was then caught by the now 24 @- @ man chase group at the summit on the second loop , after riding solo ahead of the pack for over an hour and a half .

Under the impetus of Sastre and Kreuziger in particular , the 24 @- @ strong breakaway group built their lead to over six minutes at the half @- @ way point of the race , after four of the seven circuits . At that point , the Italian @- @ paced main field increased its speed in order to bring them back . Aleksandr Kuschynski ( Belarus ) and Ruslan Pidgornyy ( Ukraine ) went clear of the leading group afterward and gained an advantage of a minute and 40 seconds over the Sastre group and 2 minutes , 45 seconds over the main field by the start of the fifth lap over the hilly circuit . The Sastre group was absorbed by the main field at the 60 km ( 37 mi ) to go mark , leaving just Kuschynski and Pidgornyy out front . Not long after , shortly before the end of the fifth circuit , Marcus Ljungqvist ( Sweden ) , Rigoberto Urán ( Colombia ) and Johan Van Summeren ( Belgium ) attacked from the peloton and reeled in Kuschynski and Pidgornyy .

The next attack , one that would later be described as " audacious " and " brave " , came from Christian Pfannberger ( Austria ) , who went free of the main field toward the end of the sixth lap . His maximum advantage never grew to more than a minute , but he did stay away until well into the seventh and final lap , being caught with 20 km ( 12 mi ) to go . Within five minutes of fierce attacks , fewer than 20 riders were left in the front group , a group that included Cadel Evans ( Australia ) , Levi Leipheimer ( United States ) , Santiago Botero ( Colombia ) , and Jérôme Pineau ( France ) , with Valverde and Bettini left behind them . Five riders , Samuel Sánchez ( Spain ) , Michael Rogers ( Australia ) , Davide Rebellin ( Italy ) , Andy Schleck ( Luxembourg ) , and Alexandr Kolobnev ( Russia ) , came further clear from the group of now 13 due to repeated attacks from Schleck . Sánchez , Rebellin , and Schleck reached the summit of the Badaling climb , with 12 @. @ 7 km ( 7 @. @ 9 mi ) to race , 10 seconds ahead of Rogers and Kolobnev , and 26 seconds ahead of the Evans group . Bettini , Valverde and Fabian Cancellara ( Switzerland ) attacked from the main peloton and joined the Evans group at the top of the climb . The leading group 's advantage over the two @- @ man chase was 15 seconds with 10 km ( 6 @. @ 2 mi ) to go .

With 5 km ( 3 @. @ 1 mi ) left , Cancellara attacked from the Evans group and caught up with the chasers that the group of three had left behind , Kolobnev and Rogers . The three of them

successfully bridged the gap to the leaders with about 1 km ( 0 @. @ 62 mi ) to go , and there were six riders contesting the final sprint . Sánchez won the gold medal , Rebellin the silver , and Cancellara the bronze .

= = Doping incident = =

In April 2009 , the IOC announced that six athletes had tested positive during the 2008 Summer Olympics , without mentioning names or sports . Later , rumours emerged that the athletes included two cyclists , one of them a medal winner . The Italian National Olympic Committee ( CONI ) then confirmed that a male Italian cyclist had tested positive for Continuous erythropoietin receptor activator ( CERA ) during the men 's road race , without identifying him . The next day , on 29 April 2009 , the Committee confirmed that Davide Rebellin was an involved athlete . Rebellin 's agent sent a request for the analysis of the B sample . On 8 July 2009 , Rebellin , along with Stefan Schumacher , were confirmed as having tested positive . Schumacher was already serving a ban after testing positive in the 2008 Tour de France , but faces further punishment , and Rebellin subsequently had his medal removed by the UCI and the IOC . On 27 November , Rebellin returned his silver medal to CONI , per their and the UCI 's request . Per UCI regulations , Cancellara and Kolobnev were moved up to second and third in the official results , but did not initially receive new medals . On December 18 , 2010 , Cancellara received the same physical medal initially given to Rebellin , in a ceremony held in his hometown of Ittigen , Switzerland . The medal originally given to Cancellara will in turn be given to Kolobnev .

Rebellin had appealed at the Court of Arbitration for Sport ( CAS ) against the decision to remove his silver medal , but in July 2010 , this was rejected .

There had been controversy in the months before the men 's road race when , in the aftermath of doping revelations at the Tour de France , International Olympic Committee vice @-@ president Thomas Bach had suggested that the men 's road race 's place in the Olympics should be reconsidered , and said that the credibility of the sport had been damaged ; although he clarified that there was no immediate threat . Pat McQuaid had reacted angrily to these comments , saying , " Why should they [ the majority of cyclists ] be threatened because of a few bad apples ? "

= = Final classification = =

A total of 142 riders 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 their riders with better climbing skills in good positions once the mountainous part of a course begins . Many of these riders also sought to conserve themselves for the time trial that was to come . Additionally , if a rider was lapped by the race leader on the Badaling circuit , he would be forced to stop .

The notation " s.t. " indicates that the rider crossed the finish line in the same group as the one receiving the time above him , and was therefore credited with the same finishing time .

Source : Official results

Notes