

Tour de France - Half way through

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I've been following the Tour de France, and it's been kind of cool to watch. Here's some thoughts on what's happened so far - 10 stages down, 11 to go.

Stage 1

I was kind of bummed that there was no prolog this year, because it's such an exciting event. Instead, the first stage was a mass start road race, with Valverde taking the win with a very impressive uphill sprint, along with the yellow jersey.

Stage 4

The first time trial event, an individual race against the clock. At only 30km, this was a short race, and promised to yield a surprise winner. Stefan Schumacher took the stage victory, and moved into the yellow leader's jersey.

Stage 5

Finally a mass sprint. I love the mass sprints of the first week of the tour, but they haven't been happening here. Cavendish takes the win. He went early and didn't show a huge acceleration. But he went early, and won. Impressive.

Stage 6

First mountain summit finish, and punk-ass kid Riccardo Ricco takes the win. He sure can climb.

Schumacher climbed well to stay in yellow for another day, when he rubbed wheels with Kim Kirchen and went down, not 300 meters from the finish line. To make things sting just a little more, Kirchen was the one who took the yellow jersey as a result.

I enjoyed the irony of this cruel event, as Schumacher himself took out George Hincapie last year in similar fashion, denying him the overall victory. Karma?

Stage 9

The first real mountain stage, the tour ventured in to the Pyrenees mountains. Ricco took another impressive stage win, taking off for the win while everyone else stared at each other.

Kirchen is still in the yellow jersey, but he and his team (Columbia) have been working awfully hard.

Valverde and his team (Caisse d'Epargne) are looking strong, but also seem to have been working really hard.

Race favorite Cadel Evans had a pretty hard crash, and had to race another 112km all bloody and beat up. Ouch.

While Garmin-Chipotle team leader David Millar has already given up on his GC hopes, Vande Velde seems to be getting stronger and more confident. However, he still seems to be regarded as a second tier rider among his competition. I just found an underdog to root for.

Stage 10

Another big day in the mountains. Evans rode hard, even though he must have been hurting from yesterday's crash. He even rode into the yellow jersey, held by only one second. I've never seen someone so emotional from taking the yellow jersey.

The course had two hard summits, and CSC rode an awesome race today. Sastre didn't come up with the yellow jersey, but it's not from a lack of well played tactics.

First, they sent Cancellara off the front in a break. He stayed away until the top of the first summit. Meanwhile, my man Jens Voigt absolutely killed it on the entire climb, thinning out the main field along the way. Valverde was dropped. Cunego was dropped. I think Kirchen was dropped here, too. I was wondering why I didn't see Jens in the breakaways for the first week of the tour, but now I know why. He was amazing.

Okay, so over the summit, Voigt and Cancellara (now back with the main pack) kill it DOWN the hill and up to the foot of the next climb. Anyone dropped on the climb (e.g. Valverde and Kirchen) is not going to catch up with these two guys driving the pace. And nobody did.

Second summit begins, Sastre (CSC leader) is in good shape. Lots of attacks take place on the climb, but nothing really sticks. Both Schleck brothers (CSC) cause trouble to help Sastre. Frank Schleck finally takes off with two guys from the Saunier Duval team, and he makes up gobs of time on GC.

In the end, Evans finishes one second ahead of Frank Schleck in GC. Vande Velde again rides a good race, and stays in third place, 38 seconds back. Valverde and Cunego are done.

That leads us in to the first rest day, half way through the race. With nobody clearly in charge of things, I've no idea who's going to win the overall. I hope it's a good show.