

PARIS-NICE 2021: THE BATTLE LINES START TO BE DRAWN



©A.S.O./F.Boukla

Key points:

Ø The 2021 edition of Paris-Nice, which will start on Sunday 7th March in the Yvelines department, will give a number of insights into the form of some of the main players in elite cycling pack, at a stage of the season when the indicators are still vague.

Ø For all that, the battle has already commenced between Jumbo-Visma and Ineos Grenadiers: for the first time on the Race to the Sun, the Dutch team will be lining up Primoz Roglic, who has not raced competitively since his triumph on the Vuelta, while the British squad will be placing their hopes in the winner of the Giro d'Italia, Tao Geoghegan Hart.

Ø Title holder Max Schachmann and his Bora-Hansgrohe

Ø The holder Max Schachmann and his Dora-Transglobe colleagues as well as the DSM Team of Jai Hindley will be looking to join in the contest for victory, while David Gaudu, among others, will be defending French hopes of success.

Ø Beyond the stakes of the general classification, stage wins on the sprint finishes will be especially sought after. Arnaud Démare will be up against tough rivals such as Sam Bennett, Michael Matthews, John Degenkolb, Giacomo Nizzolo, Nacer Bouhanni and Bryan Coquard.

Each season's beginning brings with it a number of questions and uncertainties. This is even more true as the start to Paris-Nice 2021 approaches, with postponements and cancellations of races in the first weeks of the year added to significant changes in team compositions and jerseys during the winter. In an already shaky cycling world in March 2020, Germany's Max Schachmann won authoritatively after taking control on the very first stage of the race. There is no guarantee of a repeat on the route into Saint-Cyr-l'École, but then again nothing prevents him from believing in a second success if he can prove to be better than his rivals on the time-trial at Gien, then in Chiroubles or also on La Colmiane. His plans could come up against a major obstacle in the form of Primož Roglič, who will be making the first appearance of his career on the Race to the Sun, supported in the ranks of Jumbo-Visma by George Bennett and Steven Kruijswijk. The title to be won in Nice may seem to be reaching out to him, but the Slovenian world number 1 also does not always win! Indeed, he could be challenged by Team DSM, formerly Sunweb, who began the 2020 vintage of Paris-Nice in lively fashion, thanks to Kragh Andersen (who won the time-trial at Saint-Amand-Montrond) and Tiesj Benoot (2nd in the general classification). The two men will be accompanied this year by Australian Jai Hindley, who finished 2nd on the Giro 2020 and who will be keen to have his word to say in the outcome.

Paris-Nice 2021 is also an invitation for the Ineos Grenadiers team to show a new face after an underwhelming year in 2020. Indeed, the British team will be counting on its rider who stood

out the most, by shining on the roads of Italy. For the occasion, Tao Geoghegan Hart will be supported by Richie Porte, 3rd on the Tour de France and two-time winner of the Race to the Sun (in 2013 and 2015), who has returned to the squad where he enjoyed his best successes. The French riders could spoil the party for the favourites, and, during their first outings of the year, have displayed form that allows them to aim for the leading positions. Such is the case for David Gaudu, who was victorious last weekend in the Ardèche, while Warren Barguil and Guillaume Martin also looked dynamic.

When looking through the list of participants, it becomes evident that there will be fierce battle for all the winners' bouquets handed out during the week. Classics specialists such as Bob Jungels, Philippe Gilbert, Matteo Trentin, Mads Pedersen and Dylan Teuns will, for example, have their eyes on the stages at Chiroubles or Biot, while top level sprint finishes are to be expected in Saint-Cyr, Amilly or Bollène. The most prolific winner of 2020, Arnaud Démare, has already won three stages on Paris-Nice, but will have to tackle an enormous field of speedsters this year: Sam Bennett, Pascal Ackermann, Alexander Kristoff, Michael Matthews, Sonny Colbrelli, John Degenkolb, Giacomo Nizzolo, Jasper Philipsen, Nacer Bouhanni, Bryan Coquard, Christophe Laporte and Hugo Hofstetter are unlikely to be content with playing supporting roles, but there will not be room for everyone at the top of the pile.



©Baixauli Studio



©PresseSports

© TEAM - THE MAIN PARTICIPANTS

23 TEAMS - THE MAIN PARTICIPANTS:

Australia

Team BikeExchange: Matthews (Aus)

Bahrain

Bahrain Victorious: Colbrelli (Ita), Poels (Ned), Teuns (Bel)

Belgium

Deceuninck-Quick Step: Cavagna (Fra), Bennett (Irl)

Lotto Soudal: Degenkolb (Ger), Gilbert, De Gendt (Bel)

Intermarché-Wanty Gobert Matériaux: Eiking (Nor), Meintjes (Saf)

Alpecin-Fenix: Philipsen (Bel)

France

AG2R Citroën Team: Jungels (Lux), Naesen (Bel), Paret-Peintre (Fra)

Cofidis: Martin, Laporte (Fra)

Groupama-FDJ: Démare, Gaudu (Fra)

Total Direct Energie: Boasson Hagen (Nor), Latour, Vuillemoz (Fra)

Team Arkea-Samsic: Barguil, Bouhanni (Fra)

B&B Hotels p/b KTM: Coquard, Hivert (Fra)

Germany

Bora-Hansgrohe: Schachmann, Ackermann (Ger), Grossschartner (Aut)

Team DSM: Kragh Andersen (Den), Benoot (Bel), Hindley (Aus)

Israel

Israel Start-Up Nation: Hofstetter (Fra)

Kazakhstan

Astana–Premier Tech: Lutsenko (Ukr), Vlasov (Rus), Fraile, L.L. Sanchez (Spa)

Netherlands

Jumbo-Visma: Roglic (Slo), Bennett (NZ), Kruijswijk (Ned)

South Africa

South Africa

Team Qhubeka Assos: Walscheid (Ger), Aru, Nizzolo (Ita), Henao (Col)

Spain

Movistar Team: Mühlberger (Aut), Rojas (Spa)

United Arab Emirates

UAE Team Emirates: Kristoff (Nor), Trentin (Ita), De la Cruz (Spa)

United Kingdom

Ineos Grenadiers: Geoghegan Hart (UK), Porte, Dennis (Aus)

USA

EF Education Nippo: Powless (USA), Nielsen (Den)

Trek-Segafredo: Elissonde (Fra), M.Pedersen (Den)