

Purito claims red jersey for one second as Schleck wins stage 16

On Tuesday, the Vuelta rests

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USPA NEWS - Joaquim "Purito" Rodriguez (Katusha) snatched the overall leader's red jersey at the Vuelta when he distanced his main rivals in the finale of a punishing 16th stage won by Frank Schleck. This Tuesday, the Vuelta rests.

Schleck (Trek Factory) was the strongest of an early breakaway group, finishing 1:10 ahead of Rodolfo Torres (Team Colombia) after 185 km to claim his biggest win since he prevailed in the 2011 Criterium International. "Purito" Rodriguez accelerated with one kilometre left in the final ascent to the Alto Ermita de Alba (6.8 km at 11.1%) and beat Aru (Astana) by two seconds, taking the overall lead for one second one day after missing out on the red jersey by the same margin yesterday.

Rafal Majka (Tinkoff-Saxo) is third overall, 1:35 off the pace. Tom Dumoulin cracked with only 900 metres left and lost 27 seconds to Rodriguez. Sitting in fourth place overall 1:51 behind Purito, the Giant-Alpecin rider very much stayed in contention for the title going into Wednesday's time trial after a rest day in Burgos. All riders having finished yesterday's stage, they were 167 at the start.

Verona (Etixx-Quick Step), Rolland (Europcar), Schleck, Torres and Fraile (Caja Rural-Seguros RGA), looking to strengthen his lead in the mountains classification, jumped away from the gun. They were joined by Bennett (LottoNL-Jumbo), Lemoine (Cofidis), Warbasse (IAM Cycling), Moser (Cannondale-Garmin) and Grmay (Lampre-Merida) to form the day's 10-man breakaway.

After the second climb of the day, the Alto de Piedratecha, the group was sitting on a comfortable 16:40 lead over the peloton. Katusha moved to the front of the pack to control the gap, which had risen to 22 minutes at the foot of the Alto de Cabrunana. They reduced it to 19 minutes and although they stayed at the front, they gave up the chase with 60 kilometres left.

In the breakaway, Schleck called for the medical car and Fraile made sure he would wear the blue on white polka dot jersey after reaching the top of the first five climbs in first position. Tinkoff-Saxo the matter into their own hands before the ascent to the Alto del Cordal and the breakaway's advantage melted down to 11:30 and Astana took their turn at the front of the pack.

In the descent from the Alto del Cordal, Duque (Team Colombia) and Chavanel (IAM Cycling) crashed in a left-hand curve. The Colombian was quickly back on his bike while the Frenchman, who apparently hit a safety barrier, sat in obvious pain by the side of the road for a moment before also remounting his bike. In the climb to the Alto de la Cobertoria (9.8km at 8.7%), Fraile, but also Rolland, Grmay, Lemoine and Moser were quickly dropped as Schleck upped the pace. Warbasse also slipped back shortly afterwards as well as Verona and Bennett, leaving Schleck and Torres on their own with an 11-minute lead at the top. Meanwhile the red jersey group was trimmed down to 18 riders at the base of the final ascent.

Schleck attacked 3km from the top and never looked back. Pozzovivo (AG2r-La Mindiale) and Chaves (Orica-GreenEDGE) lost contact with the favourites midway through the ascent while Dumoulin fought hard to stay in Aru's wheel. Purito's late acceleration was too much too handle for the Dutchman, who once again however limited the losses. On Wednesday, a stage against the clock that can decide the final winner of the Vuelta with four other stages.

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