

02/01/2003

Heavy task awaits Wegelius, Aug

FORMER Mapei Quick-Step rider Charly Wegelius, who posted a creditable result of placing himself 14th overall last year, and Estonian sprinter Andrus Aug will shoulder the hopes of their new team De Nardi-Colpack who will make their debut in the Telekom Malaysia Le Tour de Langkawi (LTdL) 2003.

Wegelius, a notable climber, brings along with him a wealth of experience to spearhead the Slovakian team, made up of riders from four nations, for the eighth edition of the race which starts on Jan 31.

The Division Two team, to be managed by Antonio Bevilacqua, were formed following the merger between team De Nardi-Montegrappa and Astro-Colpack. De Nardi Montegrappa finished 9th overall in the 2002 season while Astro Colpack ended their 2002 campaign in 19th spot.

Apart from aiming for a good outing in Genting, the 25 year-old Wegelius will be going all out to stake his claim in the time trial. In the presence of some of the world's best sprinters, Wegelius managed to place himself eighth in last year's race against the clock in Putrajaya. His other notable result last year was claiming third spot in Stage 4 of Tour de Suisse.

Apart from Wegelius, De Nardi will also be aiming for some stage wins with Estonian rider Andrus Aug, who had a fruitful season with De Nardi last year, taking up the task as the team's sprinter.

Despite joining the pro ranks at a relatively late age of 28, Aug has so far accumulated a total of 14 victories, some of it coming from top-rank races. Aug's major achievement last year included stage wins in the Grand Premio Nobili Rubinetterie (ranked 1.3), Trophy Porec (1.5), Sprints Competition in Settimana Ciclista Lombarda (2.3), Tour of Poland (2.2), Peace Race (2.2), Course de la Solidarite Olympique (2.3), Tour of Slovakia (2.5) and Croatia's Jadranska Magistrala (2.5).

Meanwhile, Italian Guiseppe Palumbo, formerly of Amica-Chips, is also capable of turning the tables on his rivals based on his recent form which included winning the GP Kanton Aargau (1.1) in June and the Metas Volanted Competition in Vuelta Asturias (2.3) in May.

Italian Devis Miorin, formerly of Formaggi Trentini, will also be looking for some stage wins and judging by his performance in last year's International Uniqa Classic in Austria and several top 10 places in international races including Giro della Provincia di Lucca (ranked 2.3), the 27 year-old Italian should be good for some stage wins here.

A total of 22 teams and 154 riders will see action in the eighth edition of the Tour which covers a total distance of 1,343km. The peloton will ride through nine states in the Peninsula namely Kedah, Perlis, Perak, Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang, Negri Sembilan, Selangor and Kuala Lumpur.

The Tour starts off on Jan 31 with the individual time trial race which takes riders on a 9.5km journey on the island. LTdL is held under the patronage of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad with recognition from the sport's international body UCI, Asian Cycling Confederation and Malaysian National Cycling Federation (MNCF).

THE RIDERS: Andrus Aug (Estonia), Charly Wegelius (Great Britain), Simone Cadamuro (Italy), Michele Colleoni (Italy), Rafael Nuritdinov (Uzbekistan), Giuseppe Palumbo (Italy), Devis Miorin (Italy).