

CONI Given Access To Mantua Files

Just a few days before the 2013 Giro d'Italia begins in Naples, the Italian national Olympic committee (CONI), is to be given access to evidence gathered by prosecutors as part of the Mantua investigation into doping in cycling. The doping scandal involves big names like [Alessandro Ballan](#) and Damiano Cunego and the date for that hearing was fixed by preliminary hearing judge Gilberto Casari, who also permitted CONI to be joined to the case as a civil party.

The investigation is focused on a pharmacist based in Mariana Mantovana, Guido Nigrelli, and his relationship with the Lampre team, with a number of past and present riders and staff among those implicated. The judge's authorization came after the session was suspended for 40 minutes while the judge considered lawyers' requests. This incident is different from another probe that is being conducted from Padua and focuses on banned doctor Michele Ferrari and his alleged relationship with riders from a variety of teams.

Former world champion Ballan, who is currently recovering from a bad crash while training for the current season, and 2004 Giro d'Italia winner, Cunego, are among the 31 people said to be potentially facing charges as a result of the Mantua investigation. The list of suspects includes former Lampre team manager and Giro d'Italia and world championship winner Giuseppe Saronni, Danish ex-pro Michael Rasmussen who confessed to doping earlier this year, and current riders including Astana's Simone Ponzi, Vini Fantini-Selle Italia's Mauro Santambrogio, and Daniele Pietropolli, who is now in his fourth season with Lampre.

Alessandro Ballan, the Italian professional road bicycle racer for UCI World Tour team [BMC Racing Team](#), is best known for winning the World Road Race Championships in 2008 and suffered a severe training crash during a descent as he was riding with his team in Spain. Ballan fractured his left femur, broke a rib and ruptured his spleen, which had to be removed and spent a little more than a week in intensive care. Damiano Cunego, the Italian professional road racing cyclist who rides for the Italian UCI ProTeam Lampre-Merida and his biggest wins are the 2004 Giro d'Italia, the 2008 Amstel Gold Race, and the Giro di Lombardia in 2004, 2007, 2008. Cunego finished second in the UCI Road World Championships in 2008 and in the 2008 UCI ProTour. He, in 2008, won the Klasika Primavera and the Amstel Gold Race, with two powerful sprints against Alejandro Valverde and Fränk Schleck, with victory in the latter propelling him to the top of the UCI Pro Tour rankings.

The preliminary hearing into the case will consider whether formal charges should be brought against those who have been implicated or not, as well as whether evidence obtained by phone-

taps should be admissible. It is not the first time that the Italian Olympic Committee has been involved in the investigation. Its anti-doping prosecutor, Ettore Torri, summoned some of the riders implicated, including Ballan, for interviews at his offices in Rome two years ago although he decided to take no further action pending a criminal trial taking place.