

Puerto Judge's Ruling Condemned By Cyclists

The decision of the court in the infamous Operation Puerto trial has been criticized by cyclists and team directors at the Giro d'Italia. The Judge Julia Santamaria ordered, to the surprise of the World Anti-Doping Agency and many others, destruction of the blood bags seized in the [Operation Puerto doping case](#).

This destruction of evidence pertains to more than 200 bags of blood and other evidence gathered in police raids involving Spanish doctor Eufemiano Fuentes in 2006. It was despite the doctor testifying that he had clients from other sports, including soccer, tennis, boxing, and track. In the trial, more than 50 cyclists were implicated in the Puerto case and several were identified by name as having worked with the tainted doctor.

Most riders and team directors expressed disappointment with the ruling and said the ruling undermines the efforts to catch sport cheats and uncover the extent of one of the biggest drug scandals in European sports. Taylor Phinney, an American rider with the BMC squad who won the time trial that opened last year's Giro, remarked he does not agree with the decision to destroy all the evidence and it doesn't quite make sense to me.

British rider David Millar who returned from a doping ban to become an outspoken critic of banned drugs is hopeful that the ruling gets overturned on appeal. Anti-doping organizations have until May 17 to make an appeal. Millar said before the opening stage of the Giro that he knows the Spanish anti-doping agency are firmly against (destroying the evidence) and he knows WADA (the World Anti-Doping Agency) are firmly against that. Stefano Zanatta, the team director for Ivan Basso's Cannondale squad, remarked unfortunately institutions often don't handle things the same way in every country.

Fuentes was found guilty of endangering public health by the Madrid court and the doctor was handed a suspended jail sentence of one year and was barred from medical practice in sports for four years and ordered to pay a \$6,000 fine. The judge cited privacy laws of Spain in her decision not to turn over the evidence to anti-doping authorities. This ruling, unless overturned on an appeal, would not allow officials from identifying the doctor's blood-doping clients and pursuing disciplinary cases against them.

In other developments, Britain's tennis star Andy Murray says the decision of the Spanish court to allow for the destruction of more than 200 blood bags in the Operation Puerto doping case is one big cover-up. Tennis star [Rafael Nadal](#) also expressed his disappointment with the decision and said the decision casts a dark cloud over Spanish athletes in particular and remarked the only ones who have benefited from this resolution are those who have cheated and it seems unfair that in a case as serious and as damaging to sport as this we're talking about Spain. Nadal added to not give names looks like a big mistake to me and those who cheated deserve the contempt from all other athletes, who should make them feel ashamed before society. After the decision, Ana Munoz, the head of Spain's anti-doping agency, announced that she would appeal the decision to destroy the evidence.