

## 1998 Tour de France Top Three 'Were Doping'

Ahead of a French parliamentary commission's report, French daily [Le Monde](#) has revealed that the top three riders in the 1998 edition of the Tour de France were all taking the banned blood booster erythropoietin (EPO).

According to reports published by the French daily, Italian Marco Pantani, Germany's [Jan Ullrich](#), and American Bobby Julich who were the top three during the 1998 Tour de France were all taking EPO. These revelations come just ahead of a French parliamentary commission that is all set to release a report shortly. On May 15, the commission made waves after it announced that senators from the upper chamber of parliament would reveal the identities of those riders using erythropoietin during the race.

A few days back, a delegation of professional riders, including Jens Voigt, Jérémy Roy, Samuel Dumoulin, Jerome Pineau, and Luis Angel Mate, met with French sports minister Valerie Fourneyron to delay the release of the report before the start of the Tour de France. After the delay request was accepted, Dumoulin remarked we never said we did not want the fight against doping, but simply were asked for equality between sports. He added that given the media coverage of the Tour, we know that a spark would trigger a huge fire as viewers would be reminded of the old doping cases. Dumoulin added that now we can concentrate on the sport, and once we have turned the page of the Tour, we will focus on the findings of the investigation.

The French parliamentary commission questioned 84 witnesses under oath, from sportsmen and women to organizers and anti-doping experts, to lift the lid over the subject. The senators are aiming to frame legislation on sport and put it before parliament for debate next year.

French former rider Laurent Jalabert was alleged last month to have been one of those implicated through comparison of retrospective testing results from 2004 and a list of anonymous samples from 1998. The cyclist immediately stepped down as a television and radio pundit for this year's Tour de France that was won by British rider Chris Froome. Marco Pantani's family said they were against identifying riders; the rider died in 2004. Pantani, the Italian road racing cyclist, was widely considered one of the best climbers of his era in professional road bicycle racing. He was found dead in a hotel in Rimini. Nicknamed "The Pirate", Pantani won the 1998 Tour de France and Giro d'Italia but was thrown out of the 1999 Giro d'Italia for failing a blood test. He was the last man to win the Tour before American Lance Armstrong embarked on a record-equaling five straight victories.

The professional cyclists' union the CPA also opposed to publication. In a statement, the union remarked publication of a list amounts to an accusation of doping without any means of defense and argued that no counter-analysis was possible as the original samples no longer existed. But this opposition may not deter the senators who are still likely to publish the identities of the riders and could equally include lists of samples taken on the 1999 Tour, which was won by US rider Lance Armstrong was stripped of his seven Tour wins and banned from cycling for life last year for doping in a scandal that engulfed cycling into crisis.