

Cunego Among 28 Charged With Doping

Former Tour of Italy winner [@Damiano Cunego](#) was among 28 people connected to the Lampre team who were charged with doping-related offenses.

The biggest wins of the Italian professional road racing cyclist who rides for the Italian UCI ProTeam Lampre-Merida included the 2004 Giro d'Italia, the 2008 Amstel Gold Race, and the Giro di Lombardia in 2004, 2007, 2008. Considered the best Italian cyclist for classics after the retirement of Paolo Bettini, Cunego finished second in the UCI Road World Championships in 2008 and in the 2008 UCI ProTour.

In his first season as a professional with Saeco in 2002, Cunego won the Giro d'Oro and the Giro Medio Brenta and won the seventh stage and the overall classification of Tour of Qinghai Lake in 2003. During 2004, Cunego finished the season number one in the UCI Road World Cup, the youngest rider to achieve it, at the age of 23. He won the Klasika Primavera and the Amstel Gold Race in 2008 with two powerful sprints against Alejandro Valverde and Fränk Schleck that propelled him to the top of the UCI Pro Tour rankings and finish second in the 2008 UCI Road World Championships. Cunego ended the 2008 season with the victory of the Japan Cup, confirming himself as one of the best Classics Specialist in the world.

In addition to Cunego, former world champion Alessandro Ballan and a host of riders, officials, and doctors have been called in by the Padua prosecutor's office to explain themselves. The disgraced former Tour winner Michael Rasmussen is also listed along with the likes of Marzio Bruseghin and Mauro Santambrogio. Summons have been issued to Cunego and Bassan, sporting directors Giuseppe Saronni and Guido Bontempi, and team chemist Vittorio Nigrelli, suspected of being the "brains" behind the doping operation.

Prosecutor Antonino Condorelli remarked that the 28 in collaboration with each other are accused of having bought, administered or otherwise favored the use of doping products with the aim of altering the sporting performances of Lampre athletes. The story first broke two years ago, following a three-year investigation by Condorelli.

The team is accused of having given their riders the banned blood-booster EPO, anabolic steroids, [human growth hormone](#), and testosterone. The case will be heard on December 10 by Judge Gilberto Casari.

A Lampre statement reads: The charges are technically neutral in relation to any affirmation of responsibility and we will be able to demonstrate, in the appropriate domain, how wrong these accusations are. From 2008 to 2011, the team was subject to a doping investigation following revelations made by former cyclist Emanuele Sella after he had tested positive for EPO derivative CERA, although nothing came of the investigation. In a statement, [Lampre-Merida](#) said: The team reaffirms trust in the athletes and the team members involved in this case, and is confident that during the hearing it will be possible to demonstrate their non-involvement in the subject of the charges. It added that the certainty of being able to demonstrate the non-involvement brings about the question of who,

once that issue has been clarified, will take responsibility for the burdens and offence placed upon the team.