

Beat: Sports

CYCLING-CONTADOR FAVORITE FOR GIRO DI ITALIA

AUSTRALIAN PORTE COULD BE CONTENDER

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USPA NEWS - The 98th Giro d'Italia kicks off on Saturday with a 17.6km team-time trial along the spectacular Ligurian coastline between San Lorenzo al Mare and San Remo.

Cycling's second-biggest stage race will finish three weeks later on May 31 with a flat 185km road stage from Turin to Milan. The favourite is Spaniard Alberto Contador, who is aiming this year to become the first man to pull off the Giro-Tour de France double since late Italian Marco Pantani in 1998.

Two-time Tour champion Contador won the Giro in 2008 and he also came first in 2011, but he was subsequently stripped of that victory due to a positive drugs test from the previous season.

The 32-year-old Tinkoff-Saxo rider has had a quiet season so far, in view of the exertions ahead of him in the Giro and Tour.

"I have arrived pretty well, we have worked very hard since late last year, when I had this race in mind," Contador said. "It is the first big goal of the season and I've prioritized the first part of the year for it. "I'm happy to be here and also motivated by the team that I have, because it's very powerful and all riders are here in good shape and excited about this challenge. "Now it's time to have good legs".

Contador's main rival is expected to be Team Sky's Richie Porte.

The 30-year-old Australian, nicknamed the Tasmanian Devil in reference to his home state, is in strong form, having won the Paris-Nice, Catalunya and Giro del Trentino races this year.

"This has been my main goal since the end of last season - to fight for the pink jersey," said Porte. "This year's been really good. I started well with my national time trial win, took a stage at the Tour Down Under, and I've got nine victories to my name so far this season.

"Winning races like Paris-Nice and the Volta a Catalunya was fantastic, but the Giro d'Italia has always been the big one for me, and it's the race I really want to win".

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