

D-1: Defending champion Kragh Andersen wants to strike again - the voices of the favourites

Word of the route change at Eschborn-Frankfurt got around the cycling world after its premiere. The teams have reacted and sent riders who are more resistant to the mountains to the start of the 61st edition of the cycling classic. Among others, Giulio Ciccone, who won the Tour de France mountain jersey in 2023 and previously also the Giro d'Italia, has slipped into the Lidl-Trek squad at short notice. Sprinter Pascal Ackermann (Israel - Premier Tech), on the other hand, had to postpone his comeback once again after breaking his collarbone. However, last year showed that anything is possible in Frankfurt.

Defending champion **Sören Kragh Andersen** (Alpecin - Deceuninck): *"Last year's victory meant a lot to me. It was very important for me because it was the first victory for the new team. But also because I really wanted to contribute to our successful classics campaign. I started this year with a knee injury, but I realise that my form is slowly improving. Even though I already have a lot of classics in my legs, I'm not too exhausted yet. We've had an excellent season with the team so far, but my personal result is still missing. That alone gives me the ambition to win here again. From my point of view, you basically have to be at the front almost all the time. Definitely when it's the last time over the Mammolshainer Stich. After that, it's so fast towards the finish that there's no chance of coming back."*

Maxim Van Gils (Lotto Dstny): *"My goal this year was to perform in the big one-day races. That has worked well so far, I've been in the top 5 almost every time and that's why I'm very happy with my season so far. I would like to continue this in Frankfurt. The course is harder than in previous years when I raced here, so it should suit me better. I've had a good look at the parts that are crucial for me. If we don't have a sprinter as a backup, we'll have to make the race even tougher so that everyone finishes tired. But we'll decide that spontaneously."*

Maximilian Schachmann (Bora - hansgrohe): *"After finishing third in the juniors in 2011, this will be my first participation in the pros, so I'm really looking forward to it. The weather will be good and I'm hoping for a tough race. The route change last year should also improve my chances. That would be a big thing at my home race in Germany."*

Nils Politt (UAE Team Emirates): *"The form won't be the same as in the classics. I took a week and a half break afterwards and let a bit of air in. I'm now coming to Frankfurt with a week's training. Nevertheless, my form won't be bad. We have a good team at the start so that we can attack and make the race difficult. I always look forward to 1 May. It's always something very special because it's the first German race on the calendar. I want to deliver my best."*

John Degenkolb (Team dsm-firmenich PostNL): *"This really is the highlight of the year for me. Of course, other races have a higher priority, but Eschborn-Frankfurt is always marked in my calendar. I see the event from a personal point of view, because I identify with it a lot, the second Feldberg passage is definitely a*

boost for the race, even if it doesn't make it any easier for me. When Marc Hirschi sets off from Königsstein, everyone else already has a knife to the throat, because then there's a danger that a group will form that can't be brought back. However, there are also enough sprinters with strong teams who could collude. After the last crossing of the Mammolshainer Stich, there are almost 40 kilometres to go. I assume that it will be as exciting as last year - but hopefully this time with a bunch sprint."

Jonas Rutsch (EF Education - EasyPost): *"Eschborn-Frankfurt is of course always a highlight for me and in some ways unique. At no other race do I hear my own name so often in my mother tongue and see so many familiar faces. But from a sporting point of view, you have to be realistic. I'm not one of the top favourites either way, regardless of whether there's a bunch sprint at the end or a group goes up the mountain in the Taunus and makes it to the finish. Nevertheless, the course also has a surprise factor. Last year it was really, really difficult, but if I get a chance, I want to take it. Maybe there will be a group that I can go with."*

Georg Zimmermann (Intermarché - Wanty): *"I've already been on the podium once this year in a one-day race and that's also the goal for Eschborn-Frankfurt. We have a broad-based team with Mike Teunissen, Lorenzo Rota and myself, it's a strong team. The key passages are the combination of Mammolshainer, Billtalhöhe and Feldberg and then the final crossing at the Mammolshainer Stich. We have to be at the front there."*

Marc Hirschi (UAE Team Emirates): *"The race is very difficult to predict. It depends very much on what other teams are interested in. There are few sprinters at the start this year, I think many realised last year that it's not so easy here anymore. And for my part, I hope that it will be really difficult for us to eliminate many riders on the Feldberg. But the other teams also have to be motivated to continue. Last year, many of them came back before Mammolshain. But we also have a strong team with which we can basically cover every scenario."*

The WorldTour race starts at 12:05 in Eschborn. After an initial passage of the finish area in front of the Alte Oper in Frankfurt after 15 kilometres of racing, the pros will tackle the Taunus circuit. The first mountain classification is on the Feldberg (46.5 kilometres). The Mammolshainer Stich is then conquered twice in quick succession (92 km and 107.9 km). This is followed by the second, more difficult ascent to the Feldberg (117.8 km). 50 kilometres later, the riders cross the Mammolshainer for the third and final time, before almost 40 flat kilometres to Frankfurt await. After crossing the finish line for the first time, the final 6.6-kilometre lap begins before the winner of the 2023 cycling classic is crowned at around 5 p.m.