

The Tour Diary: History on the Champs-Élysées

[Beth Jakubowski](#) writes about her experience on the Champs-Élysées for the final stage of the 100th Tour de France and Britain's new cycling hero, Chris Froome

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Image: Sum_of_Marc.

The heat has descended on the Champs-Élysées in preparation for the final stage of the 100th Tour de France. It's barely five o'clock in the evening and yet anticipation is already mounting for this momentous occasion; already the sides of the road are filled with punters in bright yellow t-shirts, with bright yellow umbrellas and bright yellow hats. The air is thick with excitement as the large British contingent amongst the crowd start to unfurl their union jacks and take stock of the historic occasion. I'm most definitely among them; this day is just as historic as last year's final stage. Chris Froome may not be Bradley Wiggins - he may not be the charismatic, swaggering figure we've grown accustomed to - but his quiet, reserved demeanour is fitting for the occasion. In approximately five hours, a British cyclist will win the 100th Tour de France.

The day started sedately, the Champs-Élysées was barely ready for the mass of cyclists that were to descend on it that evening. But the crowds soon began to gather and the alcohol was flowing freely. By the time we took our seats in the stand opposite the finish line the British tourists were already giddy with a mixture of wine and success. It was the kind of atmosphere where you make friends regardless of the language barrier and cultural differences. It was the kind of atmosphere where if you get sat next to an

Australian couple, you miss absolutely no opportunity to remind them of the Ashes score. Of course, it would be rude to rub it in, but it would also be rude not to keep my family updated on the score ('Dad... DAD! The Aussie's are NINE down. Yeah, NINE down!'). It would also be rude for me not to use a slightly raised voice to make sure the Brits behind us heard as well.

To the credit of the Aussie's, they took it in good humour. It's funny; the Aussie's are so much more bearable when they're not winning everything. So after a few reminders of the Ashes score ('DAD! We're 2-0 up! Yeah, 2-0 up! Did you hear me? We WON!'), and of course the obligatory odd remark about the Lions tour, we got down to the serious business of discussing the cycling. Apparently this couple had been in France for three weeks and hadn't missed a single stage. As they were telling us this, the big screen showed a scantily dressed bloke legging it into the middle of the road and just about narrowly missing the front wheel of someone's bike. That's something I've noticed about cycling fans: they're dedicated, passionate and border-line insane.

The evening's festivities were accompanied by the dulcet tones of a rapidly speaking, very excitable French man who had been, according to the Aussie's, present at every single stage. Occasionally we would pick up odd phrases like 'Mark Cav-en-deeesh' or 'Chris-topher Froome', other than that I was utterly lost.

There were two factors that united the differing nationalities around me. One was that we all admired and respected Chris Froome enormously. The other was that we all wanted Cavendish to win (apart from the lone Marcel Kittel supporters in the corner. We didn't speak to them). Cavendish was vying for his fifth straight win on the Champs-Élysées and, despite not having the best of tours, it would have made up for an awful lot. He'd been plagued by illness, controversy and the rawness of the new team. You constantly got the sense there was more to come but his team didn't know how to get there. They have missed a world class lead out man; but with Renshaw's signing pretty much sewn up, matters will be different next year.



Image: jvanattenhoven.

It wasn't long before the riders were whizzing past us for the first time. It was akin to watching Formula One, you saw the breakaway group whirl past and seconds later the peloton were passing in a blur. It was almost impossible to see your favourite riders. But the one man nobody could miss was Froome, his yellow jersey stood out like a beacon as the riders shot past; just a gentle reminder of who this day was really about. There was a heart stopping moment when Cavendish rode past amongst the team cars and everyone went into panic mode. Those who didn't speak French had no idea what was going on. Then some bright spark thought to check the live blog and we found out it was just a puncture. Momentary respite. The crowd were now humming with barely concealed anticipation. Did Cavendish have the train to win his fifth Champs-Élysées? Would Andre Greipel's superior team pip him at the line? Would the green jersey winner, Peter Sagan, cap off his wonderful tour with victory?

The pressure began to mount as the laps ticked by, Omega-Pharma Quickstep were at the front of the peloton and David Millar's brave effort was quickly gobbled up in the dying laps. The crowd braced themselves as the sprint finish became eminent. On the big screen we saw the peloton leave the shimmering red tunnel far behind them; they were into the final stretch.

Ultimately, it was agony for the British crowd. Cavendish left it just too late to come round the outside of

Kittel. Devastation. The disappointment of the final stage was in danger of overshadowing the true achievement of the Tour de France. But then the sparkling figure of Chris Froome cycled over the line arm in arm with his teammates in what proved to be a moment of beautiful poignancy.

This tour belonged to Froome. Bradley Wiggins was the hero that British cycling wanted; Chris Froome is the hero that British cycling needed. Froome is a man who will dominate the tour for years to come; he will be an ever present figure in our sporting history.

Chris Froome is now and will always be the winner of the 100th Tour de France. One year ago a clean, British rider won the yellow jersey. This year, in one of the most treacherous and mountainous tours in the 100 year history of the race, a clean, British rider won the yellow jersey.

I'm starting to see a wonderful pattern emerge here.



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