

THE TOUR DE FRANCE 2013 - LIVE ON ITV4

ITV4 will bring viewers extensive live coverage of the 100th Tour de France, which begins on Saturday June 29.

Presenter Gary Imlach and reporter Ned Boulting are joined by cycling legend Chris Boardman, commentators Phil Liggett and Paul Sherwen for the 21-stage race, which starts in Corsica and ends at its traditional home, the Champs-Elysees in Paris, on Sunday July 21.

It is the fourth time ITV4 has screened daily live coverage and extended highlights of the Tour, with 88 hours of cycling to be shown during the 21-stage event on ITV4 including the entirety of the first day's stage action.

Alongside terrestrial TV coverage, ITV.com/tourdefrance will feature the live action and highlights as well as exclusive features, and the @ITVCycling Twitter feed will keep fans up-to-date with the latest developments.

The tour covers 3,360km and this year will remain on the mainland of France once it leaves the island of Corsica, taking in a 25k team time trial challenge at Nice, two individual time trials from Avranches to Mont-Saint-Michel and from Embrun to Chorges, and two climbs of the Alpe-d'Huez, both on the 18th stage.

Britain's Chris Froome and Mark Cavendish are hotly tipped to perform well on the Tour after defending champion Sir Bradley Wiggins withdrew when a chest infection and a knee injury left him unable to train.

Hot favourite Froome, who finished second to Wiggins in 2012, will be hoping to go one better on the centennial Tour and comes into the race on the back of winning the Criterium du Dauphine. Cavendish, who won five stages at the Giro d'Italia in May, is the most successful sprinter in the history of the Tour, with 23 stage wins.

This is a VSquared production for ITV4.

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CHRIS BOARDMAN

Pundit

1) Who do you think will win this year's Tour, why and how?

"It's not a very 'out there' kind of answer - Chris Froome is odds-on favourite. The way he has behaved all year, he has looked like Bradley Wiggins did last year, with passion and focus, and the strongest team behind him. {His team-mate} Richie Porte is a podium rider, and is perfectly willing to lay down and be his lieutenant, which means he is in the best position."

2) What makes the Tour de France so special above other cycling events and why does it strike a chord with the public?

"In any sport there is a single event that transcends it - the Super Bowl, Wimbledon - and the Tour is it in cycling. It's the only event in the world you only have to say 'the Tour' and that's it, it is instantly recognisable. The fact it is over three weeks allows it to be more than just a cycle race - there is heartache, despair, tragedy, elation - it's all in there. And because it is over three weeks, the law of averages says you will get some of that in there. Someone's probably already done it but you could write a book about each Tour de France and it will have a different character."

3) Can you give us an insight into what it's like behind the scenes with ITV4's coverage?

"It's an eclectic group of slightly eccentric characters who fight their way around France every year. It's like having some weird members of your family you don't necessarily always get on with, but they are still your family, and a shared experience like no other. This particular crew has now become a really solid group, the same people keep coming back and that's lovely. It's the same people doing lunch, and parking next door, that were there for the last two, three years. It becomes a part of your life."

4) What are you looking forward to most about this year's Tour?

"I enjoy the mountains - it's a love-hate relationship. I love it because the scenery is spectacular, and it's where the race is won and lost. The hate bit is when you've got 60,000 people trying to leave and you're trying to find a police convoy to slot in behind to get out. When you do that it's fantastic and you've beaten 'The Man'. I'm generally the navigator looking for tiny tracks on the

mountain to go another way from someone else. And when you do that, you really feel like you've won."

5) What do you make of Mark Cavendish's chances in the overall race and as a sprinter?

"In something that seems like a chaotic part of the sport he is consistent, where you and I would see a mass of bodies he sees gaps. I think he's in good shape and on course to win the sprints. He's already stated that he wants to wear the yellow jersey in Corsica but it will be tricky."

6) Any hot tips for outsiders or underdogs you think might do well?

"I'm fascinated by Geraint Thomas, I don't think he knows how good he is. I think as far as challengers for the yellow jersey, there is Alberto Contador but after that there is a gap."

GARY IMLACH

Host

1) Who do you think will win this year's Tour?

"Well, at the start of the season I think I would probably have said Alberto Contador but I think Chris Froome, because of all the contenders - and there aren't actually that many - he's in the best form and has got the strongest team. And I think he'll do it by distancing his rivals in the

time trials and either sticking with them in the mountains or possibly even riding away from them there because he's looking so good at the moment. Like I say he has an unbelievably strong team with him that can set a punishing pace that makes it very difficult for any of their rivals to launch attacks."

2) What makes the Tour de France so special above other cycling events?

"History, geography, bravery, tragedy, treachery and scenery. If you're looking for great sporting drama in the most spectacular setting possible, then the Tour's got it. And I know from past experience that we've hooked in viewers who've started tuning in just because they like the helicopter shots of the mountains or they like eyeing up a few chateaux in the Loire, and they are hooked into the race. I think it's got everything."

3) Can you give us an insight into what it's like behind the scenes with ITV4's coverage?

"It's a bit like the worst driving holiday you've ever been on. People say "Wow, France - you must be dining out every night!" but no, we're getting pathetically excited about the motorway service station coming up because the evening meal is a packet of crisps and a sarnie and some Orangina. So there's a lot of driving, there's a lot of setting up in anonymous car parks, though that's compensated for by setting up in some spectacular meadow halfway up an Alp or a Pyrenee. So it's great fun but it's a mad runaround. The great thing these days is we don't have to unpack the truck before we start working. It used to be that we'd get there in the morning and the truck was full of the set and the gear and all the cameras and everything, and before you could actually get in and get to your desk you'd have to unpack it but now there's a loading area at the back so it's a bit less like a camping holiday."

4) What are you looking forward to most about this year's Tour?

"There's actually quite a lot to choose from, I mean Corsica's going to be pretty spectacular to start, Paris at night is going to be amazing to finish, and the Mont St Michel featured on the very first Tour I did in 1990 so I'm looking forward to seeing that. I think going up Alpe d'Huez twice, the second time with even drunker fans, that will be a great stage. That could be the classic stage of this year's Tour."

5) What do you make of Mark Cavendish's chances this year?

"Well I would say Cavendish has a point to prove, but there's no need to say that because Cavendish has always got a point to prove. He's relentlessly self-motivated, he doesn't need the fact he's left Sky and joined a new team to motivate him more because you know he's just got

that inner fire. Cavendish I think will do what Cavendish has always done, which is to win three, four or five stages. What he'll have trouble doing I think is winning the green jersey because there's the phenomenal Slovak rider, Peter Sagan, who can score points on the kind of stages that Mark can't because he's an all-rounder whereas Mark is more of a pure sprinter. But I'm sure Mark will have a great Tour."

6) Any hot tips for outsiders or underdogs you think might do well?

"I'm not sure how far of an outsider he is, but Nairo Quintana of Movistar is a great talent, one of a new generation of great Colombian riders. Of course, Colombia has a tradition of producing really excellent climbers and he is one. It's his first Tour so expectations shouldn't be too high, and he's young, but he could have a real impact and depending on how the race goes he could even sneak onto the podium."

7) Which do you think will be the key stage on this year's Tour?

"Well I'm hoping it will be Le Semnoz which is stage 20, because that's the final mountain summit finish, and it's the stage before Paris. So if that's the key stage it'll mean the race has been in the balance all the way through and we've had a great Tour. But I suspect it might blow apart on Mont Ventoux and then the victory might be sealed on Alpe d'Huez. And if that's the case I'll settle for that."

PHIL LIGGETT

Commentator

1) Who do you think will win this year's Tour, why and how?

"Well I cannot believe that for the second year, because this is the 100th edition of the Tour, that we still have a British favourite - two out of two - last year Bradley Wiggins got the victory and Chris Froome got second. Now it's time for Chris Froome to step up I think and he has shown the same form in the build-up that Wiggins showed last year. And so he'll go in as the favourite, but for me he will have a real fight on his hands with Alberto Contador and there are probably four or five guys in the second grouping who could, if things drop in their ball court, win the race."

2) What makes the Tour de France so special above other cycling events and why does it strike a chord with the public?

"I think because of its very roots, beginning back in 1903 and it has lasted the passage of time, but the thing is it has developed with the country of France. They brought in the mountains in 1910 and 1911, the riders and the romanticisms and the stories behind the race that have built, it has reached such a height. It is the event, sadly to say, the sporting event that if you have a grudge against the country of France, where you demonstrate because there are huge viewing figures around the world who will see your plight. And of course the doping scandals, sadly in one way but popular in another, have brought the event at least more to the attention of the public. This race is never going to go away, it is the biggest sporting event in France and if you take it on an annual basis it is now as big as anything in the world except a [football] World Cup or an Olympic Games."

3) Can you give us an insight into what it's like behind the scenes with ITV4's coverage?

"Well it's a big moving jamboree to be honest now, there's about 20 nations who cover it live, we all sit alongside each other in our commentary boxes, but every nation has its own outside broadcast unit on the Tour, we even have our own chefs because there's no time to go anywhere. There are bizarre situations like being on top of a mountain for a full day's racing, and you'll arrive at 8am in the morning and you won't go until 6.30pm at night. So everything is in self-contained units now. It seems like organised chaos but it all goes very, very smoothly. It never ceases to amaze me how the host broadcasters who provide all our signals can run such a smooth show but the use of helicopters of course is the key, and at 10,000ft a fixed-wing aircraft. These are how the signals are leaving us and are beamed into homes around the world."

4) Any hot tips for outsiders or underdogs you think might do well?

"In all honesty I don't think anybody likes to be called the favourite to win the Tour de France. It's a race of 3,000 kilometres, it's over 21 days, and things happen - you get chest complaints, you fall off, you get injured, you can never be sure you're going to win the Tour even if you're the most outstanding favourite. But there is only a handful of riders in any one year who have the all-round ability to win the Tour. They have to be able to climb mountains, ride the individual time trials and conserve their losses when they are on the flat sprinted stages. Chris Froome has all this ability, he has proved that already. Contador has as well. There are other guys who will push them close. Cadel Evans has won the Tour in the past, he's older now but he has indicated with a third place in the Giro d'Italia that he can win again in the Tour de France, so you must put him up there. Also Alejandro Valverde, another top Spaniard, he is showing good form this

year, and I don't think Joaquim Rodriguez can win but he can climb, and he'll also be a challenger. There's very very little room for someone to come from the depths of the race but there are one or two young developing riders in their first Tour de Frances who could surprise us."

5) What do you think will be the highlight of this year's Tour?

"This year is a great Tour - it starts on the island of Corsica for the first time which is fitting for the 100th edition. That is not a flat island, there are two second-category mountains on that island so it won't be a flat start. I expect Mark Cavendish to give us a great opening day, it looks of course suited to him. It might be he's struggling a bit on the next two days. Then we move on to the mainland of France and after the team time trial we go very quickly to the Pyrenees, and it's very tough there but not as tough as in the Alps."

6) This is your 41st Tour. What has been the highlight of the many events you've covered so far?

"We go back to 1978 when World of Sport asked me to cover the Tour for them after the death of David Saunders a couple of months earlier. I had been on the Tour but as David's driver and journalist and ITV knew of me and offered me the job. I never applied for the job and in actual fact I've been very lucky and I've never actually applied for any job in television. From there of course Channel 4 came on stream, then we swung over to ITV4 and of course last year on the main channel as well. The race has now caught the public imagination, we are now into millions in our viewerships on the days of the big winners, and I'm just happy I've been there. I didn't think I'd last for such a long time, but I have and I've been at every single day since 1973 of the Tour de France. In fact, I've never been at home in July unless the Tour de France has been coming to Britain, as has happened on three or four occasions."

NED BOULTING

Reporter

1) Who do you think will win this year's Tour, why and how?

"I've been struggling to think of any serious opposition to Chris Froome because probably the second best rider in the Tour de France is his team-mate Richie Porte. If Contador comes with a different attitude from the one he's shown and renewed strength from what he's shown this season then he'll be a big threat but as things stand going in Chris Froome is a much, much stronger favourite than Bradley Wiggins was this time last year and he's done everything to justify that favouritism - he's ridden a perfect season. Imperious, up until now."

2) What makes the Tour de France so special above other cycling events and why does it strike a chord with the public?

"It's not just the bike race, and the bike race itself is so multi-faceted it's like watching the Olympic Games. You know, you can watch a marathon one day and a sprint the next day. Even when there's not much happening in the race which periodically does happen in the Tour de France, you can just kind of kick back and enjoy France, which is the reason for the Tour's existence in the first place. It's a walking billboard for a great nation that's just over the water. So it's a spectacular event on all sorts of levels, not least the visual eye candy of the landscape itself. But I think just the scale - the size of the crowds, the size of the mountains, the size of the peloton, the scale of the feats of endurance day after day simply take your breath away every

year, no matter how used you are to watching it as a spectacle it appears fresh and extraordinary each year."

3) Can you give us an insight into what it's like behind the scenes with ITV4's coverage?

"It kind of looks semi-polished on the television but sometimes you sit back and wonder how on earth we get anything on the telly. I remember a day three years ago on the Tourmalet, a big famous mountain in the Pyrenees, when it just cascaded with rain for 24 hours. We were literally ankle-deep in mud and water, in that little bit under the camera that you can't see. Heaving water off our £20 gazebo that someone got from B&Q, literally flicking water off the top of the set with the back of a broom handle to keep us going. How we stayed on air I don't know. It's kind of incredibly makeshift because it has to be, because it's an event that doesn't stay still so everything has to fit almost into the back of the boot of your car, basically on a slightly grander scale and move 250km down the road each day and then it has to be put up quickly and dismantled quickly. So we're flying by the seat of our pants. They're long days, they're brutal hours really, and hideous traffic jams. And every year you come away from it thinking, "Ah no, I'm not spending July like that again", and all of a sudden this is my 12th Tour. So something gets under your skin about it. But it's utterly unlike other big events I've covered - World Cup finals and Champions League finals don't compare in any way because it is just so monstrously difficult to televise."

4) What are you looking forward to most about this year's Tour?

"I'm looking forward to the first three stages in Corsica because I went there for a bike race we showed earlier in the year, the Criterium International, and the Tour has never been there which I find staggering for a big lump of France, albeit cut adrift from the mainland. It is savagely beautiful, it will be incredibly hot I should imagine when we're down there, and the of first three stages, the first is really designed for Mark Cavendish to win and assume the yellow leader's jersey for the first time in his glorious career, and the second two are very difficult to read and could result in a big shake-up in the overall race straight away so it's wildly unpredictable, just like the landscape itself."

5) What do you make of Mark Cavendish's chances in the overall race and as a sprinter?

"Well Cavendish's entire career now is about becoming the greatest Tour rider in history in the sense of stages won. Eddie Merckx holds that record at the moment. Cavendish's next four or five years will be defined by chasing that record down. I've had a look at the route of this year's Tour and with a fair wind behind him and if he stays injury-free and his form holds up, he could win his greatest ever haul of stage wins. He could win seven, eight, possibly even nine stages on

this year's Tour including the team time trial. So he's closing in on history and he's been riding brilliantly on the grand tours this year and the Tour loves him. The race organisers love him, the French love him - it's because he's box office. He's pugnacious, charismatic, and quite ruthlessly brilliant at what he does. I mean the Tour in its 100 years, has never seen a sprinter like Cavendish who can win with or without a lead-out train, who can win in all sorts of conditions, and so regularly you would put your mortgage on him winning a certain type of stage. You would back him to the hilt and 99 per cent of the time he will repay your faith."

6) Any hot tips for outsiders or underdogs you think might do well?

"Sky are so much the strongest team and they do have the strongest rider by head and shoulders but the Tour is a capricious beast really and watch out for the Spanish team of Movistar with their leader Alejandro Valverde and the likes of Rui Costa and Quintana in that team because they have a few different dice to throw and while everybody will notionally be watching their team leader they do have the kind of riders who could get in a breakaway and get away and gain time and actually do a significant amount of damage to Sky."

7) Which do you think will be the key stage on this year's Tour?

"The Tour organisers want it to be Mont Ventoux and it would be fantastic if that had a really defining impact on the outcome of the Tour because it's the big icon in the mountain world and it has a particular resonance for British cycling fans because it was on the slopes of Mont Ventoux that Tommy Simpson lost his life all those years ago. And if a British rider were to deliver the telling act on the slopes of Mont Ventoux I think it would have a great resonance here."