



GRANDS
PRIX CYCLISTES
**DE QUÉBEC
DE MONTRÉAL**
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TEAM PROFILES AND KEY RIDER BIOS

WORLDTEAMS

AG2R LA MONDIALE (FRA)

The French squad, which has been in the top flight for more than a quarter-century, has had an up-and-down season. They once again made headlines during the Tour de France (Romain Bardet was 6th overall and Pierre Latour won Best Young Rider), but achieved their best performances in the Spring Classics, when Silvan Dillier was the runner-up in the Paris-Roubaix race and Bardet finished third in Liège-Bastogne-Liège. That speaks to the stature taken on by Vincent Lavenu's squad, which also continues to nurture plenty of young talent through its training centre, one example being Benoît Cosnefroy, the 2017 Under-23 Road World Champion. *Founded in: 1992. Wins in 2018 (as of Aug. 20): 11*

RIDERS TO WATCH

Oliver Naesen (BEL): Age 27, turned pro in 2014. *Palmarès: 5 wins including the 2016 Bretagne Classic, 2017 Belgian National Championships. This season: 3rd in the Frankfurt GP, 4th in the GP E3, 6th in Gent-Wevelgem, 11th in the Tour of Flanders.* In less than two seasons with AG2R, the former Belgian champion has become indispensable to the French squad. Propelled into a leadership role in the Flanders Classics, all he's missing is a little success to be a legitimate contender for victory in Monument races like the Tour of Flanders or Paris-Roubaix. The Flemish cyclist has also shown himself to be an outstanding road captain in the Tour de France, where the leaders appreciate his scientific racing approach and his daily good humour.

Alexis Vuillermoz (FRA): Age 30, turned pro in 2013. *Palmarès: 8 wins including Stage 8 of the 2015 Tour de France. This season: runner-up in the Tour du Haut-Var, 4th in the Classic de l'Ardèche, 5th in the GP de Plumelec, 8th in Paris-Nice.* The man from the Jura, who started out in mountain biking, continues to show immense potential despite runs of bad luck. Vuillermoz fell ill during high-altitude training in the Sierra Nevada of southern Spain in May, then had to abandon the Critérium du Dauphiné after crashing in the very first stage, and then had to bow out of the Tour de France just before reaching the Alps, after a close encounter with a spectator and his camera resulted in a shoulder blade fracture. He's back just in time for the end of the season (last year at this time, he enjoyed good results, finishing 4th in both the Québec City GP and the Tour de Lombardie).

ASTANA PRO TEAM (KAZ)

The Kazakh squad managed by Alexandre Vinokourov remains one of the most formidable in the World Tour peloton, although it was rumoured in the spring that its main source of funding was about to dry up. That didn't happen, and while they've had to deal with the departure of Italian star Fabio Aru, Astana is sending a very strong squad to the Canadian races. They boast up-and-coming young talents like Denmark's Michael Valgren, a future Classics specialist, and Colombia's Miguel Angel Lopez, third in this year's Giro d'Italia, who promises to be a solid leader. *Founded in: 2006. Wins in 2018 (as of Aug. 20): 27*

RIDERS TO WATCH

Jakob Fuglsang (DEN): Age 33, turned pro in 2006. *Palmarès: 17 wins including the Tour of Denmark (2008, 2009 and 2010), 2012 Tour of Austria, 2017 Critérium du Dauphiné. This season: 1 win (Stage 4 of the Tour de Romandie), runner-up in the Tour of Switzerland, 3rd in the Tour of Valencia, 4th in the Tour of Andalusia, 4th in the Tour de Romandie.* With his win in the 2017 Critérium du Dauphiné, this Dane known as a climbing specialist has taken things to the next level. This year has brought confirmation that he's really an all-terrain man who can shine all season long, although he's lacking the killer instinct that would bring more wins. His only regret in 2018 has been his performance in the Tour de France (12th), where he ran into some bad luck.

Michael Valgren (DEN): Age 26, turned pro in 2011. *Palmarès: 8 wins including the 2014 and 2016 Tour of Denmark, the 2018 Omloop Het Nieuwsblad and the 2018 Amstel Gold Race. This season: 2 wins, 4th in the Tour of Flanders.* Ever since his runner-up showing in the 2016 Amstel Gold Race, this solid all-rounder from Denmark has been a man to watch in the Classics. He lived up to all those hopes early on in the season with a win in the Omloop Het Nieuwsblad, and then rolled to victory in the storied Amstel Gold Race. Those results and his strong potential caught the eye of recruiters, and Valgren has signed a two-year deal with Team Dimension Data.

Hugo Houle (CAN): Age 27, turned pro in 2011. *Palmarès: 1 win, 2015 Canadian National Championships Time Trial. This season: 8th in the Tour of Denmark, 13th in Prudential RideLondon.* Since joining the ranks of Astana (who ride bikes made by Montréal-based Argon 18) at the start of the season, the Québécois rider has continued to progress. He rode several well-known races, and was on the shortlist for this year's Tour de France for quite a while. The erstwhile Canadian TT Champion remains an invaluable team rider, and recently proved he can fulfill his responsibilities, with an 8th-place finish in the Tour of Denmark.

BAHRAIN–MERIDA (BAH)

Created two years ago at the initiative of Sheikh Nasser bin Hamed Al Khalifa, this team financed by Bahrain hopes to put the tiny Persian Gulf kingdom on the international cycling map. After an inaugural season buoyed by steady results from Vincenzo Nibali and the speed burst of *puncheur* Sonny Colbrelli, they've ramped things up in the past few months as Slovenian Majet Mohoric has come into his own. *Founded in: 2017. Wins in 2018 (as of Aug. 20): 22*

RIDERS TO WATCH

Sonny Colbrelli (ITA): Age 28, turned pro in 2012. *Palmarès: 20 wins including the 2014 and 2016 Coppa Sabatini, 2016 Tour du Limousin, 2017 Brabantse Pijl. This season: 2 wins (Stage 4 of the Tour of Dubai, Stage 3 of the Tour of Switzerland).* The man from Lombardy first gained attention with a string of results in Italian semi-classics, then took things to the next level in 2017 when he joined the World Tour. Only three-time World Champion Peter Sagan kept him from taking Stage 2 of this year's Tour de France—proof that Colbrelli, who was 10th in Québec City last year, is on the verge of a defining victory.

Matej Mohoric (SLO): Age 23, turned pro in 2013. *Palmarès: 8 wins including Stage 7 of the 2017 Vuelta a España, Stage 10 of the 2018 Giro d'Italia, 2018 Binck Bank Tour. This season: 5 wins (including the Larciano GP and Stage 1 of the Tour of Austria), 3rd in the Tour of Slovenia.* This Slovene *puncheur* showed very early that he was a talent to watch by doing something no rider had ever done: he won the World Junior Championships and the World Under-23 Championships in successive years (2012 and 2013). Finding his place in the pro peloton has proven a longer (and more painful) process than expected, but since last year, Mohoric has begun fulfilling his potential: he finished 1st overall in this season's Binck Bank Tour, his first GC title in a World Tour event.

BMC RACING TEAM (USA)

Boasting a deep, cosmopolitan lineup, this U.S.-registered team is riding its final races in its current incarnation. The death of Andy Rihs, founder of Swiss bike manufacturer BMC, on April 18 signaled the end of the ownership structure, and manager Jim Ochowicz announced a merger with Polish team CCC ahead of next season. Negotiations with the squad's main riders are ongoing: although Australia's Richie Porte is expected to leave, Belgium's Greg Van Avermaet, one of the favourites to win in Québec City or Montréal, will stay on as leader. *Founded in: 2007. Wins in 2018 (as of Aug. 20): 19*

RIDERS TO WATCH

Greg Van Avermaet (BEL): Age 33, turned pro in 2006. *Palmarès: 39 wins including 2011 Paris-Tours, 2016 Tirreno–Adriatico, 2016 Olympic Road Race, 2016 Montréal GP. This season: 3 wins including Tour of Yorkshire, 4th in the Paris-Roubaix, 5th in the Tour of Flanders.* Among the dominant single-day-race specialists of his generation, the Belgian is certainly the man of the Québec City and Montréal GPs, having competed here every year since 2012, racking up one win and four podium finishes. While he failed to win a Spring Classic this year, the Flemish rider enjoyed a nice consolation prize in the form of an eight-day run in Yellow at the Tour de France. His end-of-season run naturally takes him to Canada, and he has his sights set on the World Championships in Innsbruck. Some pundits say that course will be too tough for him, but that's also what they said about the Rio Olympics in 2016—and then he proceed to upstage all those climbers. . .

Simon Gerrans (AUS): Age 38, turned pro in 2003. *Palmarès: 33 wins including 2012 Milan-San Remo, 2014 Liège-Bastogne-Liège, 2012 and 2014 Québec City GP, 2014 Montréal GP. This season: 5th in the Cadel Evans Great Ocean Race.* The extremely likeable Australian is set to retire at season's end, so it's only natural that he should compete one last time in the Laurentian Classics, we're he's had so much success. This *puncheur* who's bagged two Monuments as well as stages on all three Grand Tours

is still the only man to have won both the Québec City and Montréal GPs the same year (in 2014). Fans have a great opportunity to give him the sendoff he deserves.

BORA–HANS GROHE (GER)

Originally known as Team NetApp, this German-registered squad has evolved through a string of mergers, eventually emerging as one of the top-performing WorldTeams on the wheel of Slovak sensation Peter Sagan, the three-time World Champion, and twice a winner in Québec City, though he'll be absent this year. Luckily, Bora-Hansgrohe can look to other talents, like Irish sprint specialist Sam Bennett. *Founded in: 2010. Wins in 2018 (as of Aug. 20): 25*

RIDERS TO WATCH

Sam Bennett (IRL): *Age 29, turned pro in 2011. Palmarès: 29 wins including three stages of the 2018 Giro d'Italia. This season: 4 wins, 7th in Frankfurt GP.* Born in Belgium (where his father played professional soccer) and trained in France at the Vélo Club La Pomme–Marseille, the Irish sprinter became a force to be reckoned with after he won a stage of the 2017 Paris-Nice. This season, he's been even more impressive, including on the Giro d'Italia, where he three stage wins to equal Italian rival Elia Viviani. The parcours of the Québec City and Montréal GPs, with which Bennett became acquainted in 2015, would appear to be too arduous for this powerful racer, who'll be looking to warm up for the Autumn Classics.

Patrick Konrad (AUT): *Age 26, turned pro in 2010. Palmarès: 2 wins including 2014 Oberösterreichrundfahrt (Tour of North Austria). This season: 7th in Paris-Nice, 7th in the Giro d'Italia, 10th in the Flèche Wallonne.* Konrad is one of the season's pleasant surprises, the leading light of Austrian cycling, which is enjoying a boost thanks to Innsbruck hosting the World Championships at the end of September. A perfect fit for Classics that suit *puncheurs*, like the Flèche Wallonne, Konrad also assumed a leadership role on a particularly challenging Giro d'Italia this year. At age 26, he's continuing to break new ground.

GROUPAMA–FDJ (FRA)

With the arrival of insurance company Groupama as sponsor, the French team—a fixture in the pro ranks for close to twenty years—was intent on continuing its development. Holding on to key assets like sprinter Arnaud Démare, who extended his contract, and mountain man Thibaut Pinot, was a priority, but they've also played the transfer market, with Swiss all-rounder Stefan Küng set to join. In so doing, the clover-leaf squad led by Marc Madiot has shown its determination to remain competitive alongside the biggest armadas in the World Tour peloton. *Founded in: 1997 – Wins in 2018 (as of Aug. 20): 22*

RIDERS TO WATCH

Anthony Roux (FRA): *Age 31, turned pro in 2008. Palmarès: 14 wins including Stage 17 of the 2009 Vuelta a España, 2018 France National Championships. This season: 2 wins including Stage 1 of the Tour du Limousin, 3rd in the Clásica San Sebastián.* The Frenchman first turned heads at age 22 with a Vuelta a España stage win, and has since enjoyed a role as a dedicated team rider, interspersed with a few brilliant performances reminding observers of his potential. One such exploit was his podium finish in the 2016 Québec City GP (3rd behind Sagan and Van Avermaet); another was his win at the France National Championships this past June, entitling him to proudly wear the *tricolore* kit, and more recently a 3rd-place performance in the Clásica San Sebastián. Aged 31, with his contract set to expire and plenty of teams interested in his services, Roux is clearly in the midst of the most intense spell of his career.

Arthur Vichot (FRA): *Age 29, turned pro in 2010. Palmarès: 14 wins including Stage 5 of the 2012 Critérium du Dauphiné, 2013 and 2016 France National Championships. This season: 2 wins including the Tour de l'Ain, runner-up in the Boucles de l'Aulne, 4th in the GP de Plumelec.* After nine seasons riding for Marc Madiot's squad, where he got his start, Vichot will move to the fledgling Vital Concept team next season. His triumph in the Tour de l'Ain in May proved he's still a fine racer despite a career hampered by mishaps. Many still remember his awful crash at the Québec City GP in 2014 as he sprinted to the finish, victory in his grasp.

LOTTO SOUDAL (BEL)

Funded since the 1980s by the Belgian National Lottery, the team led by Marc Sergeant is approaching a crossroads, with their veteran German sprinter André Greipel, who has 93 wins in the Lotto jersey, set to leave. Aside from a disastrous Tour de France, which saw only three of their riders make it to the Champs-Élysées, the Belgian outfit has had a successful season behind talented athletes like Tiesj Benoot and Tim Wellens, representing both its present and its future. *Founded in: 1985. Wins in 2018 (as of Aug. 20): 23*

RIDERS TO WATCH

Tim Wellens (BEL): Age 26, turned pro in 2012. *Palmarès: 23 wins including the 2015 Montréal GP, Stage 6 of the Giro d'Italia 2016. This season: 7 wins including the Tour of Andalusia, Brabantse Pijl, Stage 4 of the Giro d'Italia, Tour de Wallonie.* Wellens prevailed in horrible rainy conditions in Montréal three years ago, firmly establishing him as a rider to watch. He has since lived up to all the promise he showed that day, and is having his best season ever, with strong showings in the final standings of stage races (Andalusia, Wallonie) as well as single-day contests. Hot temperatures are his only real nemesis.

Jelle Vanendert (BEL): Age 33, turned pro in 2005. *Palmarès: 3 wins including Stage 14 of the 2011 Tour de France. This season: 1 win (Stage 4 of the Tour of Belgium), runner-up in the Tour of Belgium, 3rd in the Flèche Wallonne.* The Flemish climber has never put up as prestigious a win as his stage victory in the Grande Boucle seven years ago, but on a good day, he's still a tough customer. Now aged 33, he's enjoying a more-than-honourable season, with a podium result in the Flèche Wallonne and a stage win in Tour of Belgium. Vanendert will be a valuable ally in the Canadian races, which he'll be riding for the fifth time.

MITCHELTON–SCOTT (AUS)

After seven years in existence, the only Australian team in the top flight has emerged as one of the most competitive. Though sprinter Caleb Ewan will soon be exiting (having signed with Lotto-Soudal), they have great depth, and are now led by brothers Adam and Simon Yates, who were constantly in the mix at both the Giro d'Italia and the Tour de France. *Founded in: 2011. Wins in 2018 (as of Aug. 20): 31*

RIDERS TO WATCH

Daryl Impey (RSA): Age 33, turned pro in 2008. *Palmarès: 22 wins including 2014 Tour of Alberta, 2018 Tour Down Under. This season: 4 wins including Stage 1 of the Critérium du Dauphiné.* This multiple winner of the South Africa National Championships has also put up great numbers on the international circuit. A solid *puncheur*, very comfortable on hilly courses, the 33-year-old has been enjoying his best-ever season, which included a GC win in a World Tour event (the Tour Down Under), much coveted by his team. Fourth in Québec City in 2014, he can aim higher this year.

Mikel Nieve (ESP): Age 34, turned pro in 2008. *Palmarès: 5 wins including 3 stages of the Giro d'Italia (2011, 2016 and 2018). This season: 1 win, 16th in the Tour de Romandie.* The shy Basque climber has put together an enviable palmarès with wins in prestige competitions like the Vuelta a España, Giro d'Italia and Critérium du Dauphiné. This past July, he was 300 metres from finally claiming a Tour de France stage, only to be overtaken by a surging Geraint Thomas. A quality super domestique who spent time with Team Sky, Nieve is most often there to help his teammates, who appreciate his extensive experience.

MOVISTAR TEAM (ESP)

Founded 36 years ago, this Spanish squad boasts one of the most imposing armadas in the pro peloton. Led by riders of the calibre of Spain's Alejandro Valverde, still effective at age 38, and Colombia's Nairo Quintana, they've chalked up fewer wins than usual this year but have seen eye-opening results from Marc Soler, who won Paris-Nice, and Richard Carapaz, 4th in the Giro. *Founded in: 1980. Wins in 2018 (as of Aug. 20): 24*

RIDERS TO WATCH

Carlos Betancur (COL): Age 28, turned pro in 2011. *Palmarès: 11 wins including 2011 Tour d'Emilie, 2014 Paris-Nice. This season: 4th in the Klasika Primavera, 5th in the GP Indurain, 15th in the Giro d'Italia.* One of the most promising figures in international cycling after finishing 5th in the Giro d'Italia GC aged just 24 and winning Paris-Nice the next year, the Colombian then lost his way, in part because of weight problems. He's rebooted his career since signing with Movistar in 2015, turning in a good overall performance in the Giro this year, but has yet to regain his former lustre.

Carlos Barbero (ESP): Age 27, turned pro in 2012. *Palmarès: 14 wins including 2015 Philadelphia Classic, 2014 Tour of the Alentejo (2014 and 2017). This season: 3 wins including Stage 4 of the Tour of Burgos, runner-up in the Tour of Castille-Leon, runner-up in the Circuito de Gexto.* After several years toiling with second-tier teams, this Spanish rider has found his niche since joining Movistar last year. A formidable *puncheur*, he's known for having made the Spain and Portugal circuit his personal hunting ground, but is still chasing a benchmark result at the World Tour level.

QUICK-STEP FLOORS (BEL)

With more than 50 victories before late August, the Belgian team has again set a new standard, demonstrating its end-to-end dominance of the international calendar. Thirteen different riders have shared the spoils during this record-setting spree, proving that the squad is doing very well, thank you very much, in the wake of the retirement of Tom Boonen and the departure

of sprinter Marcel Kittel last year. Italy's Elia Viviani, France's Julian Alaphilippe and Belgium's Philippe Gilbert (who won the Québec City GP in 2011 and, had it not been for a scary crash in the Tour de France that left him with a fractured patella, would have competed here again this year) have taken up the torch with brio. *Founded in: 2003. Wins in 2018 (as of Aug. 20): 55*

RIDERS TO WATCH

Zdenek Stybar (CZE): Age 32, turned pro in 2008. *Palmarès: 15 wins including 2013 Eneco Tour, Stage 6 of the 2015 Tour de France. This season: 6th in Across Flanders, 7th in the Strade Bianche, 8th in Gent-Wevelgem, 9th in Paris-Roubaix.* This Czech rider came to the World Tour via cyclo-cross (he's a three-time World Champion of the discipline), and since 2013 has morphed into a Flanders Classics specialist. He's notched stage wins in the Vuelta a España and the Tour de France, but the one title he truly craves is Paris-Roubaix. He was runner-up in in 2015 and 2017 and 9th this year, and has made the "Hell of the North" his career obsession.

Rémi Cavagna (FRA): Age 23, turned pro in 2016. *Palmarès: 5 wins including 2018 A Travers la Flandre occidentale. This season: 1 win, 10th in the Tour of San Juan.* Spotted for his talents as an all-rounder and recruited as a Quick-Step reservist at age 20, like Julian Alaphilippe before him, the Frenchman has been furthering his apprenticeship with the world's best cycling team. With a semi-classic win to his credit this season, he will no doubt continue progressing.

TEAM DIMENSION DATA (RSA)

Promoted to the World Tour ranks in 2016, the first-ever high-level cycling team from an African country has had a rough time of it this season, owing mainly to subpar showings by its leaders, Britain's Mark Cavendish and Norway's Edvald Boasson Hagen, who were expected to do far better. But it has allowed South African, Eritrean, Rwandan and Ethiopian riders to show off their skills on the world's finest road racing circuits. *Founded in: 1997. Wins in 2018 (as of Aug. 20): 5*

RIDERS TO WATCH

Edvald Boasson Hagen (NOR): Age 31, turned pro in 2006. *Palmarès: 91 wins including 2009 Gent-Wevelgem, 3 stages of the Tour de France (in 2011 and 2017), 2012 GP de Plouay. This season: 2 wins including Stage 2 of the Tour of Norway, 3rd in the Tour of Norway GC, 4th in the Tour des Fjords GC.* Though he's flirting with 100 victories as a professional rider, the Norwegian has a definite air of unfinished business about him. He demonstrated a talent for the Classics early on, but has never won a single Monument race, and languished in a domestique role during a five-year stint with Team Sky. Since 2015, he's tried to kickstart his career with Dimension Data, but seems to have lost his fire.

Tom-Jelte Slagter (NED): Age 29, turned pro in 2010. *Palmarès: 9 wins including Tour Down Under 2013, 4th place and Stage 7 of the 2014 Paris-Nice. This season: 3rd in the Tour Down Under.* The Dutch *puncheur*, who's been looking for his second wind since joining the South African squad, is among the riders with the most appearances in the Québec City and Montréal Grands Prix Cyclistes. He hasn't missed a race since 2012, came fourth in Québec in 2015, and finally claimed a podium place (3rd) in Montréal last year. Given that specialization, he's definitely a rider to watch, even though he hasn't been performing up to par in the past few weeks.

TEAM EF EDUCATION FIRST – DRAPAC p/b CANNONDALE (USA)

A presence in the World Tour for the past 13 years under various names, this team managed by Jonathan Vaughters had a roller-coaster off-season, with a new sponsor coming to their rescue at the eleventh hour: Education First, an international company specialized in language training. With that indispensable support secured, the U.S.-based squad was able to hang on to its best riders, including Colombia's Rigoberto Urán, who won the 2015 Québec City GP, but won't make the trip to Canada this year, as he's riding the Vuelta a España. *Founded in: 2005 – Wins in 2018 (as of Aug. 20): 4*

RIDERS TO WATCH

Sep Vanmarcke (BEL): Age 30, turned pro 2008. *Palmarès: 6 wins including the 2012 Omloop Het Nieuwsblad. This season: 3rd in the Omloop Het Nieuwsblad, 3rd in Across Flanders, 5th in the Belgium National Championships, 6th in Paris-Roubaix.* The Flemish rider has made the Classics his specialty, notably Paris-Roubaix (one podium and three top 10 finishes), but hasn't had a benchmark victory these past few seasons, as he's too generous in races. An impressively powerful cyclist, he knows when to make his move, but seems to lack finishing flair. It remains to be seen what sort of end-of-season run he can put together.

Lawson Craddock (USA): Age 26, turned pro in 2011. *Palmarès: 3 wins including Stage 5 of the 2012 Tour of the Gila. This season: 9th in the Amstel Gold Race.* The Texan has posted some impressive results this season, but all the talk has been about his epic Tour de France ride. After crashing horribly on the first day, he finished the stage with his face bloodied and nursing a hairline

fracture of his left shoulder blade. He then hung on all the way to Paris, riding as the *lanterne rouge* (last place in the GC) for the entire race—a first. His courage was inspiring, as was his decision to start an online fundraising campaign, which amassed more than \$130,000 for renovations to the Houston velodrome where he got his start.

TEAM KATUSHA–ALPECIN (RUS)

Despite being funded by the Russian government and the gas companies and further beefed up last year with a German co-sponsor, Katusha–Alpecin have been having a season to forget. Newly arrived sprinter Marcel Kittel hasn't worked out and already wants to jump ship, while fellow German Tony Martin has barely maintained his profile as a world-class *rouleur*. With an anemic wins total, the squad consoled themselves with a steady performance from Ilnur Zakarin in the Tour de France (9th in the GC). But that's most unsatisfactory for one of the biggest budgets on the World Tour. *Founded in: 2009. Wins in 2018 (as of Aug. 20): 4*

RIDERS TO WATCH

Simon Spilak (SLO): *Age 32, turned pro in 2005. Palmarès: 13 wins including 2010 Tour de Romandie, 2015 and 2017 Tour of Switzerland. This season: 6th in the Tour of Switzerland, 9th in the GP Indurain.* Quite by chance, all of the Slovene's big wins have come in Swiss competitions. He won the Tour of Switzerland for the second time in 2017 and took 6th place this past June, and continues to excel in week-long stage races, having ruled out Grand Tours since 2014.

Baptiste Planckaert (BEL): *Age 29, turned pro in 2008. Palmarès: 6 wins including 2016 Tour du Finistère and 2016 Polynormande. This season: 4th in the Three Days of De Panne.* An amazing 2016 season (5 wins and 16 top-three results on the way to finishing first overall on the UCI Europe Tour) led to him being recruited by Katusha. That has meant a lucrative contract, but fewer opportunities to express himself. Confined to a team rider role, Planckaert works in the shadows.

TEAM LOTTO NL–JUMBO (NED)

A fixture of the pro peloton for the past 20 years under different names (most notably Rabobank), this Netherlands-registered squad proved during this year's Tour de France that it can compete with the best. With two riders just shy of the podium in Paris (Primoz Roglic was 4th, and Steven Kruijswijk 5th) and three stage wins, the team put a stamp on a rich season, with Dutchman Robert Gesink, one of only three men to have won both the Québec City and Montréal GPs, as their stalwart road captain. *Founded in: 1996. Wins in 2018 (as of Aug. 20): 28*

RIDERS TO WATCH

Robert Gesink (NED): *Age 32, turned pro in 2005. Palmarès: 17 wins including 2010 Montréal GP, 2012 Tour of California, 2013 Québec City GP.* This season: 8th in the Clásica San Sebastián, 10th in the Tour Down Under. The Canadian GPs have figured prominently in the Dutch climber's career: he won the inaugural race in Montréal in 2010, then triumphed in Québec City three years later. Though he hasn't earned a win since taking a stage of the 2016 Vuelta a España, Gesink, who rode both the Giro and the Grande Boucle this season and has extended his contract with Lotto NL–Jumbo through 2021, is still a threat on any given day.

Antwan Tolhoek (NED): *Age 24, turned pro in 2015. Palmarès: 14th in the 2016 Tour de l'Avenir. This season: 10th in the Clásica San Sebastián, 11th in the Critérium du Dauphiné.* This babyfaced Dutch rider may look like he's barely out of the junior ranks, but he's taken a serious step up this season with promising stage-race wins, e.g., in the Critérium du Dauphiné. Those performances earned him his first Tour de France (he finished 37th) and, as the season winds down, a selection to the Netherlands team for the World Championships in Innsbruck seems within reach.

TEAM SKY (GBR)

Britain's Team Sky has the biggest budget of any World Tour squad, and with six Tour de France winners in the past seven years, they've made the Grande Boucle their private hunting ground. This year, it was Welshman Geraint Thomas's turn to stand atop the podium in Paris. Teammate Chris Froome, the four-time winner, had to settle for third, having earlier won the Giro after weathering a lengthy legal battle touched off by an abnormal doping control result at the 2017 Vuelta. But on a team with such great depth, the likes of Poland's Michal Kwiatkowski and Colombia's Egan Bernal—one of the surprises of the season—are perfect fits as well. *Founded in: 2010. Wins in 2018 (as of Aug. 20): 36*

RIDERS TO WATCH

Luke Rowe (GBR): *Age 28, turned pro in 2012. Palmarès: 2 wins including Stage 2 of the 2017 Sun Tour. This season: 15th in the European Continental Championships.* Cardiff-born Rowe will long remember 2018 as the season when he proudly supported

fellow Welshman Geraint Thomas as the latter rode to victory in Tour de France. His success as a Classics rider (8th in the 2015 Paris-Roubaix, 5th in the 2016 Tour of Flanders) makes him an invaluable teammate on flat stages in Grand Tours—indeed, he hasn't missed a Tour de France since 2015. Might he have an ace up his sleeve for the Canadian races?

Kenny Elissonde (FRA): Age 27, turned pro in 2012. Palmarès: 2 wins including Stage 20 of the 2013 Vuelta a España. This season: 3rd in the Route d'Occitanie, 10th in the Tour of Burgos. This pocket-size climber (he's all of 1.62 m tall) first attracted attention with his Vuelta a España stage win at the summit of the Alto de l'Angliru, one of the world's harshest mountain ascents. In 2017, the Parisian was headhunted by the mighty Team Sky, where he's much appreciated as a support rider. Case in point: he helped Chris Froome to victory in the most recent Giro d'Italia.

TEAM SUNWEB (GER)

Founded in the Netherlands but registered in Germany these days, the team managed by Iwan Spekenbrink relies mainly on the performances of Tom Dumoulin, who finished second overall in both the Giro d'Italia and Tour de France this year. Australian Michael Matthews has seen his star dim somewhat this season and will be looking to bounce back, while young Dutch rider Sam Oomen, who was key to Dumoulin's Giro performance, is slowly coming into his own as a world-class stage race specialist.

Founded in: 2005. Wins in 2018 (as of Aug. 20): 7

RIDERS TO WATCH

Michael Matthews (AUS): Age 27, turned pro in 2009. Palmarès: 35 wins including 3 stages of the Tour de France, 3 stages of the Vuelta a España, and 2 stages of the Giro d'Italia. This season: 2 wins (prologue of the Tour de Romandie, Stage 7 of the Binck Bank Tour), runner-up in the Frankfurt GP, 5th in the Flèche Wallonne, 7th in Milan-San Remo. The Australian speed merchant with the Hawaiian surfer-dude looks has had an atypically poor campaign in 2018; he bowed out of the Tour de France due to illness after just four stages. He's clearly worked hard to rebound in the second half of the season, and is surely looking forward to these Laurentian Classics, where he's fared well in the past. He's been on the podium twice in Québec City (runner-up in 2015; 3rd in 2017) and done nearly as well in Montréal (4th in 2016), making him a clear favourite this year.

Sam Oomen (NED): Age 23, turned pro in 2014. Palmarès: 6 wins including Tour de l'Ain 2016. This season: 7th in the Tour of Switzerland, 9th in the Giro d'Italia, 9th in the Tour of Poland. Sam Oomen's performance in this year's Giro, where he supported team leader Tom Dumoulin right up to the last mountain stage, reminded everyone that he's one of the finest climbers of the emerging generation. The Dutchman fulfills his leadership duties well in stage races, and in Canada he'll be looking to test his fitness, just three weeks prior to the Worlds in Innsbruck, which will favour climbers.

TREK-SEGAFREDO (USA)

With Alberto Contador having retired following the 2017 Vuelta a España, this U.S. squad, financed by the major bike manufacturer, has had a transitional season. They lack a stage race leader, and are hoping to sign Australia's Richie Porte for 2019. Still, they've had some satisfying results this year, with Latvian Toms Skujins and Irishman Ryan Mullen living up to their potential—and, most important, German sprinter John Degenkolb returning to form. *Founded in: 2011. Wins in 2018 (as of Aug. 20): 16*

RIDERS TO WATCH

John Degenkolb (GER): Age 29, turned pro in 2008. Palmarès: 53 wins including 2014 Gent-Wevelgem, 2015 Milan-San Remo and 2015 Paris-Roubaix. This season: 3 wins including Stage 9 of the Tour de France, runner-up in the Germany National Championships. In January 2016, the Classics specialist and sprinter was at the peak of his powers when he was struck by a car while on a team training ride. He finally shook off after-effects of his injuries this past July in Roubaix, winning the cobbled Stage 9 of Tour de France, two-and-a-half years after his Paris-Roubaix triumph. After a few years riding the Vuelta a España, where he racked up ten stage wins, Degenkolb has tweaked his end-of-season strategy and will be competing in the Canadian GPs for the first time since 2013.

Jasper Stuyven (BEL): Age 26, turned pro in 2012. Palmarès: 7 wins including Stage 8 of the 2015 Vuelta a España, 2016 Kuurne-Brussels-Kuurne. This season: 1 win (Stage 4 of the BinckBank Tour), 3rd in the Belgium National Championships, 4th in the Omloop Het Nieuwsblad, 5th in Paris-Roubaix. The Belgian is no longer just an up-and-comer in the Cobbled Classics; he's now a major player, as evidenced by his strong showings in the past two Paris-Roubaix races (5th this year, 4th in 2017). But he's also a complete rider, as he showed with his solo escape on the difficult Stage 14 of the Tour de France, when he was caught just one kilometre from the finish in Mende. He's been strong all season long and, given his current form, he'll be looking to do better than his 12th-place finish in Montréal in 2016.

UAE TEAM EMIRATES (UAE)

Originally known as Lampre and registered in Italy, this squad managed by Giuseppe Saronni has flown a new flag since 2017, after an abortive sponsorship bid by a Chinese firm and an eventual rescue by Emirati interests. While it hasn't really changed its operating methods, the influx of capital from its new backers has allowed the team to sign big names like Norway's Alexander Kristoff and Ireland's Dan Martin, both of whom won stages in this year's Tour de France, while holding on to Diego Ulissi and Rui Costa, both of whom have had success in the Canadian GPs. *Founded in: 1999. Wins in 2018 (as of Aug. 20): 10*

RIDERS TO WATCH

Diego Ulissi (ITA): Age 29, turned pro in 2010. *Palmarès: 30 wins including 6 stages of the Giro d'Italia, 2017 Montréal GP. This season: 1 win (Stage 5 of the Tour of Switzerland), 4th in the Tour Down Under, 4th in the Lugano GP.* With a trophy case full of Giro d'Italia stage victories, the *puncheur* from Tuscany scored a milestone last year by claiming the Montréal GP for the first World Tour single-day race win of his career. He's been less effective this year, notably at the Giro in his native Italy, but is fond of circuit races, and hopes to earn a selection to the Italian *squadra* for the World Championships.

Rui Alberto Costa (POR): Age 32, turned pro in 2008. *Palmarès: 24 wins including the 2011 Montréal GP, 3 stages of the Tour de France (2011 and 2013), 2013 Road World Championships. This season: 5th in the Tour de Romandie, 8th in the Tour of Abu Dhabi.* Victory in Montréal in 2011 heralded the most fruitful spell of the Portuguese rider's career: two years later, he earned the rainbow jersey as World Champion in Florence. He's been quieter since then, despite some success in the Tour of Switzerland, and didn't compete in any of the Grand Tours this season. He'll be eager to earn his first win of the season here in Canada, where he has always enjoyed racing.

WILD-CARD TEAMS

ISRAEL CYCLING ACADEMY (ISR)

Formed in 2015 as a third-tier team and now competing at the Continental Pro level, Israel Cycling Academy was created with the objective of developing young cyclists and promoting the sport in its home country, which hosted the Big Start of the Giro d'Italia this past May. Its cosmopolitan roster includes Canadians Guillaume Boivin and Benjamin Perry, and is expected to be further bolstered next year, with the team targeting a wild-card invitation to the 2020 Tour de France. This marks their second appearance at the Québec City and Montréal GPs. *Founded in: 2015. Wins in 2018 (as of Aug. 20): 13*

RIDERS TO WATCH

Ben Hermans (BEL): Age 32, turned pro in 2009. *Palmarès: 10 wins including the 2015 Brabantse Pijl, 2017 Tour of Oman. This season: 2 wins including le Tour of Austria, runner-up in the Tour of Utah.* Welcomed as one of the team's star recruits this past winter, the experienced Belgian *puncheur*, who's ridden for the likes of BMC, did not disappoint. He prevailed in the Tour of Austria, the first win for the Israeli team in an HC (*hors-catégorie*, the second tier of cycling competition after the World Tour) race. He leads the young squad at the Canadian GPs.

Guillaume Boivin (CAN): Age 29, turned pro in 2010. *Palmarès: 8 wins including the 2015 Canada National Championships. This season: 7th in Kuurne-Brussels-Kuurne.* The Montréal native joined the Israeli team in 2016, putting up some great results in the Belgian Classics and eventually riding in his first Giro d'Italia in 2018. The Québec City and Montréal GPs will mark his return to competition after he collided with a car during a race in Belgium in mid-June, injuring his knee.

Benjamin Perry (CAN): Age 24, turned pro in 2015. *Palmarès: 3 wins including Stage 5 of the 2015 Tour de Beauce. This season: runner-up in the Canada National Championships, 6th in the Tour of Korea.* Though he lost out to Antoine Duchesne in the final sprint of this year's Canadian Road Championships, the all-rounder from Ontario has enjoyed a plentiful season, which began at the Tour of San Juan in Argentina in January and included the Tour of Portugal in August. Though he has yet to put up a win, his offensive temperament is undeniable.

RALLY CYCLING (USA)

Active in the third tier of world professional cycling for a decade, the U.S.-registered team stepped up to UCI Pro Continental status this past winter, and has been invited to the GPCQM for the first time. Until recently, it had mostly built its reputation on the U.S. circuit, where wins at the Tour of Utah and Tour of Alberta in 2017 prompted its managers to aim higher. Its staff of 16 riders includes five Canadians, all of whom will line up for the start of the Québec City and Montréal GPs. *Founded in: 2007. Wins in 2018 (as of Aug. 20): 4*

RIDERS TO WATCH

Ryan Anderson (CAN): Age 31, turned pro in 2008. Palmarès: 1 win, 2015 Guadania GP. This season: 13th in the KOGA Slag om Norg. Having spent two seasons with French squad Direct Energie, the Spruce Grove, Alberta, native is a welcome addition to this team, which is racing on the Europe calendar for the first time. He's been a steady presence all season, making him a valuable road captain, and has competed several times in the Canadian GPs, which is obviously a plus for the team.

Rob Britton (CAN): Age 33, turned pro in 2010. Palmarès: 5 wins including 2017 Tour of Utah. This season: 1 win (Tour of the Gila), runner-up in the Canada National Championships Time Trial, 5th in the Tour de Beauce. In nine seasons as a pro, Britton, who hails from Regina, Saskatchewan, has built up a more-than-respectable palmarès, chiefly in stage races on the North American calendar. With his experience and his familiarity with the Canadian races (he rode the very first edition of Montréal GP in 2010), he has every reason to put in a strong performance.

Adam De Vos (CAN): Age 24, turned pro in 2015. Palmarès: 3 wins including Delta Road Race 2018. This season: 2 wins including Stage 3 of the Tour de Langkawi, 4th in the Canada National Championships. This all-rounder born in Victoria, British Columbia, is living up to his potential. Having won a stage at the difficult Tour de Langkawi, in Malaysia, and shown he can hang in with the best earlier this month in the Tour of Denmark (19th in the GC), he has what it takes to shine in the Montréal and Québec City GPs, which he first rode in 2015.

TEAM CANADA

Managed once again by Kevin Field, the Canadian National Team has been invited by the race organizers, as it has every year since 2010, to compete in Québec City and Montréal, giving riders at the second and third tiers of international road cycling to compete against the world's best. Year after year, the opportunity to shine before a home crowd is an emotion-rich experience for Canadian racers.

RIDERS TO WATCH

Bruno Langlois: Age 39, turned pro in 2005. Palmarès: 10 wins including the 2016 Canada National Championships. This season: 6th in the Tour de la Guadeloupe. This veteran Canadian rider can still perform at a high level, as he showed this year in Guadeloupe, at the Tour de Beauce, and in the Canadian Championships (6th place). The native of Matane, Québec, has competed in every edition of the Canadian GPs except in 2015.

James Piccoli: Age 26, turned pro in 2014. Palmarès: 2 wins including Tour de Beauce 2018. This season: 2 wins, 6th in the Tour of the Gila, 7th in the Colorado Classic, 8th in the Canada National Championships. A member of U.S. team Elevate-KHS Pro Cycling since last year, the Montrealer captured the biggest trophy of his career by winning the Tour de Beauce this past June. The reward for this excellent climber: two days after his 27th birthday, he'll get his first taste of World Tour-level racing in Québec City, and then in his home town of Montréal.

Alexander Cataford: Age 24, turned pro in 2013. Palmarès: runner-up in the 2016 Tour of the Gila. This season: 3rd in the Canadian Championships Time Trial, 10th in the Colorado Classic. Ottawa-born Cataford's skills as an all-rounder earned him a place with UCI Pro Continental team UnitedHealthcare in 2017. Though he's yet to win a race professionally, he previously competed in the Québec City and Montréal GPs in 2015 and 2016, and as his 10th-overall finish in the Colorado Classic this year shows, he has a bright future ahead of him.

ABOUT THE #GPCQM

The Grands Prix Cyclistes de Québec et de Montréal, the only UCI WorldTour events presented in the Americas, contribute to fulfilling one of the primary objectives of the International Cycling Union (UCI): the globalization of the WorldTour circuit. These tour stops are in addition to the existing, officially sanctioned events in Europe and Oceania. Since 2010, the organization has been responsible for the planning and conduct of the GPCQM and counts on the invaluable support of public and private partners: the Government of Canada, the Gouvernement du Québec, the city of Québec, the city of Montréal, the National Battlefields Commission, Québec City Tourism, Tourisme Montréal, Québecor, Air Transat, and TVA Sports (official GPCQM broadcaster).

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CONTACT Véronique Lavoie, Head Media Relations, C. 514 554-2161, vlavoie@gpcqm.ca