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Belgium's Wauters wins second stage

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ANTWERP, Belgium (AP) -- Belgium's Marc Wauters won the second stage of the Tour de France on Monday between Calais in northeastern France and Antwerp in Belgium.

Two-time and defending champion Lance Armstrong crossed the line in the main pack, 22 seconds behind Wauters and in 80th place. The Texan was 11th in the overall standings after Monday's stage.

Before the race, the Texan defended his working relationship with an Italian doctor whose name has been linked to the doping agent EPO, but said he would "re-evaluate" his association if the physician is found guilty of wrongdoing in an ongoing doping inquiry.

Wauters, who cycles for Rabobank, finished the 220.5 kilometer (136.71 mile) stage in four hours, 35 minutes and 47 seconds. He takes the leader's yellow jersey from France's Christophe Moreau, of the Festina team.

Wauters crossed the line in a sprint finish. Festina rider Arnaud Pretor was in second place and South Africa's Robert Hunter, riding for Lampre-Daikin, was in third. All clocked the same time.

For Armstrong, Monday's race was overshadowed by the controversy swirling around his relationship with Dr. Michele Ferrari.

Speaking before the start of the stage, Armstrong said he was "proud" to work with Ferrari, whom he described as "honest."

Weekend newspaper reports linking Armstrong to the doctor prompted the rider to issue a statement late on Sunday acknowledging that they have worked together, and denying that

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the Texan has ever taken the banned performance-enhancer EPO.

Ferrari is the subject of an Italian doping investigation linked to his role as physician to several high-level professional cyclists. A trial is slated for this September.

Armstrong said Monday he is "proud" to have worked with Ferrari "on a limited basis" since 1995, and is currently working with him on a possible attempt at breaking the world one-hour record.

Armstrong said he uses only "natural methods of improvement" in his work with Ferrari, including altitude tents and dietary advice.

However, Armstrong added that his continued relationship with the physician would depend on the outcome of the Italian probe.

"If the investigation throws up a guilty verdict, we'll re-evaluate the relationship," he said. "I feel he's honest and innocent."

Armstrong also described as "unfortunate" comments made by Ferrari in 1994 that played down the health risks of EPO.

The French sports daily *L'Equipe* reproduced those quotes in its Monday edition. "EPO is not dangerous. Only excessive consumption of EPO is dangerous, as the excessive consumption of orange juice is dangerous," Ferrari is quoted as having said in 1994.

The newspaper said Ferrari, who worked for the Gewiss cycling team at the time, denied he prescribed EPO. Ferrari could not be reached at his home for comment on Monday.

"[Ferrari] has never discussed EPO with me and I have never used it," Armstrong said in his statement on Sunday.

Armstrong has repeatedly denied taking banned substances, most recently in response to an ongoing French investigation into the possibility that his U.S. Postal Service team may have used illicit agents in last year's Tour.

Team officials say they respect anti-doping rules. Armstrong has never failed a doping test and the investigation has so far yielded no evidence of illicit drug use.

The Tour lasts three weeks and takes riders over more than 3,400

kilometers (2,100 miles). It ends July 29 with the traditional ride down the Champs-Elysees in Paris.

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