**Frenchman Loulergue wins the first stage of the Peace Race, Přidal was the top Czech**The U23 Peace Race started on Thursday with its longest stage, leading from Krnov to Šternberk, which was won by 20-year-old Frenchman Victor Loulergue in a mass sprint. Tomáš Přidal, the leader of the national team, was the best of the six Czech riders in seventeenth place.

"It was extremely difficult today, especially on the cobbles it was very slippery, it was not easy at all," said Přidal. "It was very windy all day, we had to be alert all the time," continued Přidal. The winner of the stage spoke in a similar vein. "It was quite dangerous at times, especially here at the finish," he said.

In its 12th edition, this international four-stage under-23 race, part of the Nations' Cup, brought 22 national teams and 128 participants to North Moravia. They were faced with a stage of 168 kilometres and an elevation gain of 2,552 metres over two Category 2 climbing premiums right at the start.

At 9 kilometres, a trio of riders broke away from the peloton: German Cedric Abt, Italian Riccardo Lorello and Colombian Freddy Avila. They spent almost the whole day in solitude, and at one point their lead grew to 6 minutes. "I thought the breakaway was pretty much under control," said Pridal.

After the first climbing premium of this year's Peace Race in Lhotka near Litultovice, where Abt collected the most points, the peloton began its pursuit work and the trio's advantage began to drop quickly, mainly thanks to the British team, with the Czechs also active. Lorello, of Italy, was the first rider to pass through the speed premium mark in Vitkov, and was named the most active rider of the stage for his work in the breakaway at the end of the day.

At the second summit of the stage in Kozlov, the German was first again and will therefore start the second stage wearing the polka dot jersey of the best climber. This suits him well, as he already became king of the mountains in the category 2 stage race Around Brittany at the beginning of May this year.

Thirty-seven kilometres from the finish line, the main group finally swallowed the escapees after a 120km chase, and the winner had to be decided over two circuits through Šternberk, the traditional finishing town of the Czech Tour. This time the cobles of Radniční Street were mastered by Frenchman Loulergue, who will thus take the yellow jersey from Uničov to Rýmařov in the second stage.

"Tomorrow is a sprinter's finish, we will definitely go for Dan Mraz and our goal is not to lose any more time and ideally try to attack somewhere," added Přidal. Second place today was taken in the same time by Spaniard Pau Marti, third by Italian Simone Gualdi.

