

Ferrari's downforce a key weapon at 23-corner street circuit

Street-fighter Hamilton out for Singapore sting

SINGAPORE, Sept 13, (AFP): Lewis Hamilton will aim to plunge a dagger into Sebastian Vettel's world title ambitions by upsetting his expected march to victory in Singapore — two weeks after ruining Ferrari's anniversary celebrations at Monza.

Hamilton is distinctly second favourite against his title rival at the twisting, turning and stiflingly hot Marina Bay street circuit, which plays to Ferrari's strengths and where Vettel has won four of the nine races.

But an unexpected victory for the Mercedes driver, who edged to the front of the standings by just three points with his wire-to-wire win in Italy, would set alarm bells ringing at Ferrari.

The Italian team will be smarting after Hamilton's crushing triumph at their home circuit this month — spoiling their 70th anniversary party, and earning boos on the podium from irate fans.

Another disappointment on Sunday in Singapore, the 14th of 20 races and the unofficial start of the title run-in, would deflate optimism of Ferrari's first world title in a decade.

Ferrari's downforce is a key weapon at the 23-corner street circuit, whose lack of

long straights traditionally nullifies Mercedes' high-speed advantage and puts overtaking at a premium.

Mercedes chief Toto Wolff said the German marque faced a difficult weekend — but he will take heart from the fact that in five of the last seven seasons, the winning driver in Italy also took the chequered flag in Singapore.

"So far this year, we have seen the pen-

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dulum swing according to circuit type. On the surface, Singapore is the kind of circuit that should favour both Ferrari and Red Bull," said Wolff.

"Both have shown strong performance on low-speed circuits demanding maximum downforce, and we have found life more difficult at those places in 2017."

But Wolff added: "We have made good progress in understanding what we need to do in order to get the most from the chassis ... It's a weekend when every part of the team needs to be at its best if you wish to score a strong finish.



This file photo taken on Aug 27, 2017 shows Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton driving ahead of Ferrari's German driver Sebastian Vettel during the Belgian Formula One Grand Prix at the Spa-Francorchamps circuit in Spa. (AFP)

"We will aim to put all the pieces of the puzzle together and finish strongly."

Hamilton's blistering form in qualify-

ing this year, which saw him take a world-record 69th pole position in Monza, also gives Mercedes a chance. All but two of

the races in Singapore have been won from pole and Hamilton is on a roll, having won three of the last four grands prix.

The three-time world champion Hamilton, who penned a poetic tribute to mark 20 years since the death of Princess Diana, was also moved to wax lyrical about his performances behind the wheel.

"I definitely feel like I have found more heart and passion within myself in the last three or four races," he said at Monza. "Silverstone was an empowering weekend and that has kind of sparked a forest fire in me and that is hopefully reflecting in my driving.

"While I feel like I always drive with my heart — my heart is really the engine, the power and the force behind what I do — my mind is like the rudder, and I feel like it has been steering me in the right direction."

Red Bull's Daniel Ricciardo will also approach the weekend with confidence after reaching the podium on his last three trips to Singapore.

"(It's) one of our best chances of a win in the second half of the season," said the Australian, who won in Azerbaijan and lies fourth in the standings.

'Honda committed to Formula One'

F1 boss tells spectacular S'pore to stay fresh

NFL Roundup



Green Bay Packers' Jordy Nelson catches a touchdown pass in front of Seattle Seahawks' Bobby Wagner during the second half of an NFL football game on Sept 10, in Green Bay, Wisconsin. (AP)

Bucs to host Bears

Packers claim top spot in AP Pro32 poll after Patriots' loss

NEW YORK, Sept 13, (Agencies): After the opening week of the NFL season, it's so easy to overreact, given such a small sample.

That's not an issue for the Green Bay Packers. They started the season last week at No. 2 in the first AP Pro32 poll and opened with a 17-9 win over the Seattle Seahawks.

And after the defending champion New England Patriots were routed in their opener, the Packers took advantage.

Green Bay grabbed the top spot in the latest AP Pro32 poll, which was released on Tuesday, receiving seven of 12 first-place votes for 376 points in balloting by media members who regularly cover the NFL.

In all, six teams received a first-place vote.

The Kansas City Chiefs earned one of those first-place votes to reach 367 points, jumping five places to No. 2 in the poll after opening the season with a 42-27 win against the Patriots.

Coach Andy Reid and the Chiefs will host the Philadelphia Eagles on Sunday. Reid coached the Eagles for 14 seasons and reached the playoffs nine times.

The Dallas Cowboys also earned a first-place vote and finished with 331 points, moving up five places to No. 3 after a 19-3 win over the rival New York Giants.

The Patriots fell from No. 1 to No. 4 and will look to rebound in New Orleans on Sunday against Drew Brees and the Saints.

New England also received a first-place vote and trails Dallas by only two points.

The Atlanta Falcons stayed at No. 5 and will open their new \$1.5 billion Mercedes-Benz Stadium when they host the Packers on Sunday night in a rematch of the NFC championship game.

The Oakland Raiders and Pittsburgh Steelers were tied at No. 6. Both received a first-place vote and have 327 points, trailing Atlanta by one.

Seattle, which lost to the Packers at Lambeau Field on Sunday, dropped five spots to No. 8.

The Minnesota Vikings moved up six spots to No. 9 after opening with a win against the Saints. Minnesota faces a test this week when it goes on the road to take on the Steelers.

The Carolina Panthers gained

three spots to round out the top 10.

Officials approved Raymond James Stadium for Week 2 and the NFL agreed the game between the Buccaneers and Chicago Bears will be played as scheduled Sunday in Tampa, Fla. The Bucs were still working through a bunch of logistical problems Monday.

Arizona Cardinals running back David Johnson will have surgery on his left wrist and is expected to be sidelined two to three months, multiple outlets reported on Tuesday.

The Cardinals placed Johnson on injured reserve, but with a chance to return this season.

Houston Texans defensive end J.J. Watt isn't going to let a little thing like a finger injury slow him down, even if that injury reportedly dealt with a bone breaking through the skin. When asked about his condition, Watt told the team's website on Tuesday that he was fine.

"It's inside my body, so it's still attached," the three-time NFL Defensive Player of the Year said.

The Los Angeles Rams signed punter Johnny Hekker to a two-year contract extension, the team announced.

Hekker, who initially signed a six-year extension in 2014, will remain with the team through the 2022 season. The deal gives the 27-year-old \$10 million guaranteed, the most ever for a punter, ESPN's Adam Schefter reported.

New Orleans right tackle Zach Strief is expected to be sidelined a few weeks after sustaining an MCL sprain in his left knee during Monday's 29-19 loss to the Minnesota Vikings, according to multiple reports.

An MCL sprain typically is a four-week injury, which means Strief could be sidelined through the team's Week 5 bye.

The Philadelphia Eagles will sign rookie Jake Elliott off the Cincinnati Bengals' practice squad to replace fellow kicker Caleb Sturgis, according to NFL Network's Ian Rapoport on Tuesday.

Rapoport reported that Sturgis will be placed on injured reserve/designation to return after the kicker sustained a hip flexor injury in Philadelphia's season-opening 30-17 victory over the Washington Redskins on Sunday.

SINGAPORE, Sept 13, (AFP): Formula One chief Chase Carey challenged the "spectacular" Singapore Grand Prix to keep improving on Wednesday as he made positive noises about striking a new deal to retain the glittering night race.

Carey refused to discuss talks about the future of the street race, which snakes past the city's landmarks and skyscrapers and is in the final season of its second five-year contract.

But Carey, speaking at the All That Matters conference ahead of Sunday's Singapore Grand Prix, was highly complimentary of the event, suggesting that F1 is unwilling to let it go.

"I think it's great," the F1 chief executive and chairman said of Singapore, which was the first race he attended after America's Liberty Media sealed its deal to take over the sport last year.

"Last year was the first time I was here and I thought it was spectacular. You can never rest on your laurels, so I think you've got to continue to find ways to make it fresh, make it new, so I think we have to continue to work. If you're standing still, you're going backwards.

"But I think Singapore, with such a spectacular skyline and the setting for that race, I think is something that will always capture people's imagination."

Discussions over Singapore continue as the longstanding grand prix in neighbouring Malaysia, which has been cut for cost reasons, prepares for its final race in two weeks' time.

Carey said Singapore, which is known for its pop concerts and entertainment alongside the race, had been "ahead of the curve" in the drive to broaden the F1 experience beyond rac-

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ing. "We're actively engaged with our partners here. It's our goal to try and reach a new deal that enables us to continue. We're proud of the race here, we have a good relationship," he said.

"We haven't concluded a deal yet but we're having positive discussions and it's certainly our goal to try and reach a deal that works for both of us."

Carey said it was still "early days" for Liberty, which is setting about rebuilding Formula One after taking over from its flamboyant long-term ringmaster Bernie Ecclestone.

But he said China, which has a grand prix in Shanghai, was one area of focus as well as the United States. Liberty's plans include potentially forming American, European and Asian sections of the season.

"Everybody talks about China, and obviously China and the US are the ones that get singled out as big huge, markets where we really are at the very early stages of tapping into potential," Carey said.

However, Carey signalled there was unlikely to be any way back for the races in India and South Korea, which were both brokered by Ecclestone but foundered after just a few editions.

"We had a race in Korea, we had a race in India, but they were very much one-offs, deal of the day, as opposed to a commitment to really build and grow a sport," he said.

Carey added: "Bernie and I used to have debates. Bernie used to say the sport needs a dictator, I'd say I think it needs a leader."

Meanwhile, Formula One chief Chase Carey said on Wednesday he was confident that Honda was in F1 for the long haul as reports said McLaren was about to confirm its split with the Japanese engine-maker.

Carey met Honda executives at this month's Italian Grand Prix and said they seemed excited about the future of Formula One, despite the company's troubled return to the sport.

McLaren are strongly rumoured to be on the verge of going with Renault engines rather than Honda's, whose power units have been notoriously unreliable and under-powered.

Reports say the Japanese manufacturer, which returned to F1 in 2015, is about to join forces with Toro Rosso, the secondary team of multiple world champions Red Bull.

"Honda's a very important partner," Carey said at the All That Matters conference in Singapore, ahead of Sunday's grand prix in the city.



Los Angeles Sparks forward Candace Parker drives to the basket against Phoenix Mercury's Camille Little (20) and Brittney Griner (42) during the first half of a WNBA basketball playoff game, Sept 12, in Los Angeles. (AP)

Nneka helps Sparks beat Phoenix in playoff opener

Lynx roll to 101-81 win over Mystics

LOS ANGELES, Sept 13, (AP): Nneka Ogwumike scored 19 points to lead five starters in double figures, helping the Los Angeles Sparks opened defense of their WNBA championship with a 79-66 victory over the Phoenix Mercury on Tuesday night in Game 1 of the semifinals.

Candace Parker added 15 points while playing with five fouls. Ogwumike overcame four fouls. Chelsea Gray had 13 points, Odyssey Sims

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12 and Alana Beard 11. Leilani Mitchell led the Mercury with 19 points and made five 3-pointers, both career playoff highs. Brittney Griner added 18 points before fouling out with 4:44 left in the game. Diana Taurasi went 2 of 10 from the floor for a career playoff low six points.

After trailing much of the first half, the Sparks pulled away in the third quarter, outscoring Phoenix 14-6 to lead 56-48. Things got testy with 28 seconds left in the period. Phoenix's Emma Cannon and the Sparks' Essence Carson were called for double technicals after exchanging words. Before that, Phoenix's Camille Little was called for a blocking foul, with Parker on the floor with her legs in the air and her arms protecting her face. At Minneapolis, Seimone Augustus scored 24 points and Sylvia Fowles added 18 to help the Lynx roll to a 101-81 victory over the Mystics.

Augustus made 11 of 17 shots and the Lynx looked plenty sharp after a week off and playing in an unfamiliar arena. The Lynx will play all of their playoff games at the University of Minnesota's Williams Arena after playing the regular season at Xcel En-

Nets sign Zeller to multi-year deal

Lakers to retire Bryant's two jersey numbers in December

LOS ANGELES, Sept 13, (Agencies): The Los Angeles Lakers plan to retire the jersey numbers of Kobe Bryant on Dec 18 prior to the game against the Golden State Warriors. The team will retire both of Bryant's numbers. Bryant wore both No. 8 and No. 24 during his 20 seasons with the Lakers.

Bryant, an 18-time All-Star who won five NBA titles with the Lakers, retired following the 2015-16 campaign. He wore No. 8 for his first 10 seasons before

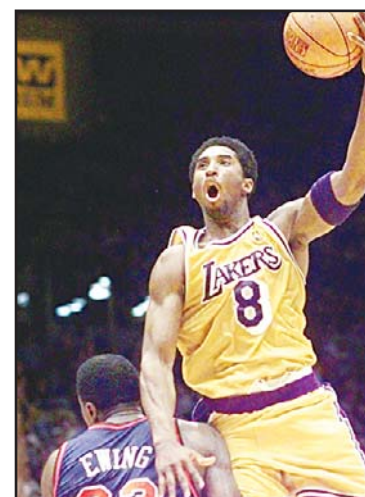
switching to No. 24.

The Brooklyn Nets added some toughness to the frontcourt by signing veteran center Tyler Zeller to a multi-year contract. Terms of the deal were not disclosed. Zeller, 27, spent the past three seasons with the Boston Celtics and averaged 3.5 points and 2.4 rebounds in 2016-17. In five seasons with the Cleveland Cavaliers and Celtics, Zeller is averaging 7.0 points on 49.9 percent shooting and 4.4 rebounds.

The Detroit Pistons signed guard Dwight Buycks to a two-way contract. Buycks spent the past two seasons with the Fujian Sturgeons of the Chinese Basketball Association, and averaged over 25 points in each campaign. The Marquette product averaged 4.8 points, 1.8 rebounds and 1.2 assists in 20 career NBA games with the Toronto Raptors and Los Angeles Lakers.

As the NBA joins sports leagues around the world in allowing sponsors' names on jerseys, the Golden State Warriors have inked a logo deal with Rakuten worth a reported \$60 million (\$50 million euros) over three years.

The deal with the reigning NBA champions is just one of the sports sponsorships pursued by Rakuten, the Japanese e-commerce giant whose logo now graces the FC Barcelona kit.



In this Marcy 28, 1999 file photo, Los Angeles Lakers' Kobe Bryant shoots over New York Knicks' Patrick Ewing during the first half of an NBA basketball game in Inglewood, Calif. (AP)

ergy Center, home of the Minnesota Wild.

Elena Delle Donne had 17 points for the Mystics, who had a quick turnaround after beating the Liberty in New

York on Sunday. After setting a playoff record with nine 3-pointers in the victory over New York on Sunday, Mystics guard Kristi Toliver scored just three points on 1-for-7 shooting.