

## Verstappen plays down chances at speedy Silverstone

## Hamilton says Mercedes are ready to roar back

SILVERSTONE, United Kingdom, July 5. (AFP): Lewis Hamilton believes his Mercedes team are stronger than ever and ready to bounce back from the debacle of a double retirement at last weekend's French Grand Prix.

The defending four-time world champion's run of 33 points finishes ended at Le Castellet, where Mercedes team-mate Valtteri Bottas also fell by the roadside, but on Thursday Hamilton oozed confidence ahead of his home British Grand Prix.

"Obviously it was a difficult weekend and we wished it had not been that way, but, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger and the spirit in the team is stronger than it has ever been," he said.

"We are really more united than ever and there is a great energy in the team. We are closer and we are stronger and we have some fixes already here on the cars (for the reliability issue).

"The team are right on it and I am confident we have done all we can to make sure it doesn't happen again."

The Briton added that he felt excited to be racing again just a few days after

his French flop and forecast record fastest laps around the high-speed Silverstone track this weekend.

"I felt OK after the race in France," he said. "Ultimately, I look at the positives and it reminds me how passionate I am and everyone in the team felt the same thing."

"We really win and lose as a team and we are really reunited now in the last few days and I can see how energised everyone is to be back. The confidence and the will to win is still

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there. "And it is mind blowing to me how quick they are to react and to produce things and so I am excited to get in the car tomorrow."

Hamilton trails German Sebastian Vettel of Ferrari by one point in the drivers' title race as the two men, both seeking a fifth championship, arrive at Silverstone where the Englishman seeks a record fifth consecutive win and sixth overall.

He said that regaining the lead in the



Mercedes driver Lewis Hamilton of Britain, (center), looks to Sauber driver Charles Leclerc of Monaco (right), as Red Bull driver Max Verstappen of The Netherlands is in background during the news conference at the Silverstone racetrack, Silverstone, England on July 5. (AP)

drivers' standings at Silverstone, in front of what has developed into a partisan and passionate home crowd

for him, would "be great" but added that, when it came to taking first place, "anywhere is good ..."

"I have been on an incredible journey since 2007," he said. "And I am grateful and I am privileged to be in a position to be here going for a sixth win at Silverstone where the support is so special."

The support for Max (Verstappen) is close, but we don't have a Dutch Grand Prix! So I hope I can deliver and be on form."

Hamilton also brushed aside concerns about reliability and strategy problems.

"It's natural because we are all humans and everyone in the team has it in the back of their mind, there is a nervousness, but for me, as a driver, an athlete and a competitor - I can't let it interfere with my mentality or my weekend."

"You can never predict it and it's not going to get in my way and I think that is the same for the rest of the team."

He conceded that the heatwave in Britain may affect tyre wear, but also forecast that the cars would run flat out through more corners and "for sure, it will be the fastest we have ever driven here - it will be fun."

Meanwhile, fresh from his opportunistic triumph at last weekend's Austrian Grand Prix, Max Verstappen said Thursday that he has little hope of a repeat at Silverstone.

The Dutchman said the circuit does not suit his Red Bull car, because of the high-speed corners - some of which are likely to be taken flat out this year.

"Here at Silverstone, some of the corners have become flat out and so that makes it a 'double straight' and

that's painful for us. "I think we have the best chassis, but we are not going to be super-competitive here. Copse, for example, is flat and that is a shame for us."

He added that Red Bull's inconsistency, because their car is better suited to technical "aero" circuits than fast high-power tracks, meant he was not a real contender for the drivers' championship.



Vettel



Four-time Tour de France cycling race winner Chris Froome of Britain (third from left), and his Sky teammates ride during a training near Saint-Mars-la-Reorthe, Vendée region, France on July 5, ahead of upcoming Saturday's start of the race. (AP)

## Porte plots place on podium

## Relieved Froome says ready to focus on Tour de France

LA ROCHE-SUR-YON, France, July 5. (Agencies): Defending champion Chris Froome said he was relieved to be able to pursue a fifth Tour de France title after being cleared by cycling's governing body of any wrongdoing in a doping case.

On Monday, the case was dropped by UCI following an investigation after excessive levels of asthma drug Salbutamol was found in Froome's urine sample during last September's Vuelta a Espana.

Froome won the Giro d'Italia in May while the investigation was still going on, and the Tour organisers had sought to block his registration prior to the long-awaited verdict.

"Now I just want to draw a line in the sand and move on," the 33-year-old told a news conference. "My aim is to win and go for a Tour-Giro double."

"Doing the Tour de France and the Vuelta (a Espana) last year taught me an amazing amount about how to manage my training... But really I can't make a prediction about how it's going to go."

Froome believes he has nothing to fear from the French public, after UCI president David Lappartient called for a safe environment for the British rider during the race.

"I just raced the Giro in May with the Salbutamol thing hanging over me, and nothing happened there," Froome added.

"In terms of safety I obviously would encourage fans of the sport to come watch the race, and if you are not

necessarily a Chris Froome fan or a Sky fan, come to the race and put a jersey on of another team you do support. That would be my advice."

Team Sky boss Dave Brailsford praised Froome's strength of character during the doping investigation.

"Chris has shown great strength and integrity while also maintaining his form. He won the Giro under those conditions," he said.

"This is not the first time where there has been this feeling (against the team). We have to focus on our race."

The 105th edition of the Tour begins in Noirmoutier-en-l'Île on Saturday.

Australia's Richie Porte knows the clock is ticking down on his cycling career but is confident he and his BMC team can deliver at least one podium

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spot on the 2018 Tour de France.

As lieutenant at Sky for both Bradley Wiggins and Chris Froome in the past, Porte, 33 and with just a fifth placed Tour finish to his name, is hoping to get a head-start on his rivals for a result his fans believe he deserves.

"We have the horsepower to get us through the first week," said Porte in reference to the expected windswept Western France section of the Tour that starts Saturday and needs the stronger, bigger riders.

"In the team time-trial on stage three we have Stefan Kung to lead us out and we can take time off our rivals there," said Porte, who may find he or a teammate in the coveted leader's yellow jersey at that stage. If so, he intends to hold on to it.

"I don't think however that there is one, single clear favourite this year," he said.



Porte

## Zaman's career-best 73 sparks Pakistan to win over Australia

Tourists complete clinical 45-run victory in T20 Tri-Series

HARARE, July 5, (AFP): Pakistan's opener Fakhar Zaman blazed his way to a career-best 73 as his side completed a clinical 45-run victory over Australia on Thursday in the Twenty20 Tri-Series in Zimbabwe.

Zaman's knock helped his side race to 194 for 7 before left-arm seamer Shaheen Afridi starred with three wickets as Pakistan's bowlers held Australia to 149 for 7 in a match which was effectively a dress rehearsal for Sunday's final.

Australian seamer Andrew Tye admitted his disappointment after the loss.

"We were just well off the mark today in all aspects," said Tye.

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"With the bat, the ball and in the field we were a bit sloppy. We definitely expect more from ourselves."

Pakistan had lost Haris Sohail for a golden duck after being put in to bat on a chilly midwinter morning in Harare, but Zaman and Hussain Talat wrested back control back with a rapid 72-run stand.

Talat cracked three fours and a six before playing one shot too many to be bowled by Glenn Maxwell's offspin.

Zaman continued to middle his aggressive strokes and went to a 33-ball 50, his third for Pakistan in this format, with a slog sweep for six, while another big hit off Tye's seamers took the batsman past his previous best of 61.

An edged four took Pakistan beyond 130, and Zaman into the 70s, in the 15th over, but he pulled the next ball he faced straight to Maxwell on the edge of the circle at midwicket.

The quick dismissal of captain Sarfraz Ahmed, edging a Tye legcutter into the hands of wick-



Pakistan batsman Fakhar Zaman plays a shot during the fifth T20 cricket match between Pakistan and Australia of a T20 tri-series including host nation Zimbabwe at The Harare Sports Club in Harare on July 5. (AFP)

etkeeper Alex Carey, put a further dent in Pakistan's batting, but the experienced Shoaib Malik ensured that the runs kept flowing.

He hit 15 off the 17th over, bowled by Marcus Stoinis, boosting Pakistan beyond 150. After he fell, Asif Ali struck three fours and two sixes in an unbeaten 37 to keep the pressure on Australia right to the end of the innings.

"We didn't execute our plans very well," said Tye.

"We probably set our fields a bit wrong at times as well. They knew what we were going to come out and do and they attacked us pretty hard at the start. Once they got away, we found it hard to bring it back."

Pakistan kept up the pressure with the ball, with Afridi taking the vital early wicket of Aaron Finch when the Australian cap-

tain had made just 16.

Bowling from the Golf Course End, Afridi swung and seamed the ball prodigiously to trouble



Australia bowler Billy Stanlake delivers the ball during the fifth T20 cricket match between Pakistan and Australia, one of a T20 Tri-Series including host nation Zimbabwe, at The Harare Sports Club in Harare on July 5. (AFP)

the batsmen.

He trapped Glenn Maxwell lbw, and then rattled D'Arcy Short's stumps as Australia slipped to 75 for 5.

"Since yesterday I've been planning on getting (Finch and Maxwell's) wickets, and trying to work out how to get them early," Afridi said after his second international match for Pakistan.

"I think (Australia's bowlers) didn't take advantage of the pitch. The ball was seaming around a lot, and that's why we pitched it up when we bowled."

Australia's chase never recovered from the early losses, with the rest of Pakistan's attack chipping in with wickets in a much-improved performance.

The two teams will meet again in Sunday's final, and Afridi lined up Finch as a key wicket in that game.

"Finch is their main batsman and he's playing really well, so I'll focus particularly on trying to get him early on Sunday," he said.

## Chandimal named in Sri Lanka Test squad despite suspension threat

## Prolific opener Markram ready for new challenge

COLOMBO, July 5, (RTRS): Opener Aiden Markram is looking forward the challenge of his maiden Test series outside of South Africa as well as the return of seamer Dale Steyn as the Proteas prepare for the first Test of the two-match series against Sri Lanka in Galle on July 12.

Markram has scored exactly 1,000 runs at an average of 55.55 in his first 10 tests, all at home, as he helped South Africa to series successes against India and Australia earlier in the year.

But on lower, slower turning wickets in Sri Lanka, he admits it will be an altogether new challenge.

"I would like to do well this tour because it is outside of South Africa. You don't want to be labelled as a guy who only does well in home conditions," he told reporters on Thursday.

"We tried our best before we came here to simulate the conditions of how we think it is going to play."

"At home the wickets do get lower in winter compared to summer, so that naturally helped us. And then we batted in different creases, worn-out creased and that kind of thing, to try and simulate some spin."

Seamer Steyn returns to the squad after two years of injury setbacks and finds himself three short of breaking a 11-r-o-u-n-d-e-r Shaun Pollock's South African record of 421 Test wickets.

Markram says that while it is a major milestone for one of cricket's great fast bowlers, it has not been a topic of discussion in the camp.

"Dale in any conditions is great to have back in the camp. He brings a wealth of knowledge, a good energy and a buzz to the side. With ball in

hand he is one of the best in the world," Markram said.

Sri Lanka captain Dinesh Chandimal has named in the squad for the two-Test series against South Africa, even though he may be unavailable due to suspension.

Chandimal, coach Chandika Hathurusingha and manager Asanka Gurusinha have admitted breaching the International Cricket Council's (ICC) code of conduct after the team delayed play during the sec-

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ond Test against the West Indies last month.

The minimum punishment for the offence is suspension from two tests for Chandimal, with the hearing due to be held on Tuesday - two days before the start of the first Test against the Proteas.

Sri Lanka have also included

Rangana Herath and Kusal Perera in the 16-man squad but their participation is subject to fitness.

Spinner Herath split the webbing on his bowling hand ahead of the third Test against the Windies, while Perera collided with a boundary hoarding during the final Test on the tour.

All-rounder Angelo Mathews has returned to the squad after he left the West Indies tour to attend the birth of his second child.

Sri Lanka will host the first Test in Galle which begins on July 12, before moving to Colombo for the second Test from July 20.

**Full squad:** Dinesh Chandimal (captain), Angelo Mathews, Dimuth Karunaratne, Kusal Mendis, Kusal Perera (subject to fitness), Danushka Gunathilaka, Dhananaya de Silva, Roshan Silva, Niroshan Dickwella, Rangana Herath (subject to fitness), Suranga Lakmal, Dilruwan Perera, Akila Dananjaya, Lahiru Kumara, Lakshan Sandakan, Kasun Rajitha.

## Pakistan vs Australia Scoreboard

HARARE, July 5, (AFP): Scoreboard in the Twenty20 international between Pakistan and Australia at Harare Sports Club on Thursday:

PAKISTAN	
F. Zaman c Maxwell b Stoinis	73
H. Sohail c Short b Richardson	0
H. Talat b Maxwell	30
S. Ahmed c Carey b Tye	14
S. Malik c Finch b Tye	27
A. Ali not out	37
F. Ashraf c Maxwell b Richardson	0
S. Khan c Stoinis b Tye	7
M. Amir not out	0
Extras (w6)	6
Total (7 wks, 20 overs)	194
Did not bat: U Khan, S Afridi	
Fall of wickets: 1-8 (Sohail), 2-80 (Talat), 3-107 (Ahmed), 4-132 (Zaman), 5-158 (Malik), 6-176 (Ashraf), 7-190 (Khan)	
Bowling: Stanlake 4-0-30-7; Richardson 4-0-43-2 (3w); Tye 4-0-35-3 (1w); Stoinis 3-0-29-1 (1w); Maxwell 3-0-30-1; Agar 2-0-27-0	
AUSTRALIA	
D. Short b Afridi	28

A. Finch c Ahmed b Afridi	16
T. Head b Ashraf	7
G. Maxwell lbw Afridi	10
N. Maddinson st Ahmed b Khan	5
M. Stoinis c Ali b U Khan	16
A. Carey not out	37
A. Agar b Amir	11
A. Tye not out	12
Extras (lb5, w2)	7
Total (7 wks, 20 overs)	149
Did not bat: J Richardson, B Stanlake	
Fall of wickets: 1-29 (Finch), 2-38 (Head), 3-49 (Maxwell), 4-67 (Maddinson), 5-75 (Short), 6-106 (Stoinis), 7-131 (Agar)	
Bowling: Amir 4-0-25-1; Ashraf 4-0-30-1; Afridi 4-0-37-3 (1w); S Khan 4-0-26-1; U Khan 4-0-26-1 (1w)	
Result: Pakistan won by 45 runs	
Toss: Australia	
Umpires: Russell Tiffin (ZIM), Langton Rusere (ZIM)	
TV umpire: Jeremiah Matibiri (ZIM)	
Match referee: Jeff Crowe (NZ)	