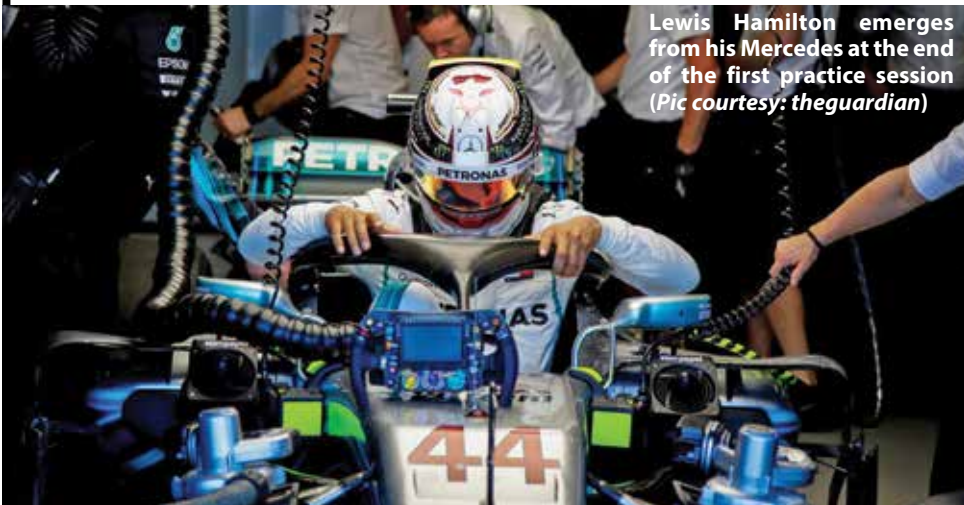


Hamilton fastest in practice



Lewis Hamilton emerges from his Mercedes at the end of the first practice session (Pic courtesy: theguardian)



Lewis Hamilton sets the pace in practice at Albert Park (Pic courtesy: theguardian)

Melbourne

Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton topped the timesheets for Mercedes in both practice sessions at the Australian Grand Prix yesterday but Red Bull's Max Verstappen showed enough pace to give the Silver Arrows pause for thought.

After lapping Albert Park in one minute, 24.026 seconds to dominate the first practice

of the new season, Hamilton improved the mark slightly to 1:23.931 in the second session on a balmy autumn day.

"The car is quicker here than it was last year, so it feels better everywhere," the four-times champion told reporters.

"It closed up a little bit in FP2 in terms of the gap between us all, but that's exciting. It's more challenging

for me to try and eke out a little more from the car."

Red Bull's Dutch wunderkind Verstappen was snapping at his heels, however, finishing only 0.127 seconds adrift of the Briton after the second session.

Raising hopes of a contest for Mercedes, who have swept the driver and constructors' titles for the past four years, there was less than three-

tenths of a second separating the champions from the Red Bull and Ferrari cars.

Verstappen sandwiched himself between the Mercedes drivers, with Hamilton's team mate Valtteri Bottas third quickest despite taking a couple of slides off the track.

"That's what I call a positive start to the season," Verstappen tweeted. "The

car handled well and I'm happy with today."

Fourth in FP2, Kimi Raikkonen showed why Ferrari may also be in the hunt for Sunday's race but he will have to face the stewards after allegedly impeding fellow Finn Bottas, who nearly rammed into his rear and ended up in the gravel.

It was a tougher day for Raikkonen's four-times

champion team mate Sebastian Vettel, who was more than a half-second off the pace in FP2 down in fifth position, a disappointing run he later downplayed.

"We still have quite a lot of performance in hand. I am not too worried because I know if I get everything right we should be in better shape," the German told reporters. (Reuters)

Bolt on target in Dortmund training

Dortmund

Multiple Olympic sprint champion Usain Bolt had the chance to show off his football skills yesterday, nutmegging an opponent and scoring with a header as he trained with Borussia Dortmund in front of a cheering crowd.

Some 1,500 people were in the stands of Dortmund's training ground in the

suburb of Brackel for the morning session and dozens of reporters and camera crews were spread along the sideline as Bolt entered the pitch alongside players Mario Goetze and Julian Weigl.

Bolt, who also trained with the team behind closed doors on Thursday afternoon, warmed up with the Dortmund players as fans, some waving Jamaica flags, cheered on a

chilly and overcast Ruhr valley morning.

Bolt, playing alongside World Cup winner Goetze and U.S. international Christian Pulisic, then delighted his supporters as he nutmegged an opponent, knocking the ball through his legs, and scored with a fine header as coach Peter Stoeger gave him a thumbs-up.

"It was good. I had fun with

the guys and they were very welcoming," Bolt, who signed dozens of autographs, told reporters after his one-hour workout.

Dortmund, who are not in action until March 31 due to the international break, share the same sponsor, Puma, as Bolt, and had agreed in January to let the retired athlete train with the team. (Reuters)



Usain Bolt delights fans by scoring in Dortmund training (Pic courtesy: AP)

Ibrahimovic move announced via advert

London

Zlatan Ibrahimovic was described by LA Galaxy as "one of the winningest players of all time" after completing a move to the Major League Soccer club.

Ibrahimovic's signing was announced in an advert in the LA Times, with Galaxy later officially confirming the deal.

The full-page advert in Friday's edition of the newspaper had a message from the Swedish striker, 36, saying: "Dear Los Angeles, you're welcome."

LA Galaxy boss Sigi Schmid said: "He'll have a very positive impact."

He added: "Adding one of the finest goal scorers in this sport's history to our roster will tremendously help our club in

the hunt for a sixth MLS Cup, "As one of the winningest players of all time, we are confident that Zlatan can be one of the most dangerous strikers in our league."

Ibrahimovic arrives on a free transfer following the mutual termination of his contract with Manchester United on Thursday.

His contract at United was due to expire in the summer after 20 months at the club.

In an interview with the LA Times on Thursday, Ibrahimovic was asked if Los Angeles was big enough to handle his personality, to which he replied: "If it's not, I'll make it bigger."

When he arrived at United, he had said: "I'll be the God of Manchester." (BBC)



Zlatan Ibrahimovic