

'Changed' Hamilton is now a team player

Monaco

Mercedes boss Toto Wolff believes Lewis Hamilton has changed from being a loner to become a true team player this year – and hopes that it will boost his hopes of taking pole in Monaco.

As the Formula One paddock took advantage of Friday's traditional rest day in Monte Carlo, Mercedes were busy seeking solutions to the set-up problems that saw three-time champion Hamilton fall a second behind championship leader Sebastian Vettel in Thursday afternoon's second practice.

Ferrari were doing the same to ensure their advantage was consolidated with four-time champion Vettel forecasting a major fight-back from the champions.

"I am not counting out Mercedes," he said. "They probably had a problem and I am sure they will be back to full force on Saturday."

"There is plenty of time for them to sort things out. My guess is that it will be very close -- and that the five-tenths we are ahead of Red Bull is not the reality."

"We have been able to put it together on Thursday and I am happy about that. It was a good start into the weekend -- now let's let that sink in and see that we keep the tension until Sunday."

Vettel added that he was wary of saying he felt like the favourite.

"We have to get everything right and then we should be in good shape, but here you are not entirely the master of your own fate and so many things can happen in a long race."

"We have seen that many times before, so let's keep the fingers crossed."

Vettel also made clear he believed it was time for Ferrari to win again in Monaco after a 16-year spell since 2001.

"Monaco is always special -- if you

could have the freedom to choose any race on the calendar that you would want to win, it would be without doubt be Monaco...

"You can ask up and down the paddock and you would get the same answer. I would say it is about time that Ferrari wins again here."

Wolff revealed that the abrupt retirement of 2016 champion German Nico Rosberg has led to a new unity at Mercedes with his replacement Finn Valtteri Bottas working more closely with Hamilton.

"Nico played a fundamental role in our car development," he said. "His head worked like an engineer, but with Valtteri, we have found the best possible substitute."

"The dynamics in the team have changed completely. With Lewis and Nico, we went through different phases, from friendship to rivalry to hostility and arrogance."

"But with Valtteri and Lewis, there is zero controversy."

Wolff said that mutual respect had brought a new mood inside the team.

"I think Lewis changed over the winter. He went from a loner to a true team player." (AFP)

British Formula One driver Lewis Hamilton arrives for the amFAR's 24th Cinema Against AIDS Gala



'I'm the favourite? I don't care', says Nadal

Paris

Rafael Nadal insisted yesterday that he didn't care if he was regarded as the favourite for a 10th French Open, even if his rivals begged to differ.

"100% he's the big favourite," said Austrian star Dominic Thiem, one of the support cast waiting in the wings should the great Spaniard slip up.

"Of course I think he's back at his best this year, and then also he won here nine times. So he knows how it works to win here."

"I think he will try everything to win Le Décima, I think it will be very unique in tennis to win a Grand Slam title ten times. It's pretty crazy, I guess."

So 100% he's the one to beat and the big favourite."

Thiem, the 23-year-old world number nine, has already faced Nadal three times on clay this spring -- losing in the finals in Barcelona and Madrid before gaining revenge in the quarter-finals in Rome.

It's that kind of surprising setback -- Nadal's only loss on clay this year -- that has the 30-year-old Spaniard eager to calm the mood.

However, with defending champion Novak Djokovic and world number one Andy Murray both struggling for consistency, it appears to be a thankless task.

"You have to write what you



Rafael Nadal of Spain have to do, but I don't care," said Nadal.

"At the end of the day for me the only important thing is arrive here, play well. If I am playing well, doesn't matter if you believe or you don't believe that I am one of the candidates or not."

"The only way to have chances, real chances to play good event is play very well, be healthy, and then be with the right attitude in every practice and in every match, no?"

Nadal, who was forced to withdraw from last year's Roland Garros with a wrist injury after two rounds, has already reached the magical 10 titles number this year at the claycourt events in Monte Carlo and Barcelona.

Rooney close to decision on future

Stockholm

England and Manchester United's record goalscorer Wayne Rooney says he is just weeks away from revealing where he will be playing next season.

The 31-year-old's future at the club, where he has spent the past 13 years, and his country, is the subject of intense debate which intensified on Thursday when he was left out of the national squad.

"I've got decisions to make now over the next few weeks, have a word with my family, and then I'll decide," Rooney said after United ensured Champions League football next season with a 2-0 win over Dutch side Ajax in the Europa League final on Wednesday.

"I think I just have to make a decision in terms of a football decision, and that's what I'll do."

"I'll do that the next few weeks with my family while I'm away and, honestly, as soon as I know what's going on then, I'm sure you (will know)."

Rooney, who says he has no end of offers both in England and abroad with China often being mooted as a possible destination, says ultimately the decision could come down to whether he is satisfied with a bit part role at United or having regular

first team football.

"I think a younger me would have been a lot more frustrated," said Rooney of his limited playing time under Jose Mourinho at United.

"Obviously happy to be part of that and in some way help the club win trophies, and that's the way it's been over the last 18 months, last year, and that's a decision I have to make now, whether I want to continue doing that or go on and play more regular football."



Manchester United's English striker Wayne Rooney