

# Hami, Mercedes dominate season-opening practice

Lewis Hamilton tops times ahead of Mercedes team-mate Valtteri Bottas at season-opening Austrian Grand Prix

AFP | Spielberg, Austria

Lewis Hamilton began his quest for a record-equaling seventh world title by topping the times yesterday as Formula One roared back with a full day's practice for the belated season-opening Austrian Grand Prix.

Three months after the cancelled traditional curtain-raiser in Australia and six months on from the last race, it was business as usual from the dominant 'black arrows' Mercedes men with Valtteri Bottas next fastest as the sport re-started after its longest off-season.

Hamilton, in commanding form in both the morning and afternoon sessions, was quickest in one minute and 4.304 seconds to lead Bottas by 0.197 seconds and third-placed Sergio Perez, in Racing Point's pink Mercedes, by 0.657.

Sebastian Vettel, in his last season with Ferrari, was fourth for the Italian outfit ahead of McLaren-bound Daniel Ricciardo of Renault and Lando Norris of McLaren.

Lance Stroll, in the second Racing Point car, modelled on the hugely-successful 2019 title-winning Mercedes, was seventh ahead of Red Bull's Max Verstappen, Charles Leclerc in the second Ferrari and his future team-mate Carlos Sainz of McLaren.

The long-awaited track ac-



Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton during practice

tion brought an end to Formula One's longest break following the lifting of lockdown restrictions in Europe caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Hamilton, who has been an outspoken supporter of the campaign for equality and diversity since the death of American George Floyd last month, revealed a statement 'Black Lives Matter' helmet before climbing into his Mercedes.

His Mercedes W11 car was also running in revised new black livery, instead of the team's traditional silver, with a message to 'End Racism' on the halo.

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LEWIS HAMILTON

for the car, for the (driver) suit change and I have also designed my helmet in black," said Hamilton, speaking on a video released on social media.

"Normally, my helmet is white, my suit is white and ob-

viously the car is in silver. This is why - it's the whole reason that the helmet has changed its colour and the suit and the car.

"It's supporting equality, above all, and just really continuing to solidify that important message as we currently have 'the mic' and people are starting to listen. So, it's an opportunity to push that message and really hold people accountable.

"It's not good enough, even if someone says to you 'we've been doing something' or 'we've been trying'. They need to try harder because it is still a big issue that the world is fighting 60 years later, after Martin Luther King was fighting for it and gave his life."

Zidane wants Messi to stay in Spain despite Barca exit claims



Barcelona's Argentine forward Lionel Messi (L) walks past Real Madrid's French coach Zinedine Zidane (file photo)

AFP | Madrid

Lionel Messi was reported on Thursday to be planning to leave Barcelona in 2021, but Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane was hoping the Argentine maestro will stay in Spain.

Messi's current contract expires next year and he has halted negotiations due to frustrations with the direction of the club, said Spanish radio station Cadena Ser.

Barca sit second in La Liga with five games left, four points behind Real Madrid, who edged past Getafe 1-0 on Thursday to put the title within their grasp.

"I don't know what will happen but we hope not because he is in this league and we want the best in this league," said Real coach Zidane afterwards, when asked about the possibility of Messi leaving.

Messi said in February he did not believe Barcelona could win the Champions League on current form.

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Barcelona's presidential elections are due to be held in 2021, when current president Josep Maria Bartomeu will have to step aside.

Among those set to run against Bartomeu's successor is Victor Font, who wants to appoint Messi's former teammate Xavi Hernandez as coach.

## Quintana hit by car on training ride in Colombia

AFP | Bogota

Colombian Tour de France hopeful Nairo Quintana was knocked down by a car in central Colombia, a local town hall said on its Twitter account.

The 30-year-old winner of two Grand Tours complained of "pain in one knee" and "scratches on an elbow", Mery Mozo, the mayor of the Motavita municipality, told Blu Radio.

The accident occurred on Thursday when "a driver performed an improper manoeuvre and hit him," added the town hall.

The town hall posted pictures of Quintana sitting on a plastic chair by the side of the road, talking to the mayor and police, with his brother and Arkea-Samsic teammate Dayer alongside him seemingly unhurt.

There were no visible injuries to Quintana, who was wearing a scarf over his face in one picture, but he was wearing a brace on his left knee.

The mayor said the car tried to get away but was blocked by Quintana's entourage.



Nairo Quintana

Quintana -- the winner of the Giro d'Italia in 2014 and Vuelta a Espana two years later -- was taken to his home in Boyaca, where he received medical attention.

The diminutive climber is training in the mountains in his homeland ahead of the August restart to the cycling calendar.

Quintana was in fine form for his new team before the season was suspended in March, winning two minor French stage races and the final stage of the prestigious Paris-Nice.

He has finished on the podium three times at the Tour de France but compatriot Egan Bernal last year became the first South American to win the Grand Boucle, cycling's most prestigious race.

## Klopp and Guardiola defend Liverpool's attitude after 4-0 loss

AFP | London

Juergen Klopp and Pep Guardiola insisted that Liverpool had been fully focused and hadn't taken their foot off the gas, despite Manchester City's comfortable 4-0 win over the newly crowned champions at the Etihad on Thursday.

City looked sharper and hungrier for most of the game, taking a 3-0 lead by half-time, while Klopp's Liverpool were well below their usual levels of intensity.

Liverpool had previously lost only one league game this season, leading some observers to suggest last week's title win - their first in 30 years - and subsequent celebrations had affected play on Thursday.

But manager Klopp was having none of it.

"If you want to lead this story in the direction that we're not focused, then do it," Klopp said. "I liked my teams' attitude - I saw a brilliant attitude - I saw boys who were fighting with all they have.

"It has nothing to do with last week, to be honest. It hurts like defeats hurt. What I wanted to



Manchester City's Spanish manager Pep Guardiola and Liverpool's German manager Jurgen Klopp (L) embrace after the match

see tonight was a team who is ready to fight against Man City, who obviously had a point to prove," the German said.

"If there is a team in the world that can smash us like this, it is probably City but we will come again. Make a few things better and it could look differently, but for tonight that is it," he added.

City manager Guardiola said there was no question of Liver-

pool having suffered any kind of 'hangover' from their title win. "I think they drank a lot of beer the last week, but they were here with no beer in their blood and to win this game," the Spaniard said.

"I saw a team with incredible focus, with energy and a desire to win the game, and I saw from the first minute they were focused to play hard," he added.

Lampard, Ancelotti call for VAR 'reflection'

AFP | London

Frank Lampard called for a "big reflection" on VAR at the end of the season after another controversial incident involving the technology in the midweek Premier League fixtures.

Tottenham were controversially denied an equaliser against Sheffield United on Thursday when Harry Kane's goal was chalked off for a dubious handball against Lucas Moura.

In a Premier League season marred by debatable calls, Spurs boss Jose Mourinho, whose side lost 3-1, said he feared for the future of football if the system were not addressed.

Chelsea boss Lampard, who played under Mourinho as a player at Stamford Bridge, said the goal should have stood.

"It was certainly one where common sense could have been involved but if the rule book states something, then the handball is given," he told reporters yesterday.