

Leclerc aims for a first in a thousand

Young star Charles Leclerc eyes victory in Formula One's 1,000th race

AFP | Shanghai, China

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc is gunning for his first win this week in China after cruelly missing out in Bahrain as Formula One's 1,000th race coincides with the emergence of a bright new star.

The supremely talented 21-year-old upstaged five-time world champion Lewis Hamilton in Bahrain but ultimately limped home third when his Ferrari lost power with 10 laps left.

The Chinese Grand Prix is replete with sub-plots: can Hamilton win the race for a sixth time? Can Sebastian Vettel silence the doubters? How much faster are Ferrari?

But the focus in Shanghai will be on Leclerc, the Ferrari rookie from Monaco who fully deserved victory two weeks ago but had to settle for the first podium of his career.

In just his second season in F1, it is widely assumed that it is just a matter of time until Leclerc tastes victory.

"Usually the Chinese race is good fun because the weather can be unpredictable and rain can arrive when you least expect it," said Leclerc.

"It's the 1,000th race in the



Ferrari's Monegasque driver Charles Leclerc celebrates on the podium after placing third at Bahrain Grand Prix

history of Formula One and I hope the car will be as good as it was in Bahrain (until late on) so that I can continue to go for the results we deserve."

Shanghai has one of the longest straights in the 21-race championship and should be perfect for Ferrari's searing pace, with reliability the main concern for the Italian marque.

While there has been fulsome praise of Leclerc, particularly the mature way he handled the Bahrain disappointment, his Ferrari team-mate Vettel is facing criticism.

It seems absurd for a four-time world champion to have to defend his ability and temperament, but the German is having to do just that after a series of

unforced errors stretching back to last season.

Former F1 driver Jolyon Palmer, who left Renault during the 2017 season, called Vettel's spin in Bahrain -- where he was dueling with Hamilton -- "amateur".

Vettel finished fifth and was comfortably eclipsed by Leclerc, who is a decade younger. "If a backmarker rookie had



It's the 1,000th race in the history of Formula One and I hope the car will be as good as it was in Bahrain (until late on) so that I can continue to go for the results we deserve

CHARLES LECLERC

spun in the manner Vettel did, it is easy to forget that Mercedes won the opening two races.

"For a four-time world champion to do so should be unthinkable."

'Daunting'

With all the talk about Ferrari, it is easy to forget that Mercedes won the opening two races.

Valtteri Bottas claimed a dominant victory in the season-opening Australian Grand Prix with world champion Hamilton second.

It was the other way round in Bahrain, leaving the Finn a point ahead of the Briton in the early drivers' standings after picking

up the fastest-lap bonus point in Melbourne.

However, Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff is under no illusions about the challenge posed by Ferrari.

"The truth is that we weren't as quick as our direct competitors throughout qualifying and the race in Bahrain," he said.

"The Ferrari was considerably faster on the straights and this added up to several tenths around one lap.

"Nevertheless, the saying goes that 'in order to finish first, first you have to finish'..."

"The challenge we are facing doesn't daunt us, it's uplifting," he added.

Being able to say they triumphed in the 1,000th race is added incentive for all drivers and teams.

F1's first championship race was at Silverstone, England, in 1950 and it says much about how the sport has grown that its milestone grand prix is in China.

The country, which has a swelling number of motor sport enthusiasts, is a key market for F1's US-based owners Liberty Media.

Liberty Media say they are interested in holding a second grand prix in the world's most populous country.

Liverpool cruise to victory over Porto

AFP | Liverpool

Liverpool closed in on a Champions League semi-final meeting with Barcelona or Manchester United after sweeping aside Porto 2-0 in the first leg of their quarter-final tie at Anfield.

Far from the late drama that has accompanied the Red's Premier League title bid of late, Naby Keita and Roberto Firmino struck inside the first 26 minutes to put the hosts in command.

"2-0 is a really good result, I would have taken it before the game and I take it now," said Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp.

"It was a good game, a controlled game. We deserved the win 100 percent and scored two wonderful goals."

Liverpool's only regret may be not building a more emphatic lead to take to Portugal for next week's second leg.

However, a fourth clean sheet in five home Champions League games this season means an away goal at the Estadio do Dragao on April 17th will leave Porto needing four to progress.

"We have to go there, we have to fight, Porto will do everything to strike back but that's how it should be in the Champions League quarter-finals," added Klopp.

Liverpool thrashed the Portuguese giants 5-0 in the first leg of their last-16 tie last season and the scoreline could have been just as embarrassing for Sergio Conceicao's men had the hosts been more accurate in front of goal.

It took the hosts just five minutes to open scoring as Keita got his second goal in as many games having waited nine months to open his account.



Naby Keita scores to put Liverpool in control and on their way to a 2-0 home victory over Porto



Liverpool had thrashed Porto 5-0 in the first leg of their last-16 tie last season

The Guinean got the benefit of a big deflection off Oliver Torres as his strike from the edge of the area left veteran goalkeeper Iker Casillas helpless.

Mohamed Salah ended his eight-game goal drought as Liverpool returned to the top of the Premier League table with a 3-1 win at Southampton on Friday, but the Egyptian got his angles wrong when he failed to double the hosts' lead with just Casillas to beat moments later.

Porto's slack defending

Conceicao was visibly furious with his side's slack defending, but Porto could easily have got back into the tie when Alisson Becker saved well with his feet from Moussa Marega.

Liverpool then had to survive a VAR review for a potential handball against Trent Alexander-Arnold as Alisson palmed the ball into his full-back.

Soon, though, Alexander-Arnold was helping twist the knife into Porto at the other end with his eighth assist of the season.

Jordan Henderson, playing in a more advanced midfield position than normal, cut the visitors' defence open for the England international to square for Firmino to tap into an empty net.

"Hendo is a brilliant player and I'm really happy he can show that again," said Klopp.

"He likes that position so it is my fault he played for one-

and-a-half years as the holding player, but we needed him there."

Only a matter of centimetres denied Liverpool a third early in the second half when another excellent Henderson allowed Sadio Mane to volley home, but the Senegalese was flagged offside.

The fine balance Liverpool must strike in maintaining their quest for European glory while also trying to end a 29-year wait for a league title was in evidence as Klopp withdrew Mane and Firmino in the final quarter with one eye on Sunday's Premier League visit of Chelsea.

However, that proved a luxury that Liverpool could afford to take as they look set for a second Champions League semi-final in as many years.

Kohli named among Wisden's Cricketers of the Year

AFP | London

Virat Kohli was yesterday named as one of Wisden's Five Cricketers of the Year and also became the first player to win the award for leading cricketer in the world in three successive years.

The India captain put to bed questions over his ability to thrive in English conditions last year, topping the Test run charts with 593 runs and two centuries even though his side lost the series 4-1.

Kohli, who is top of the Test and one-day international rankings, scored 2,735 runs in all formats in 2018, outstripping nearest rival, Eng-

land's Joe Root, by more than 700 runs.

"His struggles in English conditions were consigned to history, and Kohli banished any doubt about being regarded as the outstanding player of the era," Wisden said in a statement announcing its awards.

The other cricketers of the year were England's Sam Curran, Jos Buttler and Rory Burns, plus prolific England women's player Tammy Beaumont.

Players can only receive Wisden's cricketer of the year award, given primarily for feats achieved during the preceding English domestic season, once in their career.

Kohli was also named as the leading men's player in the world for a third straight year.

"In making hundreds in South Africa, England and Australia, as well as at

home, he showed a mastery of all conditions and bowling attacks," Wisden said. "The pressure never cowed him."

India's Smriti Mandhana scooped the women's award, with Afghanistan leg-spinner Rashid Khan retaining his title as leading Twenty20 cricketer in the world.

The latest edition of Wisden Cricketers' Almanack, considered the "Bible" of the game, is published on April 11.



Virat Kohli