

SPORTS

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Sebastian Vettel leads Charles Leclerc during the Russian Grand Prix

'It won't happen again' insist Ferrari's feuding drivers ahead of race

AFP | Suzuka, Japan

Squabbling teammates Sebastian Vettel and Charles Leclerc yesterday insisted "everything is clear now" with Ferrari team orders after their Russian Grand Prix debacle.

The Scuderia saw their race in Sochi fall apart handing Mercedes a one-two after a pre-arranged plan for Leclerc, who started from pole position, to "tow" Vettel into the lead unravelled when the German refused to give back the place before retiring with a mechanical problem.

Leclerc told reporters in Suzuka ahead of the weekend's typhoon-threatened Japanese Grand Prix that team principal Mattia Binotto had held talks with both drivers to iron out a "misunderstanding".

"Yeah, obviously there was some misunderstanding from the car but I think we've had a discussion and everything is clear now," said Leclerc.

"Obviously it felt like it was a huge deal from the outside, which it definitely wasn't, but yeah, now everything is fine." Vettel disobeyed team orders in Russia and Leclerc seemed to have a further dig at his teammate before trying, cryptically, to wriggle out of it.

"I think that's clear from the beginning of the season, we need to obey team orders," said the Monegasque.

"And what is clear is that the situation wasn't clear for both of the drivers, starting the race, and I think that's the most important.

"So we spoke about it and we'll make sure that this situation doesn't happen again in the future."

Vettel agreed with his teammate that relations between them and the team had been resolved but admitted: "There are certain things we could have done better."

"We spoke about it obviously, more than once," Vettel told reporters.

"We speak with each other. Maybe different to what some people think. But I think it's pretty clear. But in the end, we look forward and look forward to this race and the next races. So not worried too much."

Vettel shrugged off suggestions that Ferrari rookie Leclerc's recent electrifying pace, which has seen him win two races and top Vettel consistently in qualifying, had any bearing on what happened in Russia.

"Charles is doing a very good job, but I genuinely believe it's first a race against yourself and then the others," said Vettel.

Saturday's qualifying and practice have been put in doubt by the approach of Super Typhoon Hagibis, which has caused the cancellation of two Rugby World Cup games.

Japanese Grand Prix organisers will make a decision on Friday whether to move qualifying to Sunday morning, saying the safety of fans and drivers was their top priority.

"I think it's pretty clear if the typhoon is going to come here there's no way we can drive," said Leclerc.

High noon decision today on Japan GP qualifying

This year's qualifying on Saturday could be moved to Sunday as Typhoon Hagibis bears down on Japan

AFP | Tokyo

Japanese Grand Prix organisers will decide at noon today (0300 GMT) if the race weekend timetable, including Saturday qualifying, can go ahead as Super Typhoon Hagibis threatens the Suzuka circuit.

A spokesperson for the governing body FIA said yesterday that any decision to change the weekend programme rested with the local authorities in consultation with the FIA and Formula One.

The typhoon has already claimed casualties at the Rugby World Cup in Japan, with Saturday's England-France clash in Yokohama and the New Zealand-Italy match in Toyota City cancelled.

Two minor support races scheduled for Saturday at Suzuka have already been scrapped as a precaution.

Saturday's third free practice session and qualifying are likely to follow suit, but the volatile nature of Hagibis means even Sunday's race could be under threat, though the current forecast is for better weather that day.

Earlier, the FIA issued a statement saying the safety of fans and drivers would be the top priority as Hagibis -- classed as "violent" and the equivalent of a Category Five hurricane -- is predicted to make landfall near Tokyo on Saturday.

The latest forecasts for Saturday predict heavy rain and winds gusting in excess of 100 kilometres an hour to batter the Suzuka Circuit, which lies near the Honshu coast about 300 kilometres (180 miles) southwest of the capital.

"Every effort is being made to minimise disruption to the Formula 1 timetable, however, the safety of the fans, competitors and everyone at the Suzuka Cir-



Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton crosses the finish line to win the 2018 Japanese Grand Prix in Suzuka



In both 2004 and 2010, qualifying at Suzuka had to be postponed until Sunday morning before the race

cuit remains the top priority," said the FIA.

The qualifying session, originally scheduled to start at 3 pm Saturday (0600 GMT), determines the starting order for Sunday's race.

It leaves the organisers with two options to form the race grid.

They can either shift qualifying to Sunday morning, something that was done successfully at Suzuka in 2004 and 2010

because of bad weather, or they can use the timings of the drivers from Friday afternoon's second free practice to determine the starting order.

Whatever happens, a postponement of the grand prix to Monday is impossible, FIA said.

Safety first

After the tail-end of a typhoon affected the 2014 race at Suzuka, French driver Jules Bianchi crashed heavily after losing control in rain and poor visibility and died the following year from his injuries having never recovered from a coma.

Drivers yesterday backed changing the weekend timetable.

"I don't think anybody wants to put anybody's life in danger," said Ferrari's four-time world champion Sebastian Vettel.

"The decision is not for us, necessarily, because for us it's nice and easy, cosy, in the garage.

"But for the people out there around the track, it is not nice to

be sitting there with rain going sideways."

A blank Saturday would be a huge disappointment to thousands of fanatical supporters at one of the best-attended races on the circuit, but other drivers were prepared for the worst.

"I've got my speedboat on standby, so I'm ready," joked Red Bull's Max Verstappen.

"At the moment it doesn't look very likely. So we'll have a bit more free time on Saturday and it means waking up a little bit earlier on Sunday," he added.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc said he hoped the FIA would consult the drivers to decide if conditions were safe but thought it "would be pretty clear if we can't drive".

Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton crosses the finish line to win the 2018 Japanese Grand Prix in Suzuka. This year's qualifying on Saturday could be moved to Sunday as Typhoon Hagibis bears down on Japan.

Makeshift Germany held at home by Messi-less Argentina

AFP | Dortmund, Germany

An experimental Germany team leaked two second-half goals Wednesday as a weakened Argentina side, minus superstar Lionel Messi, earned a 2-2 draw in a friendly in Dortmund.

Germany flew into a 2-0 lead thanks to first-half goals by Serge Gnabry and Kai Havertz, but Lucas Alario turned the game in the second-half when he came on for Argentina.

The Leverkusen striker pulled a goal back, then set up Lucas Ocampos for the late equaliser against a German team which included four debutants.

Freiburg pair, defender Robin

Koch, a late call-up on Monday who was thrust into a makeshift back three at the last-minute, and striker Luca Waldschmidt started.

Leverkusen forward Nadiem Amiri and Schalke midfielder Suat Serdar came on to make their second-half debuts.

The Germans had already been forced into a hastily re-arranged defence as Koch replaced centre-back Niklas Stark, who pulled out before kick-off with a stomach bug.

Despite 13 withdrawals due to either illness or injury, Germany impressed early against an Argentina team missing Messi, Ser-



Argentina's forward Lucas Alario (R) scores a goal

gio Aguero and Angel di Maria. With Messi suspended for comments made at the Copa America, Juventus' Paulo Dybala partnered Lautaro Martinez up front for Argentina.

"We matured during the game. We made two or three mistakes in the first half, but got a grip in the second half, were more patient and we take a lot of positives for the future

LIONEL SCALONI
ARGENTINA COACH

This match was a repeat of the 2014 World Cup final, yet Argentina's Manchester United defender Marcos Rojo was the only survivor when the Germans won in Rio de Janeiro.

He partnered Manchester City veteran Nicolas Otamendi in an Argentina defence which crumbled early on.

A week after scoring four goals for Bayern Munich at Tottenham, Gnabry put Germany ahead on 15 minutes.

The winger used his pace when Atletico Madrid's Angel Correa lost possession to get in behind the defence to stab the ball past Argentina goalkeeper Augustin Marchesin.