

Verstappen takes momentum to Spain

Verstappen become the youngest ever winner in Barcelona on his Red Bull debut

● Verstappen has stood on the podium at the last four races and is now the closest challenger to Hamilton

AFP | Paris

Max Verstappen returns to the scene of his first Formula One triumph on Sunday, hoping to pile more pressure on championship leader Lewis Hamilton in Spain after winning at Silverstone last Sunday.

The 22-year-old Red Bull driver has stood on the podium at the last four races and is now the closest challenger to Mercedes' six-times world champion, with 30 points separating them.

It would be a lot less if Verstappen, who has beaten Hamilton's Finnish team mate Valtteri Bottas in the last three races, had not suffered the first retirement of the season in Austria last month.

"It's a different track so let's see how competitive we are against Mercedes and how the temperatures have an impact on everyone," the Dutchman said of the Circuit de Catalunya.

Verstappen will always have a soft spot for the Barcelona track after becoming Formula One's youngest ever winner there on his Red Bull debut in 2016 at the age of 18.

This year's race, postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic that has also led to it going be-



Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen celebrates after winning the race during the F1 70th Anniversary Grand Prix

hind closed doors, is normally held in the cooler month of May rather than August where track temperatures are likely to be above 40 degrees Celsius.

"The track at Barcelona is also quite hard on the tyres so I'm not sure how they will hold out in the heat," said Verstappen.

The tyres were decisive last Sunday, with the Red Bull managing the softer compounds better than the Mercedes which suffered severe blistering, but there will be a return to harder rubber in Spain.

That could help Hamilton, who had won three races in a row before Verstappen's success and has also won the last three outings in Spain.

"Maybe it won't be as bad as today but still going to be a challenge," he said last Sunday when asked about expectations.

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MAX VERSTAPPEN

Bottas started on pole in Spain last year and needs to pull something out of the bag to rein in a team mate who is driving as well as ever.

Losing out at Silverstone, after also starting on pole but having the strategy go against him, was a serious blow.

The top three will be taking every precaution against the new coronavirus, with a rising

number of new infections being seen in Spain and particularly around Barcelona.

"I stay at the track always, so nothing changes for me," said Hamilton. "I stay in my bubble, I'm only around a couple of people and so I will get to the airport and then go straight to my motorhome and stay at the track for the three/four days."

Verstappen and Bottas said it was the same for them.

"You minimise contact, you stay in your bubble. I don't expect any trouble. It's not only in Barcelona or in Spain there is corona, you know, so you just have to be careful," said the Dutchman.

Racing Point's Mexican Sergio Perez, who missed the two rounds at Silverstone after testing positive for COVID-19, could return for Sunday's race.

Root backs Anderson to show his class against Pakistan



Joe Root and James Anderson of England talk during a match (file photo)
AFP | London

James Anderson is set to be given an immediate chance to come good against Pakistan with England captain Joe Root saying yesterday it was "likely" the veteran paceman would feature in this week's second Test.

By his own admission the 38-year-old Anderson, England's all-time leading wicket-taker, was not at his best with a match haul of 1-67 during the win in the series opener at his Old Trafford home ground last week.

He has now taken just six wickets in three Tests so far this season at an expensive average of over 41 apiece.

But Anderson, speaking earlier this week, bristled at suggestions he was contemplating retirement and Root had no hesitation in backing him, even if the skipper was coy about who else might be in England's team for the second Test in

590
Test wickets have been taken by James Anderson in his career

Southampton, which starts on Thursday.

"Jimmy is likely to play, yes," Root told reporters.

"Wouldn't you give him the opportunity with nearly 600 wickets?"

"To get that stuff off his chest and talked about has definitely helped him. With Jimmy it won't be long before he's right back at the peak of his powers and I'm very much looking forward to him performing this week," Root added.

"I don't think it will be long before he's got another five-for beside his name."

Barcelona player tests positive for COVID-19

AFP | Barcelona

A Barcelona player has tested positive for the novel coronavirus after reporting back for pre-season training, the La Liga side said in a statement yesterday.

Barca said the player was isolating in his home and was asymptomatic, adding that he had not been in contact with any of the players who are to travel to Lisbon for the Champions League 'Final Eight' tournament.

Tahar Hadbi's unusual BRAVE CF career has him ready for the next chapter

● Tahar Hadbi will take on Giannis Bachar in the main event of BRAVE CF 39

TDT | Manama

It's safe to say that most professional Mixed Martial Artists will go through an entire career without having a single "No Contest" on their records. What about having two-in-a-row on your first two fights with a new promotion?

Well, this unusual scenario was exactly the one in which Tahar Hadbi saw himself when he arrived at BRAVE Combat Federation. Even more impressive is that, despite the adverse circumstances, Hadbi was able to place himself among the best Welterweights in the world very quickly. He returns this Saturday after a 17-month layoff to reclaim his place at the top of the Welterweight food chain at BRAVE CF, as he takes on Giannis Bachar



Tahar Hadbi

in the main event of BRAVE CF 39.

Back in 2017, "Fast Hands" debuted as an event headliner in India. His opponent was England's Carl "The Bomber" Booth. At BRAVE CF 5, Hadbi and Booth had an even contest, with high-level striking going back-and-forth, but the bout ended without a result due to time-keeping issues.

Tahar wasn't comfortable with his shaky beginning in his new home and asked for the toughest challenge available. His wish was granted by BRAVE CF officials and the French-Algerian was matched against Lebanon's Mohammed "The Latest" Fakhreddine.

With two strong personalities on opposite sides of the cage, the



Tahar Hadbi debuted at BRAVE CF 5 in 2017 in India with a match against Carl Booth which ended without a result

bout at BRAVE CF 9, the very first edition of BRAVE International Combat Week back in 2017, quickly became the biggest rivalry in the history of Middle Eastern MMA.

Publicly and privately, Hadbi and Fakhreddine engaged in a war of words and promised fireworks when the cage doors finally closed. The two went for it right away and what the fans saw was the clash of power vs precision that they were expecting.

Against all odds, though, Hadbi's second consecutive fight

under BRAVE CF's banner also came to an end with another No Contest. Tahar connected with an accidental low blow and Fakhreddine couldn't recover from the groin shot. The bout was then declared a no contest, given the lack of intention from Tahar's side.

He knew, on the other hand, that there was only one way to break the "curse of No Contests": meeting his bitter rival Mohammed Fakhreddine inside the cage and finishing him. And that's exactly what he did, in devastating fashion.

Roughly four months after their first encounter, Hadbi and Fakhreddine met once more, this time in Jordan. Hadbi was aware of the issues that made the last bout end in a no-contest and this time aimed almost exclusively for the head.

The strategy worked and halfway through the second round, Tahar Hadbi stopped Mohammed Fakhreddine, becoming the winning side of the biggest rivalry in Middle Eastern Mixed Martial Arts.

Recovered from the rocky start, Hadbi was then awarded a title eliminator against Jarrah Al-Selawe. The bout took place in Indonesia, in May of 2018. Tahar put on a very good performance, with his fast combinations causing damage to Al-Selawe, but a broken arm in the first round prevented him from being more aggressive with his attacks, and Jarrah ended up winning and going on to fight for the title - and win.

While on the losing side of the title eliminator, Hadbi proved that he wasn't just skills and fast hands. He was also one of the toughest fighters in the world, something that he's keen to remind the Welterweight division when he meets Bachar at BRAVE CF 39.

Returning after a long hiatus, Hadbi is ready to prove that the unusual experience he gathered in his first four fights inside BRAVE Combat Federation were only shaping the current moment of his career and that he's ready to start another title run.