

Bottas dominates in Australia



Valtteri Bottas

● **Valtteri Bottas upstages Mercedes teammate Lewis Hamilton at the Formula One season opener**

● **Red Bull's Max Verstappen completes podium**

● **Ferrari duo finish just outside podium positions**

AFP | Melbourne

Valtteri Bottas upstaged his Mercedes world champion team-mate Lewis Hamilton yesterday to win the season-opening Australian Formula One Grand Prix in a sizzling performance that he called his "best ever".

The flying Finn started second on the grid but got a jump on the polesitting Briton at the first corner and never looked back, scorching round the Albert Park circuit to take the chequered flag a massive 20.9 seconds ahead of Hamilton.

Red Bull's precocious Max Ver-

stappen came third to join them on the podium after audaciously overtaking Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel midway through the race.

"How about that! Yes!" said Bottas over the team radio after also taking the new bonus point for the fastest lap.

"I don't know what just happened. I don't know what to say. It was definitely my best race ever," he said after. "I felt so good and the car was so good."

Four-time world champion Vettel had to settle for fourth, trailing in 57.1 seconds behind Bottas. Ferrari partner Charles Leclerc was fifth, with Kevin Magnussen in a Haas sixth.

Frustrated Hamilton

Bottas, whose last triumph was at the Abu Dhabi season finale in 2017, was overshadowed last year by Hamilton, failing to win a race, hampered by mechanical problems and bad luck but was fast in qualifying and only narrowly edged out of pole position.

"In the beginning it was all about managing the race and building the gap," Bottas said. "I knew I could do it, I've done it before, it was about being at my best level."

Bottas, now in his third year with Mercedes, knows he must perform with promising Frenchman Esteban Ocon, 22, waiting in the wings as the team's reserve driver. He delivered in spades yesterday for his fourth Grand Prix win in his 119th race.

"It's a good weekend for the team," said Hamilton. "Valtteri



Mercedes' Valtteri Bottas leads the field through turn two during the Australian Grand Prix at Albert Park

drove an incredible race today so he deserved it.

"We have some work to do, (but) it is more than we could have hoped for as a team."

Starting on soft tyres on a fine day, Bottas got an electric start and built a gap of 1.153 seconds on Hamilton after the opening lap, with Vettel, Verstappen and Leclerc trailing in their wake.

The gap kept growing, and when Vettel pitted on lap 14 to swap for medium tyres Mercedes called in five-time champion Hamilton soon after.

Bottas stayed out, pumping out fastest laps, and when seven laps later he pitted he emerged more than 10 seconds ahead of his team-mate, who was clearly bemused.

"What was the reason for stopping so early?" Hamilton asked over the team radio, to be told it was to cover Vettel's early stop.

Ecstatic Verstappen

With Bottas having an unsurmountable lead the battle was on for second, with Verstappen hounding Hamilton but unable to find a way through.

"I had to overtake Sebastian to get onto podium which is not easy here but was happy to pull that move off," said Verstappen, who was ecstatic at beating the Ferraris.

Mercedes have been in a class of their own all weekend, turning the tables on pre-season testing when Ferrari looked like the team to beat.

The Italian team's performance will be a source of worry, especially as they haven't won the constructors' title since 2008 and their last driver to become world champion was Kimi Raikkonen in 2007.

In contrast, Mercedes and Hamilton have been dominant, winning the drivers' and constructors' titles five years in a row.

Carlos Sainz Jr was the first casualty, forced to stop his McLaren with smoke and flames billowing out of his engine on lap 10 while he was running 14th.

It was also a day to forget for local hero Daniel Ricciardo in his first race for Renault after switching from Red Bull.

Federer, Thiem into Indian Wells final

● **Rafael Nadal pulls out with injury before the semi-final against Roger Federer**

● **Dominic Thiem beats Milos Raonic to make final**

AFP | Indian Wells



Dominic Thiem of Austria plays a forehand against Milos Raonic of Canada

The 39th match between Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal failed to materialize on Saturday as the world No. 2 Spaniard hobbled out of Indian Wells to send Federer into a title clash with Dominic Thiem.

Nadal, whose longstanding right knee trouble flared up in his quarter-final victory over Karen Khachanov, couldn't take the court for the blockbuster semi-final with Swiss great Federer.

"I wanted to try my best to be competitive today," a dejected Nadal said. "I warmed up today in the morning, and I felt that my knee was not enough good to compete at the level that I need to compete, to play semi-finals match of this event."

Federer, seeded fourth as he pursues a record sixth title in the California desert, will battle 25-year-old Austrian Thiem, who is seeking his first title in one of the ATP's prestigious Masters 1000 events.

Thiem, ranked eighth in the world, was rock-solid in a 7-6

(7/3), 6-7 (3/7), 6-4 victory over 14th-ranked Canadian Milos Raonic.

Thiem, who advanced to the semis on a walkover when Gael Monfils withdrew with a Achilles tendon inflammation, was locked-in from the start, firing 10 winners without an unforced error in the opening set.

He couldn't convert his only break point against Raonic in the second, and Raonic managed to seize the tiebreaker aided by a favorable netcord bounce for a 5-3 lead.

'Amazing' Thiem

Thiem gained the first break of the match for a 3-2 lead in the third and after saving the only break point he faced all day as he served for the match wrapped it up with a sparkling backhand volley.

"It was an amazing day," said Thiem, who will be playing in his third Masters 1,000 final. "His serve is just unreal so even though I played amazing it was so close the first two sets."

Liverpool survive Fulham scare to go top

AFP | London

Liverpool usurped Manchester City to take top spot in the Premier League but needed a James Milner penalty nine minutes from time to see off lowly Fulham 2-1 at Craven Cottage yesterday.

The on-form Sadio Mane put the visitors in front midway through the first half, but a rare defensive mix-up between Virgil van Dijk and Alisson Becker allowed Ryan Babel to give his former club a huge scare 16 minutes from time.

Fulham's awful defending all season is the reason they are heading back to the Championship after just one season back in the top flight, and the hosts gave Jurgen Klopp's men a much-needed gift when goalkeeper Sergio Rico bundled over Mane and Milner secured all three points from the spot.

Liverpool now hold a two-point lead over City, but the champions have a game in hand.

The league leaders completed a clean sweep of four English sides into the quarter-finals of the Champions League with a highly impressive 3-1 win at Bayern Munich on Wednesday.

But they nearly suffered a very costly European hangover against a Fulham side still 13 points adrift of safety.

Most of the visitors' attacking threat came down their left side in the first half and that proved the source of the breakthrough on 26 minutes.

Mane scored twice in Munich in midweek and took his hot streak to 11 goals in 11 games with a simple finish after exchanging passes with Roberto Firmino.

At the other end, Babel was Fulham's biggest threat all afternoon and Tom Cairney fired wastefully over after the Dutchman outpaced Trent Alexander-Arnold just before the break.

Liverpool started the second



Liverpool's English midfielder James Milner (R) scores the team's second goal

English Premier League

Fulham	1	-	2	Liverpool
Everton	1	-	0	Chelsea

Italian Serie A

Genoa	2	-	0	Juventus
Atalanta	1	-	1	Chievo
Empoli	2	-	1	Frosinone
Lazio	4	-	1	Parma

German Bundesliga

Bayer 04 Leverkusen	1	-	3	SV Werder Bremen
Bayern Munich	3	-	0	Mainz 05

Spanish La Liga

Eibar	1	-	2	Real Valladolid
Espanyol	0	-	1	Sevilla

French Ligue 1

Lyon	3	-	2	Montpellier
Reims	1	-	0	Nantes
Bordeaux	1	-	0	Rennes

*Scores as of closing

half with greater intent to try and put the game to bed.

Torrential rain

Andy Robertson was the provider as Georginio Wijnaldum headed a good opportunity over at the far post before Rico was called into action to deny Van Dijk.

However, as a torrential rain shower swept over the banks of the Thames to make playing conditions hazardous, Liverpool's slender lead proved a dangerous one.

Floyd Ayite was rightly flagged offside as he headed a deflected shot past Alisson before the Brazilian number one

got down well to save from Andre Zambo Anguissa.

Mane was inches away from securing the points and doubling his tally for the day with a deft header from a corner that clipped the top of the crossbar.

But disaster seemed to have struck for Liverpool when Van Dijk's header back towards Alisson didn't have enough purchase and Babel stepped in with the break of the ball to tap into an empty net.

However, the league leaders showed why they are in the running to end a 29-year title drought to get a vital three points with the help of some erratic goalkeeping from Rico.