

Hamilton earns 99th career pole at Emilia Romagna GP

Lewis Hamilton takes pole position ahead of Sergio Perez in a thrilling qualifying session

● Hamilton was just 0.035 seconds clear in the Mercedes as Perez outqualifies team-mate Verstappen

AFP | Imola

Lewis Hamilton claimed his 99th career pole position in qualifying yesterday for the Emilia Romagna Grand Prix, with Red Bull's Sergio Perez starting alongside the seven-time world champion's Mercedes at Imola.

Max Verstappen, runner-up to Hamilton at the season-opening race in Bahrain last month, will begin third on the grid in the other Red Bull as the top three were separated by less than one-tenth of a second.

"The day's been great obviously," said Hamilton. "I definitely didn't expect us to be ahead of the two Red Bulls. They've been so quick this weekend."

"There were times when they were six-tenths ahead and we didn't really know where we'd be. But the car was already feeling a lot better from the begin-



Lewis Hamilton launches off a raised kerb

ning this weekend."

"I knew going into qualifying and especially that last lap, it was going to take something special," he added.

"It really had to be the most perfect lap and a little bit more to beat the Red Bulls because they really have been so fast all weekend. And I didn't honestly know whether we could do it."

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc qualified in fourth ahead of Pierre Gasly, Daniel Ricciardo and Lando Norris, who was heading for second but had his lap time deleted for exceeding track limits.

Hamilton's Mercedes team-mate Valtteri Bottas could only manage eighth, with Esteban Ocon and Lance Stroll rounding out the top 10.

Carlos Sainz failed to make it to Q3 and will start in 11th position in the second Ferrari. Two-time former world champion Fernando Alonso was a disappointing 15th, six places behind Alpine team-mate Ocon.

Hamilton edged out Perez by 0.035 seconds, the Mexican in turn sneaking ahead of Verstappen by 0.052sec in just his second race with his new team. "I didn't expect to be here

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LEWIS HAMILTON

but I should have been on pole - I did a mistake on my final corner, but tomorrow is what matters," said Perez, after securing his best qualifying position to date ahead of a 193rd Grand Prix start.

Verstappen admitted he paid for his mistake.

"Not so good in Q3. I went off at Turn Three, so a bit messy, not a good lap," he said.

"You can't be good every time, so we'll see what went wrong. It's still P3, which is a good starting position."

Japanese rookie Yuki Tsunoda, who impressed by coming ninth on his F1 debut in Bahrain, planted his Alpha Tauri into the wall coming out of a chicane in Q1 and will set off from the back on Sunday.

Klopp admits Liverpool under pressure in top four race

AFP | London

Jurgen Klopp admits Liverpool are under pressure as they try to salvage a troubled season by finishing in the Premier League's top four.

Klopp's side have failed to defend the Premier League title they won last term and were knocked out of the Champions League by Real Madrid on Wednesday.

That quarter-final exit means Liverpool's only route back into Europe's elite club competition next season is via a top-four finish in the league.

The sixth-placed Reds have been outside the top four since early February and they slipped as low as eighth before winning their last three league games to get back in the race.

Fourth-placed West Ham's 3-2 defeat at Newcastle yesterday was a major boost to Liverpool's hopes.

With seven pressure-packed games left, they would go

“We are of course under pressure as we want to finish in the top four but we don't know in the moment if we will. We have seven games to prove that and we will try

JURGEN KLOPP



Jurgen Klopp

above the Hammers on goal difference with a victory at Leeds on Monday.

"We just go for it, go and go and go and play our best football," Klopp said.

"We are of course under pressure as we want to finish in the top four but we don't know in the moment if we will. We have seven games to prove that and we will try."

Leeds are coming off an impressive victory at leaders Manchester City last weekend where they played half the match with 10 men.

Klopp is well aware of the threat posed by Marcelo Bielsa's side and he said: "We should not forget the opponents we face. We won the last three and that's why we're still around, still in the fight for the Champions League spots."

"It's clear we have to win football games. It would be best to win all of them, but they are tough opponents and we have to respect all of them."

Diaz to formalize Tokyo Olympic appearance

TDI | Manila

The ticket to this year's Tokyo Olympics is already in the bag for Filipino ace weightlifter Hidilyn Diaz.

The 2016 Rio Olympics silver medalist Diaz will lead eight other Filipinos when they compete in the 2021 Asian Weightlifting Championship which is scheduled for today in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

The tournament is the region's qualifying tournament for the quadrennial international sporting competition slated on July 23 to August 8 in Tokyo, Japan.

However, regardless of winning a medal or not in Tashkent, Diaz's stint in the Asian weightlifting event will only formalize her fourth straight Olympic outing as she will complete the International Weightlifting Federation's requirement of competing in five tournaments to get a slot in Tokyo.

Diaz, currently ranked no. 5 in the IWF world rankings in the women's 55 kilogram category, will see action tomorrow.

In front of Diaz in the world ranking are four Chinese lifters, Jiang Huihua (4,667.8878), Liao Qiuyun (4,288.9622), Zhang Wangqiong (4,212.6639) and Li Yajun (4,099.0223).

However, as per the IWF guidelines and Tokyo Olympics rules, it appears that only Jiang will advance because only one weightlifter is allowed to compete per country in the Summer Games.

"I've been waiting for so long for this event, and I am happy that it's finally happening," said the 30-year-old Diaz, who will become the first Filipino athlete to reach four straight trips to



Diaz ... first Filipino athlete to reach four straight trips to the Olympics



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the Olympics.

Originally set in April of last year in Kazakhstan, the event organizers canceled it due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A country hungry for international acclaim saw its prayers

answered when the then 27-year-old weightlifter from Zamboanga City, the hotbed of this sport in the Philippines, took home a silver medal from the Brazil Games.

She particularly made history for the Philippines when she finished second best in the 53-kg division of the women's weightlifting competitions to end the country's 20-year medal drought in the Olympics.

Diaz - the country's lone athlete to Rio to win a medal for the country - also became the first Filipina to win an Olympic medal and the first who finished at the podium after Mansueto "Onyok" Velasco won the silver for the boxing event in the 1996 Atlanta Games.

A three-time Olympic campaigner, Diaz initially said that the Rio Games was to be her last Olympic stint, only to have a change of heart.

She is setting her sights at winning the Philippines' first ever Olympic gold medal.

"It's still the Olympics. That's my target," said Diaz. "I will be back to try and win the gold medal."

Dy, Lausa seek redemption at BRAVE 51

TDI | Manila

The Philippines' Rolando "The Incredible" Dy and Jenel "The Demolition Man" Lausa are bent on redeeming themselves and hoisting the country's flag aloft by competing at BRAVE Combat Federation 51.

Although the Bahrain-based promotion has yet to announce the bout lineup for its maiden venture on Belarusian soil, the two Filipino mixed martial artists have already thrown in their names as willing participants on the card.

The 29-year-old Dy, son of boxing legend Rolando Navarrete, bowed to Kyrgyz powerhouse Abdusalom "Omok" Kubanychbek via second-round corner stoppage in the headliner of BRAVE CF 47: Asian Domination last month.

On the undercard of the same event, the 32-year-old Lausa was dealt a unanimous decision setback by Ryskulbek Ibraimov, also of Kyrgyzstan.

Despite their respective defeats, the Filipino fighters are in high spirits and determined to bounce back on BRAVE CF 51 to be held at the state-of-the-art Falcon Club Arena in Minsk, Belarus on June 4.

Dy, the 2020 BRAVE CF Fighter of the Year, remained optimistic despite falling to Kubanychbek in the world lightweight title eliminator.

"I have no other options but to get back up. I know the loss to Kubanychbek will make me a better fighter. I learned a lot from this loss more than I learned from my wins," said Dy. "I will be ready for the next one. I hope I will be back in action very soon."



Dy, left, and Lausa are eager to get back on the winning track



Despite their respective defeats, the Filipino fighters are in high spirits and determined to bounce back on BRAVE CF 51 to be held at the state-of-the-art Falcon Club Arena in Minsk, Belarus on June 4

"I haven't been to Europe yet, and it's enticing to fight over there. Belarus is a great starting point of my road to redemption. I won't think twice about taking that offer to fight in Europe," added Dy, who holds a 14-10

record.

Lausa, for his part, also threw his name in the card, saying that he is not discouraged at all after yielding to Ibraimov in his much-awaited mixed martial arts comeback.

"I want to fight as soon as possible. Winning and fighting again will motivate me," he declared.

The Filipino former UFC fighter cited Octagon veteran Andrei "The Pitbull" Arlovski, a Belarusian-American himself, as one of his MMA idols.

Arlovski is known for giving a name to Belarus by bagging the interim UFC heavyweight belt before the UFC recognized him as the undisputed world champion in 2005.

"He's one of my idols. I admire how he (Arlovski) fights in the cage because he's exciting and gives it all in every fight. It will be a dream come true if I get to fight where he started his career," said the Iloilo native Lausa, who owns a 7-6 record.