

Mercedes cautious despite Hamilton's 'stardust'

AFP | Singapore

Mercedes boss Toto Wolff said it was special to conquer "bogey track" Singapore but cautioned the F1 title race wasn't over yet after Lewis Hamilton's "stardust" propelled him to a potentially decisive 40-point lead over Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel.

Hamilton raced to a stunning pole position which he converted into a dominant victory -- his fourth in five races -- to leave Ferrari, who seem to have the faster car, again scratching their heads with just six grands prix to go.

Team principal Wolff said there was no mystery to Mercedes' form, it was all down to sheer hard work back at the factory and the track.

"Singapore has been our bogey track for several years, so it is a special feeling to come here and win this race on pace," Wolff told reporters after Hamilton's pole-to-flag win and team-mate Valtteri Bottas's fourth place gave them a 25-point lead over Ferrari in the constructors' championship.

"The entire team has worked so hard to understand the car



Lewis Hamilton

and take steps forward, especially since our defeat in Spa, and this result is an indication that our work is paying off."

"It was a weekend of many parts: a stardust lap from Lewis in qualifying, a chess game of tyre management this evening, and some nervous moments with traffic and backmarkers

during the race," Wolff added.

Hamilton also paid tribute to "the guys back at the factory" when he spoke to reporters.

"We're hitting the nail on the head with the balance of the car and really just eking out each little bit and each weekend we've got incredible communications," said Englishman who is gunning

for his fifth Formula One drivers' world championship.

"I give quite long debriefs nowadays and we work to the point that we leave no stone unturned -- there's not a single stone unturned each weekend that we arrive and so it's a real collective.

"It's just the strongest the

team has ever been."

Wolff warned they had to keep up the intensity to win both drivers' and constructors' championships this season, starting with the Russian Grand Prix in two weeks.

"From our side, we can be pleased with a very solid weekend," he added. "We have leads

in both championships, but they change nothing in the mindset of this team.

"We have six weekends to go and we know how quickly the situation can swing back against us. We will take it weekend by weekend, feet on the ground and determined to maximise our potential every time."



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TOTO WOLFF

Real Madrid more of a team without Ronaldo, says Bale

AFP | London

Gareth Bale has won four Champions Leagues in five years at Real Madrid, but believes the Spanish giants can be even better in their quest for a 14th European crown despite the loss of Cristiano Ronaldo.

Bale has shone in the spotlight since Ronaldo's departure for Juventus, scoring in all of Real's opening three La Liga wins and providing the equaliser for Isco in a 1-1 draw at Athletic Bilbao on Saturday.

"Obviously it's going to be a little different from having

such a big player there," Bale told British newspaper the Daily Mail.

"It's maybe a bit more relaxed, yes. I suppose there is more of a team, more working as one unit rather than one player."

Fired by his anger at being left out of the starting line-up in Zinedine Zidane's last match in charge of Madrid, Bale came off the bench to score twice in last season's Champions League final to beat Liverpool 3-1.

However, it is Ronaldo's goals that have led Real to so much success on the continent in recent times.

The Portuguese has been the competition's top scorer for the past six seasons.

But ahead of their Champions League opener against last season's semi-finalists Roma on Wednesday, Bale insists Real can be even better this season.

"We can be even better again," he added. "Another start and another challenge. We're ready for it."

The strained relationship between Bale and Zidane may have led to the Welshman looking for an exit this summer had the French coach not decided to bow out after winning a third straight Champions League in just two and a half years in charge.

Bale avoided the question of whether new boss Julen Lopetegui is a better manager than the French great, but accepts Lopetegui's command of English has made it easier to communicate.

"Obviously it helps," said Bale. "In Spanish I can talk but maybe not go into that amount of detail with them that I would need to."

Hazard can be top-scorer: Sarri

AFP | London

Eden Hazard can score 40 goals this season and win the Premier League Golden Boot, according to Chelsea boss Maurizio Sarri after the Belgium forward scored a hat-trick to maintain the club's perfect start to the season.

Sarri believes Hazard can become the best player in Europe and outstrip even arch-poachers Harry Kane and Mohamed Salah following his three goals in a 4-1 victory against Cardiff on Saturday.

"We have spoken and I told him he can score 40 goals," said the former Napoli manager. "He has to improve some things, but he can do it."

Hazard himself has hailed Olivier Giroud as the world's best target man after the World Cup-winning striker laid on two goals for him.

Giroud is yet to find the net for Chelsea this season but already has three assists in five Premier League games while Hazard has found the net five times.

And the 27-year-old paid tribute to the Frenchman for creating his first two goals at Stamford Bridge on Saturday.

"Olivier's a target man, maybe the best in the world, I think so," said Hazard.

"When he gets the ball he can hold the ball and we can go in deep with him, so for us it's a pleasure to play with him."

Despite Chelsea's fluency

in attack, Sarri is aware the Stamford Bridge team must improve their defending.

The Italian boss wants to turn Chelsea into the best team in England but says Liverpool and defending champions Manchester City will be the league's pacesetters.

"Eight players joined us this summer," he said. "So I think it's normal that in this period we have some defensive problems. We can cope with the problems with the quality in the offensive phase, but not in the defensive phase."

"So I have to organise better the defensive phase and the players have to understand that. I think my opinion in this moment, two teams, Liverpool and Manchester City, are better than us."



Gareth Bale (L) and Cristiano Ronaldo (file photo)



Eden Hazard