

SPORTS

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Hamilton powers to French GP pole

● **Five-time world champion, who struggled to match Valtteri Bottas' pace in practice sessions, reels off fastest lap**

● **Hamilton holds off challenge of Bottas and Leclerc**

AFP | Le Castellet, France

Lewis Hamilton timed his best lap to perfection yesterday when he took pole position ahead of his Mercedes team-mate Valtteri Bottas with a blistering late effort at the French Grand Prix.

The five-time world champion, who had struggled to match the Finn's pace in the previous two practice sessions, reeled off a fastest lap in one minute and 28.319 seconds to beat him by 0.286 seconds.

It was the 86th pole of his career for Hamilton, who won last year's race from pole, and a record-increasing 63rd front-row lock-out for Mercedes. Hamilton has taken 60 of his poles with Mercedes.

It was a master-class from the dominant Silver Arrows team while their rivals laboured in pursuit, with Monegasque Charles Leclerc taking third for Ferrari ahead of Max Verstap-

pen, fourth for Red Bull.

British rookie Lando Norris impressed with a fine effort to take fifth ahead of his resurgent McLaren team-mate Carlos Sainz and, surprisingly, a despondent Sebastian Vettel finished down in seventh in the second Ferrari after a gearbox issue during Q3.

Daniel Ricciardo was eighth for Renault ahead of Frenchman Pierre Gasly in the second Red Bull and Antonio Giovinazzi of Alfa Romeo.

"It's not an easy track," said Hamilton. "It's very technical and Valtteri has been very quick all weekend. I've been chipping away and the last two laps were the ones."

Bottas said: "I think Lewis had a really good lap. It's between super close between us all weekend and it's about fine details."

A happy Leclerc said: "At the end, I am pretty happy with my lap and unfortunately it wasn't enough! A good start will be very important tomorrow."

Searing heat and gusty winds On an afternoon of searing heat and a gusty wind at the remote Le Castellet circuit, the track temperature was 55 degrees as the session began and the air was 30, conditions that ensured plenty of complaints about the smooth, if slippery, asphalt surface.

As he had on Friday afternoon and yesterday morning, Bottas was quick to set the pace and



Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton leaves the pits during the qualifying session



It was the 86th pole of his career for defending world champion Lewis Hamilton

topped Q1 ahead of Hamilton with Leclerc a close third. Out went Daniil Kvyat, of Toro

Rosso, who will start at the back of the grid after taking a new engine, Romain Grosjean in his Haas, Lance Stroll of Force India and the two Williams of George Russell and Robert Kubica.

Both Mercedes and Ferrari started Q2 on mediums and Hamilton responded with a lap in 1:29.520, only for Bottas to reply with 1:29.437, taking an extra lap to do so.

As these are intended to be their race-starting tyres, Hamilton's more cautious approach may have preserved some life he can make use of on Sunday.

Alexander Albon, 11th for Toro Rosso, also impressed but

missed out on the top-ten shootout along with Kimi Raikkonen in the second Alfa, Nico Hulkenberg of Renault, Sergio Perez and Kevin Magnussen.

On their first Q3 runs, it was Hamilton on top by two-tenths with Leclerc third and Vettel forced to pit after missing an upshift -- his gearbox not responding as required.

That left the four-time world champion, already in a solemn mood after the rejection of Ferrari's appeal against the Montreal penalty which cost him victory in Canada, sounding ironically grim ahead of the final showdown.

Europe and IMMAF-WMMMA celebrate Bahrain's top ranking

TDI | Manama

Team Bahrain has had a phenomenal start to the year as they progressed through to first place of the MMA ranking after victorious campaigns at the Asian and African Open Championships. It is the first time the country has topped the list after only four years of the official beginning of a mixed martial arts program.

The achievement didn't go unnoticed at ongoing European Championships, which are being held in Rome, Italy. The IMMAF-WMMMA and national federations celebrated Bahrain's topping of world rankings and honoured efforts of Bahrain MMA Federation, and HH Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa.

A message of congratulations to Team Bahrain was put out on the big screen during all matches.

Meanwhile, on second day of competitions that included Team Bahrain, six of the Kingdom's competitors kept their medal hopes alive, with Magomed Idrisov, Abdulmanap Magomedov, Shamil Gaziev, Murad Guseinov, Abdulla Alyaqoob and Ramazan Gitiinov each picking up crucial wins in Rome.

Federer to meet Goffin in 'special' 13th Halle final



Roger Federer from Switzerland returns the ball during his match against Pierre-Hugues Herbert from France

AFP | Halle Westfalen, Germany

Roger Federer said it was a "special" feeling to reach the final of the ATP event in Halle for a 13th time after beating Pierre-Hugues Herbert 6-3, 6-3 in yesterday's semi-final.

Federer is chasing a record-extending tenth title at the pre-Wimbledon grass court event this year, having suffered a surprise defeat to Croatian Borna Coric in last year's final.

"It is very, very special. I am glad I got another chance this year, because last year I really didn't know if I would ever play another Halle final," he said.

World number 43 Herbert, 28, struggled in his first-ever meeting with 20-time major winner Federer, who is hoping to win a ninth Wimbledon title

next month.

The straight-sets victory provided welcome respite for the Swiss star, who was forced to battle through grueling three-set encounters with Jo-Wilfried Tsonga and Roberto Bautista Agut earlier in the week.

"I feel in a similar situation to last year. I was perhaps more tired last year because I had played in Stuttgart the week before," said Federer.

"I hope I can call on that extra bit of energy, because I am going to need it tomorrow."

The 37-year-old Swiss will face David Goffin in the final, after the Belgian fought to victory over rising Italian star Matteo Berrettini earlier yesterday.

"Goffin plays well from the back of the court, he plays aggressively and returns well," said Federer.

Sanchez sends Chile into quarter-finals

Manchester United forward Sanchez hits second-half winner against Ecuador to send Chile through to Copa America quarter-finals

AFP | Salvador, Brazil

Alexis Sanchez put a miserable club season with Manchester United behind him as he sent Chile into the Copa America quarter-finals with the winning goal in Friday's 2-1 win over Ecuador.

Jose Fuenzalida gave reigning champions Chile an eighth-minute lead but Enner Valencia equalized for Ecuador from the spot.

Sanchez bagged the winner, his 43rd goal for his country, but Chile finished with 10 men after Gabriel Achilier's red card a minute from time.

The 30-year-old Sanchez started only nine Premier League matches, scoring just once, in an injury-interrupted season for the Red Devils in which he struggled to make an impact when he did play.

But he scored for the second game running in Salvador as Chile joined Colombia as the only teams to qualify for the knock-out stages after their first two games.

However, he revealed afterwards that he turned his ankle during the first half, aggravating an old injury.

"I think I have a sprain, I hope it's not too serious. At half-time they strapped it up, I played on with a bit of pain," he said.



Ecuador's Pedro Velasco, left and Chile's Alexis Sanchez go for a header

Chile top Group C with a perfect six points ahead of their clash with Uruguay at Rio's iconic Maracana on Monday.

Ecuador are left staring elimination in the face after a second straight defeat, knowing they must beat Japan in Belo Horizonte on Monday to stand any chance of progressing.

"We put in a huge effort but we're making the mistake of switching off and that's why they scored silly goals," moaned Valencia.

"We'll try and beat Japan and then see where that takes us."

Chile began as they had left off in their 4-0 thrashing of Japan last Monday, opening the scoring after just eight minutes.

Ecuador made a hash of clear-

ing a corner and Fuenzalida sent an angled volley from the edge of the area into the far bottom corner.

Ecuador brought the same muscular approach to the game that had seen them reduced to 10 men in their opener against Uruguay -- a 4-0 loss.

Sebastian Mendez found himself in the referee's book after just three minutes for a robust challenge on Charles Aranguiz.

Rushes of blood

However, it was Chile who were lucky to reach the break with a full complement after goalkeeper Gabriel Arias suffered two rushes of blood to the head.

First he clattered into Mendez

inside the area, allowing Valencia to chip home the equalizer from the spot on 28 minutes.

Arias escaped further sanction, though, and that saved him five minutes before the break when he charged rashly out of his area to try to beat the speedy Romario Ibarra to the ball on the flank.

Ibarra went down from the slightest brush of contact and after a lengthy VAR delay, Arias was shown a yellow card.

In what proved a niggly encounter, referee Patricio Loustau showed nine yellow cards and a red.

"We lacked the intelligence to control the game after the first goal," said Chile coach Reinaldo Rueda.

"Ecuador reacted really well and equalized in a moment in which we lost our shape."

Chile were back in front early in the second period after more poor Ecuador defending.

Aranguiz was allowed to turn and cross far too easily on the right and Sanchez was left unmarked at the back post to side-foot a volley beyond the despairing dive of Alexander Dominguez.

Ecuador were bossing possession but were toothless up front, while Sanchez and Eduardo Vargas provided far greater cut and thrust for Chile.