

Hamilton and Bottas deliver perfect on-track Lauda tribute

Lewis Hamilton fastest for Mercedes in both practices at Monaco GP

AFP | Monaco

Lewis Hamilton and Valtteri Bottas delivered a perfect on-track tribute to Niki Lauda yesterday when they topped the times for the dominant Mercedes team in second practice at the Monaco Grand Prix.

The two Silver Arrows drivers were separated by only 0.081 seconds at the front of the pack with nearest pursuivant Sebastian Vettel, in the leading Ferrari, seven-tenths adrift in third place.

Barely 72 hours after the death of their team's former non-executive chairman, the defending five-time champion and current series leader and his team-mate were in a class of their own on the unforgiving barrier-lined Mediterranean street circuit.

Hamilton was fastest in one minute and 11.118 seconds, his most eloquent statement since arriving in the principal-



Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton drives during the first practice session at the Monaco street circuit

ity and side-stepping a routine pre-event news conference on Wednesday afternoon.

Many of the mourning

Mercedes' team, and others, wore black armbands or carried messages on their cars on a sombre day of hazy sunshine.

It was, as Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff had said of his fellow-Austrian before the opening session, as if the sport had just



Niki Lauda was instrumental in Hamilton's career-defining move from McLaren to the Silver Arrows team

lost not only a great three-time champion and larger-than-life personality, but something of its "heart and soul."

That loss was keenly felt, but had no effect on the teams and their speed as they raced as Lauda would have wanted, led by his Mercedes men.

Behind them and Vettel, Pierre Gasly was fourth for Red

Bull ahead of Alex Albon for Toro Rosso with Max Verstappen pushed down to sixth in the second Red Bull ahead of Kevin Magnussen in his Haas.

Antonio Giovinazzi was eighth ahead of his Alfa Romeo team-mate Kimi Raikkonen with Monegasque Charles Leclerc 10th in the second Ferrari in front of his home crowd.

Vettel produced the session's most notable incident when he locked up at Sainte Devote and narrowly missed hitting the barriers in the closing minutes.

By then, it was clear Mercedes were in total control as they worked towards extending their record run of five season-opening one-two finishes in Sunday's race to six.

That would rub salt into Ferrari's wounds as they struggle to keep pace with their rivals. The Italian team, for whom Lauda won two of his three titles, have not managed five one-twins in the last decade.

Benedetti wins Giro 12th stage, Polanc takes pink jersey

● Bahrain-Merida's Damiano Caruso comes second

AFP | Pinerolo, Italy

Italy's Cesare Benedetti won yesterday's 12th stage of the Giro d'Italia at Pinerolo in the Italian Alps ahead of compatriot Damiano Caruso. Slovenian Jan Polanc took the overall lead.

It was the first win for 31-year-old Bora rider Benedetti who led a long break-away group in the first mountain stage after the 158km run from Cuneo.

Polanc, also among the leading group, took the leader's pink jersey from UAE Emirates team-mate Valerio Conti of Italy.

Benedetti crossed just ahead of Bahrain-Merida's Caruso with Ireland's Edward Dunbar of Team INEOS third.

"I've worked a lot for the others in the past but today I got my opportunity," said Benedetti.



Winner Team Bora rider Italy's Cesare Benedetti (R) reacts as he crosses the finish line ahead of second-placed Team Bahrain rider Italy's Damiano Caruso (L) and third-placed Team Ineos rider Ireland's Eddie Dunbar (R)

"I'm not a talent, I'm not (usually) a winner, but the way I finished it off is exactly what I wanted to do."

It was the third stage win for Benedetti's Bora team after Germany's Pascal Ackermann's two sprint wins.

The first 15 finishers had all been part of a large early breakaway that built up a sizeable advantage. Polanc finished 25 seconds behind Benedetti but

more than nine minutes ahead of Conti and more than seven minutes ahead of fellow Slovene Primoz Roglic, who climbed to second.

Behind the breakaway, the opening skirmishes between the favourites occurred in the main climb of the day, Montoso, the first ranked in the top category of this Giro.

Colombian Miguel Angel Lopez, third in 2018 Giro, and

Spaniard Mikel Landa went on the attack, 37km from the finish, taking about 30 seconds on their direct rivals in the standings.

Polanc -- a 27-year-old Slovenian who has won two Giro stages, each time in the mountains -- pulled on the pink jersey for the first time.

"It was a team tactic that I'd go in the breakaway so we could have a better control over the race," said Polanc.

"It was also a way to keep the Maglia Rosa (pink jersey) in the team.

"We were lucky to be able to play these cards and I'm very happy to have the jersey.

"I was thinking about the stage win as well but being the virtual leader I had to pull a lot more than others."

Friday's 13th high-mountain stage covers 196km and features three difficult summits -- Colle del Lys, Pian del Lupo and the final Colle del Nivolet climb, leading to Lago Serru, on a route that includes gradients of up to 15 percent.

Ronaldo included in Portugal squad for Nations League finals

AFP | Oeiras, Portugal

Captain Cristiano Ronaldo was included in Portugal's squad for next month's Nations League semi-final against Switzerland, head coach Fernando Santos announced yesterday.

Ronaldo, 34, a five-time Ballon d'Or winner missed group stages preferring to try and adapt to life in Juventus since moving from Real Madrid.

The Euro 2016 champions welcome the Swiss on June 5 in Porto and the Netherlands play England in Guimarães a day later before a third place

play-off and a final on June 9.

He lifted the Serie A title with his Italian club this season but failed to clinch a third straight Champions League after losing to Ajax in the quarter-finals.

Head coach Fernando Santos has chosen not to call up veterans Adrien Silva, Nani and Ricardo Quaresma and Sevilla forward Andre Silva misses out with a knee injury.

Highly-tipped Benfica uncapped youngster Joao Felix is also included alongside three other club teammates who won the Portuguese league champions this season.

Portugal squad to face Switzerland on June 5 in the Nations League semi-finals:

Goalkeepers: Beto (Goztepe/TUR), Jose Sa (Olympiakos/GRE), Rui Patricio (Wolves/ENG)

Defenders: Joao Cancelo (Juventus/ITA), Jose Fonte (Lille/FRA), Pepe (Porto/POR), Mario Rui (Naples/ITA), Nelson Semedo (Barcelona/ESP), Raphael Guerreiro (Borussia Dortmund/GER), Ruben Dias (Benfica/POR)

Midfielders: Bruno Fernandes (Sporting Lisbon/POR), Danilo Pereira (Porto/POR), Joao Moutinho (Wolves/ENG), Pizzi (Benfica/POR), Ruben Neves (Wolves/ENG), William Carvalho (Real Betis/ESP), Joao Felix (Benfica/POR)

Forwards: Bernardo Silva (Manchester City/ENG), Goncalo Guedes (Valencia/ESP), Rafa Silva (Benfica/POR), Dyego Sousa (Sporting Braga/POR), Diogo Jota (Wolves/ENG), Cristiano Ronaldo (Juventus/ITA)



Cristiano Ronaldo

Reduced Brazil squad begins preparations for Copa America

AFP | Teresópolis, Brazil

Copa America hosts Brazil began preparations for the tournament at their training centre in Teresopolis on Wednesday, despite missing most of their team.

Only seven players are expected at the Granja Comary football complex near Rio de Janeiro for the first week of training.

Neymar, the world's most expensive player, is due to appear on May 28 along with PSG team-mates Daniel Alves, Thiago Silva and Marquinhos.

Everton winger Richarlison



Brazil's coach Tite (R) greeting his player Richarlison as he arrives for training

was the first to arrive Wednesday.

"I want to get on the field very quickly to train, I'm very happy to be here with the squad, it's a

unique moment," said Richarlison in a statement issued by the Brazilian football federation.

Richarlison was joined by Ajax Amsterdam's David Neres,

another 22-year-old striker.

Fernandinho, Gabriel Jesus and Casemiro also arrived later on Wednesday, while Ederson and Filipe Luis were expected on Thursday.

Alisson and Roberto Firmino, who will play the Champions League final on June 1 with Liverpool, will be the last to arrive.

Coach Tite made a brief appearance near the field where workers were still painting the lines.

Eight-time winners Brazil face Bolivia, Venezuela and Peru in the group stage, which start on June 14, after two friendlies against Qatar and Honduras.