

F1 midfield battles to heat up in Bahrain

Plenty to play for at Bahrain International Circuit as 2020 season heads into home stretch

● **Racing Point's Sergio Perez currently holds fourth position on the drivers' championship with 100 points, just three ahead of Ferrari's Charles Leclerc and four in front of Renault's Daniel Ricciardo**

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Things are set to heat up at Bahrain International Circuit (BIC) this weekend in the Formula 1 Gulf Air Bahrain Grand Prix 2020, as there is still plenty to play for with the season heading down the home stretch.

The quest to secure the drivers' and constructors' titles may already be over, but the fight in the mid-field is still very much alive.

Only four points separate three drivers in the battle for fourth place overall for 2020, while four teams have just 24 points between them in the race for third on the constructors' standings.

Racing Point's Sergio Perez currently holds fourth position on the drivers' championship with 100 points, just three ahead of Ferrari's Charles Leclerc and four in front of Renault's Daniel Ricciardo.

Perez is coming off a runner-up finish in the Turkish Grand Prix just under two weeks ago, and he hopes to continue his good form heading into Bahrain.



Racing Point's Sergio Perez arrives in Bahrain

"There is definitely a great atmosphere in the team right now," he said. "I also want to fight for P4 in the Drivers' Championship and we managed to take that position after a great result in Turkey. That gives me confidence going into Bahrain."

"We want to be fighting for podiums and the chance to sign off this era on a real high for the team and myself."

Leclerc, meanwhile, just missed out on the podium in Istanbul where he placed fourth. He will be looking to do one better this time around, and will also hope to improve on his third-place finish at BIC last year.

Ricciardo, on the other hand, was able to finish in the points in Turkey to keep him in the thick

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ANDREAS SEIDL

McLAREN TEAM PRINCIPAL

of things. Following that event, he has now raced over 10,000 laps in F1 (10,055) and is under 500 away from equalling Alain Prost's total of 10,540.

Thrilling constructors' battle for third

Racing Point currently stand third in the constructors' standings with 154 points. McLaren follow with 149, while Renault are on 136 and Ferrari have 130. Racing Point will be banking on Perez's expertise in Bahrain, where he had scored a podium in 2014 and finished in the points four other times, including last year.

"It's always a great feeling to revisit the circuit and remember 2014," said Perez. "It was a very special moment in my career and it's incredible to think it happened in only my third race with the team."



Ferrari's Charles Leclerc competes at BIC last year



Four points separate three drivers in the battle for fourth place overall for 2020, while four teams have just 24 points between them in the race for third in the constructors' championship

Ferrari have been the most successful team at the Bahrain Grand Prix, winning six times in the past, most recently in 2017 and 2018. Leclerc was also on pole in last year's race and was headed towards a victory, until some late car trouble saw him limp to the finish.

Renault have also been successful at BIC, winning twice with Fernando Alonso in 2005 and 2006 en route to clinching both the drivers' and constructors' titles those seasons.

For McLaren, the races in Bahrain are extra special, team principal Andreas Seidl says. "We've got three very exciting and equally challenging races left with two in Bahrain, which is a very special venue for McLaren and a home-from-home race," he said.

"We know how strong our competitors are, so our focus is to extract everything we can out of the car, stay on top of reliability, maximise any opportunities and continue to keep scoring important points."

Toto Wolff, team principal of world champions Mercedes, said of the thrilling four-horse race for third: "We will be following the intense battle for P3 in the championship with interest."

Bahrain name 12-man squad for FIBA Asia qualifiers

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Bahrain named their final 12-man roster last night that will be competing in their upcoming home qualifiers this weekend for the FIBA Asia Cup 2021 Bahrain named their final 12-man roster last night that will be competing in their upcoming home qualifiers this weekend for the FIBA Asia Cup 2021.

The Bahrainis, coached by former NBA champion Sam Vincent from the US, will be spearheaded by the quartet of Mohammed Qurban, Maitham Jameel, Hesham Sarhan and Subah Hussain from defending league and Khalifa bin Salman Cup champions Al Ahli.

The roster also features Manama Club's Mohammed Hussain, Mohammed Ameer, Ahmed Najaf and Ahmed Salman, as well as Muharraq's Mohammed Kuwayed and Mohammed Juma'a.

The roster is rounded out by naturalised player CJ Giles and young stud Muzamil Ameer, who is the Kingdom's first-ever student-athlete to have been granted a scholarship in the US. Jameel, Sarhan, Salman and



The Philippine team during their photoshoot

Mohammed Hussain make up a talented backcourt for the hosts, while Kuwayed, Juma'a and Muzamil will be holding their own as the team's versatile wings. The paint will be anchored by Giles, and the frontline will be beefed up by Qurban, Ameer, Subah Hussain, and Najaf, as they take on much taller opponents.

Bahrain will be playing two qualifying games in three days in Group D. They will first play Iraq tomorrow and then take on India on Sunday. Both fixtures are scheduled for 7pm tip-offs.

Lebanon are the other team in the group, but the Bahrainis will face them at a later date.

Group A teams the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia are also playing in the Kingdom.

All the qualifiers will be held at the Khalifa Sports City arena in Isa Town from tomorrow to Monday. No spectators will be allowed to watch, although fans can follow all the action on the FIBA Asia YouTube channel.

All the teams competing in Bahrain this week had their official photoshoots yesterday at the teams' hotel in Seef.

Bahrain to play in FIFA Arab Cup 2021

● **22 teams from across the Arab world will take part in the tournament**

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Bahrain will be one of 22 nations taking part in the first-ever FIFA Arab Cup, which will be held in December of 2021 in Doha.

This has been confirmed by FIFA president Gianni Infantino during his visit to the Qatari capital, where he visited certain locations that will be hosting the FIFA World Cup 2022.

Infantino said that the Arab Cup will help Qatar in their preparations for the global competition, which will be held a year later.

The Arab tournament is set to feature 12 countries from Asia, including Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the UAE, Yemen and hosts Qatar; and 10 from Africa, namely Sudan, Algeria, Morocco, Somalia, Tunisia, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Mauritania and Libya.

Of the 22 squads, 16 will move on to the final stage, which will be comprised of four groups with four teams apiece. The top two squads in each group will



FIFA president Gianni Infantino inspects a stadium being constructed during his Doha visit



then qualify for the knockout stages of the competition. A total of 32 matches will be held over 18 days.

Infantino commented: "We are delighted that all 22 teams

from across the Arab world have agreed to take part in the FIFA Arab Cup 2021, which will be held in FIFA World Cup 2022 stadiums, and we are looking forward to seeing the region's best teams battle it out to see which nation will become champion. Through football, this tournament will unite over 450 million people from across the region, and we are confident that the FIFA Arab Cup will help to build excitement across the region as we edge ever nearer to hosting the first FIFA World Cup in the Middle East and Arab world in 2022."