

Mercedes teen ace Antonelli wants more of the same after maiden win

Antonelli's China triumph boosts belief as Mercedes duo chase first Suzuka win since 2019

● Mercedes dominate opening races

● Confidence boosted after China win

AFP | Suzuka

Kimi Antonelli said yesterday that his maiden Formula One win had given him more "awareness" of his potential as he and Mercedes look to ram home their early season advantage in Japan.

The 19-year-old Italian came home first at the Chinese Grand Prix to become the second-youngest race winner in history behind Max Verstappen, after finishing second at the season-opener in Australia.

Mercedes have claimed one-two finishes at both grands prix so far in 2026, with Antonelli's team-mate George Russell winning in Australia.

Antonelli said his approach would not change at this week's Japanese Grand Prix but admitted his win had boosted his



Mercedes' Italian driver Kimi Antonelli celebrates his victory after the Formula One Chinese Grand Prix

confidence. "I think the only difference is that the win gave me a bit more awareness of the potential, on

what is possible to achieve," he said.

"But in terms of approach, I want to keep the same because

it's been working well so far."

Antonelli, who also became the youngest pole-sitter in F1 history in Shanghai, was given



By winning in Shanghai, Kimi Antonelli ended a long drought for his home country, becoming the first Italian driver to stand on the top step of a Formula One podium in 20 years



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of races in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia because of war in the Middle East.

"It's never good to have a break, especially when you have such momentum," said Antonelli.

"You need to look at the positive side of it, which is you get a bit of time to reflect and to try and analyse where are the areas where you have to work on."

Russell leads the early championship standings by four points from Antonelli, with Ferrari's Charles Leclerc 13 further back in third.

Russell is chasing his first world title and he said Mercedes were reaping the benefits after some lean years.

Norris talks up McLaren chances after double China disaster



McLaren's British driver Lando Norris

AFP | Suzuka

Formula One world champion Lando Norris said yesterday he was confident he could still get into title contention after a disastrous start to the season, starting this week in Japan.

The McLaren driver is 36 points behind championship leader George Russell of Mercedes after two grands prix and arrives in Suzuka after an embarrassing non-start in China.

Norris and McLaren have struggled to get to grips with sweeping new regulations, but he said the car had "a lot of potential" as he targets a positive result in Japan.

"What we are thinking of is getting on the podium first of

all and then returning to winning races," said the Briton.

"The points then take care of themselves and we'll see what we can claw back, and we're confident in that.

"I have a good belief in the team and I think we can have the best car this year," he added.

Norris finished fifth in the season-opener in Australia and fourth in the sprint in China, but did not even make the grid for the grand prix in Shanghai.

Team-mate Oscar Piastri also did not start as both cars suffered separate technical issues.

Norris said McLaren now understood what the problems were but admitted that the double failure "hurt us as a team".

'Get out': Verstappen bans reporter from Japan press conference

AFP | London

Four-time world champion Max Verstappen was involved in a flashpoint ahead of the Japanese Grand Prix yes-

terday when he refused to start his press conference until an English journalist had left the room.

The Red Bull driver sat down to speak to reporters

at the team's hospitality suite in Suzuka, but then said, "I'm not speaking before he's leaving", and gestured at a journalist from The Guardian newspaper.

The journalist asked Verstappen if his demand was because of a question he had asked the driver last season, to which Verstappen replied "yes" and told him to "get out".

Bahrain Victorious ready for key test at E3 Saxo Classic

TDT | Manama

The cobbled Classics season heats up today as Bahrain Victorious lines up for the E3 Saxo Classic in Harelbeke. Seen as the final major test before the Tour of Flanders, the 208 km race will reveal which riders are ready to contend on cycling's biggest stage.

This year's edition features 16 short climbs and nine cobbled sectors, with nearly 3,000 metres of elevation gain. The route winds through the heart of Flanders, including Oudenaarde and Geraardsbergen, where narrow roads and steep gradients are expected to split the peloton early.

A key addition to the course is the E3-Col, a 1.2 km climb tackled twice, including once inside the final 35 kilometres. The decisive phase begins shortly after, with a reverse approach to the Oude Kwaremont, followed by familiar climbs such as Taaiberg, Kortekker, and



Bahrain Victorious riders in previous cobbled action

Eikenberg. The race is expected to be decided in the final 40 km, where the Paterberg-Oude Kwaremont combination and the last ascent of Tiegemberg with 20 km remaining could separate the contenders.

Bahrain Victorious Banking on Depth

Bahrain Victorious arrives with a balanced lineup led by

Matej Mohoric and Alec Segaert. Sports Director Nikolas Maes highlighted the importance of positioning before the crucial sections, explaining that the team's support riders will guide the leaders and control the race.

"E3 is one of the hardest races of the Classics. We want to position our leaders well before the decisive sections and be in the

mix for the finale," Maes said. Attila Valter could play a key role by seeking opportunities in a breakaway, adding tactical flexibility to the squad.

Leaders in Form

Mohoric heads into the race in strong condition and is targeting another top result in Harelbeke.

"I've been feeling good in the last Classics. I've had a top five here before, so I'd like to aim for something similar," the Slovenian said.

Segaert, fresh off victory at GP Denain, also brings momentum. "With a win already and strong performances from the team, I'm confident we can have a good campaign," the Belgian explained.

Today's E3 Saxo Classic will be a proving ground for Bahrain Victorious, giving the team the chance to measure their strength and stake their claim as serious contenders ahead of the Tour of Flanders.