

# McLaren dominate Austrian practice

Norris leads Piastri in McLaren sweep as Verstappen trails amid contract speculation

● Norris fastest after missing session one

● Piastri second, Verstappen trails in third

● Stroll, Leclerc, Russell follow behind

AFP | Spielberg bei Knittelfeld

Lando Norris bounced back from his Canadian catastrophe to top the times ahead of team-mate and championship leader Oscar Piastri as McLaren reeled off a commanding 1-2 in second practice yesterday at the Austrian Grand Prix.

Norris, who sat out the first session at the Red Bull Ring, clocked a best lap in one minute and 4.580 seconds to beat Piastri by 0.157 seconds with four-time champion Max Verstappen third fastest for Red Bull, adrift by 0.318 seconds.

For Norris, it was a relief to move on from his collision with team-mate Piastri in Montreal where he retired pointless, admitting he had “made a fool of myself”.

Lance Stroll was fourth for Aston Martin ahead of Ferrari’s Charles Leclerc, George Russell of Mercedes, who won last year



McLaren's British driver Lando Norris drives during the second practice session

and two weeks ago in Canada, and Yuki Tsunoda in the second Red Bull.

Gabriel Bortoleto was eighth for Sauber ahead of two-time champion Fernando Alonso of Aston Martin and seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton, struggling in his updated Ferrari.

After much paddock speculation linking Verstappen with a move to Mercedes, the session began with Colapinto and Ocon leading the way in near-perfect conditions at the picturesque, and historic, circuit set in the Styrian Alps.

Russell, fastest in the morn-

ing, was soon on top again, but it was the McLarens of Piastri and Norris that proved they had found more pace amid the rising temperatures, with the air at 26 degrees Celsius and track at 34.

Having missed the morning session, when Irish reserve driver Alex Dunne proved his huge potential by finishing fourth, Norris swept to the top after 10 minutes shortly before Leclerc, also back after sitting out the first practice, ran off at Turn Six and his Ferrari team-mate Hamilton reported he had “no pace” in his updated car.

Norris stayed on top, trimming his time, before switching to softs with ‘papaya’ team-mate Piastri slotting in second. Stroll was third, four-tenths adrift ahead of the chasing pack including ‘man of the moment’ Russell.

“He has been part of our programme for 10 years,” said Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff of Russell.

**Mercedes confirm Max talks**

“He’s always performed to expectations and continues to do so.

“These kind of contract dis-

cussions end up accelerated in the media, but it’s normal business. Contracts discussions are not held in Town Halls. All is going to plan.”

Wolff confirmed he was in contact with Verstappen, but suggested it was not in his mind to replace Russell and stressed that he was also very happy also with Antonelli. Thus most seasoned observers regarded the speculation as merely exploratory.

The Dutchman is contracted to Red Bull until 2028, but with release clauses – that may relate to a possible exit by adviser Hel-

mut Marko amid claims that he could be replaced by four-time champion Sebastian Vettel.

On track, Verstappen delayed his entry by 12 minutes and worked his way into contention, but with 15 minutes remaining he was adrift of the two McLarens by three-tenths with Mercedes and Ferrari struggling to keep pace.

It was another session of few incidents with Tsunoda and Oliver Bearman having brushes with gravel traps and Nico Hulkeberg ran off at Turn One, but few dramas although Hamilton was called to see the stewards for accidentally impeding Antonelli.



After “making a fool of himself” with a collision in Canada, Lando Norris dramatically rebounded by topping the times in Austrian Grand Prix second practice

## Sri Lanka spinners leave Bangladesh on verge of crushing defeat

AFP | Colombo

Spinners Dhananjaya de Silva and Prabath Jayasuriya rounded off another dominant day for Sri Lanka yesterday, taking two wickets each to leave them on the brink of a crushing innings victory over Bangladesh in the second Test.

By close of play on the third day at the Sinhalese Sports Club in Colombo, the visitors had slumped to 115-6 in their second innings, still 96 runs away from making Sri Lanka bat again.

Bangladesh started their second innings with a daunting deficit of 211 after Kusal Mendis’s forthright 84 had taken the Sri Lanka first innings to 458 all out earlier in the day.

All seven batters so far in the Bangladesh second innings made it into double figures but



Sri Lanka’s captain Dhananjaya de Silva (C) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Bangladesh’s captain Najmul Hossain Shanto

only Mushfiqur Rahim made it beyond 20, making 26 before being beaten all ends up by Jayasuriya.

With only four wickets in hand, it will be a tough ask of the Bangladesh lower order to see off the Sri Lanka spinners, who have been gaining plenty of turn, from wrapping up the Test and the two-match series. The first Test ended in a draw.

Sri Lanka batter Kamindu Mendis said that the “wick-

et is spinning now from both ends and its not easy for the batters”.

“We will look to wrap this up quickly,” he said after the day’s play.

Earlier, leading from the front, skipper De Silva dealt twin blows with his off-spin in the evening session yesterday.

He had Mominul Haque (15) caught at first slip before trapping his opposite number Najmul Hossain Shanto (19) leg before.

Left-arm spinner Jayasuriya, under pressure to keep his spot after a lean patch, also responded in style with a probing spell.

He struck with the new ball, removing Shadman Islam (12) caught behind, and then bowled Mushfiqur.

The early part of the day belonged to Kusal Mendis who hammered a rapid 84 off 87 balls, with eight fours and two sixes, when it looked as though the Sri Lanka first innings was faltering.

## Manager Van Nistelrooy leaves relegated Leicester



Ruud van Nistelrooy reacts during a match (file photo)

AFP | London

Ruud van Nistelrooy has left this position as manager of Leicester after relegation from the Premier League, the club announced yesterday.

The club and Van Nistelrooy had “mutually agreed” that the Dutchman’s contract would be terminated with immediate effect, a club statement said.

The 48-year-old joined the struggling Foxes in late November after a brief spell as Manchester United’s caretaker boss.

But he was unable to stop their slide and they returned to the second-tier Championship after just one season back in the Premier League.

“Ruud has overseen a challenging period for the club,” Leicester said in a statement.

“From his appointment in November 2024, he ap-



Ruud van Nistelrooy’s departure marks the end of his brief tenure at Leicester, having taken over in November 2024 after a spell as Manchester United’s caretaker boss

proached the role with professionalism, integrity and a clear commitment to our aims, including through the integration of several promising players from the club’s academy into our first team environment.



Taijul Islam, with 17 Test five-wicket hauls, is just 10 away from overtaking Shakib Al Hasan as Bangladesh’s leading Test wicket-taker