

QUALIFYING FIASCO STALEMATE IS 'MADNESS': MERCEDES BOSS

MANAMA: Formula One's failure to resolve problems surrounding the future shape and structure of qualifying has been described as "madness" by Mercedes team chief Toto Wolff.

The Austrian, who has called for the sport to ditch the failed fiasco of 'progressive elimination' qualifying, said he was suspicious that political agendas were now at play that were preventing a switch back to the successful former system.

Discussing the outcome of Sunday's

talks at the Bahrain International Circuit which failed to resolve the problems, he said: "All the teams had the same opinion—that we probably need to go back to 2015."

"But there are various agendas and this proved that it is not an easy one, so I cannot tell you what happens next. Last time I told you, I was totally wrong..."

Asked if he could explain how such a simple decision-making process had ended up in such chaos, he said: "A sim-

ple explanation? Madness." Wolff was one of the team bosses who met the president of the sport's ruling body, the International Motoring Federation (FIA), Jean Todt and the veteran commercial ring-master Bernie Ecclestone on Sunday. The teams have expressed a unanimous view that the new qualifying format should be dumped and replaced by its predecessor, a wish shared by virtually all neutrals and paddock observers.

Ecclestone and Todt, however,

vetoed that plan and instead put forward a new complex proposal for aggregate times to be used in qualifying instead of single laps to decide the starting grid. Many paddock observers believe that Ecclestone and Todt want to undermine the power of the teams.

Red Bull team chief Christian Horner, who in Australia had suggested that Formula One should apologise to its fans for the non-entertainment provided by the new system, said he was prepared to look at the new idea.

"The FIA are going to circulate some draft regulations, let's take a look at those and then we will make a decision on the vote," he said. "But after two pretty decent races do we really need to mess around with qualifying?"

The teams are due to meet again with the F1 bosses on Thursday to try and reach a resolution on an impasse that has created a furor on social media with many fans fearful that F1 is becoming ungovernable and a laughing stock. —AFP

ROSBERG LIVING THE MOMENT, REMAINS FEARFUL OF FERRARI

MANAMA: After two successive season-opening wins, Nico Rosberg is "living the moment" but says he remains fearful of Ferrari following their demonstration of potential in Sunday's Bahrain Grand Prix.

The 30-year-old German leads the embryonic drivers' championship by 17 points ahead of his Mercedes team-mate, defending three-time champion Lewis Hamilton.

That, he says, has given him great satisfaction, but in the wake of his 16th career victory at the Bahrain International Circuit, he was keen to point at the advances made by Ferrari despite their early-season setbacks. "I am not thinking about the season," said Rosberg. "I am going step-by-step. I am just enjoying it at the moment. "I have been very privileged to drive this car and go for wins. When I go to China, I know I am going to fight for the win there as well so it is such a great feeling to have..."

"Winning is awesome. Celebrating with the team and getting all those points... It is great to start the season like that, but I am not looking too far ahead, I am living for the moment."

He said he was well aware that Kimi Raikkonen who split the two 'silver arrows' cars and finished second behind him for Ferrari had demonstrated threatening speed on a day when his team-mate Sebastian Vettel had failed to start a race

for the first time following an engine failure. "I was in control," he said. "We were just managing the race, trying to reduce risks strategy-wise, pit-stop wise, and bring the race home. "But at the same time, Kimi showed good pace in the race and we know that Ferrari are super close. So, we need to keep pushing. "They haven't shown what they are able to do yet. That's clear. They have had so many mishaps, which have cost them dearly, so we haven't seen the real Ferrari yet."

"We have to be careful. They are coming on at us and they are strong." Ferrari's potential has been masked this year by difficulties - a strategy call that failed in Australia where Raikkonen retired with turbo troubles, Vettel's reliability problems and Raikkonen's poor start in Bahrain. For Rosberg, Ferrari's problems and Hamilton's two successive opening lap collisions have gifted him two victories and a perfect start to the 21-race season.

Champion Hamilton, who has taken both pole positions so far, departed Bahrain with a smile, however. "I am feeling very chilled," he said. "It is just the start of the season..." Vettel, meanwhile, remains unconcerned by Ferrari's early-season problems. "They are not connected," he said. "Of course, it is frustrating. I saw smoke coming out of my car and we decided to stop - but it is a long season..." —AFP



KANSAS CITY: Salvador Perez #13 of the Kansas City Royals kisses his glove after Yoenis Cespedes #52 of the New York Mets struck out to end the game at Kauffman Stadium on Sunday in Kansas City, Missouri. The Royals won 4-3. — AFP

VOLQUEZ, HOSMER STAR AS ROYALS DOWN METS

KANSAS CITY: Edinson Volquez would rather sit on the bench than stand on the mound on opening day, especially when it happens to be the first game following a World Series triumph. "I like to enjoy the show," Volquez explained with a grin. "Enjoy the time." He had every reason to enjoy Sunday night's festivities anyway. Given no choice but to start the game by Royals manager Ned Yost, the veteran right-hander responded with six scoreless innings. His bullpen held on through three more shaky frames and Kansas City beat the New York Mets 4-3 in the first opening-day rematch of a World Series.

"I did the best I could," said Volquez, who also started the decisive Game 5 at Citi Field last November. The Mets rallied for three runs off Joakim Soria in the eighth, then put runners on the corners with one out against Wade Davis in the ninth. But the All-Star closer struck out David Wright and Yoenis Cespedes, preserving a nail-biting victory and sending 40,030 fans home in another celebratory mood.

"They're scrappy," Wright said. "We knew that they put the ball in play, they find holes, put together terrific at-bats. They get that lead early and you know the bullpen is coming in. That's their M.O. - good starting pitching, terrific bullpen and a pesky offense. That's exactly what they did tonight."

Volquez (1-0) allowed two hits and three walks in outdueling Matt Harvey, who also opposed him in Game 5 of the World Series. Harvey (0-1) allowed four runs - three earned - on eight hits and two walks in 5-2-3 innings.

There wound up being little good about opening night for the NL East champs, still in search of their first championship in three decades. They spent nearly an hour before the first pitch reliving last year's World Series defeat through a steady stream of highlights on the crown-shaped big screen, then had to watch the raising of the championship banner over the Royals Hall of Fame in left field at Kauffman Stadium.

"It was just strange, the pregame ceremony. I think I would have enjoyed it more if we played another team," Yost said. "For them to relive that, it's a little awkward."

SHODDY FIELDING

Things didn't get a whole lot better for the Mets once the game began.

Cespedes, the Gold Glove outfielder whose shoddy fielding hurt the Mets in the Series, dropped an easy fly ball in the first inning that ultimately led to the Royals' opening run. Kansas City then strung together a couple of singles before Kendrys Morales popped a sacrifice fly to center in the fourth, and Alex Gordon and Omar Infante added two-out RBI singles in the sixth.

Volquez and the Kansas City defense had things well in hand by that point. The right-hander escaped a jam by getting Travis d'Arnaud to ground out in the second inning, then watched first baseman Eric Hosmer make a nice diving stop to escape a sticky spot in the third. All-Star catcher Salvador Perez threw out Michael Conforto trying to steal second base to end the fourth.

The biggest misstep Volquez made may have been fashion-related - he wore his spring training hat with a gold crown over the interlocking "KC" to start the game. He swapped it out for the proper one by the second inning. "Nobody said anything!" he said, grinning again. "Not even in the bullpen."

TRAINER'S ROOM

Mets: Harvey got the start despite having a blood clot in his bladder that led to a minor procedure last week. "When the word 'blood clot' came up, that's severe stuff," manager Terry Collins said. "We started to look at alternative plans and what we might do down the road. Fortunately, it came out he's going to be OK."

Royals: RF Jarrod Dyson was milling around the clubhouse before the game. He's out a few more weeks with an oblique injury that he sustained in the first game of spring training.

MORE BLING

During the pregame festivities, DH Morales

picked up his Silver Slugger Award, and 1B Hosmer, C Perez and SS Alcides Escobar got their Gold Gloves. The remaining members of last season's team are scheduled to get their championship rings before Tuesday's game.

UP NEXT

Mets: RHP Noah Syndergaard, whose inside pitch to Escobar in Game 3 was a flashpoint of the World Series, takes the mound Tuesday. Syndergaard allowed three runs in six innings in a 9-3 victory that night. Royals: RHP Chris Young started Game 4 of the World Series against New York. He also earned the win in Game 1 when he tossed three scoreless innings in a 5-4, 14-inning victory. — AP



SHANGHAI: This file photo taken on March 9, 2012 shows Noh Jin-kyu (C) of South Korea leading the pack during the men's 1500-meters final of ISU World Short Track Speed Skating Championships at the Oriental Sports Center in Shanghai. South Korea's world-record holding short track speed skater Noh Jin-kyu has died at the age of 23 after a battle with bone cancer, his family said yesterday. — AFP

KOREAN CHAMPION NOH DIES FROM CANCER

SEOUL: South Korea's world-record holding short track speed skater Noh Jin-kyu has died after a battle with bone cancer, his family said yesterday. He was 23. Noh's sister, speed skater Noh Seon-yeong, posted on her brother's Facebook page that he had died Sunday evening. Noh Jin-kyu rose to prominence as an 18-year-old when he won the overall title at the International Skating Union World Short Track Speed Skating Championships in 2011 in Sheffield, England.

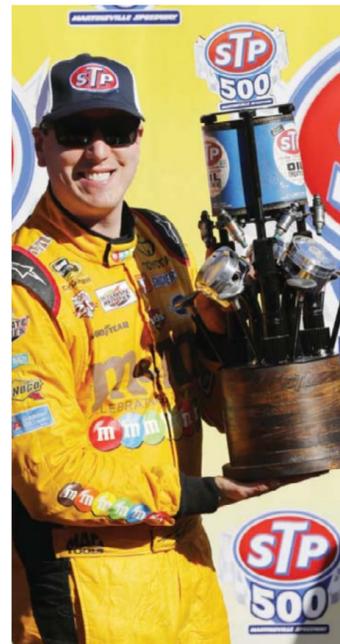
He set new world marks in the 1,500 and 3,000 metres the same year-records that still stood at the time of his death. Noh was first diagnosed with a benign tumour in his left shoulder in

2013 but put off surgery to compete in the 2014 Winter Olympics. He was unable to take part in the Sochi Games after breaking his elbow during practice.

When Noh underwent surgery for his elbow in January 2014, doctors discovered a 13-centimetre long malignant tumour in his left shoulder. Following the news of his death, there were immediate tributes from some of the sport's past and present champions. "Short Track lost one of the greats today," tweeted US speed skater J.R. Celski, a three-time Olympic medalist and current 500m world record holder. "So sad to hear about Noh Jin-kyu. He will be missed," tweeted Dutch Olympic champion Jorien ter Mors. — AFP



SANTIAGO DEL ESTERO: Spain's biker Marc Marquez of Honda celebrates on the podium after winning the MotoGP race of the Argentina Grand Prix at the Termas de Rio Hondo circuit, in Santiago del Estero, Argentina, on Sunday. — AFP



MARTINSVILLE: Kyle Busch poses with a second trophy as he celebrates winning the Sprint Cup auto race at Martinsville Speedway on Sunday, in Martinsville. — AP

"That was the key to the race, being able to restart on the bottom like that," Busch said after choosing the inside line, putting Kenseth outside. "We all talked as a group earlier this morning about how we were going to do that and what we were going to do and we all said, with 10 to go, it's pretty much off limits. It was (11) to go, so it was pretty much right on the brink there, so, 'Sorry Matt.'"

When the green flag flew, Busch sailed off, Allmendinger beat Kenseth to the inside position and Kenseth got shuffled back to 15th. Allmendinger finished second, followed by Kyle Larson, Austin Dillon and Brad Keselowski. "I was kind of hoping we'd stay green the last 120 laps," Allmendinger said. "I figured that wasn't going to happen, but I was praying we had a shot at that because I felt like if that happened, we had a great chance to win the race."

Several other drivers who pitted before the final restart started in the sixth row, or further back, of side-by-side racing, and while Larson and Keselowski recovered for top-five finishes, others got caught up in traffic and that allowed Dillon to take fourth out of nowhere.

It was the second straight major disappointment at Martinsville for Kenseth. Last spring, he crashed race leader Joey Logano with 46 laps to go, earning himself a two-race suspension. This time, he seemed poised to challenge Busch for the lead with 35 laps to go until a blown tire by Jamie McMurray caused a caution, bunching up the field.

"I was a little worried there toward the end before that last caution came out that Matt was catching me," Busch said. "He was on me pretty good and I wasn't sure that I had enough brake in order to handle the rest of the day, but fortunately we got a yellow there."

Busch led the most laps at Martinsville since Bobby Hamilton was out front for 378 on April 20, 1998.

The race also was a lost day for Denny Hamlin, one of the favorites going in and the defending champion. Hamlin was running fifth after 221 laps after overcoming a pit road penalty until his car lost control heading into Turn 1 and slammed into the wall, sending him to the garage. He never returned, and finished 42nd. — AP