

'WE NEED AURIER', SAYS PSG'S MATUIDI

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain midfielder Blaise Matuidi on Saturday offered his support to disgraced team-mate Serge Aurier, insisting that the Ligue 1 leaders "need him, whether it be on the field or off it." "Serge is my friend and is the friend of everyone in the dressing room. He is well-liked by everyone," said Matuidi after PSG beat Reims 4-1 at the Parc des Princes as they continued their relentless march towards another French title. "We know he made a mistake but, as they say, people make mistakes. He has apologised. He will have a discussion with the coach and we hope it will be positive." Aurier was suspended by the club last Sunday after appearing in a video on the social media site Periscope in which he directed homophobic insults at PSG coach Laurent Blanc and also appeared to insult several team-mates. He will meet with the club's hierarchy on Monday amid speculation that PSG will not play Aurier again and will look to sell the Ivory Coast international in the summer for a cut-price fee. But Matuidi added: "We need him, whether it be on the field or off it, because he is someone who is liked by everybody." — AFP

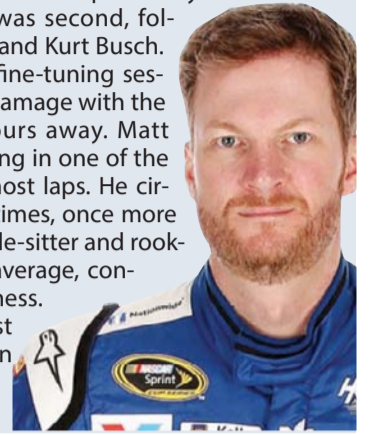


HAAS AIM FOR POINTS WITH THEIR 'VERY FIRST' F1 CAR

BARCELONA: Formula One newcomers Haas, the sport's first U.S.-owned team in 30 years, presented their 2016 car on Sunday with a grey and red livery and the designation VF-16 to mark it out as the 'Very First'. "Our goal with this car is to score points," declared principal Guenther Steiner, who previously worked in Formula One with Jaguar and then Red Bull when the Austrian energy drinks company bought that team. "First, we need to go out there and show that we can do the job, that we can finish races, that we are respected by the fans and other teams in the paddock. Then, we want to score points. That is the ultimate goal." The car, designed in Italy by Dallara and powered by Ferrari, will make its first public appearance on track at Barcelona's Circuit de Catalunya on Monday at the start of pre-season testing. The team carried out a brief 'shakedown' of the car in Barcelona on Saturday but Ferrari had the circuit to themselves on Sunday for private filming. Frenchman Romain Grosjean and Mexican Esteban Gutierrez, who was a Ferrari reserve last season after previously racing for Sauber, are the Haas drivers. The season starts in Australia on March 20. — Reuters

EARNHARDT NOTCHES FASTEST LAP IN FINAL DAYTONA 500

DAYTONA BEACH: Dale Earnhardt Jr. had the fastest lap in final practice for the Daytona 500. Earnhardt, whose car is nicknamed "Amelia," has been strong all week. He reached 197.131 mph on his eighth and final lap Saturday at Daytona International Speedway. Defending race winner Joey Logano was second, followed by Ryan Blaney, Brad Keselowski and Kurt Busch. Twenty-five cars took part in the final fine-tuning session. Fifteen did not to avoid potential damage with the season-opening race less than 24 hours away. Matt Kenseth drove a backup car after crashing in one of the twin qualifying races and turned the most laps. He circled the 2 1/2-mile superspeedway 30 times, once more than Logano, Blaney and Keselowski. Pole-sitter and rookie Chase Elliott had the fastest 10-lap average, considered a good indicator of race readiness. He averaged 195.106 mph over his first 10 practice laps, a tick quicker than Brian Vickers, Busch and Kevin Harvick. — AP



KOTC SHOOTING TOURNAMENT CONCLUDES

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Oil Tankers Company shooting tournament was concluded Saturday at Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Shooting Complex in the air pistol, air gun, 50m rifle and Olympic archery, in the presence of President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Eng Duaj Khalaf Al-Otaibi, KOTC CEO for Financial and Administrative Affairs Khalid Al-Quoud, and Secretary General of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Obaid Al-Osaimi.

The tournament witnessed fierce competition and results were close to each other in top places, reflecting the interest of shooters in winning and be selected as members of the national team keeping in mind that HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Annual International Grand Prix is around the corner.

In his closing ceremony speech Obaid Al-Osaimi said Kuwait Shooting Sport Club is proud to organize the KOTC shooting tournament each year, due to the company's contributions in supporting KSSC activities, and encouragement of

shooters to reach their goals. Al-Osaimi said that more than 75 shooters participated from the club and National Guard, who completed in a friendly atmosphere. He said the tournament was held as Kuwait shooting is preparing for its most dear international tournament in 2016, which is HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Annual International Grand Prix which will be held from 1st March to March 8th, in which a large number of teams will participate. Results of the tournament were as follows:

Air pistol - men

Mideth Al-Sahaly, Hassan Al-Mulla, Saad Al-Ajmi.

Air rifle - men

Abdallah Al-Harby, Mohammad Adel, Suleiman Al-Asousi.

Air pistol - women

Huthama Al-Baghli, Athari Qurban, Israa Bahman.

Air rifle - women

Heba Irzouqi, Ayat Al-Duwaikhi, Mariam Irzouqi

50 rifle - 3 positions men

Mohammad Adel, Torky Al-Shimmari, Abdallah Al-Harby.

50m rifle, prone - men

Khalid Al-Subaie, Abdallah Al-Harby, Torky Al-Shimmari

50m pistol - men

Saad Al-Ajmi, Hassan Al-Mulla, Ali Al-Mutairi

50m rifle prone - women

Niran Irzouqi, Mariam Irzouqi, Heba Irzouqi

Air rifle - women - juniors

Heba Irzouqi, Reem Al-Bughaili, Shurooq Duwaisan.

Olympic Archery

Faisal Al-Rashidi, Abdallah Taha, Bader Al-Mutairi

Compound archery men

Ahmad Al-Shatty, Salam Al-Zaid, Amer Al-Hajiri.



FERRARI THREAT TO MERCEDES SCRUTINISED IN TESTING OPENER

BARCELONA: Ferrari's ability to challenge Lewis Hamilton and Mercedes' dominance of Formula One will be examined as the longest season in the sport's history gets underway with the first series of testing in Barcelona today.

Hamilton is looking for a third consecutive drivers' championship and the fourth of his career across a mammoth 21 Grand Prix season that starts in Australia on March 20.

The Englishman coasted to the title last season as he and Mercedes teammate Nico Rosberg won 16 of the 19 races. However, Ferrari showed signs of a revival with four-time world champion Sebastian Vettel claiming the other three race wins, exceeding team principal Maurizio Arrivabene's pre-season expectations.

Arrivabene is now looking for even more progress from the SF-16H to be able to challenge Mercedes with Vettel and Kimi Raikkonen—the last man to win a drivers' title with Ferrari back in 2008 — at the wheel.

"I think this year, we need to push a bit more. We would like to fight until the end for the championship," Arrivabene said at the SF-16H launch.

"I know that is not going to be easy, because our competitors are not sleeping, but we are committed to do our best." Mercedes certainly believe Ferrari will be their main obstacle to another season of dominance.

"We see Ferrari as our main threat and it remains to be seen how we position ourselves in the weeks to come," Mercedes technical director Paddy Lowe told Sky Sports.

"Ferrari are a very strong competitor and one we worry about. It keeps us motivated to keep us pushing all the time." Worrying for Mercedes' competition, though, the double world champions ran a trouble free 98.2km on a filming day in

the W07 Hybrid in Silverstone last week. "We take our opposition very seriously—especially Ferrari," said Rosberg. "They are going to be a big threat so we need to keep pushing." Elsewhere, all eyes will be on what improvements the McLaren-Honda partnership has developed in the off-season after a disastrous return to F1 for the Japanese manufacturer last season.

IMPROVEMENT

Former world champions Fernando Alonso and Jenson Button didn't even get on the podium as McLaren finished ninth in the constructors' championship ahead of only Marussia, who failed to register a single point.

Red Bull will also be looking for continued improvement as they ended 2015 promisingly to finish fourth in the constructors' championship.

"We're looking to build the progress we made at the end of the season and carry that momentum into the early races," said team principal Christian Horner.

However, it was Williams who were the best of the rest behind Mercedes and Ferrari last season and are looking for more in 2016 with the partnership of Finland's Valtteri Bottas and Brazilian Felipe Massa back for a third consecutive season.

"Staying where we are will be a challenge in itself, but we are determined to keep improving because only winning will ever be good enough," team principal Frank Williams said at the launch of the FW38.

The grid extends to 22 cars in 2016 as thanks to the introduction of the first American F1 team in 30 years in Haas.

Meanwhile, French car giant Renault returns as a constructor after buying out the financially stricken Lotus team. — AFP



INFINITI'S FORMULA ONE INVOLVEMENT PROGRESSES

KUWAIT: Infiniti's successful involvement in Formula One enters the next phase. Starting with the new 2016 season, Infiniti will be a technical partner of the new Renault Sport Formula One team. Leveraging its expertise in performance hybrids, Infiniti will contribute engineering resources to the Renault Energy F1 Power Unit's Energy Recovery System (ERS), which incorporates two motor generator units, the MGU-H and MGU-K, and a battery.

This new and enhanced involvement strengthens the Renault Nissan Alliance and at the same time leverages the opportunities the Alliance provides by creating powerful industrial synergies for its members.

Infiniti's reputation for performance hybrid

vehicles is built on the widely-acclaimed 3.5-litre hybrid engine. The Q70sedan, equipped with this engine, has been recognized by the Guinness Book of World Records as the fastest accelerating full-hybrid car. The same hybrid system is also offered on the Q50 sports sedan. Infiniti's strong expertise will be used by the Renault Sport Formula One team in Viry-Châtillon as a team of Infiniti hybrid specialists move from Infiniti's technical center in Atsugi, Japan, to France to support development of the Renault Energy power unit. At the same time, Infiniti will use the experience from the F1 ERS system to further enhance its hybrid powertrains for road cars.

Infiniti began its Formula One involvement in

2011 as partner of the Red Bull Racing team and evolved into the title sponsor of the team as of the 2013 season. Building upon this experience, Infiniti now takes the logical next step forming a technical cooperation with the Renault Sports Formula One team based on a five-year plan.

"At Infiniti, motorsport is an important part of our business strategy," said Roland Krueger, President Infiniti Motor Company. "Forming a technical collaboration and enabling technology transfer road-to-track and track-to-road is the logical next step. The establishment of the Renault Sport Formula One Team by our Alliance partner Renault provides us with an ideal opportunity to enter this next phase of our long-term motorsport strategy."