

SINGAPORE IN THE DRIVING SEAT AS IT NEGOTIATES NEW F1 DEAL

SINGAPORE: After negotiating Singapore's current Formula One deal, Bernie Ecclestone said in 2012 the hardest thing was explaining to the authorities that "we don't race for free".

Four years on, the F1 boss appears to be frustrated again as he tries to keep one of the most glamorous races on the calendar after the contract expires in 2017, at a time when the city-state is weighing whether the event makes economic sense anymore.

With its tourism industry increasingly diversified, a stronger country brand than when it first hosted the event in 2008 and other major sporting events in the bag, Singapore seems to have the upper hand in the talks with F1.

Moreover, Ecclestone and F1's new owners, US cable TV mogul John Malone's Liberty Media, face a new risk: with Malaysia pulling out of a new deal, they could altogether lose their presence in

Southeast Asia, one of the world's fastest-growing regions.

F1's 86-year-old commercial supremo first told German magazine Auto Motor und Sport that Singapore does not want to host F1 anymore, then clarified he did not want to lose Singapore. His comments suggest talks getting tougher.

"I think Singapore has come in and negotiated hard and has realised they are in a position of strength to do so," said James Walton, head of the Sports Business service line at Deloitte Singapore and Southeast Asia.

"This is one of the top ranked grand prix ... and one of the markets that the key sponsors of F1 are most interested in." Singapore's government funds 60 percent of the S\$150 million (\$105.13 million) it costs to host the race each year. Analysts say the city-state is weighing the costs, and benefits, of staging the event in the future.

Singapore GP, the event's organiser, said it would not comment on "ongoing commercial negotiations". A decision is expected before year-end, Ecclestone has said. The Singapore race is one of the most popular, taking place at night on a street circuit with spectators entertained by music acts such as Beyonce and Justin Bieber, while TV watchers get a bird's-eye view of the glitzy skyline.

As a top wealth management hub, the city-state is a natural draw for the region's affluent people, a key target of Formula One sponsors such as Hugo Boss and Tag Heuer, a luxury LVMH brand. But the significance of that is bigger for Ecclestone than for Singapore, which also hosts events such as the WTA women's tennis Finals and the Rugby 7s series that bring over 100,000 visitors each. While the F1 initially played an important role in boosting the tourism industry, Singapore has diversified its offering, now focusing

on the emerging middle classes from China, India and Indonesia. Tourism is actually a bright spot in a slowing economy. In the first eight months of this year, before this September's F1 race, the number of visitors was up 10.3 percent from the same 2015 period, at 11.3 million. Tourism receipts grew 12 percent to S\$11.6 billion (\$8.1 billion) in the first half of 2016.

REWARDS

To be sure, Singapore has benefited from hosting F1. Since the 2008 debut race, the event has generated S\$150 million in tourism receipts every year on average, except for 2009 at the height of the global financial crisis.

But about 80 percent of the spending gets recycled into the economy, with local firms hired for circuit set-up, ticketing and security, the Singapore Tourism Board says. "In these economic times,

every order book is important and I believe this is not a small order book," said Kurt Wee, President of the Association of Small & Medium Enterprises. He added though that "everybody would understand that the event has to be sustainable". And that is where Singapore has another argument. Attendance, which topped 100,000 on all three days in the first year, has declined, with this year's race averaging 73,000 spectators for each day, down from 87,000 in 2015.

With the global economy slowing, the numbers might fall further and a five-year commitment may not be so appealing, although this may be offset in the future by Malaysia pulling out as F1 fans in the region would have only one nearby option. "If you think of the government as a business, I think they have to manage their funds prudently to get the most bang for their buck," said ANZ economist Weiwen Ng.—Reuters

'TOUGHEST YET' 39TH DAKAR RALLY UNVEILED

PARIS: The 39th Dakar Rally will be raced over nearly 9,000 kilometres from January 2-14 in Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay and will demand "extreme endurance", organisers announced yesterday. The race will set off from the Paraguayan capital of Asuncion, with race sporting director Marc Coma promising "the toughest edition in the history of South American rally-raiding".

There will be one week spent on the Bolivian Altiplano, with five stages raced at crushing altitudes of more than 3,500m (11,480ft), going up to 4,500m. "High up in the mountains, you're really tested on a respiratory level," race director Etienne Lavigne told AFP.

"Producing an effort is more complicated. Competitors will experience this discomfort very often and for long periods."

There will also be six special stages of more than 400km, dune crossing and driving in sand, especially on the sections of the route still unknown to rally-raid regulars or during the all-important "Super Belen" stage, three days from the finish line in Buenos Aires.

"It's a very physical course for the competitors, the stages are long and on the bike or quad they'll be very physically challenged," Lavigne said, adding that the rally threw up an unprecedented series of

extreme geographical scenarios and climates. "There will be great differences between the tropical temperatures in Paraguay, the high-altitude climatic conditions (in Bolivia) and then the descent into the northwestern part of Argentina which is very dry and desert-like."

"The nature of the terrain, both tricky, rocky, off-road, numerous sandy parts on the route, along with rain, wind, sometimes snow, mud, sand, salt... It makes for a very complicated cocktail for the competitors." Some 316 vehicles, including 83 cars and 146 motorbikes, are registered for the rally, which will feature old hands such as Peugeot's French duo of defending champion Stephane Peterhansel and Cyril Despres, and Toyota's two-time winner Nasser al-Attiyah of Qatar and South African Giniel De Villiers. Also in the running will be nine-time world rally champion Sebastien Loeb and Carlos Sainz, both in Peugeots, 2004 Dakar champion Nani Roma in a Toyota and Finland's Mini driver Mikko Hirvonen, fourth on his debut in 2016. It will be the ninth time the Dakar Rally has been held in South America.

The race was cancelled in 2008 over security threats in Mauritania, organisers taking the decision to move the rally to another continent in 2009.—AFP



BOSTON: Tuukka Rask #40 of the Boston Bruins makes a save against the St. Louis Blues as teammate John-Michael Liles #26 clears the rebound during the second period at TD Garden on Tuesday in Boston, Massachusetts. The Blues won 4-2.—AFP

ALLEN STOPS 39 FOR BLUES IN 4-2 WIN AT BOSTON

BOSTON: Robert Bortuzzo and Paul Stastny scored 2:12 apart in the second period and Jake Allen had 39 saves, helping the St. Louis Blues beat the Boston Bruins 4-2 on Tuesday night to extend their winning streak to four. Jori Lehtera scored twice for St. Louis, including into an empty net with 1:16 left. Colton Parayko and Patrik Berglund each had two assists. Longtime Blues captain David Backes scored for Boston in his first game against his former club, putting the Bruins up 1-0 early in the first with the 20,000th goal in franchise history. Montreal is the only other NHL team with 20,000 goals. Dominic Moore also scored for the Bruins, who lost for just the third time this season with Tuukka Rask starting in goal. Rask had 24 saves for the Bruins, who had won four of five.

HURRICANES 2, MAPLE LEAFS 1

Viktor Stalberg scored a tiebreaking, short-handed goal in the second period, lifting Carolina over Toronto for its fifth straight victory. Jeff Skinner also scored for Carolina, and Cam Ward stopped 25 shots. Frederik Andersen made 27 saves for Toronto, which lost for only the third time in 10 games at home. Jake Gardiner had the Leafs' goal. Stalberg got the deciding tally against his former team after Tyler Bozak's pass was picked off in the neutral zone. Stalberg entered the zone alone, beating Andersen for his third goal of the season.

SENATORS 4, CANADIENS 3

Mark Stone and Erik Karlsson scored 2:24 apart in the third period, helping Ottawa rally to beat Montreal. Stone tied it at 3 early in the third from the slot after three Canadiens players got caught behind their own net. Karlsson then scored at 5:37, the visitors' first lead of the evening, on a fluke no-look shot from the blue line after a bad giveaway by Jeff Petry. Mike Hoffman and Derick Brassard also scored and Craig Anderson made 36 saves for Ottawa. Shea Weber, Alexander Radulov and Alex Galchenyuk scored for Montreal. Andrei Markov had three assists, and Carey Price stopped 19 of 23 shots.

FLYERS 3, PANTHERS 1

Steven Mason made 38 saves and Wayne Simmonds had a goal and an assist, helping Philadelphia beat Florida. Nick Cousins and Dale Weise also scored for the Flyers, and rookie Travis Konecny and Brayden Schenn had assists. Reilly Smith scored for the Panthers, who got 25 stops from Roberto Luongo. The loss spoiled the return of Florida forward Nick Bjugstad, who had missed all of this season after an injury in the preseason.

ISLANDERS 3, DUCKS 2, 50

Nick Leddy scored the winner in a marathon 14-round shootout, lifting New

York over Anaheim. Thomas Greiss made 39 saves and Adam Pelech and Josh Bailey scored in regulation for the Islanders, who had been 0-4-1 on the road this season. Each team had four goals in the shootout through 13 rounds. After Kevin Bieksa missed on a slap shot to start Round 14,

Leddy waited out Jonathan Bernier before snapping in the winner. Anaheim nearly won in the 12th when officials reviewed a tying goal by New York's Thomas Hickey, but officials determined that Hickey did not interfere with Bernier on his attempt and awarded him the tally.—AP

NHL Results/Standings

St. Louis 4, Boston 2; Carolina 2, Toronto 1; Ottawa 4, Montreal 3; Philadelphia 3, Florida 1; NY Islanders 3, Anaheim 2 (SO).

Western Conference						Eastern Conference							
Central Division						Atlantic Division							
W	L	OTL	GF	GA	PTS	W	L	OTL	GF	GA	PTS		
Chicago	13	5	2	61	53	28	Tampa Bay	12	7	1	62	49	25
St. Louis	11	6	3	51	53	25	Ottawa	11	7	1	44	49	23
Dallas	8	7	5	53	66	21	Boston	11	8	0	47	44	22
Minnesota	9	7	2	46	35	20	Florida	10	9	1	53	54	21
Winnipeg	9	10	2	58	62	20	Toronto	8	8	3	58	62	19
Nashville	8	7	3	50	48	19	Buffalo	7	8	4	37	48	18
Colorado	9	9	0	39	49	18	Detroit	8	10	1	46	51	17
Pacific Division						Metropolitan Division							
Edmonton	11	8	1	59	51	23	NY Rangers	14	5	1	81	47	29
Anaheim	9	7	4	52	49	22	Pittsburgh	11	5	3	54	55	25
San Jose	10	8	1	45	42	21	Washington	11	5	2	48	40	24
Los Angeles	10	9	1	51	51	21	Columbus	10	4	3	56	40	23
Calgary	8	12	1	49	69	17	New Jersey	9	6	3	41	42	21
Vancouver	7	10	2	41	61	16	Philadelphia	9	8	3	65	68	21
Arizona	6	9	2	44	56	14	Carolina	8	6	4	47	50	20
Eastern Conference						Atlantic Division							
Atlantic Division						Montreal	14	4	2	63	46	30	

Note: Overtime losses (OTL) are worth one point in the standings and are not included in the loss column (L)



PARIS: Peugeot driver Stephane Peterhansel, of France, poses during the presentation of the Dakar Rally 2017 in Paris, yesterday. The race will start in Paraguay and finish in Buenos Aires in Argentina from Jan. 2 to Jan. 14, 2017.—AP

DECISIVE DAY LOOMS FOR HAMILTON AND ROSBERG

ABU DHABI: Lewis Hamilton feels he faces "pretty impossible odds" going into Formula One's Abu Dhabi title-decider while Mercedes team mate and rival Nico Rosberg says he will treat Sunday's race like any other. Both are being disingenuous, of course. Hamilton knows he still has a real chance and Rosberg is well aware just how much is at stake.

While Rosberg is the favourite to win the 'Duel in the Desert', needing only to finish on the Yas Marina podium to become Germany's third world champion after Michael Schumacher and Sebastian Vettel, he will still be on tenterhooks. "I will give it everything to end the season with a win," said Rosberg, the son of Finland's 1982 champion Keke, even if cynics suspect he would be happy enough to settle for a fourth successive second place.

"I've had a great week, relaxing and catching up with my family and friends, so I feel like I'm in a good place. "In Brazil ... I was joking that I would still be taking things one race at a time. But, the more I think about it, the more that's actually not as crazy as it sounds. I have to treat this like any other race."

That has become Rosberg's mantra, his increasingly-implausible mechanism for dealing with the pressure as the title talk grows louder. That stress will be greater than ever on Sunday, a lifetime's ambition within reach after years of being beaten by Hamilton.

How he handles it in the day-to-night race could be crucial.

'IMPOSSIBLE ODDS'

Hamilton, who started the year tipped to become Britain's first four times world champion but goes into the season-ender 12 points adrift, has less pressure.

He must finish in the top three to have any hope but, in his mind, has nothing to lose and everything to gain. "I'm faced with pretty impossible odds no matter what I do this weekend. But I can't and won't give up. You never know what might happen, however unlikely it may seem," said the reigning champion. In fact four of Hamilton's nine wins this season (Monaco, Canada, Austria and

Germany) came with Rosberg off the podium—a result that if repeated for a fifth time in 21 races on Sunday would hand him the title.

Not quite the impossible odds he suggested. Hamilton, who has won the last three races and could end the year with more wins than Rosberg (nine each at present), knows only too well that a mechanical failure or first corner collision can change everything in an instant. At Abu Dhabi in 2014, Hamilton won both race and title while Rosberg started on pole but had a power unit problem and finished out of the points.

There is also the prospect of rivals—and particularly the Red Bull pairing of Daniel Ricciardo and Max Verstappen—getting in among the title contenders.

Verstappen in particular showed in Brazil, with a superlative drive through the field to third in the closing laps and wet conditions, that he is no respecter of reputations, nor is he afraid to get stuck in.

Further back, Williams's Brazilian Felipe Massa will be bowing out after his 250th race start in what also looks likely to be a farewell for 2009 world champ Jenson Button at McLaren. "It's going to be another emotional one," said former Ferrari driver Massa.

"I really hope the final, and 250th race of my Formula One career, can be a fantastic one. We will of course have a big party. Hopefully we can celebrate with a great result." —Reuters



Lewis Hamilton



LAS VEGAS: Majority owner Bill Foley (L) speaks with emcee Chris Maathuis before the Vegas Golden Knights was announced as the name for Foey's Las Vegas NHL franchise at T-Mobile Arena on Tuesday in Las Vegas, Nevada. The team will begin play in the 2017-18 season.—AFP