

WOLFF WARNS OF VOLCANO WAITING TO ERUPT

ABU DHABI: Mercedes boss Toto Wolff says the rivalry between team mates Lewis Hamilton and Nico Rosberg is like a volcano ready to erupt ahead of Formula One's season-ending title showdown this weekend.

The Austrian is, however, confident the drivers can avoid taking each other out of Sunday's race at Yas Marina. "It is also clear, and we have to acknowledge it, that now everything is on the line," Wolff told reporters at the Abu Dhabi circuit. "Now it's about losing or winning the drivers' world championship. They can't be in love with each other this weekend but they need to play all the

tricks to put themselves in a situation to hopefully win the championship.

"You just have to respect that there is a fierce rivalry, the competition is intense and like since 2013 we just have to try to keep it together with up and downs," Wolff said.

There have been plenty of mind games already with Hamilton saying he would consider himself the true champion, regardless of the outcome, while Rosberg has been adamant that he is just focused on the race.

"It's normal that here this is like a volcano to erupt with two of them, the two very different personalities. One is going

to dig a little deeper, the other one is going to do it in a different way," Wolff added. Rosberg is 12 points clear of Hamilton in the standings, meaning that he has only to finish on the podium to take his first title regardless of other results. A retirement by triple world champion Hamilton during the race, whether it be due to mechanical failure or a collision, would hand the German the title there and then.

Formula One titles have been settled before by a collision between the contenders-think Ayrton Senna and Alain Prost or Michael Schumacher with Damon Hill and Jacques Villeneuve-but

Wolff played down that likelihood.

"There are some examples in the past that have been very prominent and very controversial. Lewis's hero (Senna), and the other way around," he said.

"I think it is very difficult to construct such a situation and make it work. I don't think that's the way Nico operates and it would certainly not look very good. There are so many unknowns at the moment. It's about reliability and finishing the race for both of them.

"It is about qualifying, who is in the lead and how the race is going to pan out, that I don't think anyone of them is seriously considering playing that way,



Toto Wolff

because it could come out completely different." — Reuters

VERSTAPPEN READY TO PLAY DESERT 'KINGMAKER'

ABU DHABI: A teenager who passed his driving test little more than a year ago, Max Verstappen is the extravagantly-talented 'outsider' set to create an upset in the final outcome of this year's Formula One world championship this weekend.

If the 19-year-old Red Bull racer can win today's keenly-anticipated Abu Dhabi Grand Prix or split Mercedes duo Nico Rosberg and Lewis Hamilton, who are duelling for the title, he may well be cast in the role of 'king maker' in F1's chronicle.

German Nico Rosberg, who has won nine races this year, needs only to finish on the podium to clinch his maiden championship even if Lewis Hamilton claims his 10th win of the season. If not, and Hamilton wins, defending champion will claim his fourth. "I think Max might become one of my best friends," this weekend, joked 31-year-old Briton Hamilton. Rosberg, also 31, managed a wry grin. He knows that if Hamilton is leading the race, it may be quite a battle to keep the young Dutchman and his Red Bull team-mate Australian Daniel Ricciardo behind him.

"I am only interested in winning and nothing else," said Verstappen. "It is up to the championship contenders to run their own races. I want to beat them and win and whatever happens, the champion will be the one who deserves it in the end."

Verstappen, the son of a former F1 racer, has proved already that he has the ability to win races, break records and embarrass former champions and senior team-mates without breaking sweat.

In May this year he became the youngest winner of a Grand Prix when he triumphed at the Circuit de Catalunya in Spain at the age of 18 years and 228 days, one of only two races not won by a Mercedes driver - the other went to Verstappen's Red Bull team-mate Ricciardo in Malaysia. That achievement meant he displaced four-time champion Sebastian Vettel, who has many times since clashed with the young Dutchman and frequently lost his temper. If his Spanish win was a victory gifted by a

collision between the two dominant Mercedes cars, he has long since shown he needs no special favours to succeed and impress. In a series of spectacular drives, he has mixed aggression with precision and provocative blocking moves with outstanding skill to establish himself as a champion-in-waiting just six months after switching from perennial midfielders Toro Rosso to former champions Red Bull. His win in Spain was delivered with astonishing aplomb on his debut with his new team and came after only 23 outings in an F1 car. Many observers believe that a similar performance or, if needed, a repeat of his stunning wet weather rush to the podium in Brazil could carry him into a position to influence the destination of this year's drivers' title. His performance in Sao Paulo where he recovered from 16th to finish third in torrential rain was praised as one of the greatest wet-weather drives in the history of the sport.

On Friday, he was less spectacular as he struggled slightly with tyre degrading and engine power problems to take fourth place at the end of two free practice sessions. He was also blocked on one of his best laps, an inconvenience that he said cost him at least two-tenths of a second and left him half a second off Hamilton's fastest pace.

"I think it will be tight here," said Verstappen. "Ferrari is looking quite strong here this weekend, but I am sure we can be stronger." Verstappen is trying not only to claim a podium finish, or win. He is also keen to claim fourth place in the drivers' championship in which, before the race, he is just five points behind Vettel - the man with whom he has had a series of run-ins and rows.

The most notable came in Mexico last month when Vettel erupted into a wild rant littered with swear words after Verstappen had moved to defend his position in the final laps when the Ferrari driver was attempting to pass him. In the end, both men were demoted from third place after the race and Ricciardo in the second Red Bull was promoted to finish behind the two Mercedes men.— AFP

HAMILTON WILL STILL BE CHAMPION IN HIS HEART

ABU DHABI: Lewis Hamilton has indicated that, in his heart at least, he will be the true Formula One world champion even if today's title-deciding Abu Dhabi Grand Prix goes against him.

If he was to beat the odds and deny Mercedes team mate Nico Rosberg a first championship, it would represent the biggest achievement of the uncompromising Briton's stellar career. "I think in my heart I will feel - and maybe I should keep that private to myself - but I feel a certain way in my heart how I have performed," Hamilton told reporters ahead of the season's finale at Yas Marina.

"If he is labelled 'the world champion' it doesn't necessarily mean that's the way it's labelled in my heart," said the 31-year-old, who was quickest in both Friday practice sessions, making gestures for inverted commas. Like Rosberg, Hamilton has won nine races this campaign but unlike the German he has suffered more reliability problems. The Briton said his feelings did not mean Rosberg could not be considered a worthy winner but world champions were supposed to be "the best in all areas, all year long". "Just like 2007, in my heart I feel like I actually won that championship," he explained.

"Whilst it doesn't show that on paper, and people only remember who won the championship, in my heart I know and that's good enough for me."

Hamilton missed out on the 2007 title by a point to Ferrari's Kimi Raikkonen, taking it the next year instead.

OUTSIDE CHANCE

This season he has fought back from 43 points down, taken the lead and then fallen behind again before finally having a chance of becoming Britain's first four times champion. Hamilton's fans will always argue that without a late engine failure while leading comfortably in Malaysia, the Briton would be in charge instead of being 12 points adrift with his fate in Rosberg's hands.

Despite winning the last three races, he is well aware that Rosberg need only finish on the podium to be crowned champion. All the British bookmakers have the German as clear favourite, with Hamilton very much an outside chance. "If I was to win? Oh, by far it would be the greatest, it would be the greatest achievement of my career for sure," he said.

"It would be a battle... similar to the years and years of battle that I have had, particularly in our younger days as a family, all coupled into one year.

"I never want to write a book. I get offers to do books all the time and I turn them down.... but I get excited about one day talking about this year. There are so many thoughts I have on my mind which I can't share with you just yet," he added. — Reuters



ABU DHABI: Mercedes AMG Petronas F1 Team's British driver Lewis Hamilton (C), flanked by his German teammate Nico Rosberg (L) and Infiniti Red Bull Racing's Australian driver Daniel Ricciardo, celebrate at the end of the qualifying session as part of the Abu Dhabi Formula One Grand Prix at the Yas Marina circuit yesterday.—AFP



ANAHEIM: Anaheim Ducks center Rickard Rakell (67) and Chicago Blackhawks defenseman Duncan Keith (2) chase the puck in the second period of an NHL hockey game in Anaheim, Calif., Friday.— AP

KANE PACES CHICAGO PAST DUCKS 3-2 IN BLACK FRIDAY RIVALRY

ANAHEIM: Patrick Kane had a goal and an assist, and the Chicago Blackhawks hung on to beat the Anaheim Ducks 3-2 for their fifth consecutive win in the clubs' Black Friday rivalry game. Artem Anisimov and Ryan Hartman also scored as the Blackhawks snapped their two-game skid even without captain Jonathan Toews. He missed his first game of the season due to an upper-body injury. Corey Crawford made 34 saves for the Western Conference leaders. They have won five straight regular-season games in Anaheim since March 2013. Nick Ritchie and Jakob Silfverberg scored and John Gibson stopped 22 shots for the Ducks. They wrapped up a five-game homestand on a three-game skid. The Ducks fell to 4-4-2 against the Blackhawks on Black Friday. They haven't won this rivalry game since 2009.

SHARKS 3, ISLANDERS 2

Patrick Marleau scored with 22.5 seconds left and San Jose rebounded after allowing the tying goal to New York in the closing minute. Nick Leddy had tied it for New York with a one-timer off a feed from John Tavares with 57.1 seconds left but the Sharks bounced back quickly. Brent Burns took a shot from the point that Marleau deflected in the slot past Thomas Greiss for the winner that helped San Jose improve to 7-2 at home this season. Joe Pavelski and Brent Burns scored 34 seconds apart in the second period and backup Aaron Dell made 26 saves for the Sharks. Dell has earned both of his wins this season against the Islanders Anders Lee also scored for New York, and Greiss made 25 saves.

RED WINGS, 5, DEVILS 4, OT

Defenseman Mike Green scored from the right circle at 3:18 of overtime and Detroit handed New Jersey a rare home loss. Frans Nielsen added two goals, and Dylan Larkin and Anthony Mantha scored one apiece as the Red Wings won their second straight despite losing goalie Jimmy Howard to a lower-body injury in the first period. Petr Mrazek finished and allowed three goals in relief. John Moore, Mike Cammalleri, Pavel Zacha and Adam Henrique scored for the Devils. They are 7-0-2 at home.

WILD 6, PENGUINS 2

Charlie Coyle scored twice in the first period to set the tone as Minnesota matched its season high for goals, and Nino Niederreiter had two of the Wild's three goals on the power play on their way to the victory over Pittsburgh. Zach Parise also scored with the man advantage and Mikael Granlund added a goal to build 5-1 lead by the second intermission. Penguins goalie Marc-Andre Fleury's career record against the Wild fell to 2-7, with 30 goals allowed in those nine all-time matchups. Phil Kessel and Bryan Rust had goals for the Penguins.

STARS 2, CANUCKS 1

Esa Lindell scored his first NHL goal and had an assist to help Dallas beat Vancouver. Playing in his 17th game for Dallas, Lindell at first was

NHL Results/Standings																		
NY Rangers 3, Philadelphia 2; Chicago 3, Anaheim 2; San Jose 3, NY Islanders 2; Minnesota 6, Pittsburgh 2; Washington 3, Buffalo 1; Nashville 5, Winnipeg 1; Calgary 2, Boston 1; Columbus 5, Tampa Bay 3; Detroit 5, New Jersey 4 (OT); Dallas 2, Vancouver 1; Arizona 3, Edmonton 2 (SO).																		
Western Conference					Tampa Bay													
Central Division					W	L	OTL	GF	GA	PTS	13	8	1	69	56	27		
Chicago	14	6	2	65	57	30	Ottawa	12	7	1	47	50	25					
St. Louis	11	7	3	54	57	25	Boston	11	10	0	49	49	22					
Minnesota	11	7	2	55	38	24	Florida	10	9	1	53	54	21					
Nashville	10	7	3	60	51	23	Detroit	10	10	1	53	56	21					
Dallas	9	8	5	57	72	23	Toronto	8	8	4	62	67	20					
Winnipeg	9	12	2	60	70	20	Buffalo	7	9	5	39	53	19					
Colorado	9	10	0	42	55	18	Metropolitan Division											
Pacific Division					Edmonton	12	8	2	67	57	26	NY Rangers	15	6	1	85	55	31
San Jose	12	8	1	50	45	25	Washington	13	5	2	55	44	28					
Los Angeles	11	9	1	55	53	23	Pittsburgh	12	6	3	62	62	27					
Anaheim	9	8	4	54	52	22	Columbus	11	5	3	61	45	25					
Calgary	10	12	1	53	70	21	New Jersey	10	6	4	50	51	24					
Vancouver	8	11	2	46	64	18	Philadelphia	9	10	3	69	75	21					
Arizona	7	10	2	48	62	16	Carolina	8	7	4	48	52	20					
Eastern Conference					NY Islanders	6	10	4	49	63	16	Note: Overtime losses (OTL) are worth one point in the standings and are not included in the loss column (L)						
Atlantic Division					Montreal	15	4	2	65	47	32							

credited with the goal at 9:32 of the second period that tied it 1-1. A scoring change gave the goal to Radek Faksa, who deflected Lindell's drive from the left point past goalie Ryan Miller. With 4:02 left in the second, Lindell scored from the inside edge of the left faceoff circle past a screen from Patrick Eaves. Antti Niemi made 30 saves for Dallas, allowing only Jayson Megna's early goal.

BLUE JACKETS 5, LIGHTNING 3

Brandon Saad scored on a power play and Cam Atkinson had a short-handed goal in the third period in Columbus' victory over Tampa Bay. Alexander Wenneberg, Nick Foligno and Josh Anderson also scored to help the Blue Jackets improve to 9-2-2 in their last 13 games and 11-5-3 overall. Ondrej Palat, Jason Garrison and Nikita Kucherov scored for Tampa Bay. The loss was only the second for the Lightning in their last eight games against Columbus.

PREDATORS 5, JETS 1

Colin Wilson and Ryan Johansen scored twice, Mike Fisher added three assists and Nashville beat Winnipeg. James Neal also scored and Pekka Rinne made 22 saves for Nashville, winners of three straight. The Predators continued their home dominance, improving to 8-1-1. Dustin Byfuglien scored for Winnipeg. The Jets concluded their five-game trip, losing all five games.

FLAMES 2, BRUINS 1

Chad Johnson made 35 saves and Alex Chiasson broke a tie at 7:05 of the third period in Calgary's victory over Boston. Coming off a 2-0 victory Wednesday night at Columbus, Johnson allowed only David Pastrnak's goal off a rebound

at 5:55 of the third period. Sam Bennett had a goal and an assist to help Calgary win for the third time in four games. Bennett set up winner with a backhand pass from behind the net right to Chiasson, who easily beat goalie Anton Khudobin as he scrambled to get back across. Boston has lost three straight and four of five.

CAPITALS 3, SABRES 1

Marcus Johansson scored, Philipp Grubauer made 29 saves and Washington beat Buffalo. Daniel Winnik and Brett Connolly also scored to help Washington close its five-game homestand with its fourth victory. Sam Reinhart's third-period goal helped Buffalo's NHL-worst offense avoid being shut out for the third this time this season.

COYOTES 3, OILERS 2, SO

Radim Vrbata and Oliver Ekman-Larsson scored in a shootout to give Arizona a 3-comeback victory over Edmonton. Mike Smith made 32 saves to help the Coyotes improve to 20-0-4 in the last 24 meetings with Edmonton. Connor McDavid's shot beat Coyotes goalie Mike Smith as time expired in the 3-on-3 overtime, but the goal was disallowed on review when officials deemed it did not cross the goal line before time ran out. Max Domi and Shane Doan scored for Arizona. McDavid and Adam Larsson countered for Edmonton.

RANGERS 3, FLYERS 2

Matt Puempel scored in his first game with New York, and Henrik Lundqvist made 40 saves to help the Rangers beat Philadelphia. Derek Stepan and Kevin Hayes also scored for the Rangers. Shayne Gostibeher and Chris VandeVelde scored in the third period for Philadelphia.—AP