

Sports

# Two-time champion Sainz seizes lead on day three of Dakar Rally

Alonso is fifth fastest in the stage but still two hours and 40 minutes behind Sainz

**NEOM:** Two-time champion Carlos Sainz took over at the top of the Dakar Rally car standings yesterday after winning the third stage around the Saudi Arabian desert city of Neom.

The Spaniard, driving a Mini buggy, led Toyota's defending champion Nasser al Attiyah of Qatar by four minutes and 55 seconds after the 427km loop that extended close to the Jordanian border.

Overnight leader Orlando Terranova dropped to third, eight minutes off the pace, after the Argentine completed the stage nearly 13 minutes slower than Sainz. Three different drivers have now won the opening stages of the first Dakar to be held in the Middle East after more than a decade in South America.

The stage win was a career 33rd for Sainz, a double world rally champion who is also father of the McLaren Formula One driver with the same name. Fernando Alonso, the first Formula One world champion to compete in the Dakar, came back strongly from a difficult Monday when he smashed a wheel and suspension and lost more than two and a half hours.

The Spaniard was fifth fastest in the stage but still two hours and 40 minutes behind Sainz in the overall classification. Khalid al Qassimi of the United Arab Emirates, seventh overall on Monday night, ended his involvement in the rally after crashing and rolling his privately-entered Peugeot.

In the motorcycle category, American Ricky Brabec won the stage on his Honda and took over the lead from Britain's Sam Sunderland.

Monday's stage winner Ross Branch injured his shoulder in a crash at the 88km mark that cost the Botswana-born rider more than an hour. "I took a bend a little too wide and there was a rock which I hit with my back wheel. It threw me off the bike and I'm feeling a little battered, but that's just the race, I suppose," he said. Yamaha's Adrien van Beveren fractured his collarbone in another crash and was taken to hospital by helicopter. Australia's defending champion Toby Price lost his way and finished the stage fifth. The rally, held entirely inside Saudi Arabia, ends in Qiddiya on Jan. 17. —Reuters



**NEOM:** Mini's Spanish drivers Carlos Sainz and co-driver Lucas Cruz compete during the Stage 2 of the Dakar 2020 between Al Wajh and Neom, Saudi Arabia, yesterday. — AFP

## Patriots' Kraft praying Brady won't play elsewhere

**NEW YORK:** A rare first-round loss in the playoffs has the New England Patriots entering the offseason surrounded by unprecedented levels of drama and uncertainty. At the forefront of discussions about the future in New England for the next three months is whether quarterback Tom Brady will be back with the Patriots for a 21st season. Brady said Saturday night in the aftermath of a pick-six that helped the Tennessee Titans close out the Patriots that he considered retirement unlikely. Head coach Bill Belichick on Sunday said the Patriots weren't ready to talk about the future 12 hours after the painful postseason loss.

But owner Robert Kraft opened up to Peter King in an interview regarding where Brady could play next season. "Before the season started," Kraft said, "it was very important to Tom that he be free to do whatever he wanted at the end of the year. You know what I said to myself? That any person who plays 20 years for this team and helps us get to six Super Bowls, and been really selfless, has earned that right."

I love the young man like he's part of my family. Blood

family. Anyone who's done that has earned the right to control his future after 20 years. And you know, my hope and prayer is No. 1, he play for the Patriots. Or No. 2, he retires. He has the freedom to decide what he wants to do and what's in his own best personal interest." Brady said before the season he planned to explore all opportunities granted by a restructured contract. The Patriots have paid Brady below market value for the position while stockpiling Lombardi trophies. He was 19th among quarterbacks based in annual average value of his contract in 2019.

"If it's the Patriots, great. If that doesn't work, I don't know," Brady told King. "I just don't know. I love playing football. I still want to play football. I think I still can play at a championship level. I've just got to go do it. I'm motivated to get back to work and training."

PlaySugarHouse.com and BetRivers.com are not offering futures on where Brady's next snap will be taken due to regulatory approvals for this class of bets. If approved, they would open with Brady at +140 to play next season for another team and +700 to retire. Brady playing 2020 for the Patriots would be -180.

When Kraft was reminded of the many Hall of Fame quarterbacks to wear multiple jerseys, from Brett Favre to Joe Montana to Dan Marino and Joe Namath, the Patriots' owner said he's not ready to see Brady play for another team.

"I'm thinking of all that, of all the quarterbacks who went elsewhere, and I just hope and believe that Tom ... he is so special that he's earned the right to do



Tom Brady

what's best for him. But I just hope and pray we fit into his plans," Kraft said. "He is unique in the kind of leader he is, his work ethic, his selfless nature, everything. Think about it: He's been with us 20 percent of the life of the NFL." — Reuters

## CGF to consider India's 'innovative' 2022 Birmingham proposals

**NEW DELHI:** India's offer to host separate Commonwealth championships for shooting and archery, both absent in the 2022 Birmingham Games, will be considered by the Commonwealth Games Federation in the coming weeks, CGF chief executive David Grevenberg said.

The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) has offered to host, at New Delhi or Chandigarh, separate Commonwealth championships for these two disciplines months before the actual Games begins in Birmingham.

The groundbreaking proposal could pave the way for facility-sharing among member countries, said the IOA which had earlier threatened to boycott the Birmingham Games over the absence of shooting, which is an optional sport for host cities.

"The CGF can confirm that it has now officially received a proposal from Commonwealth Games India (CGI) to host a Commonwealth shooting event and potentially an archery event in India during 2022..." Grevenberg said in a CGF statement mailed to Reuters.

"The proposal will be reviewed and considered in January and February by the CGF and discussed with Birmingham 2022 Delivery Partners."

India has promised to bear the cost of these two events and wants the results to count towards the overall medal tally in Birmingham. The proposal has been supported by the Indian government as well as the International Shooting Sport Federation and World Archery.

"Key aspects of this assessment will be to ensure that the proposal conforms with our rules and regulations, is operationally deliverable, sets manageable precedents for the Commonwealth Games and ultimately adds value to athletes and the Commonwealth Sports Movement," added Grevenberg.

Shooting supplied 16 of India's 66 medals, including seven golds, at the 2018 Gold Coast Games where the country finished third in the medals table.

In shooting's absence, India could slip to anywhere between fifth and eighth in Birmingham, according to IOA estimates. — Reuters

## Kubacki clinches Four Hills title with closing win

**BISCHOFSHOFEN:** Poland's Dawid Kubacki secured the prestigious Four Hills World Cup ski-jumping title in style on Monday with success in the closing leg at Bischofshofen.

The 29-year-old capitalised on his consistency, finishing third in the two opening jumps at Oberstdorf and Garmisch and then a close runner-up at Innsbruck on Saturday. "I'm happy that I could remain calm and do my job," said the 2019 world champion.

With only one win on the World Cup circuit in the past decade, Kubacki posted efforts of 143 metres and 140.5m for a tally of 300.9 points in the closing event to beat Germany's Karl Geiger (291 pts), in front of a 15,000-strong crowd. "It was the best 4-Hills-Tournament for me so far, I've never been that good before," said Geiger. In third came Marius Lindvik, the Norwegian outsider who had conjured up

a course record-equalling 143.5m jump to win at Garmisch and lift him into second overall. "It's been an amazing tournament for me," said the 21-year-old. "I didn't expect to be second in the overall ranking. There are so many fans at all the events that it was always nice to go back to the hotel and relax a bit." Kubacki's path to the Four Hills summit was aided by the lack of form of the big favourite, Japan's Ryoyu Kobayashi.

He stormed to Four Hills success last year with a clean sweep of wins in all four jumps. He kicked off his title defence on the right note when winning in Oberstdorf before failing to fire in the remaining three, finishing respectively fourth, 14th and seventh.

### Four Hills results

Monday's 4th leg at Bischofshofen  
1. Dawid Kubacki (POL) 300.9 points (143m + 140.5m), 2. Karl Geiger (GER) 291 (140m + 136m), 3. Marius Lindvik (NOR) 289.4 (139m + 137m)

### Overall

1. Dawid Kubacki (POL) 1,131.6 points, 2. Marius Lindvik (NOR) 1,111, 3. Karl Geiger (GER) 1,108.4, 4. Ryoyu Kobayashi (JPN) 1,096. — AFP



**BISCHOFSHOFEN:** Dawid Kubacki from Poland celebrates with the trophy of the Four-Hills Ski Jumping tournament (Vierschanzentournee), in Bischofshofen, Austria, yesterday. — AFP

## Red Bull secure Verstappen for next four years

**LONDON:** Max Verstappen has signed to stay at Red Bull until the end of 2023 in a clear vote of confidence in the former world champions' Formula One title potential and their Honda partnership.

The announcement yesterday leaves two of the top three teams with young driver talent secure for the long-term, with Ferrari announcing in December that Charles Leclerc was staying to 2024.

"I am really happy to have extended my partnership with the team. Red Bull believed in me and gave me the opportunity to start in Formula One which I have always been very grateful for," Verstappen, 22, said in a statement.

"Over the years I have grown closer and closer with the team and besides the passion from everyone and the on-track performance it is also really enjoyable to work with such a great group of people."

"Honda coming onboard and the progress we have made over the last 12 months gives me even more

motivation and the belief that we can win together...I want to win with Red Bull and our goal is of course to fight for a World Championship together."

Red Bull finished third last year in the first season of a new partnership with Honda, which proved an immediate success after the Japanese manufacturer's failed relationship with McLaren.

Verstappen was best of the rest behind Mercedes drivers Lewis Hamilton and Valtteri Bottas.

The rumour mill will now focus more on six-times world champion Hamilton, who is out of contract at the end of this year, and the future of Leclerc's four-times champion team mate Sebastian Vettel.

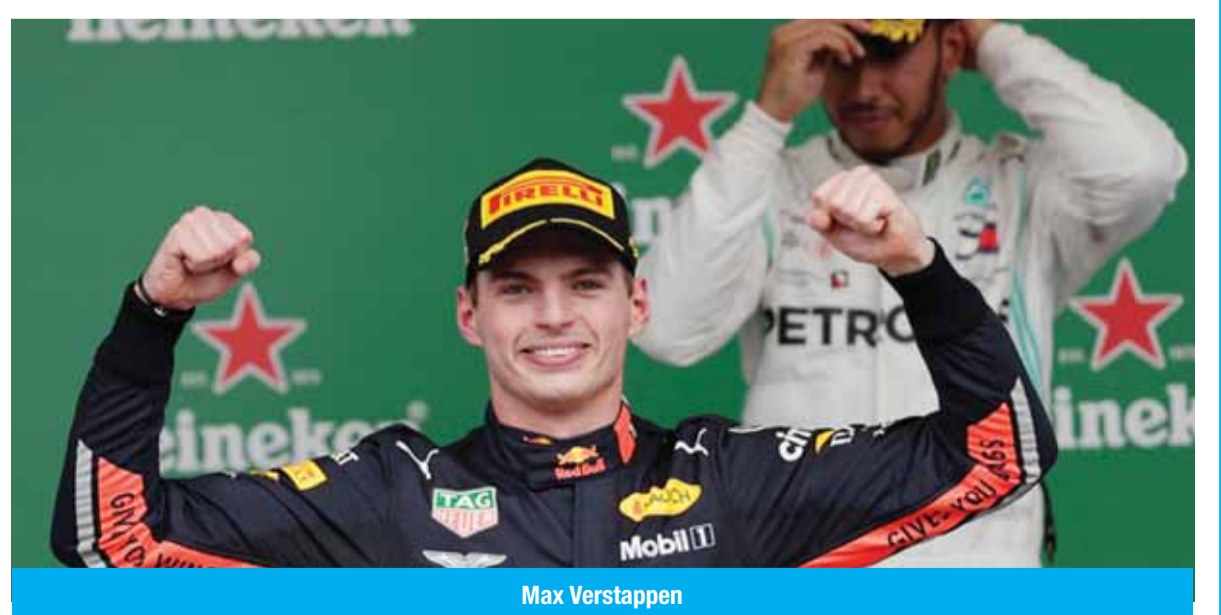
Verstappen won three races in 2019, and now has a career total of eight F1 victories, and is seen as a champion-in-waiting.

The Dutchman, who in 2016 became the youngest ever race winner in the sport's history, had been linked to both Ferrari and Mercedes in paddock speculation.

He may have damaged his Ferrari chances, however, by accusing the Italian team of cheating with their engine last season — comments that went down badly at Maranello.

Mercedes, who also have Bottas out of contract at the end of 2020, are waiting on Hamilton — who turned 35 yesterday and has had talks with Ferrari chairman John Elkann — to decide his next step.

Formula One is about to enter a new era in 2021



Max Verstappen

with sweeping rule changes and what owners Liberty Media hope will be a more level playing field.

"With the challenge of the 2021 regulation changes on the horizon continuity in as many areas as possible is key," commented team principal

Christian Horner. "Max has proven what an asset he is to the team, he truly believes in the partnership we have forged with our engine supplier Honda, and we are delighted to have extended our relationship with him." — Reuters