

## Sports

# Hamilton on crest of a wave ahead of new Qatar challenge

**DOHA:** Fresh from arguably his greatest triumph, Lewis Hamilton will be on the crest of a wave this weekend as he seeks another momentous victory over Max Verstappen at the inaugural Qatar Grand Prix. Just days after the most spectacular win of his career at the Sao Paulo Grand Prix, the 36-year-old, a keen surfer, will be powered by Mercedes' fighting spirit and a sense of shifting momentum at the Losail International Circuit.

Protests, controversies and stewards' reviews aside, Hamilton knows that if he has the same clear speed advantage, courtesy of his new Mercedes power-unit, he can further trim Verstappen's championship lead as they go forward into the unknown.

The Dutchman held a 14-point advantage after Brazil, but that may be reduced if a review of his aggressive move to defend his lead at Interlagos results in a penalty that affects the race result. A five-second sanction would relegate him to third and cost him three points, adding more ire to Red Bull's mounting anger, and apparent disbelief at Hamilton's speed, as their rivalry with Mercedes intensifies.

"If Hamilton is also so superior this weekend in Qatar, and then in Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi, we can write off the title," Red Bull's influential advisor Helmut Marko told F1-Insider. "I have never seen such a rocket engine from Mercedes. We couldn't hold Hamilton on the straights, even though he was driving with a rear wing set at a similar steep angle to Monaco. But only Hamilton has that speed. The other Mercedes drivers are no cause for concern for us."

Quoted by the German publication, Marko added that Red Bull were considering initiating another protest of Hamilton's car. "We are mainly concerned with two things, which we may also take up with the FIA for clarification, but there will only be a protest if we have evidence that

something is not compliant with the rules."

## 'Triumph through adversity'

The two areas of concern are believed to Hamilton's new engine and a 'ride height' system that allegedly lowers his car on the straights to reduce drag and increase speed. Hamilton was handed a series of penalties in Brazil, where he was fastest in qualifying, but started the sprint race from the back of the grid due to a rear wing irregularity, on top of taking a five-place grid drop for a new engine.

These setbacks and the stewards' decision to take no action after Verstappen's mid-race indiscretion, which has since been the subject of a requested review from Mercedes, fuelled the champions' determination. Team boss Toto Wolff said he felt proud of his team's response.

"It was a triumph through adversity and I couldn't be prouder of the fighting spirit from every member of our team," he said. "Through each setback, our determination grew stronger, and this already close team grew tighter with every challenge thrown our way. Lewis completed a stunning victory, which will rightly be talked about for years to come. For us, that victory is just one important step on our journey and our goal is clear."

Looking ahead to the final leg of a demanding triple-header, he added: "We arrive in Qatar for a fresh challenge, a brand-new circuit for F1 and one we can't wait to race on. We have prepared as well as we can for a new track — and the performance picture, from circuit to circuit, remains unpredictable, but as Brazil showed, even on the back foot, this team will always be in there fighting. The final race of a triple-header can sometimes test your energy levels, but with just three races to decide both championships, our motivation is greater than ever." —AFP



**MILWAUKEE:** Giannis Antetokounmpo #34 of the Milwaukee Bucks attempts a layup against the Los Angeles Lakers on Wednesday at the Fiserv Forum Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.—AFP

## Antetokounmpo's 47 points fuel Bucks in NBA win over Lakers

**LOS ANGELES:** Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 47 points and Khris Middleton grabbed a slice of Milwaukee franchise history as the NBA champion Bucks beat the Los Angeles Lakers 109-102 on Wednesday.

Antetokounmpo out-muscled a Lakers lineup still missing injured superstar LeBron James, along with Trevor Ariza and Kendrick Nunn. He set a tone with 17 points in the first quarter and combined with Middleton late to thwart a Lakers rally bid.

"I wanted to be the aggressor out there," said Antetokounmpo, whose points total was his highest since he posted 50 in the Bucks' championship-clinching victory over the Phoenix Suns in game six of last season's NBA Finals.

"I wanted to initiate the contact, get in the paint, make the right play and just play with an edge out there," added the two-time league MVP, who added nine rebounds and three assists with one steal and one blocked shot. With 29 seconds remaining, he sealed the game with two free throws. The Lakers had rallied from an 11-point first-half deficit and led 87-86 with 9:29 left to play.

Middleton, playing in his first game since October 30 after completing COVID-19 proto-

cols, combined with Antetokounmpo on nine straight Bucks points that put Milwaukee up 95-91. Middleton's 16 points included a brace of three-pointers in the fourth quarter that gave Milwaukee the lead for good and tied him with Ray Allen for most in Bucks history with 1,051. "That's a very, very special place to be," Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said.

Talen-Horton Tucker led the Lakers with 25 points and 12 rebounds. Anthony Davis, nursing a sore hip in the final period, scored 18 points and Russell Westbrook added 19 points and 15 assists for Los Angeles.

The Brooklyn Nets bounced back from a lopsided 117-99 loss to the Golden State Warriors with a 109-99 victory over the Cleveland Cavaliers at the Barclays Center. One night after coach Steve Nash admitted his team weren't in the same "category" as the Warriors, James Harden scored 27 points with 10 rebounds and seven assists and Kevin Durant added 23 points for Brooklyn.

The Nets' 21-point halftime lead was their largest of the season, but the Cavaliers kept the pressure on with a 32-19 third quarter. The Cavs, led by 25 points from Ricky Rubio, trimmed the deficit to seven points with less than five minutes remaining, but couldn't get any closer.

Over at Madison Square Garden, the New York Knicks were booed by their home fans during a 104-98 loss to the lowly Orlando Magic, who improved to 4-11. "Disappointed," Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau said after his team surrendered the lead in the final minutes of a game in which they coughed up 18 turnovers. "We have to learn from it and get ready for the next one. But we're capable of doing a lot better." —AFP



**SAO PAULO:** Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton celebrates after winning Brazil's Formula One Sao Paulo Grand Prix at the Autodromo Jose Carlos Pace, or Interlagos racetrack, in Sao Paulo, on November 14, 2021.—AFP