

## Sports

# Verstappen looks for 'perfect weekend' in Japan to retain title

## Winning the title in Japan would be 'extra special' because of his team's relationship with Honda

**SUZUKA, Japan:** Max Verstappen said Thursday that he needs "a perfect weekend" to clinch his second straight Formula One championship at this weekend's Japanese Grand Prix. Red Bull's runaway championship leader can secure the title at Suzuka if he gains eight points on nearest rival Charles Leclerc of Ferrari and six on team-mate Sergio Perez.

That would happen if Verstappen wins the race and claims the fastest lap, or if he finishes first and Leclerc finishes lower than second place. The flying Dutchman is trying not to think too hard about wrapping up the title, despite 12 previous Formula One world championships having been crowned at the Japanese Grand Prix.

"It would be very nice if it was here, but if it doesn't happen here I will be even more in favour the next race," said the 25-year-old, who missed the chance to clinch the championship at last week's Singapore Grand Prix after a seventh-place finish. "It doesn't really change anything, you just want to have a good weekend and maximise everything you can. I need a perfect weekend to be able to clinch the title here but to be honest I'm not really thinking about it too much."

Verstappen would become only the third driver after Michael Schumacher and Sebastian Vettel to clinch the title with four races to spare if he gets the job done in Suzuka. The Japanese Grand Prix returns after a three-year absence because of COVID and Verstappen is excited to be competing in front of the "crazy" Japanese fans again.

"They're very passionate-crazy but in a good way,

and they really dress up," said Verstappen, who has won 11 of 17 races so far this season. "You could see quite a few people walking around with a DRS rear wing on their heads. It shows you how popular motor sport is in Japan."

### Special relationship

Verstappen's Red Bull car will carry a Honda logo at this weekend's race as part of a "strengthened relationship" with the Japanese company. Honda officially left Formula One at the end of last season but signed an agreement to continue providing technical assistance in engine development to Red Bull and sister team Alpha Tauri until the end of the 2025 season.

Verstappen said winning the title in Japan would be "extra special" because of his team's relationship with Honda. "It's great to see the full name back on the car," he said. "It makes it extra special that they are back on the car just before their home grand prix. We have been working well together and it's been enjoyable."

Verstappen will be looking to improve on last weekend's performance, after a fuelling blunder in qualifying left him with too much work to do on the tight Marina Bay street circuit. Verstappen called the race "a prime example of how you don't want a weekend to go" but insisted there was "not really much to change" in Japan. "They all know that it was a bad weekend but we have also shown this year that we have had a lot of good weekends so we know how to do it," he said. —AFP



SUZUKA, Japan: Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen attends a press conference ahead of the Formula One Japanese Grand Prix in Suzuka on October 6, 2022. —AFP

## Farah targets April return

**DOHA:** British running legend Mo Farah said on Thursday he is aiming for an April return from injury to road racing, adding he is covering more miles now than 20 years ago as he bids to extend his career. The 39-year-old four-time Olympic gold medalist withdrew from Sunday's London marathon because of injury and said there would be no "rash decisions" about racing again.

"I hope to participate again in the future. Honestly, training was going well," Farah told reporters at the World Innovation Summit for Health in Doha, where he spoke about the need to boost mental health help for athletes.

He said his problems started about two weeks before the London race. "I felt a little bit my hip, a bit sore and that was me out," he said. Farah said he would go to Ethiopia for three months of training in January. When asked about his next competitive race, he said: "I think April. It depends."

"It's not making rash decisions in terms of 'I just want to race'. I think you have to be in the right frame of mind and the body has to be right," Farah, who quit track events this year, had no particular race in mind. He said he just wanted to "tick the box" on winning another major marathon to add to his 2018 Chicago victory.

"I'm definitely retired from the track because I've achieved everything there is to achieve," said Farah, who also has six world titles. "There's nothing that you can improve or nothing more you could do. And that's the reason why I wanted to go to the road because I believe the roads—I didn't know what I was capable of."

Farah said he is now running between 120 and 125 miles (195-202 kilometres) a week, against 100 miles two decades ago. "About four weeks ago, it was the highest I have done for a while. It was close to 138 (miles). And you couldn't keep that going." "It has to be quality over quantity," he added. —AFP

## Iran charges ex-footballer for protests

**TEHRAN:** Iran has charged former football star Ali Karimi in absentia for his support for protests over Mahsa Amini's death in morality police custody, Iranian media have reported. A wave of unrest has rocked Iran since the 22-year-old Kurdish woman's death was announced on September 16 after her arrest in Tehran for allegedly failing to observe the Islamic republic's strict dress code for women.

The Iranian judiciary accused the former Bayern Munich midfielder of being "a prominent leader the recent riots", Mehr news agency said on Tuesday. Karimi, who reportedly moved to the United Arab Emirates a few months ago, was accused of "spreading the voice of the enemy and encouraging" the protest movement, Mehr added.

The 43-year-old former player and coach has repeatedly used Instagram, where he has more than 13 million followers, to support the protests and condemn Amini's death, saying "nothing can wash away this disgrace".

Ultraconservative daily Kayhan accused Karimi on Wednesday of having "led the riots" and "poured oil on the flames of the troubles", which led to the "death and martyrdom of young people". The street violence has led to dozens of deaths—mostly of protesters but also members of the security forces—and hundreds of arrests.

After last week's Friday prayers, "a group" of regime supporters gathered outside Karimi's home in Tehran, chanting "death to the organiser of sedition", Mehr reported. Karimi, the 2004 Asian Football Confederation player of the year, is the Iranian national team's third-most awarded player and fifth top scorer. —AFP



## Kuwait gymnastic team bags 8 gold, one silver

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Juniors Artistic Gymnastics team was in first place at the conclusion of the Arab Gymnastics Championship that was held in Wahran, Algeria as they won 8 medals 7 gold and one silver.

Algeria placed second and Qatar third.

Kuwaiti Abdallah Miqdad dominated the event by winning 6 gold medals in 7 events, while the 7th gold was won by the team. Mousa Al-Sahaf won the silver medal in the rings event raising the total medals won by Kuwaiti players to 14 (7 gold and seven silver), as the girls juniors had won 6 medals earlier.

President of Kuwait and Arab Gymnastics Association Fahad Al-Soula was happy for the achievement adding that Kuwait participation was highly successful in all aspects.



## 34th Arab Clubs Basketball Tournament

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait teams participating in the 34th Arab Clubs Basketball Tournament, hosted by Kuwait Sports Club had positive results in the opening matches as Kuwait Basketball team

## 'Imperative' Formula One cost cap rules enforced: Hamilton

**SUZUKA, Japan:** Seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton said Thursday that any team breaking Formula One's cost cap must be punished, after governing body FIA pushed the findings of an investigation back to next week.

FIA had been due to reveal Wednesday if any team had breached last season's \$145 million budget cap, but released a statement instead saying the report would be delayed until Monday, October 10.

Rival teams claimed at last weekend's Singapore Grand Prix that two teams, thought to be Red Bull and Aston Martin, had exceeded the cap, which was introduced last season to make racing more competitive.

defeated Ahli Benghazi (Libya) 76-60 in its first round match. Meanwhile Kazima defeated Bashaer (Oman) 99-80, and Jahra defeated Dija University (Iraq) 72-57.

The opening day saw Ahli (Egypt) defeating Mina (Yemen) 130-53, while Ahli (Bahrain) defeated Al-Sadd (Qatar) 69-60. Ittihad Alexandria (Egypt) defeated Aleppo Ahli (Syria) 99-52. Each winning team received 2 points while losers got 1 point.

The tournament had a simple opening ceremony and laser lighting was used besides a welcoming song for the delegation by Bashar Abdallah.

The ceremony was attended by President of Kuwait Olympic Committee Sheikh Fahad Nasser

Red Bull's Max Verstappen pipped Hamilton of Mercedes to last season's title on the last lap of a controversial final race at Abu Dhabi. Should any team exceed the cost cap then there are a range of penalties available, from fines for "minor" breaches of the cap all the way up to points deductions and disqualification from the championship for a serious "material" breach.

Hamilton warned the integrity of the sport was at stake as he spoke to reporters ahead of the Japanese Grand Prix this weekend at Suzuka. "I think it's imperative," Hamilton said when asked if teams who are found guilty should be punished, stressing that he does not know if any teams broke the rules.

"I was expecting those results to come out yesterday. I would like to think that if it's been delayed it's because they're taking it very seriously," he said. Hamilton said he trusted that the FIA would deal with the matter in the right way. "It would be bad for the sport if action wasn't taken if there was a breach," he said. He claimed Mercedes would have been in a different position last year if they had spent more mon-

Sabah Al-Ahmad, Acting Director of Public Authority for Sport Mahmoud Abul, Egypt's Ambassador Usama Shaltout, Kuwait Basketball Association Chairman Rasheed Al-Enezi and other dignitaries.

Sheikh Fahad Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad said the tournament is an opportunity to strengthen ties between Arab brothers, while exchanging technical and administrative expertise. He said "welcome for our Arab brothers in their second country Kuwait and land or friendship and peace, and we wish them a pleasant stay."

Sheikh Fahad lauded the good organizations and wished Kuwait teams all success.

ey but that was "not the name of the game". "I'm grateful that our team is very strict," he said.

Hamilton's Mercedes team-mate George Russell said their team could "bring more performance to the table if we had more money to spend". Russell said he would wait for the findings but suggested that any team found guilty should have their cost limit cut for next season.

"You would expect the amount that's gone over should be the amount that's taken off for next year's budget and probably a bit more on top of that as a punishment," he said. The FIA said the investigation was too complicated for the results to be published by Wednesday.

The governing body also said that claims they had leaked details of the investigation were "baseless". Sebastian Vettel said it was vital to abide by the outcome of the investigation. "You have to have a level of trust, otherwise it shakes up everything that exists in your world when you talk about racing," said the German who won four world titles with Red Bull. —AFP