

Sports

Perez takes pole in Miami as Leclerc crash leaves Verstappen in ninth

Verstappen frustrated that he had not been able to complete a peak lap before the red flag

MIAMI GARDENS: Red Bull's Sergio Perez grabbed pole position for Sunday's Miami Grand Prix and with team-mate Max Verstappen left back in ninth on the grid, has his eyes on a victory that could send him to the top of the standings.

Perez is just six points behind defending world champion Verstappen after the Mexican's second victory of the season in Azerbaijan last week. Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso, enjoying a strong season, claimed second place and Ferrari's Carlos Sainz will start in third in an all-Spanish speaking front row of the grid.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc crashed out with one minute 36 seconds left, causing a red flag and the decision was taken not to resume the session. Leclerc, who had clipped the wall earlier in qualification, lost control through Turn Six and span out of control the entry to the next turn, with his Ferrari spinning into the wall.

The premature end to the session left Verstappen, who had topped the final two practice sessions, without the chance to make a final lap to challenge for pole and Leclerc back in seventh. Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton, the seven-times world champion, failed to make it out of Q2 and will start down in 13th place on the grid for Sunday's race.

Duel provides drama

With Red Bull consistently the fastest this season, the duel between their two drivers is so far the source of the most drama. "I'm enjoying (the battle)," said Perez. "I'm just thinking race by race. Tomorrow (Sunday) is a new opportunity starting from pole, we are the ones that have something to lose," he said.

Perez said he had been struggling in practice

before finding his pace when it counted. "It wasn't coming together. I was struggling for balance, confidence," he said. "It has been my worst weekend up to qualifying. I was just resetting everything we did, we made a small change into qualifying that really everything became more alive. We put in the lap when it mattered," added the Red Bull driver.

Verstappen was left frustrated that he had not been able to complete a peak lap before the red flag. "I was trying to put it on the limit and then I made a mistake and had to abort the lap," Verstappen said. "Then you rely on a bit of luck that there is not going to be a red flag, but that can happen on a street circuit. I'm just a bit upset with myself."

"It's going to be difficult. I made it difficult for myself, so I have to accept that," he said. Hamilton has an even more difficult task as his frustrations continued. "Last run I was at the last of the pack and trying to get the temperatures into the tyres. Everyone slowed into the last corner and I lost all temperatures and couldn't do the lap," he said.

"We knew it was very hard and there was a 50:50 chance we could get into Q3 so we need to be better with our timing. It's done, I'll try and get my head down tomorrow and see what I can do -- 13th to God knows where," he said.

Kevin Magnussen of Haas was a surprise fourth, ahead of Alpine's Pierre Gasly and Hamilton's Mercedes team-mate George Russell. After Friday's practice several drivers had complained about the relaid track being slippery and Sainz said it remained a difficult challenge.

"It was a very tricky quali for all," he said. "I think it's very difficult to find the right feeling with the tyres around this tarmac, and it was a fight the whole



MIAMI GARDENS: (L-R) Aston Martin's Spanish driver Fernando Alonso, Red Bull Racing's Mexican driver Sergio Perez and Ferrari's Spanish driver Carlos Sainz Jr., pose after the qualifying session for the 2023 Miami Formula One Grand Prix at the Miami International Autodrome in Miami Gardens. — AFP

way through and very easy to make mistakes. "It was getting windier and windier...but in general it was a decent outcome for tomorrow, but today I think we could have been even better," he said.

Rain is possible on Sunday which could add a further element of difficulty. The debut Miami race

attracted plenty of celebrity attention last year and entrepreneurs Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos were both at the track on Saturday. Tesla, SpaceX and Twitter owner Musk watched the practice session from inside Red Bull's garage while Amazon founder Bezos was with McLaren. — AFP

USA claims last semi final berth at LPGA International

SAN FRANCISCO: The United States claimed the last semi-final berth at the LPGA International Crown on Saturday to book a clash with Thailand, the only team to emerge from four-balls pool play with a maximum six wins.

The United States, already closing in on a semi-final spot after Friday's matches, lost one match and halved another against Sweden, but that was more than enough as China split their two with England—unable to get the two victories they needed to have a chance of advancing.

Meanwhile, Thailand completed a perfect pool play performance as Patty Tavatanakit and Atthaya Thitikul beat Australia's Minjee Lee and Stephanie Kyriacou 1-up and Moriya and Ariya Jutanugarn beat Hannah Green and Sarah Kemp 3&2.

Tavatanakit and Thitikul were 3-up through 13 holes when Lee and Kyriacou won two straight holes with birdies. "I think it woke me up a little bit when they started making putts," Tavatanakit said. "Steph was really clutch coming down the end. You've got to give that to her."

"But we did what we had to do, and we ended up finishing, winning." After the 16th hole was tied with pars, Thitikul matched Kyriacou's birdie at 17 and Tavatanakit matched Kyriacou's birdie at the par-5 18th to seal the win. "We had to get the birdies to beat them," Thitikul said.

With six match wins under their belts this week, Tavatanakit said the Thais are feeling "good vibes" heading into Sunday at TPC Harding Park, where each semi-final will consist of two singles and a foursomes match.

The winners will return Sunday afternoon for a final in the same format. "It's match play," Tavatanakit said. "At the end of the day anything can happen. We're just going to give it our best and hopefully we bring home the trophy."

They'll be up against a US team featuring world number one Nelly Korda, newly minted major winner Lilia Vu, Lexi Thompson and Danielle Kang.

Sweden unbeaten

Sweden's Anna Nordqvist and Caroline Hedwall beat Vu and Korda 1 up on Saturday while Thompson and Kang tied with Madelene Sagstrom and Maja Stark in the final match of the day. Vu holed out from the fairway for eagle on the sixth hole as she and Korda led much of their match, but Nordqvist's birdies at 15 and 17 were enough for a win.

Sagstrom and Stark were 2-up through 13 holes, but the Americans won 14, 15 and 16 to go 1-up, only for Stark's birdie to win the 18th and forge the tie. By then, however, the United States were already assured of going through. China's Yin Ruoning and Lin Xiyu had earned one of the points they needed with a 2&1 win over England's Bronte Law and Jodi Ewart-Shadoff.

But Alice Hewson and Liz Young claimed England's only round-robin win when Hewson's birdie at 18 gave them a 1-up win over Liu Yu and Liu Ruixin. The other semi-final will pit Sweden, winners of Pool A with 5 ½ points, against Australia, who finished second in Pool B to Thailand with 3 ½ points.

In other matches on Saturday, defending champions South Korea nabbed their first two wins of the week as Choi Hye-jin and Chun In-gee beat Japan's Nasa Hataoka and Ayaka Furue 3&1 and Ko Jin-young and Kim Hyo-joo beat Yuka Saso and Hinako Shibuno 3&2. — AFP

'One Pandya will win': Brothers skipper IPL teams

AHMEDABAD: Hardik and Krunal Pandya hugged and joked Sunday as they made history by becoming the first brothers to captain two opposing sides in an Indian Premier League match.

"It's a dream come true for us, leading our respective sides," elder brother Krunal Pandya, 32, skipper of Lucknow Super Giants, said after winning the toss in Ahmedabad. But he added: "Once we go into the field, the game face will be on."

Gujarat Titans skipper Hardik Pandya, 29, adjusted his big brother's hat and also told the host, who called it wrong, that the coin fell in Krunal's favour. "Big, emotional day for the family, our father would

Al Muzaini unveils Kuwait women's cricket training kit

KUWAIT: Al Muzaini Exchange Company, the number one exchange company in Kuwait and the proud sponsors of Kuwait Cricket joined the Kuwait women's cricket team and the Management of Kuwait Cricket for the unveiling of the women's training jersey with the Al Muzaini logo at the front of the kit.

The event was held in Sulaibiya cricket ground. Members of the women's cricket team were presented with their new training kits by Guruprasad Kadri, the Operations manager at Al Muzaini, Trevin Cutinho, the Digital Marketing officer at Al Muzaini and Sajid Ashraf, Director General of the Kuwait Cricket Council Board. The team were provided with words of support and encouragement from the guest panel as the names of the 20-women Kuwait National Women's Cricket Team shortlist was announced.

The players were excited to receive their kits and

Mage wins 149th Kentucky Derby

LOS ANGELES: Mage roared from off the pace to win the 149th Kentucky Derby on Saturday, launching US racing's Triple Crown campaign as two more horse deaths on Saturday cast a pall on proceedings at Churchill Downs.

Trainer Gustavo Delgado and jockey Javier Castellano—both from Venezuela—each claimed a first Kentucky Derby win, Mage surging around the final turn and out-dueling Two Phil's down the stretch. Two Phil's, trained by Larry Rivelli and ridden by Jareth Loveberry, finished second and Angel of Empire, trained by Brad Cox and ridden by Flavien Prat, was third.

Mage, a 16-1 shot who had impressed in running second to Forte in the Florida Derby five weeks ago, was among the beneficiaries when the race was thrown wide open Saturday morning as favorite Forte became the fifth horse scratched from the 1 ¼-mile event.

Now he's poised to challenge for the Triple Crown, with the Preakness Stakes in Baltimore on May 20 to be followed by the Belmont Stakes in New York in June. "Give me a couple of days at least," Delgado laughed when asked if Mage would be pointed toward the coveted treble.

Mage became the fourth horse to win the Derby off only three prior career starts. But Castellano, denied in 15 prior Derby attempts, said he never doubted the lightly raced colt could win. "He did it really well today," Castellano said. "He got a lot of dirt in his face, came from behind horses."

have been proud," said an emotional Hardik, a regular in the national side and a much bigger star than Krunal. "This is something that's happening for the first time. Short of words, but the family is proud. One Pandya will win." The occasion was especially momentous since the two brothers were playing in their home state Gujarat in western India at the world's biggest cricket stadium.

Brothers have played against each other in the money-spinning T20 tournament, including India stars Irfan and Yusuf Pathan, but never before have two siblings led their teams. The occasion arose when Krunal took over as leader of Lucknow after injured regular captain KL Rahul was ruled out on Friday for the rest of the tournament. Hardik, a pace bowler and a hard-hitting batsman who has played 11 Tests, 74 ODIs and 87 T20 matches for India, led Gujarat to a fairytale title last year in the team's debut season. Krunal, a left-hand batsman and left-arm spinner, has played five ODIs and 19 T20 matches for India, with his last match in 2021. — AFP



AHMEDABAD: Gujarat Titans' Hardik Pandya plays a shot during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 cricket match between Gujarat Titans and Lucknow Super Giants at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad. — AFP



Kuwait women's cricket team

expressed their gratitude towards Al Muzaini for the support and confidence that the company has placed in supporting women's cricket and for being the first company to sponsor women's cricket in Kuwait.

Al Muzaini is extremely proud to be a part of the growth of women's cricket in Kuwait and encourages the young girls to actively take up the sport and conquer all milestones and break all records. Al Muzaini also recently announced their Mega Pro-

motion Campaign 2023. Transfer money through Al Muzaini for a chance to win a BMW X3 2023 and incredible prizes worth over \$130,000. Send money through Al Muzaini's branches, self-service kiosks, online or the mobile app and use any of their services for a chance to win every day. Transferring through the app multiplies your chances of winning. The campaign lasts from 23rd March to 11th June. Al Muzaini, always near you!



LOUISVILLE: US-Venezuelan Jockey Javier Castellano on Mage (front L) rides during the 149th Kentucky Derby at Churchill Downs Racetrack in Louisville, Kentucky. — AFP

"He's a little horse but with a big heart." The scintillating run capped a disturbing week at the iconic racetrack in Louisville, Kentucky, where seven horses have died in the space of 10 days. That included two horses on Saturday's race programme—Chloe's Dream and Freezing Point—that were euthanized after being taken from the course by horse ambulance after breaking down in races.

Last week, Derby-bound Wild on Ice and Take Charge Briana were euthanized after suffering leg injuries. Chasing Artie and Parents Pride, both trained

by Saffie Joseph, collapsed and died with the cause of death still unknown.

The Board of Stewards announced Thursday that all Joseph-trained horses had been scratched from all races until further notice. That included Derby runner Lord Miles. Those four deaths prompted a statement of concern from Churchill Downs officials on Wednesday, and the Daily Racing Form then reported that another horse, Code of Kings, flipped over while being unsaddled in the paddock and broke his neck. — AFP