



Championship - Wolverhampton Wanderers v Sheffield Wednesday - Molineux Stadium, Wolverhampton, Britain Wolverhampton Wanderers players celebrate winning the Championship - Reuters-11R

Three in a row for Vettel, Hamilton shares front Azerbaijan Grand Prix row

BAKU, APRIL 29 --Ferrari's championship leader Sebastian Vettel smiled with relief Saturday after he had claimed pole for Sunday's Azerbaijan Grand Prix ahead of a revived Lewis Hamilton for Mercedes in a crash-stricken qualifying session.

The German, who leads the defending four-time champion by nine points after three races this season, clocked a best lap in one minute and 41.498 seconds to sweep to the prime starting spot.

It was an emphatic demonstration of his and Ferrari's pace after he had struggled in practice on Friday. It was his third consecutive pole position and the 53rd of his career.

"In the end, I knew I had the car I wanted and it did what I wanted... The first lap was good and it was good enough in the end so I am happy," said Vettel.

Hamilton was 0.179 seconds adrift after an improved showing that left him ahead of Mercedes

team-mate Valtteri Bottas, Daniel Ricciardo and his Red Bull team-mate Max Verstappen.

"That was close," said Hamilton. "We did the best job we could and I think I lost a little bit in the final sector, but Sebastian did a great job. We are in the mix and I am hoping to give him a hard time in the race." Bottas said: "We can fight them here and we are starting very close. This race can be crazy, but we have a good starting point."

Kim Raikkonen wound up sixth in the second Ferrari after an eventful session and a huge slide on his final flying lap.

Esteban Ocon was seventh ahead of his Force India team-mate Sergio Perez, Nico Hulkenberg who faces a five-place grid penalty for a gearbox change, and his Renault team-mate Carlos Sainz.

In cool and overcast conditions, with a strong breeze, the opening Q1 session began briskly, but was soon interrupted when Grosjean's Haas car came to a halt in

an escape road at Turn Three, his gearbox jammed.

He was unable to rejoin while the action was controlled by yellow flags. As a result, Ocon was briefly fastest ahead of Hulkenberg and Sergey Sirotkin, back in action after his crash in morning practice.

For Hulkenberg, it was encouraging despite knowing he faced a five-place grid penalty for a gearbox change.

More drama followed in the final minutes of Q1 when Pierre Gasly almost clipped his Red Bull team-mate Brendon Hartley. Taking avoiding action, Gasly bounced over the kerbs at Turn 15 and into an escape road. The Frenchman was furious, screaming at the New Zealander over the team radio. Todd Hartley had a puncture he said: "Unacceptable." "Sorry guys," said Hartley. "I was trying to get out of the way, but it was too late. I went the wrong way I feel pretty stupid."

This incident resulted in them both being eliminated in 17th and

18th positions along with the luckless Grosjean. Also out went Stoffel Vandoorne of McLaren and Marcus Ericsson of Sauber.

In Q2 more drama saw Raikkonen going straight on at Turn 15, and Lance Stroll also left the track.

Bottas led the way ahead of Verstappen and Vettel before Raikkonen went off again and a persistent Hamilton topped the charts ahead of his team-mate by 0.003 seconds until Raikkonen, racing with fury on a set of ultra-softs, roared to the head of the lap times in the final seconds.

All but one of the 11th place ahead of Williams team-mate Sirotkin, Fernando Alonso of McLaren, Charles Leclerc of Sauber and Kevin Magnussen of Haas.

On their first flying runs, Vettel outpaced Hamilton by three-tenths ahead of Bottas and the Red Bulls with Raikkonen sixth, following a scary off-road excursion at Turn 16. "I was on the kerb and couldn't steer," said the Finn.

Diego Maradona quits as coach of Al Fujairah

BUENOS AIRES, APRIL 29 --Diego Maradona resigned as coach of United Arab Emirates second division club Al Fujairah after his team failed to gain promotion, his lawyer Mateo Miorla announced.

Argentine legend Maradona, a former World Cup winner and one of football's most divisive figures, said he was stepping down after a 1-1 draw against Khorfakkan.

"After today's match, and having failed to achieve the objective of promotion, Diego Maradona will no longer be the coach of the team," tweeted Miorla.

The lawyer insisted that the decision "had been a mutual agreement" with the club and that he wished Al Fujairah "the best".

Maradona, 57, was appointed coach in May last year with the task of getting Al Fujairah back into the top flight after a two-year absence.

However, yesterday's result meant that the team cannot finish any higher than third in the table.

Neymar recovery on track, will be back for World Cup, doctor

RIO DE JANEIRO, APRIL 29 --Neymar is working hard to recover from the foot injury that sidelined him in February and will be back in action by this summer's World Cup, the Brazil team doctor who operated on him promised.

"Neymar is recovering the best way possible," Rodrigo Lasmar told GloboEsporte.

"He is working hard and the expectation is that he will arrive well prepared so he can take part in excellent World Cup training," Lasmar said. Neymar who is recuperating in a Rio de Janeiro coastal mansion, said last week he would not return to the pitch until at least May 17 -- the date of his final medical exam following his surgery in

Angelique Kerber, Garbine Muguruza limp out of Stuttgart

STUTTGART, APRIL 29 --Germany's former world number one Angelique Kerber had to quit with a right thigh injury on Thursday at the Stuttgart Grand Prix and was swiftly followed by second-seeded Wimbledon champion Garbine Muguruza who called it quits with back pain.

The limping Kerber handed over a 6-0, 2-0 second-round win to Anett Kontaveit of Estonia.

Barely an hour later, Spain's Muguruza was unable to go on due to lower back pain after dropping the opening set of her first match of the week 7-5 to Russian Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova.

In all, three of the day's seven matches ended in retirements - earlier third-seeded Elina Svitolina of Ukraine was 2-6, 6-1, 3-2 ahead of Marketa Vondrousova when the Czech qualifier quit with right thigh trouble.

Muguruza came to Stuttgart on the back of a seven-match win streak through her Monterrey title and two Fed Cup wins.

The pullouts leave a path for top seed Simona Halep at the event which also lost three-time winner Maria Sharapova in the opening round on Tuesday.

Kerber, a former two-time major winner now ranked 12th, said she had been feeling the problem for several days, even as she beat Petra Kvitova a day earlier.

"I had a lot of pain, especially this morning. I tried to go out there and play for the home crowd, I thought I could," she said.

"In the end, it was too much, it was bad in the early games. I think I made a bad movement as well."

"Now we have to see what's going on. I have to make a decision on Madrid (starting May 5)."

Kerber, who was treated off-court after going down 0-5 in 17 minutes, was playing with her right thigh strapped.

Kontaveit, the world number 31, swept the opening set and then broke to start the second before Kerber gave up a game later after 39 minutes on the clock.

The former number one last retired in Madrid 2017 against Eugenie Bouchard in the third round.

"It's hard on clay for me, it's not my natural movement," Kerber said. "Things were much worse for me today."

Roland Garros champion Jelena Ostapenko continued to build for her Paris title defence with a 6-3, 6-0 win over Zarina Diyas.

The Latvian was joined in the quarter-finals at the Porsche arena by fifth seed Karolina Pliskova as the Czech beat Russian qualifier Veronika Kudermetova 7-6 (7/4), 6-3.

Ostapenko, ranked fifth on the WTA rankings, broke her 52nd Kazakh opponent five times as she won in just 63 minutes.

The early matches are tough but I think I played really well today and I'm just happy with the win," Ostapenko said.

The 20-year-old added that she is still adjusting to life as a Grand Slam champion.

"I expected I could win a Grand Slam but not at this early age. I just understood a couple of months later."

American CoCo Vandeweghe extended her unexpected run of clay form, beating defending champion Laura Siegemund of Germany 6-4, 4-6, 6-3.

The Californian, ranked 16th after breaking into the top 10 last season, said her secret appears to be playing relaxed. "I probably have more fun on clay since I don't care too much about it," she said prior to only the second clay quarter-final of her career where she will face Halep.

Carolina Garcia, a first-round winner over Sharapova, knocked out 15-year-old Ukrainian prodigy Marta Kostyuk 6-1, 3-6, 7-5. (AFP)

Sumit, Nikhat strike gold at Belgrade International Boxing

NEW DELHI, APRIL 29 --The fit-agadoo Sumit Sangwan (91kg) and Nikhat Zareen (51kg) was among the three gold-medallists in India's stupendous campaign at the 56th Belgrade International Boxing Tournament in Serbia.

Himanshu Sharma (49kg), who defeated Algeria's Mohammed Touareg 5-0 in his final bout, was the third top spot finisher last night as India ended the tournament with three gold, five silver and five bronze medals in all.

Continuing his fine comeback from a wrist injury, Sumit, an Asian silver-medallist, defeated Ecuador's Castillo Torres in a unanimous 5-0 verdict to claim the yellow metal. The 24-year-old later dedicated the triumph to his father Suresh Sangwan.

He has been my rock through everything. I dedicate this medal to my babu (father). All the hard work I had put in for the Commonwealth Games came in handy here after I missed out on that. My hand feels completely fine now," Sumit, who missed a trip to Gold Coast after going down in the trial, told PTI from Belgrade.

"This performance is a huge morale-booster for me and I am hoping to build on it in the coming months. The boxer from Kerala I faced in the final was a tough opponent, very aggressive but I didn't allow him to connect," he added.

Former junior world champion Nikhat, also returning to action after recovering from a shoulder injury, notched up a 5-0 win over Greece's Koutsoeorgopoulou

Aikaterini to pick up a morale-boosting gold. "I am very satisfied with how I performed in this tournament. My shoulder is a bit stiff right now so it was by no means an easy campaign. The boxers from Russia and Serbia I fought were very muscular and physically it was draining," Nikhat said.

"My opponent in the semifinal Nina Radovanovic is a former professional boxer and she was very tough to fight. That bout took a lot out of me and my shoulder would need a bit of caring for once I am back," she added.

Surprisingly, the contingent did not have a single physio travelling with it for the tournament to take care of these niggles.

Signing off with silver medals among women were Jamuna Boro (54kg) and Ralte Lalakmawii (-81kg). While Jamuna lost to local favourite Andjela Brankovic 1-4, Lalakmawii went down 2-3 to Turkey's Demir Sennur.

In the men's draw, Laldinmawia (52kg), Varinder Singh (56kg) and Pawan Kumar (68kg) had to be content with silver medals.

Laldinmawia was beaten 0-5 by Korea's Kim Inkyun, while Varinder lost 2-3 to Brazilian Artilson Goncalves.

Pawan was also defeated in a split verdict, going down 1-4 to Croatia's Petar Cetinic.

Earlier, Narendar (+91kg) had fetched a bronze in the men's competition.

In the women's competition, Rajesh Narwal (46kg), Priyanka Thakur (60kg), Rumi Gogoi (75kg) and Nirmla Rawat (81kg) had settled for bronze medals. (PTI)

Nadal keeps up winning run to reach Barcelona semis, Tsitsipas stuns Thiem

BARCELONA, APRIL 29 --Rafael Nadal extended his astonishing winning run on clay to 42 consecutive sets as he reached the semi-finals of the Barcelona Open with a 6-0, 7-5 victory over Slovakia's Martin Klizan on Friday.

The defending champion will face David Goffin on Saturday after the Belgian beat Spaniard Roberto Bautista 6-7(3), 6-2, 6-2.

Greek teenager Stefanos Tsitsipas also reached the fourth round after overwhelming third seed Dominic Thiem 6-3, 6-2 and the 19-year-old will next face Spain's Pablo Carreno Busta, who served up another upset by defeating second seed Grigor Dimitrov 6-3, 7-6(4).

World number 140 Klizan, who had knocked out Novak Djokovic in the second round, came within a point of being the first player since Thiem in May 2017 to win a set against the Mallorcan on the slow surface but the world number one's famed battling skills denied him that moment of glory.

After romping through the opening set, Nadal lost

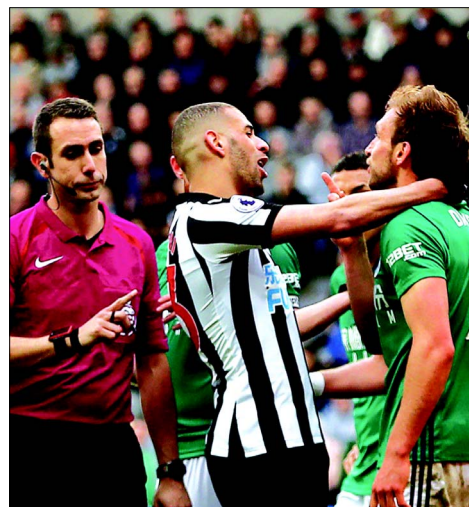


his focus and surrendered his serve at the start of the second set. But just as Klizan appeared to be on the verge of delivering a psychological blow, the 10-times Barcelona champion saved the set point at 4-5 down before breaking back to level.

He held in the next game to take the lead for the first time in the second set and then broke a tired Klizan to clinch his place in the semis.

He played very aggressively and caused me a lot of discomfort... he was unpredictable and that caused me confusion. It was tough, but the important thing was not to fail," Nadal told a news conference.

Tsitsipas converted four out of eight break points



Premier League - Newcastle United v West Bromwich Albion - St James' Park, Newcastle, Britain - April 28, 2018 Newcastle United's Islam Slimani clashes with West Bromwich Albion's Craig Dawson - REUTERS