

Verstappen seeks redemption at Spa

Red Bull urges Verstappen to abandon late-night simulation racing as he seeks to end winless streak at Spa

● **Red Bull star aims to bounce back from Hungary frustrations at his favorite Belgian Grand Prix circuit**

● **Verstappen warned to take “nothing for granted” after recent struggles**

● **Winless streak of four races would be his longest since 2020**

AFP | Spa

A week after ranting on the team radio in Budapest, Max Verstappen heads to the Belgian Grand Prix warned to take “nothing for granted” and advised by Red Bull to give up late-night simulation racing during race weekends.

The series leader and three-time world champion departed Hungary in a petulant mood after finishing a frustrated fifth, swearing on team radio and in post-race interviews, having gone to bed at three am before the race.

It was his and Red Bull's third consecutive race without a win and he will need to deliver a more composed and professional performance on his preferred circuit on Sunday to avoid ex-

tending his winless run to four for the first time since 2020.

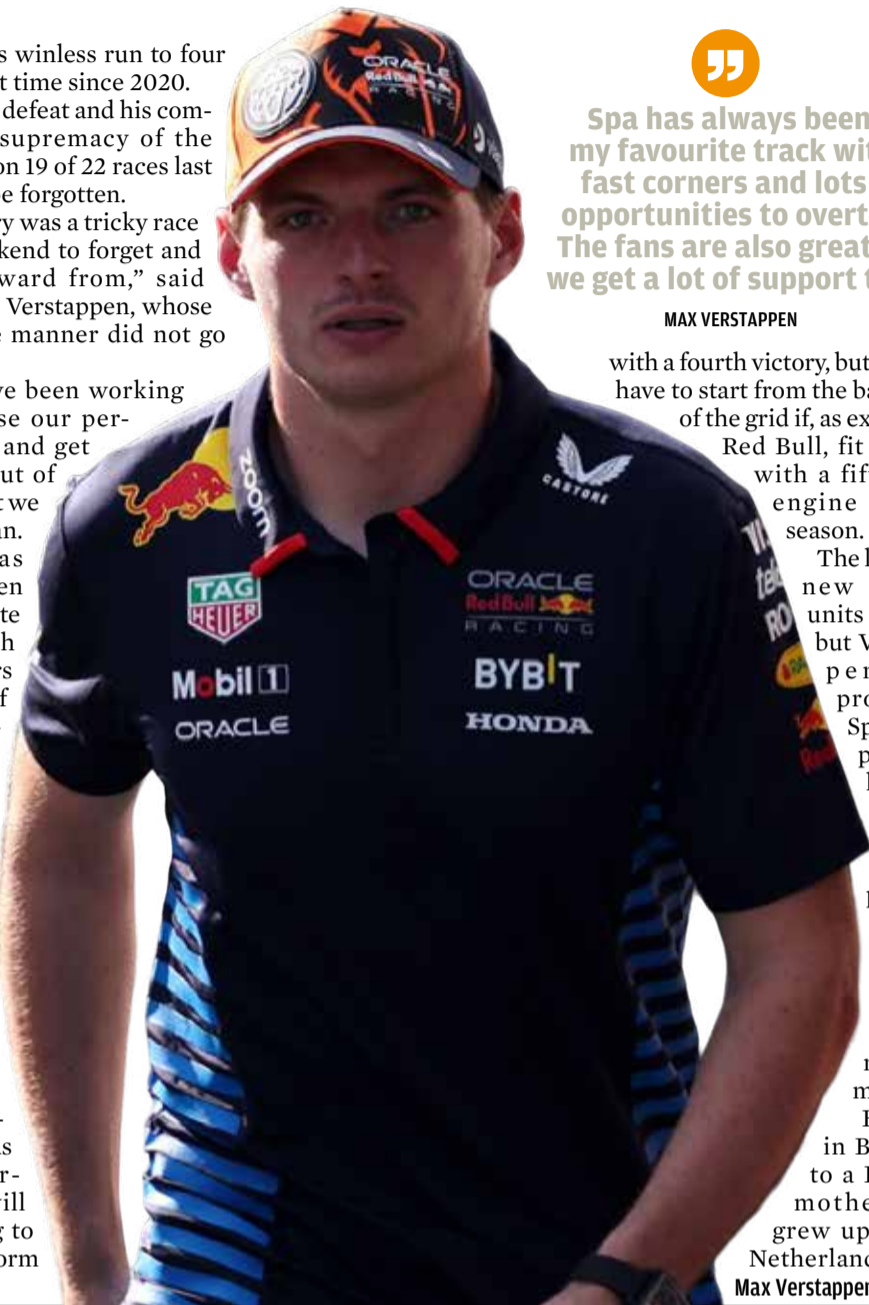
Another defeat and his commanding supremacy of the past, he won 19 of 22 races last year, will be forgotten.

“Hungary was a tricky race and a weekend to forget and move forward from,” said Dutchman Verstappen, whose combative manner did not go unnoticed.

“We have been working to optimise our performance and get the best out of the car that we possibly can.

“Spa has always been my favourite track with fast corners and lots of opportunities to overtake. The fans are also great and we get a lot of support there,” he added.

After winning the last three Belgian Grands Prix, Verstappen will be seeking to return to form



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MAX VERSTAPPEN

with a fourth victory, but he may have to start from the back half of the grid if, as expected,

Red Bull, fit his car with a fifth new engine of the season.

The limit for new power units is four, but Verstappen has proved at Spa in the past that he can overcome the momentum.

Born in Belgium to a Belgian mother, but grew up in the Netherlands, Ver-

Max Verstappen

stappen always enjoys passionate backing from the local crowd and he may need it as he bids to extend his lead, trimmed to 76 points last Sunday, ahead of McLaren's Lando Norris.

Coincidentally, Norris, who was also involved in some colourful ‘team orders’ radio exchanges last Sunday, also has a Belgian mother and he will be seeking to reduce the gap further by winning on Sunday, after handing victory last weekend to his team-mate Oscar Piastri following instructions to do so.

Piastri's ‘all-rounder’ car

Red Bull team boss Christian Horner has warned the threat from McLaren, the in-form team with the fastest car, and both Mercedes and Ferrari, could wreck their season if they cannot respond and gather points more emphatically than they have.

“We’re just going to develop the fastest car we can, and that’s what we’ll continue to do,” said Horner.

“In the drivers’ championship, obviously Max has a good lead – but that can diminish very quickly, so nothing can be taken for granted.”

The team's influential director Helmut Marko, a close adviser and confidante to the world champion, told speedweek.com: “We agreed that he would no longer run simulations so late in the future.”

Most attention may be focussed on the leading title con-



Despite being born in Belgium to a Belgian mother, Max Verstappen grew up in the Netherlands and often receives overwhelming support from the local crowd at Spa, which is considered his favorite track on the circuit

tenders, but that will suit Piastri who showed commendable assurance as he claimed his maiden victory last Sunday.

“Spa’s not been the happiest of hunting grounds for us recently, but I’m confident we’ll be strong,” said the 22-year-old Australian.

“We’ve got a car that’s become a real all-rounder so I’m super confident and I think the team should be as well.”

After winning his home British race and then finishing third for Mercedes last weekend, seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton will also be a challenger on a track where he has won four times as will Ferrari's Charles Leclerc, who took pole last year and won in 2019.

New Barcelona coach Flick hails ‘unbelievable’ Yamal

AFP | Barcelona

New Barcelona coach Hansi Flick on Thursday hailed the performance of the Spanish club's teenage winger Lamine Yamal at Euro 2024, calling it “unbelievable”.

Yamal made history in his country's opening game against Croatia by becoming the youngest player ever to appear in a European Championship game at the age of 16 years and 338 days.

He then claimed another piece of history by becoming the youngest player ever to score a goal at the Euros in Spain's 2-1 semi-final win against France, at the age of 16 years and 362 days.

Spain went on to beat England 2-1 in the final to win their

fourth Euros on July 14, just a day after Yamal turned 17.

“He has done a really great job in the last year, he has improved a lot. What he did in the Euro is unbelievable,” Flick told a news conference as he was officially unveiled as Barcelona's new coach.

“But great players maintain their performance and now it is necessary for him to keep his feet on the ground,” he added.

“I think he is a great guy.



Lamine Yamal

I spoke with him before, when I arrived, and he is now in this team and of course, he gives us great moments but he can improve and make things better. He is on a really fantastic path.”

Barca appointed the former Germany and Bayern Munich manager as head coach on a two-year contract in May after sacking Xavi Hernandez, tasking him with turning around the club's fortunes following their trophy-less run

last season.

“What I want to see is that we are playing really good football, attacking football, and that everyone can see that this team really gives a lot for this club. I think this is crucial,” Flick said.

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HANSI FLICK

Canada football staff sent home over Olympic drone scandal



Canada's players pose for photos on the pitch at Geoffroy-Guichard Stadium in Saint-Etienne, France

AFP | Paris

An assistant coach and an analyst with the Canadian women's football team were sent home from the Olympics for their part in a spying scandal.

The analyst, 43-year-old Joey Lombardi, was also given a suspended eight-month prison sentence for flying a drone over a New Zealand training session this week in Saint-Etienne.

Lombardi pleaded guilty when he appeared in court in Saint-Etienne on Wednesday, the court said.

The assistant coach was Jasmine Mander, to whom Lombardi reported.

Head coach Bev Priestman also announced she will take no part in the opening game of Canada's gold medal defence, against New Zealand.

“The COC is in contact with the IOC and in contact with FIFA. Canada Soccer has been

transparent and cooperative throughout the process,” the COC said.

“The COC will continue to review this matter and may take further action if necessary.”

The decisions come after a staff member was detained by French authorities for flying the drone in a bid to spy on New Zealand's tactics.

The Canadian Olympic Committee (COC) said it had since learned of a second incident involving New Zealand, who formally lodged a complaint with the IOC integrity unit and demanded answers from Canada.

Priestman said she did not think it would be appropriate to be on the bench for the clash against New Zealand.

“On behalf of our entire team, I first and foremost want to apologise to the players and staff at New Zealand Football and to the players on Team Canada,” she said.

French driver Ocon signs for ‘ambitious’ F1 team Haas

AFP | London

French driver Esteban Ocon has signed a multi-year deal to drive for Haas, the American Formula One team announced yesterday ahead of the Belgian Grand Prix.

The 27-year-old makes the move from Alpine as a replacement for Kevin Magnussen, whose departure was confirmed earlier this month.

“I am thrilled to embark on this new chapter in my Formula 1 career,” said Ocon.

“I’ll be joining a very ambitious racing team, whose spirit, work ethic, and undeniable upward trajectory has really im-



Esteban Ocon

pressed me.”

Ocon, who has raced in 146 grands prix, will be joining his fourth F1 team after Manor, Force India and Renault, now known as Alpine.

He claimed both his and Al-

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ESTEBAN OCON

pine's sole win so far at the rain-hit Hungarian Grand Prix in 2021.

“It was important to me that we have a driver with a known pedigree in Formula 1, and as a grand prix winner, Esteban undoubtedly fits that brief,” said

team owner Gene Haas.

“Esteban's proved himself in the teams he's raced for as someone who's continually in the mix and scoring points. It's that continuity we're keen to capitalise on as we look for increased performance gains on-track.”

Ocon, who made his F1 debut in 2016, announced he was splitting with Alpine in June, a week after he collided with his team-mate Pierre Gasly in Monaco.

Next season he will team up with 19-year-old British driver Oliver Bearman, who finished seventh in Jeddah after stepping in at late notice for Carlos Sainz in his only F1 start.