

Norris heads Piastri in McLaren one-two at Belgian GP practice

Norris and Piastri lead the pack, outpacing Verstappen who faces grid penalty

● **Norris leads Piastri by 0.215 seconds, Verstappen by 0.217**

● **Leclerc and Sainz place fourth and fifth in the session**

● **Hamilton and Russell deliver below expectations, finishing tenth and sixth**

AFP | Spa



McLaren's British driver Lando Norris drives during a practice session

Lando Norris topped the times ahead of his team-mate Oscar Piastri as McLaren finished a dominant one-two in yesterday's second free practice ahead of this weekend's Belgian Grand Prix.

The duo, who secured a front row lockout in qualifying at last

Sunday's Hungarian Grand Prix, set the pace again ahead of series leader and three-time champion Max Verstappen of Red Bull.

The Dutchman faces taking a 10-place grid penalty for Sunday's race after his team fitted him with a new engine, taking

him beyond the permitted limit of four units for the season.

Norris clocked a best lap in one minute and 42.260 seconds to outpace Piastri by 0.215 seconds and Verstappen by 0.217, meaning they were separated by only 0.002 seconds after lapping

the 7.004-kms circuit, the longest on the calendar.

In cooling conditions, with rain threatening, the Ferraris of Charles Leclerc and Carlos Sainz were fourth and fifth ahead of George Russell of Mercedes and



The Spa-Francorchamps circuit, at 7.004 km, is the longest on the Formula 1 calendar, presenting unique challenges for drivers and teams in terms of setup and strategy

Alpine's Esteban Ocon, who it was announced Thursday will switch to Haas next year.

Kevin Magnussen was eighth in his Haas ahead of Sergio Perez of Red Bull and seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton in the second Mercedes.

After his successful exploits in opening practice, which he topped with some ease, Verstappen was out swiftly for FP2 on mediums to set a marker lap in 1:43.456 as Perez joined him on the pace, back in third, separated from the champion by Hamilton.

To the delight of his fans, Alpine's Ocon joined the fray, having missed most of the earlier action due to a suspected water leak.

Verstappen improved his time as the McLarens began to reel him in, but it was Sainz, in his Ferrari, who leapt to the top of the timing monitor in 1:43.098 before Piastri moved six-tenths clear.

"Might just need to check the floor," reported the Melbourne driver, who claimed his maiden F1 victory in Hungary.

"Turned into a skateboarder at Turn Seven..."

Piastri was soon displaced by his team-mate Lando Norris, in 1:42.260, giving them a one-two again, with the Australian adrift by two-tenths, but 0.002 clear of the Dutchman.

After two aborted attempts on softs, Hamilton could manage no better than 10th on his third flying lap with Russell in sixth behind the Ferraris, a below-expectations effort from Mercedes as they switched to race runs.

For Hamilton, who counts the majestic high-speed Ardennes circuit as one of his favourites, it was a discouraging day as he sought a set-up for Sunday's race, which is expected to be run in dry conditions after a wet qualifying day on Saturday.

New India captain Yadav says ready to lead against Sri Lanka

AFP | Kandy

India's Suryakumar Yadav said yesterday he was not going to repeat the mistakes of his domestic captaincy ahead of his first trial as Twenty20 skipper against Sri Lanka.

Suryakumar, 33, this month picked up the baton from much-loved predecessor Rohit Sharma, who announced his retirement from the 20-over format after India's World Cup victory in June.

He pipped all-rounder Hardik Pandya to the post after concerns over the latter's frequent injury absences.

But his previous captaincy of state team Mumbai had aroused concerns over his leadership style, after complaints from teammates prompted his 2015 sacking.

"Lot of things have changed since then. I am a different person now," the batsman told reporters in Kandy ahead of Saturday's series opener.

"I have got married and I have learned a lot from other captains. I will take the team forward in my own style," he



Sri Lanka's captain Charith Asalanka (R) and his Indian counterpart Suryakumar Yadav at a press conference in Kandy

added.

"Our brand of cricket remains the same. What the captaincy has done is it has given me new responsibility and I am looking forward to the challenge."

Star batsman Virat Kohli also retired after the T20 World Cup and India's 15-man squad will give Suryakumar the opportunity to experiment with the top order, anchored on openers Shubman Gill and Yashasvi Jaiswal.

Sri Lanka also have a new short-format captain after a humiliating first-round World Cup knockout prompted Wanindu Hasaranga's resignation just six months after his appointment.

His replacement Charith Asalanka captained Jaffna Kings on Sunday to a title win in the island's 20-over Lanka Premier League tournament.

"It's a huge challenge for us to play the world champions. We are ready for the challenge as we

prepared well for this series," Asalanka said. "Bit disappointed that we are not at full strength," he added, saying that injury and illness had hurt the team's pace strength.

SURYAKUMAR YADAV

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Fast bowler Nuwan Thushara was ruled out of the series with a fractured thumb while Dushmantha Chameera is unwell.

Sri Lanka have brought in right-arm seamer Asitha Fernando and left-arm quick Dilshan Madushanka as replacements.

The three-match series concludes Tuesday in Kandy before a three-match ODI series begins in Colombo yesterday.

Australian swim coach avoids being kicked out of Olympics

AFP | Paris

An Australian swimming coach who backed a South Korean rival to beat two of his countrymen avoided being kicked out of the Olympics yesterday, with officials deciding it would be too disruptive.

Michael Palfrey told South Korean media this week he hoped Kim Woo-min won gold instead of Sam Short and Elijah Winnington in the men's 400m freestyle.

The trio -- all former world champions -- will face off on Saturday in the opening day of action at La Defense Arena.

Head coach Rohan Taylor blasted Palfrey as "un-Australian", deeming his actions "extremely disappointing".

But he stopped short of following through on a threat to send him home, saying athlete welfare across the 41-member pool team factored into his decision.

"We took the time to consider the two options -- for



Michael Palfrey

Mick Palfrey to stay, and for him to be sent home," he said in a statement.

"After extended conversations with athletes, the athlete leadership group, and coaching staff we have made the decision for Michael to stay."

"It is not one we have taken lightly and I stress this is an ongoing discussion for when we return home."

Palfrey works with Australian swimmers Zac Incerti, Abbey Connor and Alex Perkins, but also mentored Kim while he was training in Brisbane ahead of the Games.

Players unaware of spying scandal as Canada Olympic coach sent home: official

AFP | Paris

Canadian soccer chiefs yesterday pleaded with FIFA not to deduct points from their women's Olympic football team as a drone-spying scandal led to head coach Bev Priestman being dramatically kicked out of the Paris Games.

Canada Soccer chief executive Kevin Blue said Canadian players had not seen any footage produced by the drone used to spy on a New Zealand training session and should not be punished by global governing body FIFA.



Bev Priestman

Reigning Olympic champions Canada defeated New Zealand 2-1 in their opening match of the women's football tournament on Thursday despite the turmoil

around the squad.

Canada Soccer announced yesterday that English coach Priestman had been suspended with immediate effect after initial investigations into the scandal revealed drone-spying that pre-dated the Paris Olympics.

Canadian Olympic Committee chief executive David Shoemaker said separately yesterday that Canada's victory at the pandemic-delayed Tokyo Olympics might also have been stained by spying tactics.

Priestman's departure came a day after assistant coach Jasmine Mander and analyst Joey

Lombardi were also sent home for their roles in the scandal.

Blue told reporters there had been "frankly unacceptable shortcomings of ethical incidents" by members of the Canadian coaching team.

However, he pleaded with FIFA not to slap Canada with a points deduction, which could potentially blow a hole in the defence of their Olympic crown.

"The players themselves have not been involved in any unethical behaviour," Blue said. "And frankly we ask FIFA to take that into consideration if contemplating any further sanctions."

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