



Ferrari driver Kimi Raikkonen celebrates on the podium after winning the Belgian Grand Prix at the Spa-Francorchamps racetrack on Sunday.

FERRARI LIFT CONSTRUCTORS TITLE

Kimi in command

AFP, Spa-Francorchamps



Kimi Raikkonen led from start to finish to record his third consecutive Belgian Grand Prix victory at Spa-Francorchamps on Sunday.

The 26-year-old Finn started on pole position and took quick command of the race, establishing a comfortable cushion between himself and his Brazilian teammate Felipe Massa before going on to complete a Ferrari one-two.

Ferrari's third one-two of the season means they have secured the constructors' championship.

Fernando Alonso finished third ahead of his McLaren teammate Lewis Hamilton, who now leads the drivers' championship by just two points.

Considering the off-track distractions, third and fourth place was a strong performance from the British team still reeling from their 100 million dollars fine and exclusion from the constructors' championship after Thursday's FIA 'spygate' hearing. Germans Nick Heidfeld and Nico Rosberg finished fifth and sixth for BMW and Williams respectively.

Australian Red Bull driver Mark Webber and Renault's Finn Heikki Kovalainen were the others to score points.

Now that McLaren are out of the constructors' title race Hamilton and Alonso are free to fight amongst themselves for the drivers' title, and that fight began

in earnest at the start of the 14th race of the 17-race season.

Hamilton, starting from fourth, made the quicker start, forcing third-placed Alonso to dart across the track and block his teammate. This, however, did not discourage the 22-year-old rookie who saw a chance to sneak past Alonso on the outside.

Once again the Spaniard slammed the door shut, this time barging Hamilton right off the track.

Though he was able to rejoin the fray without losing a place Hamilton was forced to settle in behind the double world champion and is unlikely to be overly impressed with his aggressive defending.

Up ahead Raikkonen and Massa had made a clean getaway and the Ferrari pair set about establishing a cushion between them and the chasing pack.

Some of the most impressive early racing was done by BMW's Robert Kubica, the Pole started from 15th but soon carved his way into eighth place (he would eventually have to settle for ninth).

Also making early progress was Adrian Sutil who managed to extract maximum pace from the new improved Spyker car. Sutil, the highly-rated German rookie who started from 20th, made up eight places in the first six laps and was soon challenging David Coulthard for 11th place.

Sutil eventually finished 14th

after making a mistake at the Les Combes corner, but the all too brief moments of promise will buoy the Dutch team who are used to running right at the back.

The frontrunners began to come in for their first pit stops on the 16th lap and all four emerged without incident.

Soon after there was a worrying moment for Hamilton but he managed to compose himself after missing the apex of the final corner, and resume his pursuit of Alonso.

The two Ferraris had now established a ten second advantage over the McLarens and with Raikkonen ahead of Massa by a further five seconds; the real race appeared now to be for third and fourth place between the warring teammates in the silver and black cars.

Steadily Alonso eased further ahead of Hamilton and the by the time they leaders pitted for the final time his advantage over Hamilton was pushing five seconds.

Raikkonen, Massa and Alonso all stopped soon after the 30 lap mark but Hamilton's strategy kept him out for four extra laps.

It was to no great avail though; the four men at the top of the drivers' standings finished the race in the order they had started it and the championship goes to Asia just that little bit tighter at the top.

Schuster now wants Diego

AFP, Berlin

Real Madrid coach Bernd Schuster revealed Sunday he is interested in signing Werder Bremen's Brazilian midfielder Diego, just days before Real and Bremen clash in the Champions League.

Schuster, 47, who took over as Real coach in July, has been closely monitoring the form of the 22-year-old and will get a close-up view of the attacking midfielder when Real host Bremen in Tuesday's Champions League group stage clash.

"Diego is a very interesting player, we have spoken to Bremen's management about him this summer, but it is doubtful he will come this season," Schuster told Sunday's edition of Bild newspaper.

"He is very creative and had a superb first season in the Bundesliga. "South Americans normally need a lot of time to settle into European football, but he has done really well."

Diego joined Bremen from Portuguese side FC Porto last year and with the summer transfer window now closed the earliest he could join the Spanish giants would be January.

However since he will have already played for Bremen in the Champions League he would not then be allowed to play for Real in this season's competition.

Kahn admits to lethargy

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich captain Oliver Kahn admitted Sunday that the midweek internationals had left his side under par for their 1-1 draw with Schalke 04 in Saturday's Bundesliga clash.

Bayern striker Luca Toni squandered several first-half chances before Schalke's teenage forward Ivan Rakitic broke the deadlock with a goal before the break.

Only a second-half header by Miroslav Klose saved Bayern's blushes and kept the German giants on top of the Bundesliga by a slender one-point lead.

Several key Bayern players, including German stars Bastian Schweinsteiger, Klose and Marcel Jensen plus Frenchman Franck Ribery, played in their countries mid-week qualifiers for the 2008 European Championships.

And goalkeeper Kahn says the impact was obvious.

"Our build-up was very difficult because of the international matches," said Kahn.

"It's not ideal, and you probably fall 10 percent below your best.

"I think that was clear in Saturday's draw, although it would have been a very different game if we'd scored in the first half hour."

After splashing out 69 million euros on a summer spending spree to bring the likes of Toni, Klose and Ribery to the Allianz Areal, Bayern had looked like run-away favourites for their 21st crown as German champions.

But although Bayern and Schalke are the only unbeaten teams in the Bundesliga, the Munich side now have only a narrow lead over second-placed Arminia Bielefeld.

Kahn added: "As it is, the 1-1 scoreline is okay. We've seen again that it (league) won't be a stroll, but I've been saying that all along."

Marseille sinking fast

AFP, Paris



Lens striker Aruna Dindane handed leaders Nancy their first defeat of the season as six-time French league champions Lyon closed the gap to just one point on Saturday.

Dindane's 70th-minute penalty handed Lens and their new coach Jean-Pierre Papin their first win of the season.

But Nancy remain top of the standings with 16 points after seven games, one point ahead of Lyon who thrashed tailenders Metz 5-1.

Former French football legend Papin was relaxed and smiling ahead of his first home game at the Felix-Bollaert stadium.

In the job just two weeks, Papin rang the changes by leaving captain Yannick Demont and Nenad Gueye got one back for Metz just

Kovacevic, two key members of the team under his predecessor Guy Roux on the bench, and giving new recruit Kader Mangane his first outing.

"We took three points and topped the leader for the first time. I'm very satisfied and the players are happy.

"Everything will fall into place over the season," said Papin, whose side are fourth from bottom with five points from six matches.

Nancy coach Pablo Correa said: "We have the impression that we gave them the match, we missed our chances. Our biggest battle was with ourselves."

Lyon, meanwhile, swamped Metz as a first-half hatrick from Karim Benzema set the tone for the one-sided encounter.

Benzema opened after just four minutes, added his second after 36 minutes and claimed his third two minutes later.

Senegalese striker Babacar Gueye got one back for Metz just

after the break before Hatem Ben Arfa (59) and Juninho (87) added two more for Lyon.

Earlier Marseille were plunged deeper into crisis as Toulouse claimed a resounding 2-1 victory and their first win at the Velodrome in 44 years.

Three days before their Champions League opener against Turkish side Besiktas, Albert Emon's men looked a shadow of the team who finished runners-up behind Lyon last season.

They are sitting 15th with just seven points from eight games, having garnered just two points from four home games this season.

Emon's beleaguered side left the pitch after the first half with the angry whistles of the crowd ringing in their ears after goals from Achille Emana (10) and Johan Elmander (36) gave Toulouse an early advantage.

The hosts woes were compounded when captain Julien Rodriguez was sent off after 66 minutes for fouling Fode Mansare.

Toulouse were also reduced to ten men when Herita Ilunga was sent off nine minutes later for a second yellow card.

Ronald Zubar pulled one back for Marseille in the dying minutes of the game but it was too little too late.

Valenciennes drop from second position to fourth after losing 2-0 at Le Mans, as third-placed Bordeaux were held 1-1 at Lille in a game the highlight of which was the debut of former Dutch star Patrick Kluivert for the hosts.

Saint-Etienne, meanwhile, bounced back from last week's loss to Nancy as an Araujo Ilan double helped them to a 3-0 win over Caen.

Auxerre revival hopes were boosted with a 2-0 win at home against Nice as Strasbourg had to settle for a goalless draw at second-from-bottom Sochaux.

Sunday's big match sees Monaco, who sit in fifth place three points behind Nancy, host Paris St Germain.

Russia lift Fed Cup



AFP, Moscow

Russia won their third Fed Cup here on Sunday after world number two Svetlana Kuznetsova battled back from a set down to beat Italy's Francesca Schiavone, giving the hosts an unassailable 3-0 lead.

Kuznetsova, 22, won 4-6, 7-6 (9/7), 7-5 in two hours 44 minutes, clinching her seventh win in nine head-to-head meetings with Schiavone.

Elena Vesnina then forced the cancellation of the scheduled doubles rubber when she cruised to a 6-2, 6-4 victory over Italy's Mara Santangelo to put the hosts 4-0 up.

"I was really too nervous today, especially at the beginning," Kuznetsova said. "But later I managed to settle down and find my rhythm. I'm so happy to win!"

She added: "Francesca played very well today. Probably it was her best match in recent years. But our fans' and my teammates' support helped me a lot to win.

"And I feel I was slightly better physically prepared for today's match."

Schiavone, 27, took advantage of Kuznetsova's shaky start to clinch a one-set lead in 44 minutes, and her confidence continued until early in the second set during which grabbed an early break and raced to a 3-1 lead.

That proved the signal for Kuznetsova's fightback, and the Russian moved up a gear to break back in the sixth game to level at three games all. Schiavone broke again in the seventh for a 5-3 advantage.

But Kuznetsova levelled the scores again at 5-5, forcing a tiebreak which she won after surviv-

ing two matchballs to level at one set all after one hour 49 minutes on court.

In the deciding set Kuznetsova's precision returned, and she sealed the set and the match on her first matchball.

Schiavone suggested after the match that the scores did not truly reflect Italy's all round performances.

"Of course the score is 3-0 now but we were really close," said the Italian.

"There were two three-setters and we had certain chances to win."

She added: "I did a good job today. Not great, but really good. I was very focused and enjoyed every point."

Kuznetsova admitted she had played with the pain of sore abdomi-

nal muscles.

"I've been in pain in recent days, and that hit my service power," said Kuznetsova, this year's US Open finalist.

"But I battled through it. I knew the team needed me as Nadia (Petrova) was unable to play here because of her leg injury."



PHOTO: AFP

Russian players (From L-R) Anna Chakvetadze, Elena Vesnina and Maria Sharapova jump for joy after compatriot Svetlana Kuznetsova defeated Italian Francesca Schiavone to give the Russians an unassailable lead in their Fed Cup tie in Moscow on Sunday.

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