

Hamilton keeps a brave face

AFP, Sao Paulo

Lewis Hamilton and his father Anthony reacted with dignity and optimism on Sunday after seeing Kimi Raikkonen secure one of the most unexpected and dramatic world championships of modern times. British rookie Hamilton, 22, had led the title race for nearly all of the season but he was finally beaten by a faulty gearbox in the final race, Sunday's Brazilian Grand Prix, when he could finish only seventh.

But he swallowed his disappointment and hailed his rookie season as 'phenomenal' and then pledged to bounce back and fight again for the title in future.

The young British sensation, who broke every record for a rookie driver in F1, held the points lead for most of the season and looked certain to become the youngest world champion before losing out by just one point in the season finale.

He said: 'Obviously I am pretty disappointed with the result today, having lead for so much of the season and then not to win the championship.'

'But I have to put the result into perspective: this is only my first year in Formula One and overall it has just been phenomenal. I am still very young and have plenty more years in me to achieve my dream of becoming world champion.'

He added: 'I have to thank absolutely everyone in the team for everything they have done for me this year, without them and all their hard work I wouldn't have even been in this position today.'

His father Anthony said: 'None of us are in pain, trust me. We feel

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PHOTO: AFP

Ferrari's Finnish driver Kimi Raikkonen, who came from behind to beat both McLaren drivers Lewis Hamilton and Fernando Alonso, proudly holds aloft his Formula 1 drivers' championship trophy during the podium party at Interlagos in the Brazilian Grand Prix in Sao Paulo on Sunday.

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Biggies aim to qualify

AFP, Paris

European giants Barcelona, Manchester United and Arsenal can all take a huge step towards qualifying for the Champions League knock-out phase if they win their respective matches on Tuesday.

All three have a perfect six points from their first two matches and another victory will leave them virtually assured of progression.

United face arguably the toughest task with a trip to the Ukraine capital to face Dynamo Kiev, a task made all the more difficult due to a host of injury problems that sees the likes of Gary Neville, Owen Hargreaves and Louis Saha certain to miss out and Nemanja Vidic doubtful.

Manager Sir Alex Ferguson did

get the chance to rest key winger Cristiano Ronaldo, though, during Saturday's 4-1 thrashing of Aston Villa, meaning the mercurial talent

should be fresh and raring to go in Kiev.

United also have England striker Wayne Rooney in fine form following his double strike against Villa and a spectacular goal in England's 2-1 defeat in Russia in a Euro 2008 qualifier.

Most worrying for United is Vidic's absence as he is still struggling from a blow to the head he received against Wigan two weeks ago.

Ferguson admitted: 'Vidic is a doubt for Tuesday. He is still feeling some reaction to the knock he got against Wigan and in that situation you can't take a chance.'

'He will be close but I'm not so sure he will be ready to play in Kiev.'

Kiev are bottom of Group F after losing their first two games - 2-0 at Roma and 2-1 at home to Sporting Lisbon, teams United beat 1-0.

In London, Arsenal take on Slavia Prague with manager Arsene Wenger admitting that last year's painful defeat to PSV Eindhoven in the knock-out stages is motivating

his team this time around.

'The big frustration in our throats is how we went out last year against PSV Eindhoven,' Wenger said. 'That frustration is still very lively.'

'To get that out, I do not think we will have any chance to relax against teams like Slavia Prague because we have been knocked out last season by PSV.'

'We have a year's more experience now and have a squad which is really of a very good level, where everybody can play.'

'Arsenal lead group H by three points from Slavia and Sevilla, meaning a victory for them would almost certainly be enough to progress.'

'They have Robin van Persie currently sidelined through injury, meaning Wenger may turn to English teenager Theo Walcott for some attacking spark, following the forward's star showing against Bolton as a substitute at the weekend.'

'He has found the injection of pace he had before and he uses his body better,' Wenger said. 'When you see what he brings when he came on, you are very excited.'

'In group E Barcelona travel to Glasgow to face Rangers, who like the Catalans boast a perfect record from their first two matches.'

'Barca are missing some key players such as Samuel Eto'o, Deco, Yaya Toure and Gianluca Zambrotta and are heading into the game off

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FIXTURES

(1845 GMT unless stated)

GROUP E
Stuttgart v Lyon
Rangers v Barcelona

GROUP F
Dynamo Kiev v Manchester United
Roma v Sporting Lisbon

GROUP G
CSKA Moscow v Inter Milan (1630 GMT)
PSV Eindhoven v Fenerbahce

GROUP H
Sevilla v Steaua Bucharest
Arsenal v Slavia Prague

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Fiorentina dazzle, Milan fizzle Del Piero rescues Juve

AFP, Rome

Veteran talisman Alessandro Del Piero scored 10 minutes from half-time to give Juventus a vital 1-0 victory over Genoa on Sunday and three points that keeps them hot on the tails of leaders Inter Milan.

They now trail the reigning champions by just three points, having moved back above Fiorentina into second place after the Viola's dazzling 3-0 victory over Siena in the Tuscan derby earlier in the day had briefly propelled them into second.

However it was a miserable day for European Champions AC Milan who lost 1-0 at home to Empoli and have now slipped to 10 points off the pace set by champions and bitter city rivals Inter, who won 1-0 at Reggina on Saturday.

Del Piero had signed a new contract extension until 2010 earlier in the week and he settled the affair with a crisp right foot volley from six yards following a cross from fellow veteran Pavel Nedved.

The Czech midfielder was later sent off, though, after the final whistle for appearing to elbow Abdoulay Konko while coach Claudio Ranieri was also shown red for swearing at the match officials.

Alongside Inter, Fiorentina remain the only unbeaten team left in the league and it was a spectacular goal from Giampaolo Pazzini that set them on their way after a quarter of an hour.

Franco Semioli sent the ball to Pazzini who chested it down and thrashed home a stunning volley from the edge of the area in almost

a single movement.

Just after the half hour mark, Romanian international striker Adrian Mutu doubled the home side's advantage after Pazzini backhealed the ball into his path.

Siena have never won this fixture in the top flight and this match was to be no different with veteran former Italy striker Christian Vieri adding the third on 71 minutes having replaced Pazzini.

'We got off to a good start, kept

the team tight and avoided long balls. Giampaolo Pazzini plays with great determination and gave the side depth,' said coach Cesare Prandelli. 'Are we in the title race? We just want to keep up this kind of performance.'

In Milan the hosts' dreadful home form continued with this surprise defeat. Milan had already drawn three matches at the San Siro before losing there for the first time this season.

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PHOTO: AFP

GOAL OF THE SEASON CONTENDER: Fiorentina striker Giampaolo Pazzini (R) strikes a superb volley to score a stunning goal during their thumping victory in their Serie A clash against rivals Siena at the Florence Stadium on Sunday.

DISASTER FOR HAMILTON, ALONSO

Kimi conjures up title

AFP, Sao Paulo

F1 driver Kimi Raikkonen won the 2007 Formula One drivers' world championship here Sunday for Ferrari when he produced a flawless run to victory in the Brazilian Grand Prix.

The 'ice-man' from Finland superbly grabbed the 15th win of his career and his sixth this year ahead of his Ferrari teammate and local hero Felipe Massa.

'I always believed we could recover from our poor results and do a better job than our rivals,' said Raikkonen. 'So I never gave up and it was a great result for me and the team.'

'I wasn't really 100 per cent sure of what was happening at the end as we were still waiting for still to finish - I had to wait a long time to hear that I had finally won it.'

'I waited and waited. It was amazing for me that after all the last races we have had such a good finish to the season and I am very happy now.'

'It is great to win both championships and I think the whole team for that, for all their hard work, and Felipe, too. It was perfect team-work.'

'I got a very good start and I was side by side with Felipe and we did not want to race each other and the main thing for me was to pass Hamilton - and then he went off.'

'It is very difficult for me to put in words how I feel now,' he said. 'I did not have the best start to my racing because my family had

nothing and we needed a lot of help.'

'I have to very big thanks to the team because I have loved my life in this team this year. I enjoy Formula One so much more now than I did in the last few years. Now I will try to do it again next year.'

Defending double drivers' world champion Fernando Alonso of Spain finished third in his McLaren and ended up sharing second place in the drivers' title race with his teammate Lewis Hamilton.

The luckless 22-year-old British rookie, who began the day four points ahead of Alonso and seven in front of Raikkonen, lost ground at the start, falling back from second to fourth on the opening lap and then plummeting to 18th on lap seven when he suffered gearbox problems.

But he stormed back to finish in seventh place and score two points when he needed at least two more to make history by being the first rookie to lift the title.

McLaren boss McLaren boss Ron Dennis was stoical in defeat, saying: 'At difficult moments like this you've just got to have a sporting attitude. It was so close we needed just one car to stop. It's hard to find the right words but I think the whole team has done a good job all year. We have to be proud of their achievements. We've got to be positive and sporting and look forward to next year.'

'It is very difficult for me to put in words how I feel now,' he said. 'I did not have the best start to my racing because my family had

two BMW Saubers.

The drivers' title race ended with Raikkonen on 110 points and Alonso and Hamilton both on 109 at the end of the first three-way title battle for 21 years.

Massa said: 'It was a brilliant team performance by Ferrari even though I came here unfortunately unable to fight for the title.'

'But I am very happy for Kimi and I am glad for the team. I hope I will one day win a title myself too! This shows the great reliability of the team and that we are great champions and also, well, with the Spy Story this year, it is a good way to show everyone by winning both championships.'

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British fans and he slipped down to 18th place and a long way from not only the points, but possibly the world title.

At the front Massa sped clear followed by Raikkonen whilst there was carnage elsewhere with Italian Giancarlo Fisichella in his Renault rejoicing from an off-track excursion only to be driven into from behind by Sakon Yamamoto of Japan in a spyker.

Hamilton somehow solved his problems and regained his speed as he pushed his way through the field, rising from 18th to 11th with some supreme passing moves and fast driving.

The leaders began to dive into the pits to stop for fresh tyres and fuel after lap 20, Massa leading the way ahead of Raikkonen who led the race for a lap until he also pitted on lap 20.

This left the defending champion Alonso out in front for a lap but he also pitted and after the first round of stops the field reassembled with Massa leading Raikkonen and then Alonso at the front.

Hamilton pitted after 22 laps and rejoined in 14th place from where he fought tirelessly to make up places, passing Brazilian Rubens Barrichello with a sweeping and aggressive dive through the Senna S bend on lap 28.

This hoisted Hamilton into 12th place but he was 50 seconds behind the leader Massa who was running two seconds ahead of Raikkonen with Alonso down in third 19 seconds adrift.

On lap 30, there was more

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UEFA slash Dida ban

INTERNET, undated

AC Milan goalkeeper Dida has had his ban following the Champions League game with Celtic in Glasgow reduced by UEFA to one match.

The Brazilian was initially handed a two-match suspension after his theatrics following a Celtic fan's encroachment onto the pitch during the 2-1 defeat at Celtic Park.

But the club confirmed that penalty has been reduced, meaning Dida will miss only Wednesday's game against Shakhtar Donetsk.

A statement on Milan's official website, www.acmilan.com, read: 'UEFA have partially accepted Milan's appeal by reducing from two to one the match ban given to Nelson Dida following the episodes in Glasgow.'

The Rossoneri goalkeeper will not be available for Wednesday's game at the San Siro against Shakhtar Donetsk but he will be available to play in Donetsk on November 6.'

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Substitution 'hurt' Gerrard

INTERNET, undated

Steven Gerrard was 'hurt and disappointed' to be substituted in the Merseyside derby on Saturday.

Gerrard was taken off with 20 minutes to go at Liverpool's 2-1 win at Goodison Park, and was clearly baffled at Rafa Benitez's decision.

However, Benitez explained that he took Gerrard off because he wanted more control in midfield.

After the match he said: 'In this game, sometimes you need to play with the brain and we were playing with heart. We needed to keep the ball and pass the ball.'

But Gerrard told the Liverpool Echo: 'I'm a local lad so it is really important to me and I would have liked nothing better than to play the full game and to be on the pitch when we got the winner.'

'But as it turned out I was taken off and Lucas Leiva who replaced

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Unlikely backing for Lehmann

INTERNET, undated

Arsenal goalkeeper Jens Lehmann has received backing from an unlikely source, with Bayern Munich general manager Uli Hoeneß singing his praises at the weekend.

It was Hoeneß who bitterly fought with the German Football Association (DFB) to get Oliver Kahn picked as Germany's number one for the last World Cup - a battle he eventually lost as Lehmann got the nod from Jürgen Klinsmann.

However, now Kahn is off the scene, Hoeneß seems to be throwing his weight behind Lehmann in the race for the number one jersey at next year's European Championships.

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Atletico rip