

The Chequered F1ag



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Vettel moves in on another title

SEBASTIAN Vettel has been peerless in 2011, the reigning Formula 1 world champion has already scored more points than his title winning haul of last year, and his performance in Belgium once more showed just how polished a racer he has become. With difficult conditions throughout the weekend the German never put a foot wrong and set the foundations for his victory in a qualifying session that opened with a wet track and finished with an ever drying surface.

Vettel, as has been his trademark in recent times, was the last man to cross the line before the chequered flag waved in the one hour session and thus was able to enjoy the best track conditions possible. He made full use of his slick tyres to set a scintillating lap that come the end of the year will surely be remembered as one of his finest qualifying efforts.

With a dry line emerging drivers were heavily punished for running wide onto the damp extremities of the circuit with tyres losing temperature and grip. Vettel however managed to thread the eye of a needle throughout his final effort and took pole position ahead of Lewis Hamilton and Mark Webber on the grid.

Prior to the race it was expected that Red Bull would struggle to convert their one lap speed into a consistent race pace due to their lower top speed than the Ferrari's and McLaren's. It was clear that Vettel was not able to challenge the speed trap figures of his rivals but a mixture of intelligent race craft and luck saw him cruise to an easy win.

Vettel's ability to force his way past the fast starting Nico Rosberg in the opening laps showed once again that the impatience that has periodically shown itself when Vettel has been forced into wheel to wheel battles is a thing of the past and once in front he moved clear of his rivals and used superior strategy to stay ahead of Fernando Alonso who challenged for the lead in the opening half of the race before ultimately losing pace, and a place on the podium, in the final ten laps.

With Alonso hamstrung by the harder prime tyres Vettel was left unchallenged at the front but if luck had played a different hand to Hamilton the race could have been very different.

Mistakes are costing Hamilton dearly

The 2008 world champion has had a strange season with flashes of brilliance interspersed by moments of madness where his impatience has surfaced and led to a spate of avoidable accidents. In Belgium the Englishman retired following a clumsy racing accident with Kamui Kobayashi. Hamilton passed the Japanese driver on the run from Eau Rouge to the top of the hill at Les Combes. At this point of the lap the drivers are travelling at more than 330 km/h and as they entered the braking zone Hamilton started to edge towards the racing line.

The McLaren driver was clearly unaware of just how close Kobayashi's Sauber was to him and the pair touched, pitching Hamilton into the Armco barriers and instant retirement. The stewards deemed it a racing accident but having seen the crash from numerous viewpoints it was clear that, once again, Hamilton had placed his car into a position where an avoidable accident could occur.

Last season his title challenge was derailed by unnecessary accidents, for example his opening lap crash with Felipe Massa at Monza, and his mistakes this year have clearly taken a lot of the pressure away from Vettel. At Spa Hamilton once again had a car capable of winning the race and with Vettel suffering from excessive tyre wear on the softer option tyre it is clear that Hamilton could have been in a prime position to challenge his German rival for the victory.

This race, like Monaco and Montreal, cost Hamilton and McLaren dearly but crucially showed that even with a fast car the team are still capable of fumbling a race winning opportunity. It is ironic that in 2010 it was Red Bull who cost themselves lots of points with unforced mistakes, either from the team or their drivers, whereas this year it is McLaren who are making the costly errors.

At first glance the season shows pure dominance by Red Bull, pole positions at each race and both drivers leading the championship, but when the season is analysed in more detail it is clear that McLaren have had a very fast race car and been able to challenge for victories. If not for their mistakes it seems almost certain that this season of terrifically exciting races would have also had a championship battle to match it.

Button's race points to bright future

Former world champion Jenson Button has been in great form over the summer and the 31 year old scaled new heights on Sunday. His race craft was second to none at Spa and his ability to force overtaking moves was stunning throughout the race. Starting from 13th on the grid following the rain interrupted qualifying session Button made quiet progress in the opening stages before exploding through the pack with a series of daring moves.

During his championship winning season Button was consistently criticised for winning from the front and his inability to fight for positions. This race showed once again how unfair this reputation is for him. The manner in which he made his way through the field was daring and incisive and showed just how much of a pure racer Button is.

The comfortable setting within McLaren has allowed Button to flourish and while he will never drive a car with the latent aggression of his team-mate Hamilton over the course of their near two year relationship it is clear that Button is a lot closer to his team-mate in terms of sheer performance than many have cared to acknowledge in the past.

Button needs his car to be set up in a very specific way; he needs a very stable back end and a front end that allows him to glide into corners. His style allows him to carry tremendous amounts of corner speed and when he has the car to his liking he can produce amazing results. The negative for Button is that once his car is removed from its "perfect" window he cannot improvise in the same manner as the likes of Hamilton or Vettel and manhandle his car into doing as he wishes.

Thus once the car is not set up to his liking Button can have some anomalous races where he struggles in the top six unable to utilise the potential of the car at his disposal. Those days however are becoming less and less frequent as he builds up his rapport with McLaren. The team know what they have to do to provide him with a car capable of winning and if he can continue to have a strong finish to the season it is clear that Button could be well placed to challenge for a second title in 2012.

TENNIS East of Ireland Tennis Championship

Successful summer for McGahon

DUNDALK Lawn, Tennis and Badminton Club Head Coach John McGahon was victorious at the East of Ireland Tennis Championships at Lansdowne Tennis Club two weeks ago.

The tournament was McGahon's first competitive event in three years following his retirement from the professional world tour tennis circuit.

McGahon kept himself in good physical condition by taking part in early morning training at Felda along with early morning sessions at the tennis club. And the former David Cup player said it was great to be back in action.

"I decided to play in some of the national tournaments in Dublin throughout the summer to work my way back into the game", said John. "I played in Donnybrook first, reaching the quarter finals before being defeated by former top 30 player in the world juniors Lazo Kukl from Georgia.

"I then got selected to play for Leinster again where we won the Inter-provincial Cup at Greystones during the August Bank Holiday weekend. I won all my matches, defeating Ulster number one, Nelson Boyle and Cork's Jamie Blake. I then played in the Wexford Harbour Open where I reached the semi-finals."

Victory at Lansdowne capped McGahon's successful summer.

"The final tournament of the summer was the prestigious Lansdowne East of Ireland Championships. I managed to defeat San Diego scholarship player and Irish national champion Ciaran Fitzgerald for the second time this summer in the final.

"This event has been won by top players such as Matt Doyle, Sean Sorensen, Owen Casey, Stephen Nugent and Conor Niland - who just played Wimbledon this year.

"It has been a great feeling to be able to come back", said John. "I've missed the competitive rush of being in a tennis court and in a battle."

In his role managing Dundalk Lawn, Tennis and Badminton Club, McGahon's focus is on improving the standard of tennis at Dundalk.

Dundalk Tennis Club Head Coach John McGahon pictured with junior tennis club players Neil Jones and Joseph Mullen



"This year we had seven juniors competing at the National Tennis Championships in Fitzwilliam and we currently have a Leinster Junior number one, Neil Jones, at the club.

"Our tennis programme runs throughout the year, starting in September where we have categories from beginners level right up to performance", he added. "Performance being where the junior players train five days per week".

The junior development programme in Dundalk starts again on September 1. The

performance programme starts September 19 with the senior tennis programme on September 19 also. This will include cardio tennis and doubles training for senior players at Dundalk Tennis Club.

McGahon would like to congratulate all the junior Dundalk players on the current performance programme who competed at the Junior National Championships in Fitzwilliam this year, including Joseph Mullen, Neil Jones, Ruth Copas, Aoife Tonna Barthelet, Kevin O'Connor and Daniel Mullen.

RUGBY Dundalk Rugby Club

Good win for rugby lads

Naas	15
Dundalk RFC	21

DUNDALK picked up their first win of pre-season with a 21-15 victory over All Ireland 2B side Naas on Friday night in a game played over three thirds of 30 minutes each.

Naas took the lead early on following some strong work by their full-back, who bounced off two tackles before passing to his winger who gave them a 5-0 lead. A missed conversion followed.

Trevor Marama gave Dundalk a great field position minutes later with a kick to the corner from open play. Dundalk attacked strongly but couldn't capitalise in the far corner.

However soon after, some strong forward work gave the Dundalk backline the numbers needed for young Robert Williams to score his first senior try on his debut. The conversion out on the sideline was well kicked over by Marama to put Dundalk into a 5-7 lead.

Naas attacked Dundalk, putting them under serious pressure on their try line but a fantastic turnover by Mark Rowntree gave Dundalk a penalty, allowing Trevor Marama the opportunity to clear the line to touch. Minutes later, Naas struck over a drop goal just inside the 22 to give them an 8-7 lead.

Naas started the second third of the game as the stronger team, bringing on the majority of their first team. The changes led to a well worked try, aided in part by Dundalk missing some tackles.

Naas missed the conversion, but pushed their lead to 15-7.

Dundalk responded by bringing on Johnny Williams, Greg Whatley and Steven Soraghan.

Dundalk soon cut the home side's lead to one point with a well worked try from Johnny Gray. Marama converted, bringing the score to 15-14.

In the last third of the game, Dundalk started very strongly and were rewarded when debutante Marama scored a fantastic try before converting to give the visitors a 15-21 lead.

Naas retaliated, mounting numerous attacking phases on the Dundalk defence but some inspired tackling by Paul Meegan and Mark Rowntree held the Kildare side from scoring. Ene Fa'atu, putting in some massive hits on Naas' pack, also deserves a mention for his contribution.

A number of penalties were rewarded to Naas in Dundalk's '22 in injury time but the Mill Road men held out to secure their first win of the season.

Dundalk host CIYMS in the annual Lockington Trophy encounter at the Muill Road on Saturday at 2pm. The club's Under-19 side are also in action at the same time.

Meanwhile the 2011/2012 Juvenile Rugby Season starts on September 3.

DUNDALK RFC: Declan McCabe, Jonny Gray, Paul Keely, Diarmuid Sloan, David Fearon, Paul Meegan, Mark Rowntree Ene Fa'atu, Gareth Herr, Trevor Marama, David McGuinness, MJ McKeivitt, Steven Murphy, Robert Williams, Donal Claire. Subs: Steven Soraghan, Jonny Williams, Greg Whatley.

Paul Meegan is the captain this year

