

The Chequered F1ag



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Vettel victorious in an intriguing opening race

SEBASTIAN Vettel started the world title defence in style with a comfortable race win in the Australian Grand Prix.

The Red Bull driver took a sensational pole position and proceeded to drive a controlled race to claim the 11th victory of his career. While it was always expected that Red Bull would set the pace in Melbourne it was surprising to see Vettel claim pole position by a margin of 0.8s. Thankfully in the race the dominance of the Red Bull was not as pronounced, with Lewis Hamilton able to match Vettel for much of the race.

The McLaren team had struggled in testing but were much more competitive when it counted this weekend. Hamilton and Jenson Button qualified in top four and both looked very racy throughout the afternoon. While there was little doubt that Vettel would win the race Hamilton's pace prior to the opening round of pitstops is very encouraging for the year ahead and shows that McLaren should be very competitive.

Vitaly Petrov produced the biggest shocks of the weekend with a stunning drive to third position. The Renault driver will have buoyed the spirits of his team, still clearly missing Robert Kubica, with a near perfect performance that saw him stay ahead of Fernando Alonso at the flag.

Alonso must be getting sick of the sight of Petrov; in the season ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix the Spaniard saw his ailing chances of winning last season's title evaporate due to his inability to overtake the Russian. This weekend the Ferrari team looked to be off the pace and it was very interesting that they decided to use a precious set of the softer compound tyres in the opening qualifying session. This decision showed just how unsure the Italian squad was of being able to stay ahead of the rest of the field, a clear indication of their underperformance. As it was Alonso can take solace in finishing fourth and look forward to stronger races in the near future.

Mark Webber once more had a bitterly disappointing day in front of his home crowd and was comprehensively outpaced by his teammate Vettel. Webber finished the race 41s behind Vettel and when this showing is paired with his qualifying performance, third place and 0.8s off the pace, it is clear that something was amiss for Webber this weekend.

Throughout their time as teammates Webber has been closely matched to Vettel so this uncharacteristic drubbing will need to be thoroughly investigated by the team before the next race in Malaysia.

Button's race was ruined by his decision not to relinquish fourth position to Felipe Massa after using the escape road at turn 11 in the early stages of the race. The duo had a thrilling battle with the 2009 world champion ultimately unable to find a way past Massa. Without the penalty Button would have likely finished in third position and given McLaren an almost perfect start to the season.

The impact of DRS

The inability of Button to make his way past Massa will be used in the coming weeks as a cane to beat the new Drag Reduction System (DRS). The system allows drivers to adjust the rear wing and decrease drag, thus increasing top speed, and was introduced in an attempt to aid in overtaking but the first race of the system proved inconclusive in whether it will be successful.

At present DRS can only be used by the trailing rider in a specific section of the lap. In Melbourne this was on the start/finish straight and as a result it is hard to say how successful the system actually could become. The final corner in Melbourne is a long fourth gear right hander that induces understeer (when the car pushes wide of the apex) when drivers are racing on their own. When you combine this natural understeer with the aerodynamic wake from a car in front exaggerating that understeer it is clear that it would be very difficult to get close enough to make a move.

There were some successful moves made in Melbourne and it was clear that the DRS was beneficial to the chasing driver, it was just that they were not able to gain enough speed leading into the fast opening corner. Placing the "overtaking zone" into turn three may have allowed the device to be used more effectively.

Sepang though should give a much better indication of the effect of the device on racing and just how much easier it could make overtaking at certain races in 2011. The Malaysian circuit has one of the longest straights on the F1 calendar leading into a first gear hairpin. As a result there is little doubt that overtaking will be quite prevalent in round two of the championship.

Different strategies at play

Strategy has always been crucial to winning in Formula 1 and this year should see a lot of variety through the field. Last year's Bridgestone tyres were incredibly durable and made almost every race certain to feature just a single planned pitstop for fresh tyres. Melbourne showed though that uniform strategy will be a thing of the past in the future.

There was huge variety amongst the leading drivers with the podium finishers all making two stops. Alonso and Webber both made an additional stop and Sauber rookie Sergio Perez finishing a hugely impressive seventh by making just a single stop. The Mexican and his teammate, Kamui Kobayashi, were disqualified after the race when Sauber's rear wings failed scrutineering.

The disqualification should not however detract from a superb debut by Perez who showed that it is possible to make the tyres last throughout a race and move through the field with such a strategy. Running at the front it is unlikely that should a strategy would pay off but it could be hugely beneficial for midfield runners to try such a strategy in races and move up through the order to points paying positions.

The opening race of the season offered intrigue and gives lots of reasons for fans to look forward to another thrilling season of action in Formula 1. While it is very easy to look at the race and say, "it's the same as last year, Vettel and Red Bull are way faster than everyone else and there is very little overtaking." A deeper look at the race shows that Formula 1 may have found a way to write a sequel to last season's epic that could offer as much excitement and some great racing. With one race down there are 18 more chapters to be written in what should be a great story.

SWIMMING International Schools Swimming Championship

Brian's making a splash

Ardee swimmer helps Ireland to three gold medals

ARDEE swimmer Brian O'Sullivan played a starring role in Ireland's showing at the WISE - Wales, Ireland, Scotland, England - International Schools Swimming Championships last weekend.

Held at the National Aquatic Centre in Dublin, 16-year-old Dundalk Grammar School transition year student Brian travelled to the capital to meet up with his fellow squad members and put the final touches to his preparation on Friday. A total of 40 male and female swimmers represented Ireland and Irish Schools against the very best swimmers from the other countries.

On Saturday Brian swam the anchor length of the 4x 100m Freestyle Relay intermediate event which the Irish team won in 3.36.72 - a new international schools record. Brian swam 54.1 seconds for the anchor leg of the relay and came home to rapturous cheering and applause winning the long awaited first Irish gold medal of the day.

Brian's second gold medal came in the individual 100m Backcrawl, winning the intermediate age group competition in 1.01.07. This time was a new Long Course Personal Best for Brian and made it two golds from two events.

Ireland won three gold medals in total. The third Irish medal was won by Curtis Coulter from Ardpark in the 100m Freestyle Individual intermediate competition in 53.06 seconds. Both Brian and Curtis were jointly honoured at the annual swim gala dinner in Dublin on



Dundalk Grammar School student Brian O'Sullivan who excelled for Ireland at the WISE swimming event last weekend.

Saturday night where they both shared the award for Best Irish Swimmer.

O'Sullivan has been in sparkling form throughout 2011. In January this year the Newry Mourne ASC member was accepted onto the high performance Ulster Swim squad and following

some great performances at the Dave McCullagh Memorial Championships in Limerick he was also invited to become a member of the Irish National Squad.

Brian currently trains with the Irish squad in Dublin at weekends. He also continues to

train at Newry-Mourne ASC and also at Aura Leisure Centre in Dundalk.

Two weeks ago he went to Lisburn to the Ulster Youths Championships and won gold at the 400m freestyle in 4.10.46. This was also his first attempt at the 400m distance.

KARATE Blackrock



Grading joy for duo

CONGRATULATIONS to Elizabeth Marcus and Connor Begley on their recent grading to 3rd Kyu (Brown Belt) and 4th Kyu (Purple Belt) for performing under intense pressure during their grading this weekend under the watchful eye of their Sensei, Thomas Marrett.

They both have been training hard to perfect not only their basic techniques and combinations but also Ohyo's, Kihon's and Kata's. Since joining the Ireland Wadokai Karate-Do

Remnei based in Blackrock, they have flourished under their Sensei's watchful eye and have both competed in National Championship Competitions where they both returned with medals in Kata (forms) and Kumite (fighting).

They are currently looking forward to getting back to training this Tuesday where training will continue for the Annual International Karate Competition held in the Community Centre Ardee on April 16 where teams will not only be coming from all over Ireland and England, but as far away as Palestine and further afield.

HOCKEY Dundalk Grammar School

Grammar marching on



Dundalk Grammar School hockey player Aidan Hopkins in action.

THE mixed Under-13 Dundalk Grammar Junior School hockey team travelled to Three Rock Rovers Hockey Club last Thursday to play their final game in the Alison Frazer League.

The team played very well and came out strong winners by two goals to nil. The goals were scored by Rian Fox Hughes and Tara Kierians.

The team, coached by Ms Nicola Clements, have won three out of their four league games and depending on other results within the league they will hopefully qualify for the semi finals.

Meanwhile the Dundalk Grammar School Senior Boys Hockey Team enjoyed a hard fought victory away to High School, Rathgar, in the last four of the Leinster B League.

The Rathgar outfit proved a formidable force led by Ireland A Star Shane O'Donoghue who fired the home side into an early lead for a short corner set piece. However, Dundalk Grammar School always looked dangerous and with Barry Faulkner causing havoc down the right wing, young Jeremy McKeever scored for the Grammar.

In the second half O'Donoghue used all his

experience to pile pressure on Dundalk Grammar, but Niall Curran and Conor Ryan coped very well at the heart of the Grammar defence.

Ten minutes into the second half, a good through ball found Aaron Walsh who finished well from a high angle to make it 3-1.

The last 20 minutes saw Dundalk cover lots of ground and soak up wave after wave of attacks. However, despite a last minute penalty for High School, Dundalk held out to win 3-2 and gain a place in another Leinster Final on April 1 2011.

BADMINTON Louth Badminton Awards**Darver crowned Louth champions**

LEFT: The Darver team who won the Louth Under-13 Badminton title. Included are: Patrice Coyne, Eva McCaul, John Gallagher and Oisín McGuinness. RIGHT: The Dundalk Sports Centre team who won the Louth Under-15 Badminton title. Included are: John Byrne, Patrice Coyne, Naoise Carr, Jake Fanning and coach Anthony Byrne.

IN the Louth Badminton Finals Darver and Ardee played a thrilling final before Darver came through by three matches to one.

Ardee went into the final as leaders after the league competition. As it was two years previously at Under 11, the teams were very well matched.

Darver took an early lead with Patrice Coyne and Eva McCaul winning their ladies mixed

doubles by 30 to 15. Ardee were soon back level when they won the boys doubles by 30 to 18.

The two mixed doubles games were evenly matched for long periods with Darver going ahead when John Gallagher and Patrice Coyne won their match 30 to 17. It was all down to the final match and it was Oisín McGuinness and Eva McCaul who came through for Darver on a 30 to 19 scoreline.

Captain John Gallagher received the trophy on behalf of the winners. Congratulations to the team of John Gallagher, Patrice Coyne, Oisín McGuinness, Eva McCaul and Elizabeth Murdock and their coach Carol Cluskey who brought a first win to the club in two years.

Under-15 Final

Meanwhile in the Under 15 Final, Dundalk Sports Centre

went into the Final as runners-up to Silverbridge in the League competition.

However it was DSC who came out on top in a top class final, winning four very tight games by narrow margins.

Congratulations to the team of John Byrne (Captain), Patrice Coyne, Naoise Carr and Jake Fanning and to their coach Anthony Byrne on a great success.

CYCLING Cuchulainn Cycling Club**Traders Cup held over new circuit**

ON Sunday last Cuchulainn Cycling Club promoted the annual Traders Cup on a new circuit encompassing the Carlingford Road, Ravensdale and with a finish on the Old Newry Road, a 17km circuit.

The main race of the day completed five laps of this circuit with a five minute gap between the A3 riders a bunch comprising of the A1 and A2 riders. Cuchulainn had seven riders competing in this race and it was a successful day with Bryan McCrystal crossing the line in second place.

Bryan was part of a group that escaped from the second bunch, bridged the gap to the first bunch and still managed to break away from this group. In the sprint for the flag Bryan was just pipped by the more experienced former Irish International Peter Williams, riding for the Sport Active club, rounded out the podium in 3rd place.

In the A4 race, where the riders completed four laps of the same circuit, the club had 10 riders sign on. Dundalk men were rode very aggressively throughout the day and featured in every move.

One of the Dundalk riders was Pdraig Kelly, making his return to competitive cycling after a 17 year absence. As the group approached the finish line all were still together and the Cuchulainn riders massed at the front of the bunch in order to contest the sprint.

It certainly looked a case of not if a Dundalk rider would win, but more which. However disaster struck less than 1km from the finish when a touch of wheels meant a large number of



A number of Dundalk riders pictured at the front of the bunch in the A4 race on Sunday.

riders came down, including a number of Cuchulainn riders.

Mark Rafferty and Kevin Trainer who had been riding superbly throughout the race both crashed heavily and required medical attention. Cousin of Kevin, and former league winner, Aidan Martin also took a heavy fall. While badly shaken and a number of bikes damaged all riders will be ok.

Meanwhile the sprint continued and the club again took second place with Sean Loughran just missing out on that elusive win. Paul McGee also had a fast finish to take 5th place.

Loughran's start to the season has been superb and it looks like it will take no time for him to upgrade to a higher racing license.

A third race of the day was the ladies race, three laps of the

course and for the first time in recent memory Cuchulainn had a number of ladies racing.

Newcomer to the club Sonia Rae and the Dawe sisters Annette and Breda all signed on to complete, this being a first race ever for the Dawe girls.

All the Cuchulainn ladies were riding strongly and managed to stay within the bunch as others fell away, misfortune was to strike Breda as she punctured on the second lap. The race was won by Usher's Gillian McDarby, with a well known in the Dundalk League, Bohermeen's Geraldine Gill taking second place.

All in all it was a great day's racing, except for the unfortunate accident. The club would like to thank all the marshals, without their thankless work races would not go ahead, the Gadai and the Red Cross for the much need ambulance cover. Finally to the

ladies back in Dowdallashill GFC Club House who fed and watered a tired bunch of cyclists.

This Sunday, April 3, the mountain bikers of Cuchulainn CC will be hosting the first round of the prestigious all Ireland National Points Series at Bellurgan Park.

Riders on the day will be on for a treat as the mountain biking committee has done extensive work on the track at Bellurgan Park over the winter. The track, measuring over 10km in length, now features a number of technical sections including ramps, jumps, as well as fast flowing sections.

The club will be promoting a full schedule of events for all categories, with the underage racing starting at 10am. The race is part of the National Series whereby riders accumulate points over the season, county towards the

Chequered Flag Live

Stephen English reports from Donington Park

Classy Checa continues his strong start to 2011

THE second round of the World Superbikes season took place at Donington Park at the weekend. Carlos Checa dominated the proceedings at the opening round of the season and while the Spaniard started from pole position at Donington he would face a challenging weekend.

In the opening race a superb performance from Marco Melandri gave the ex-MotoGP star his first career World Superbike victory after the opening race of the day at Donington Park. The Italian started ninth but took the chequered flag first after a stunning comeback ride through the field that left long time leader Jakub Smrz with the disappointment of missing out on his maiden success. Checa recovered from making numerous uncharacteristic mistakes to claim the final spot on the rostrum.

At the start Checa made a textbook getaway but Leon Haslam managed to use the extra power of his BMW to lead into turn one ahead of Nori Haga and Checa, who lost further positions after having to sit his bike up at the Old Hairpin. Amazingly the normally super-consistent Checa made another mistake on the opening lap and crossed the line 11th at the end of the lap.

In these opening stages of the race Melandri battled with Biaggi to be the top Italian but after their Superpole incident, Biaggi holding Melandri up on a fast lap and later slapped his compatriot, the pair seemed more concerned with getting ahead of each other rather than the actual racing. Trading positions on a regular basis for five laps the Italians were lucky not to fall out of contention.

Irishman Eugene Laverty was not so lucky. After a spectacular crash in Superpole the Irishman had high hopes for a more competitive showing in the races but another crash on the third lap put paid to his chances.

With Haslam still out in front it was clear that he was holding up the riders behind him. Camier looked especially confident the former British Superbikes champion was holding tighter lines than Haslam but was unable to make a move in the early laps. Tom Sykes joined the battle for the lead and was particularly impressive, on lap five he made his way into fourth ahead of Haga.

Jakub Smrz had quietly moved into second by lap six and the ex-250GP rider quickly moved ahead of Haslam with a brave move under braking into McLeans. The Czech rider was able to quickly open a lead over the Englishman who was clearly, once again, struggling for race pace to match his superb qualifying performance.

With the race nearing its halfway point it was clear that Melandri, now running fourth, would be very competitive until the conclusion of the race. The Yamaha rider had a very composed bike under braking and could place his R1 wherever he wanted. He was so settled under braking that he managed to find a way past the impressive Camier who by this stage was tiring with the effects of a badly wearing rear tyre. Camier had a very strong race but would ultimately find up eighth.

While all around him riders were struggling for grip Melandri had tyre life to spare and he showed this with a daring move down the hill from the Craner Curves into the Old Hairpin on overtime race leader Haslam. With seven laps to go Melandri was 2.5s adrift of Smrz but looking menacing and gradually started to close down Smrz.

Smrz was clearly struggling with badly worn tyres and Melandri closed on his rival and on the penultimate lap made his move. With Smrz sliding out of Coppice it was an easy move by Melandri to take the lead and go on to take the win. Behind him Checa closed in dramatically on Haslam for third. It seemed that the Englishman had done enough to take a second podium of the season but under braking into the Melbourne Hairpin the BMW rider slid the rear end and Checa pounced on the tiny error to take third at the flag.

Checa cruises to win

In the second race of the day Carlos Checa took his third win of the season with a comfortable victory. The Spaniard fell to third as the field exited the first corner but quickly stamped his authority on proceedings and had none of the mistakes that blighted his opening race performance.

BMW's Leon Haslam once more made the best start in the field but the Englishman was powerless to stop Checa taking the lead on lap three with a superb overtaking manoeuvre at the Old Hairpin. Once in front Checa set about opening an early lead that would allow him to cruise to the finish line ahead.

With Checa moving clear at the front it was clear that Haslam was holding up Leon Camier and the fast starting Melandri. On the fifth lap he made his move at McLeans with a daring move. The Aprilia was clearly faster than the BMW but their battle held them up slightly and coming into the Esses Melandri moved past both of them into second. The trio traded places in the next half lap but by the time they got to the start finish straight Melandri moved into second and set about closing down Checa with Camier in hot pursuit.

The race settled down from this point onwards with Checa trying to open a lead to his pursuers and the gap growing to three seconds.

While Melandri and Camier gave credible chase there was nothing that they could do about Checa's pace. The Spaniard was consistently the most impressive rider over the course of the weekend and his victory in race two was thoroughly deserved. With Biaggi failing to score in race two, and only scoring nine points in race one, this was a very profitable race for Checa. There will be races, Monza and other power circuits, that Checa will be found wanting but he has made the perfect start to the season with four podiums.