

Aston Martin 'worried' by Azerbaijan GP Sprint impacts



● RACING365

Aston Martin Formula 1 Performance Director Tom McCullough has conceded that the prospect of racing on the streets of Baku twice in two days is "worrying". The Azerbaijan Grand Prix will host the first Sprint weekend of the season, which also marks the first time F1 has held the alternative weekend format at a street circuit. Drivers will be obliged to complete the full Grand Prix distance on the Sun-

day as well as a 100km race on Saturday, in addition to the high-tension qualifying session that often is cause for incident in the Azeri capital. Whilst teams are offered a financial allowance for Sprint weekends within F1's budget cap, the extent of the potential damage was highlighted by Haas Team Principal Guenther Steiner's recent revelation that Mick Schumacher's crash at the end of last season's Japanese Grand Prix

first practice cost the team \$700,000. With the Azerbaijan GP bookended by street events in Australia and Miami, McCullough was asked if the Baku Sprint created additional stress. "Yeah, from a cost cap side of things, that worries me," McCullough told media, including RacingNews365.com. "Thankfully, touch wood, we haven't had any shunts and lots of crash damage yet, but [Albert Park] is al-

ways a worry and these three [races] in a row is definitely a concern." McCullough on changing formats The Sprint format for Azerbaijan still faces the prospect of changes, with F1 aiming to implement a revised qualifying format. Providing his opinion on changes, with teams already forced into adjusting to an abnormal weekend schedule, McCullough explained: "From a technical side, I don't mind.

"I find these changing formats, as a team if you react well to it, it can be a benefit. "I'm still not convinced on the qualifying where, in effect, trying to get the faster cars at the back of the grid and the slower ones at the front, that's been one of the proposals - the single lap qualifying and things like that, I don't think that's necessarily the right thing to do and the higher potential for accidents in damage.

"I think the existing grid format already is quite challenging and works pretty well. So I think we should do that a bit more to be learned. There seems to be an urgency to change and from a regulation side of things, it's not straightforward. "So for the moment, I think we should get used to the current format, not chop and change too much. But if you want to chop and change, you should have the time to do it properly."

Los Angeles Lakers drill Memphis Grizzlies



The Los Angeles Lakers' LeBron James (right) giving the Memphis Grizzlies' Dillon Brooks an earful during pre-game warm-up.

● AFP

THE STRAIT TIMES - The Dillon Brooks-LeBron James sideshow took center stage as the Memphis Grizzlies forward was ejected for a shot to the groin of the Los Angeles Lakers star early in the second half on Saturday. Anthony Davis dominated with 31 points, 17 rebounds and three blocked shots to lead the Lakers to a solid 111-101 home victory over the Grizzlies in Game 3 as the 2020 champions took a 2-1 lead in the tense National Basketball Association first-round play-off series.

Brooks was ejected after drawing a flagrant 2 foul for delivering a blow to the groin area of James 17 seconds into the second half.

James writhed in pain on the floor after the contact. The officiating crew reviewed the play, which occurred in the backcourt, before determining it met the criteria for a flagrant 2, which comes with an automatic ejection. The incident comes three nights after Brooks ripped the 38-year-old James, calling the NBA's all-time leading scorer "old" and saying his level of play has dropped.

"He's not at the same level that he was when he was on Cleveland winning championships, or Miami," Brooks said of James, after Memphis won Game 2 on Wednesday. "I wish I got to see that. It would have been a harder task, but I'm playing with what I've got. Just wear and tear on him throughout a seven-game series and see if he can take it."

Brooks had a tough outing on Saturday from the outset. He scored seven points on three-of-13 shooting in the first half.

During pre-game warm-ups, James confronted Brooks and gave him an earful.

On that exchange, the Lakers forward, who had 25 points, nine rebounds and five assists, told ESPN, "There was nothing private about it. It was very, very public. I like it that way."

He added, "This is not my first rodeo. I've had this throughout my career with certain individuals. It's seasy." Grizzlies star Ja Morant - who posted a game-high 45 points on his return, along with 13 assists and nine rebounds - suggested that his teammate's past transgressions counted against him at the Crypto.com Arena. No player has had more ejections (three) than Brooks in the 2022-23 season.

He told ESPN, "I felt like he was ejected because of past ejections that was made in games before. I mean, if you look at the play, he was actually reaching for the ball and the crossover."

Klopp confirms Firmino replacement as 'Barcelona transfer agreed'

Jurgen Klopp has revealed that Cody Gakpo can fill the void left by Roberto Firmino after it was confirmed the Brazilian has agreed a move to Barcelona. Firmino, 31, has been at Liverpool since 2015 but is set to depart the club at the end of his contract in June - despite being offered fresh terms. The Mail first reported that the former Hoffenheim man is now expected to join the Spanish giants, having scored an impressive 109 goals in 360 appearances during his time at Anfield.

Despite Firmino's impending departure, Klopp may have already found a replacement. January arrival Gakpo has impressed since his big-money move from PSV. The Dutchman has scored five goals in 14 Premier League matches and started in the center-forward berth for Liverpool's 3-2 win over Nottingham Forest.

Speaking after the Reds' win on Saturday, Klopp said: "If you watched international football over the last five, six years as a footballer and you love football, and if you are in a similar role, have a similar job to do in the game and you didn't pick up anything from Bobby Firmino, that would be a bad decision, to be honest.

"We play in public, so you can watch all the games. I think Bobby in this role is an inspiration for pretty much every player in a similar position, so that's clear.

"Cody is 23 years old, he was captain of his former club - I had no clue how that happens that early and then when he arrived here you realize, 'Ah OK, he's a super-smart kid, really open and a real team player' and stuff like this. On top of that, a really good footballer.

"He can play this position, can play wide, can play the center. The real nine, a bit higher up, he can play that as well; double striker, can play that as well. So, he can create his own way there on the position, so it's not like we have to do it exactly [the same] because nobody can do it like Bobby, because nobody is Bobby."

Gakpo started in a front line that included Mohamed Salah and Diogo Jota either side as Liverpool secured their second successive Premier League victory. That left Luis Diaz and Darwin Nunez on the bench - but Klopp has defended his choice to keep picking Gakpo in the side.

Klopp continued: "That means you have to find your own way and I think that's much more important. That's where Cody is up to. I thought Cody, since he's here, did exceptionally well.

"We didn't do that well - that for a new player is super-difficult. It's super-difficult to come into the team and it's not clicking. He did really well in that period. And now when we do better then obviously people maybe realize his performances, and that's it. But from the first day since he's here, he's a real joy to work with."

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