

## Hamilton has 'Everest to climb' to beat Red Bull



PA WIRE

**THE GUARDIAN** – Lewis Hamilton issued a downbeat assessment of his chances of competing against Red Bull in the Formula One world championship next year after this season came to a close in Abu Dhabi. Hamilton's Mercedes team principal, Toto Wolff, also conceded the task that lay ahead was "a Mount Everest to climb".

Max Verstappen won at the Yas Marina circuit to secure his 19th victory in 22 races. He and Red Bull have been untouchable this season. Hamilton could manage only ninth and has now gone more than two full seasons without a win.

The seven-time champion believes the advantage Red Bull hold will be hard to overcome, especially given how early they stopped working on this year's car and shifted resources to next year's model.

"Red Bull won by 17 seconds and they have not touched the car since August or July," Hamilton said. "So you can pretty much guess where they're going to be next year."

The British driver was clearly despondent at the end of a trying season in an uncompetitive car. "It's not been a great year in general so there's not a lot to take from it," he said. "The fact that I survived it. That's probably about it."

Despite claiming second in the constructors' championship in Abu Dhabi and with the team adopting a new design philosophy for next year, Wolff was similarly blunt in his assessment of Red Bull's advantage as the teams go into the close season.

"There is a Mount Everest to climb in order to catch up with Red Bull," Wolff said. "Red Bull started the new regulations in 2022 with a massive advantage and they have been able to maintain it."

"We have a lot of respect for their achievements, from the engineering side, and the driver. Beating them under the current regulations is against the odds."

Verstappen, who has enjoyed the most dominant season in F1 history, acknowledged it had been an unparalleled success but one he was not sure could ever be repeated.

"It's been an incredible season, it was a bit emotional on the in-lap, it was the last time sitting in the car which has of course given me a lot," he said.

"It will be very hard to have another season like this, we know that."

# Iranian Rahmani on journey to become a professional darts player



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For the best part of the Iranian people, darts is nothing but a typical leisure activity during the vacations.

And that is how it all started for Mozghan Rahmani, when she was just a teenage girl, before she embarked on a fascinating journey to become the first Iranian to be inducted into the Professional Darts Corporation (PDC) and compete in high-profile events of the sport.

The 34-year-old recently recovered from a shoulder injury setback, which had kept her out of action for a year, to add a precious bronze medal at the Malaysian Open to her trophy cabinet. "The company that my father worked for held a multi-sport event in a vacation camp for its employees in northern Iran and that is where I first saw a dartboard. I was just 13 at the time," Rahmani told Iran Daily.

"When I made my first throw, everyone was surprised to find out that it was the first time I was holding a dart in my hand. All my three efforts hit the bullseye and I won the competition," added the Iranian girl, who received a dartboard as the winner's prize, though it proved to be a pivotal point in her life.

"I hung the board on the wall at home and kept throwing darts at it without any specific instruction and knowledge of the sport. Time wore on until I saw a banner of a darts club in our neighborhood in 2015 and



MOHAMMAD NASIMI

that's when I started my professional career," said Rahmani, who joined the national team two years later after winning the Shiraz Open.

Rahmani says her appearance at the international tournaments has drawn attention from the global media.

"I'm the only member of the Professional Darts Corporation who wears hijab at the competitions and when Sky Sports conducted an-

interview with me in 2020 it led to prominent companies wanting to sign sponsorship deals with me," said Rahmani, now playing for Malaysian DURY team, who has a Chinese-made darts equipment brand named after her. However, the Iranian has come a long way to find her way onto the highest levels of the sport.

"England is the birthplace of darts. The Netherlands is also a major pub for the sport and most of the top

players in the world are from these two countries. The Japanese are also among the high-profile champions in the women's event. In Iran, though, darts is more or less played for fun, rather than being considered as a competitive sport," said the two-time Malaysian Open champion in 2017 and 2019.

"The Malaysian Open is the most prestigious darts event in Asia and has a silver grade in the world rankings.

I also took part in the Dutch Open – held by the World Darts Federation – in 2020 and made it to the last 32," added Rahmani.

Asked about the attributes needed for a professional darts player, Rahmani said: "Darts requires a lot of concentration, precision, calmness and patience. You need to have inner peace to succeed as a darts player. Years of physical and mental training has helped me strengthen my hand mus-

cles and improve my aiming skills, so much so that I can hit the center of the board even with closed eyes."

Rahmani opened her own darts academy in Tehran last week, in which she will be looking to "begin a new era for the sport in Iran."

"I can promise you that I will introduce numerous top international players in the coming years," Rahmani told the attendees during the opening ceremony of her academy.

## Superb Sinner leads Italy to Davis Cup glory against Australia

**REUTERS** – Inspired Italian Jannik Sinner completed a perfect week by sealing his country's first Davis Cup title for nearly 50 years on Sunday, thrashing Australia's Alex De Minaur to complete a 2-0 victory for the Azzurri.

Italy's number one Sinner produced a devastating display to outclass a helpless De Minaur 6-3 6-0 after Matteo Arnaldi outlasted Alexei Popyrin in the first singles clash. Sinner, the world number four, ended the week with five wins out of five, including a heroic performance in Saturday's semi-final when he beat Novak Djokovic to keep his country alive against Serbia after saving three consecutive match points.

He then went on to beat Djokovic and the Serbian's partner Miomir Kecmanovic in the doubles with team mate Lorenzo Sonego to send Italy to the final against 28-time winners Australia and 24 hours later Sinner delivered the title in style.

Hitting the ball with relentless power from the baseline, the Italian dominated from the moment he broke serve early in the first set and there was nothing De Minaur could do.

Sinner's purple patch lasted until he claimed the winning point on his third match point, sparking celebrations amongst team mates, officials and a noisy Italian contingent inside the Malaga arena that has staged the week's captivating Final Eight.

"It helps a lot to play for the whole team and it's been an incredible feeling for all of us," Sinner said as Italy rejoiced at a first Davis Cup title since 1976 and only second ever. "Thanks to the Australian team for coming all the way here."

### 'Historic result'

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni celebrated on the social media platform X.

"A historic result ... congratulations to our players for the talent and commitment they have shown, and also to all the staff," she posted. Arnaldi was recalled to Italy's singles lineup after missing the semi against Serbia and repaid captain Filippo Volandri's faith by defeating Popyrin 7-5 2-6 6-4 in the first singles.

With Sinner in the form of his life, having reached last week's ATP Finals title match which he lost to Djokovic, it was always a tall order after that for Australia, especially as De Minaur had lost to Sinner in all five of their previous matches.

Initially it was tight as De Minaur dug in but Sinner's superior firepower soon earned him a service break and from that point on the outcome looked inevitable.

"Jannik is riding this amazing wave of confidence," De Minaur said. "He's playing in indoor conditions with some heavy balls where he can hit

the absolute crap out of it.

"Today I just didn't have enough."

Lleyton Hewitt's Australia have now been beaten in the final in successive years having lost to Canada in 2022.

Italy and Australia qualify automatically for the 16-nation Finals next year across four cities with the ITF announcing on Sunday that the Final Eight will again be hosted in Malaga.

Italy's Jannik Sinner (blue) celebrates with captain Filippo Volandri after winning his singles match against Australia's Alex de Minaur in the Davis Cup final in Malaga, Spain, on November 26, 2023.

JON NAZCA/REUTERS

