

F1 – Vettel Edges Closer to Title with Win in Japan

Sebastian Vettel today all but ensured his fourth consecutive championship with another win in Japan. Vettel's win, his fifth in a row, means that he will claim the World Drivers' Championship at the next race in India as long as he finishes in the top five, but the victory at Suzuka wasn't as dominant as some of his previous triumphs. An excellent start by Romain Grosjean meant that the Lotus jumped both Vettel and team mate Mark Webber to take an early lead. Vettel came close to Lewis Hamilton into the first corner, his front wing causing a puncture in the right rear of the Mercedes which led to damaged bodywork and an early retirement for Hamilton. Vettel managed to escape unscathed, but needed a patient performance while chasing Webber and Grosjean for long periods of the race.

It was Grosjean who ended up leading after the first round of pitstops, the Frenchman showing composure and pace to maintain the lead after his good start, but Red Bull split their strategies between the two drivers chasing him, with Webber making three stops while Vettel made one less. The latter strategy proved to be the winning one, as Vettel's fresher set of tyres meant he could overtake Grosjean quickly after the second pitstop and hold on for the win. Webber opted for used medium tyres on his third stop, giving him the extra pace to catch Grosjean for second place, but it took the Australian too long to pass the Lotus driver and by the time he succeeded, it was too late to catch Vettel. The German took the chequered flag after a good tactical performance, knowing that his fourth consecutive world championship is almost upon him.

Elsewhere in the field, Fernando Alonso and Kimi Raikkonen managed to gain a few places from their poor

qualifying positions, finishing in fourth and fifth respectively. Nico Hulkenberg had another solid performance to take sixth place, but it was his team mate Esteban Gutierrez who grabbed the attention, the rookie driver holding off Nico Rosberg well to finish seventh and claim his first points of the season. Rosberg's drive-through penalty for an unsafe release meant he could do no better than eighth, while Jenson Button and Felipe Massa completed the top ten.

Paul di Resta finished just outside the points in eleventh, but the Scot was satisfied enough with finishing the race, something which he has been unable to do in his last five outings, and hopes to get back into the points for the team's home race in India at the end of the month: "In the end we were about five laps too short with the tyre life because I couldn't defend from Jenson. With four races to go we need to take the positives from this weekend and will travel to India determined to get back in the points."

While the Drivers' Championship is all but wrapped up, the Constructors' Championship is tighter than ever. Red Bull are almost certain to take first place, but a haul of podiums from Lotus in the last few races means that only thirty-three points separate them from second-placed Ferrari, and they are only twenty-three points away from third-placed Mercedes. With Grosjean's current run of form and Raikkonen's ability to pick up points from anywhere on the grid, the Enstone team will be looking to climb the table in the last few races. Further down, resurgent Sauber are only seventeen points off Force India in sixth place, and will be optimistic about catching their midfield rivals.

The next race in India will most likely mean that the World Drivers' Championship is wrapped up, with Vettel having extended his lead in the last five consecutive races, but with plenty still to race for elsewhere in the field, the last few race are sure to hold a few more twists and turns yet.

Race Results

1. Sebastain Vettel (25pts)
2. Mark Webber (18pts)
3. Romain Grosjean (15pts)
4. Fernando Alonso (12 pts)
5. Kimi Raikkonen (10pts)
6. Nico Hulkenberg (8pts)
7. Esteban Gutierrez (6pts)
8. Nico Rosberg (4pts)
9. Jenson Button (2pts)
10. Felipe Massa (1pt)
11. Paul di Resta (0pts)
12. Jean-Eric Vergne (0pts)
13. Daniel Ricciardo (0pts)
14. Adrian Sutil (0pts)
15. Sergio Perez (0pts)
16. Pastor Maldonado (0pts)
17. Valtteri Bottas (0pts)
18. Charles Pic (0pts)
19. Max Chilton (0pts)
20. Lewis Hamilton (DNF)
21. Giedo van der Garde (DNF)

22. Jules Bianchi (DNF)