Beat: Sports

Preview: Formula 1 set for high-stakes Miami Grand Prix

Miami hosts F1 showdown

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USPA NEWS - Formula 1 resumes its season in Miami with low?degradation strategies, unpredictable conditions and a rising duel between Mercedes and McLaren.

The Formula 1 World Championship emerges from its prolonged competitive slumber to resume action this weekend in Miami, where the premier category stages its first stars?and?stripes event of the season. After the cancellations of the Bahrain and Saudi Arabian Grands Prix, the championship regains momentum on a bespoke urban circuit built around the imposing Hard Rock Stadium, home of the Miami Dolphins. It marks the fourth round of the calendar and the first genuine opportunity to reassess the competitive hierarchy after a month?long hiatus.

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The Miami International Autodrome, a 5.412?kilometre hybrid layout, blends public roads with repurposed stadium parking areas transformed into racing asphalt. Its 19 corners and three elongated straights demand surgical precision and strategic finesse, particularly on a track where tyre degradation has historically been minimal, favouring one?stop race strategies.

Pirelli has allocated the softest compounds in its range — C3, C4 and C5 — for a surface resurfaced in 2023, characterised by low roughness and rapid grip evolution. The Italian manufacturer, omnipresent throughout the weekend, will also supply all support categories, from Formula 2 to the Porsche Carrera Cup North America, which debuts the new Porsche 911 Cup equipped with the P Zero DHG.

One of the circuit’s most striking traits is its remarkable drying speed. In 2025, during the Sprint, drivers switched from intermediates to slicks within a handful of laps despite heavy pre?race rainfall. Unpredictable weather could once again play a decisive role, with the ever?present threat of neutralisations, common in urban environments where barriers punish even the slightest misjudgement.

On the sporting front, Mercedes arrives in Florida leading both championships. Kimi Antonelli, the standout revelation of his debut season, enters with back?to?back victories and a nine?point advantage over teammate George Russell, who seeks to regain momentum after his breakthrough win in Japan. Their internal duel is shaping up to be one of the defining storylines of the year.

McLaren, revitalised by Oscar Piastri’s podium in Suzuka, brings an upgrade package described by team principal Andrea Stella as “a completely new car”. The Woking squad, victorious in Miami in 2024 and 2025 — with Norris and Piastri respectively — aims to consolidate itself as Mercedes’ most consistent challenger, despite never having secured pole position at this venue.

Ferrari, steady but still winless, will also introduce technical updates in an effort to close the gap. Further down the order, Red Bull seeks to recover from a perplexing start to the season that leaves it sixth in the standings, behind Haas and Alpine, while Williams and Aston Martin chase a turning point to revive their ambitions.

The weekend also features the opening round of the Pirelli Hot Laps 2026 programme, offering guests and VIPs the thrill of a high?speed lap alongside professional drivers in supercars from Alpine, Aston Martin, Audi, Ferrari, Ford, McLaren and Mercedes AMG. Aesthetic flair comes in the form of the podium cap, designed by Denis Dekovic, whose grey tones evoke shark skin — a symbolic nod to Florida’s marine fauna.

With 80 overtakes recorded in 2025, a 50% safety?car probability, and a pit?lane loss of 18.76 seconds, Miami remains a venue steeped in unpredictability. Friday’s Sprint qualifying, Saturday’s Sprint race and Grand Prix qualifying, and Sunday’s main event

compose a competitive menu poised to reignite the season with a surge of intensity.

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