

Jonathan Agnew



After the drama in Singapore, the run-in to the Formula One season continues in Japan and with five Grand Prix remaining, the title race could not be closer between the two Mercedes drivers who have dominated this year: Britain's Lewis Hamilton and Ger-

many's Nico Rosberg. Technically, they are teammates but following a series of incidents their relationship has been described as 'poisonous' as both drivers struggle to rein in their natural competitiveness in the interests of team success.

In Hungary, Mercedes asked Hamilton to pull over and allow Rosberg, employing a different tyre strategy, to pass. Hamilton, who was in second position, refused and Rosberg finished third. Then in Belgium, Rosberg punctured Hamilton's tyre as he attempted to overtake, and effectively put him out of the race. Toto Wolff, the Mercedes motorsport director has since threatened to change the driver line up

if the two combatants cannot be managed properly. That is all very well, but Formula One thrives on such rivalry. You might even argue that the sport needs it and remembering the breathtaking battles between Ayrton Senna and Alain Prost in the 1980's, clashes between members of the same team are nothing new.

Anyway, how can you expect an ambitious sportsman at the top of his game to yield to anybody – even someone in the same team? The great

Richard Meade became the first British rider to win an Olympic gold medal in equestrianism when he won both team and individual gold at Munich in 1972. But rather than complete the 'safe' cross-country round his team expected, Meade's competitive instinct took over and he went for it. His flair and courage won through, but it was a risk.

Even in sports that are built around a solid team framework, such as foot-

'Even in sports built around a solid team, personal rivalry makes life awkward'

ball, personal rivalry makes life awkward. Teddy Sheringham and Andy Cole formed one of the most successful strike partnerships in football history at Manchester United, and yet Cole has subsequently written that he detested

his teammate for 15 years. A quick trip to Google reveals many photographs of the pair embracing in celebration, and yet they never said a word to each other. Man United hardly suffered as a result and it is naïve to expect 11 individuals all to get along, just as it is unrealistic to expect F1 drivers to pull aside. Surely the sport would miss the added drama, too.

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