# Controversy erupts at Formula One 75 season launch as fans boo Verstappen



The Formula One 75 season launch event, held at the O2 Arena in London on 14 February, has provoked a notable controversy following the reception experienced by Red Bull Racing's team principal Christian Horner and four-time world champion Max Verstappen. The event was meant to celebrate the sport’s 75th anniversary, drawing a substantial audience both in person and through various viewing platforms, with reports suggesting it was watched by nearly 7.5 million viewers.

During the event, which featured introductions from host Jack Whitehall, both Horner and Verstappen faced a rowdy reception, primarily consisting of boos from a British crowd predominantly supportive of rival teams. This reaction has led to a backlash against the fans from various quarters, including Horner himself, who expressed disappointment regarding the treatment of Verstappen, emphasising that it was disheartening for a four-time champion to be met with such hostility during what should be a celebratory occasion for all drivers.

Reflecting on the booing incident at an earlier pre-season testing session in Bahrain, Horner acknowledged the nature of the sport, stating, "Launching your car is a bit like launching your away strip in a home fans’ stadium, so fans will always back the teams and drivers that they want to." He also noted that if the event had been held in the Netherlands, Verstappen would likely have received a much warmer welcome. Despite acknowledging the competitive passion inherent in sports, Horner articulated his disappointment over the crowd’s reaction to Verstappen.

Meanwhile, the backlash has prompted Verstappen's father, Jos Verstappen, to declare the booing "unacceptable," revealing that his son may consider boycotting similar events in London in the future, contingent upon whether they are held there again. Jos voiced his agreement with Max, who stated, "If this is in England again next year, they certainly won't see me there," following the unfavourable response.

The FIA, which governs Formula One, has also issued a statement condemning what they termed the "tribalist" crowd reaction, asserting that while rivalries fuel excitement, a foundational culture of respect should prevail. The FIA's statement has further divided opinions within the motorsport community, particularly given past controversies surrounding Horner's conduct.

Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff weighed in, dismissing complaints about the crowd's reactions. "We shouldn't talk an event down that was mega just because one single individual, rightly or wrongly, was booed when he spoke," he said, highlighting the overall success of the event despite the less favourable moments for Horner and Verstappen.

McLaren’s CEO Zak Brown defended the fans' reactions, suggesting that cheering and booing are innate aspects of sporting events. He remarked, "Cheering and booing has been part of sport, every sport, forever, and that’s what fans do," emphasising that the outcry was far from violent and reflected passion for the sport.

As pre-season testing progresses in Bahrain, the potential for future launch events remains uncertain. Although the FIA has yet to finalise decisions regarding the format of next year’s ceremonies, there are indications that alternative locations may be considered, including interest from countries such as Saudi Arabia. The first race of the season, the Australian Grand Prix, is set to take place on 16 March, marking the official start of the 2025 F1 season amid an escalating atmosphere of rivalry and fan engagement.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)