

Formula One: Schumacher denies assisting Vettel at Hamilton's expense

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Formula One driver Michael Schumacher. LAT PHOTOGRAPHIC

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Mercedes GP driver and seven-time Formula One world champion Michael Schumacher had an interesting response when told that rival Lewis Hamilton felt that the German interfered in the battle for the lead during last weekend's Spanish Grand Prix. Hamilton said Schumacher--who was down a lap to the race leaders--allowed Vettel to pass him but at the same time made life hard for the McLaren driver.

"I don't recall it," Schumacher said, "and I don't think it would make sense because I think I have a lot more . . . although [Vettel] is my friend, but then Lewis is running a Mercedes engine and that's obviously a lot more important to me, not that I try to favor or not favor anybody. No, that certainly must have been a misunderstanding, but not my idea. I try to keep out of everybody's way and just do my own thing."

Meanwhile, Schumacher said he has no idea how competitive Mercedes will be this weekend in Monaco, but that he believes that the way races have worked out this year will give him a chance to make progress.

"Due to very different strategies that we apply this year compared to probably previous years, from my point of view I have absolutely no sort of feeling and understanding whether our car may suit this track any better than other tracks so it is going to be completely open," he commented.

"Tires will certainly be the most important factor but I think if you have the right tire and the right situation in place then it will normally help you. I have at least good memories when in one race I started last [2006] and went forward. So overtaking is a chance, yes it's difficult, it is a challenge but it's not impossible, and it's certainly an extra help."

Asked about what his first Monaco win had meant, Schumacher said, "It was 1994 and that was after the tragedy that we had in Imola [where Ayrton Senna and Roland Ratzenberger were killed and others injured]. It was still with us in these moments so naturally emotions were a bit low. Nevertheless, as I said at the beginning, it is the most prestigious race you can win.

"In qualifying I just had a fantastic lap. It was spot on and that is a big thrill, and if you can repeat this in the race--although we

had a certain margin I think and I was relatively easy up front--so then you don't have to. But it is the ultimate accomplishment you can have from a race over here, no doubt. Has it changed something to me? I put myself into the record of being a winner in Monaco and then it is all focused for the championship and it is just a single event."