



Kimi Antonelli Wins Belgian Grand Prix 2026: Russell's Heartbreak Hands Mercedes Star Title Lifeline at Spa

Description

Kimi Antonelli delivered a masterclass in patience and pace at Spa-Francorchamps to win the **Belgian Grand Prix 2026**, extending his Formula 1 Drivers' Championship lead to 45 points in a race overshadowed by his team mate George Russell's brutal retirement on the very first lap. The Italian's sixth win of the season came at the expense of a charging Charles Leclerc, with Max Verstappen salvaging third on a day when drama never strayed far from the pit lane.

Russell Out on Lap One: The Incident That Shaped the Race

The Belgian Grand Prix 2026 was barely minutes old when the most significant moment of the afternoon unfolded. Russell ran critically low on battery reserves coming down the Kemmel Straight and was swamped by the pack as he arrived at Les Combes – a nightmare scenario on one of Formula 1's fastest circuits. Lewis Hamilton, tucked immediately behind and with minimal front downforce from the slipstream, made contact, pitching Russell sideways and into the gravel trap. The Safety Car was deployed immediately.

Stewards judged Hamilton responsible for the incident, handing the Ferrari driver a five-second time penalty and placing him under investigation for a potential unsafe release. For Russell, his title challenge suffered a potentially decisive blow: the Briton now trails Antonelli by 50 points with the season entering its second half.

Head to our [Belgian GP preview](#) to see how we expected this race to unfold, and revisit the season's earlier drama in our [British Grand Prix race report](#).



Kimi Antonelli leads at Spa-Francorchamps during the Belgian Grand Prix 2026. Source: Formula 1 official website (formula1.com)

Antonelli's Measured Masterclass

Starting from pole, Antonelli immediately found himself challenged by Verstappen, who produced a sensational launch and swept into the lead heading towards Eau Rouge on the opening lap. The Dutchman's Red Bull looked strong in the opening stint, but Antonelli's Mercedes had the measure of the circuit's high-speed sections and he reclaimed first place via the Kemmel Straight shortly after the safety car restart on Lap 5.

The pivotal moment came on Lap 20. A Virtual Safety Car, triggered by debris on circuit, gifted Ferrari a perfect window to pit Leclerc. The Monégasque driver emerged ahead of both Verstappen and Antonelli and set about building a lead. Rather than react frantically, Antonelli boxed his Mercedes and chose to manage his hard compound tyres with meticulous care.

Lap after lap, the gap to Leclerc fell. By Lap 34, Antonelli was close enough to strike and he did so in typically clinical fashion, diving past the Ferrari down the Kemmel Straight to retake the lead he would never relinquish. The final margin was 1.9 seconds, a scoreline that flatters Leclerc but fairly reflects Antonelli's control of the closing laps.

Championship Picture Shifts Dramatically

Verstappen finished third, 11.6 seconds adrift of the winner, and was left to ponder what might have been had his early pace translated into a longer stint at the front. Hamilton crossed the line fourth after his penalty, with McLaren's Oscar Piastri a close fifth. The most impressive performance of the afternoon, however, belonged to Isack Hadjar and Lando Norris – the Racing Bulls driver charged from the back of the grid to sixth, while Norris, similarly penalised for power unit changes, recovered from P13 to take seventh.

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Lando Norris qualified P3 before grid penalties dropped him to P13, yet recovered brilliantly to seventh in the race. Source: Formula 1 official website (formula1.com)

Belgian Grand Prix 2026: Championship Standings After Spa

With 45 points separating him from his nearest rival, Antonelli's championship trajectory is now clearer than at any point this season. Hamilton's investigation for unsafe release adds further uncertainty to Ferrari's title ambitions, while Russell will be desperate to bounce back at the next round. The Italian prodigy has now won six of ten races in 2026 – a win rate that, if sustained, will make him virtually uncatchable.

Spa-Francorchamps has long been a circuit that rewards bravery and tactical intelligence in equal measure. Antonelli delivered both in abundance on Sunday. At 20 years old, he is writing his name into Formula 1's history books race by race.

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