RASHID AL DHAHERI SECURES POLE POSITION FOR RACE 2

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This morning at Spa-Francorchamps, Formula Regional European Championship by Alpine's second round resumed with qualifying. After a long battle, everything was decided in the final laps of the second group on track, where Rashid Al Dhaheri, the Mercedes junior racing for Prema Racing, clinched pole position by narrowly beating Kanato Le of ART Grand Prix in a tight time duel right at the chequered flag.

Track conditions were variable, initially half damp due to a light rain before the session, then also slightly wet during qualifying due to a few scattered drops in the typical, unpredictable Belgian weather, and finally quickly drying up.

Group B drivers were the first to take to the track, facing early challenges due to the weather and cold temperatures. In the opening laps, it was hard to bring the Pirelli tyres into the optimal operating window. Air temperature stood at 8.5°C, while the track reached 14.3°C. In the final phase, lap times started to drop, and the provisional pole was set by Hiyu Yamakoshi, who was flying with Van Amersfoort Racing, clocking a 2:13.682. His benchmark time held strong through the final moments, with Enzo Deligny of R-ace GP finishing just behind, only 0.085 adrift. However, Yamakoshi was handed a post-session penalty, losing two grid positions for failing to leave the racing line clean and unobstructed. Akshay Bohra, also with R-ace GP, was third fastest, 0.104 behind. Fourth was Italy's Giovanni Maschio with RPM, trailing by 1.554, followed by his teammate Enzo Peugeot at 1.819 and Sainteloc Racing's Dutch driver Tim Gerhards at 2.138. Race 1 winner Freddie Slater of Prema Racing struggled in qualifying, finishing seventh at 2.527, ahead of current championship leader Matteo De Palo of Trident, eighth at 2.841. Completing the top ten were Trident's Ruiqi Liu and Sainteloc Racing's Nikita Bedrin, with gaps of 2.841 and 2.921 respectively.

The final pole position was decided in Group A. With just over five minutes to go, the session was interrupted following off-track excursions by three cars, all forced to retire. Involved were Evain Giltaire of ART Grand Prix, Nandhavud Bhirombhakdi of Trident and Pedro Clerot of Van Amersfoort Racing. Once action resumed, the fight against the clock intensified. Rashid Al Dhaheri moved into the lead and began a fierce head-to-head

battle with Japan's Kanato Le. The decisive lap for the Prema driver came on his final attempt, stopping the clock at 2:10.987. Le was second, 0.359 behind. Jin Nakamura of R-ace GP was third at 0.638, followed by Taito Kato, the young talent from the Honda Racing driver development programme racing with ART Grand Prix, at 0.734. The last driver to stay within a second of Al Dhaheri was Dion Gowda, top rookie in Race 1 with Van Amersfoort Racing, fifth at 0.982. Behind him came Jack Beeton from Australia, racing with Prema Racing, at 1.119. French Mercedes junior Doriane Pin, also with Prema Racing, finished seventh at 1.163. Completing the top ten were Michael Belov with CL Motorsport at 1.212, Aditya Kulkarni with Akcel GP at 2.029 and Rui-Heng Yeh with RPM at 2.323.

Everything is now set for the final showdown of the weekend. Race 2, the closing contest of the second round of the Formula Regional European Championship by Alpine at Spa-Francorchamps, will get underway at 4:15 PM.

Rashid Al Dhaheri: *"It was definitely a very interesting session. The conditions played a very important role. We had the red flag, then the conditions changed again completely, it dried up a lot. It's very important to adapt quickly, to find the right rhythm with the car, and I think with the team we did a great job. We adapted to the conditions we had and made sure we were 100% ready, and overall, it paid off. At the end of the Kemmel Straight it's going to be quite interesting to see where you are, because the tow is a big factor here. But the target is just to focus on the start, and then T1, and then it's racing. It's going to be an interesting race."*