# Mesut Ozil: Arsene Wenger says Arsenal midfielder does not speak for club

Mesut Ozil has "a right to express his opinion" but does not speak for Arsenal in his criticism of China's treatment of Uighur Muslims, says Arsene Wenger.

Midfielder Ozil, who is a Muslim, called Uighurs "warriors who resist persecution" and criticised both China and the silence of Muslims in response.

Arsenal said the club is "apolitical" and China's foreign ministry claimed Ozil was ["deceived by fake news".](https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/50807043)

"What he says is about himself and not Arsenal," said ex-Gunners boss Wenger.

"Mesut Ozil has freedom of speech like everyone else and he uses his notoriety to express his opinions, which are not necessarily shared by everybody.

"What's important is that Ozil has an individual responsibility. He doesn't have to carry the word of Arsenal Football Club. When you make a comment about your individual opinion you accept the consequences of it."

Rights groups say about a million people - mostly from the Muslim Uighur community - are thought to have been detained without trial in high-security prison camps.

China has consistently denied mistreating Uighur Muslims in the country and says they are being educated in "vocational training centres" to combat violent religious extremism.

Secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain Harun Khan said Ozil's actions were "hugely commendable" and described [Arsenal's decision to distance themselves](https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/50795173) from the 31-year-old German's views as "regrettable".

'Human rights are important and Fifa is conscious of that'

Wenger, now world governing body Fifa's chief of global football development, was speaking in Doha, before the [Club World Cup semi-final](https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/50763243) between Mexican side Monterrey and Liverpool.

Concerns have been expressed about Qatar [hosting the event,](https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/50820195) as well as the 2022 World Cup, because of its stance on homosexuality and immigrant workers' rights, among other issues.

According to a report by the International Trades Union Confederation (ITUC) in 2013, more than 1,200 workers from Nepal and India had died on construction projects in the country linked to the World Cup, including non-football infrastructure schemes, in the previous three years.

The ITUC said at the time that if deaths continued at that rate then they could reach 4,000 - although it has now dropped its complaints against Qatar following improvements in workers' rights in the country.

Qatar has always disputed those figures, saying the deaths cannot be linked directly to the World Cup.

In [February, Amnesty International said](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/02/qatarauthorities-must-step-up-efforts-to-honour-labour-rights-promises-before-2022-world-cup/) that although progress has been made, Qatar "must step up efforts to honour labour rights promises" before the tournament begins.

Wenger says the situation in the country "has improved tremendously" because of the World Cup, adding: "Human rights are important and Fifa is very conscious of that.

"There are two possible attitudes: keep out of it or use the power you have to improve things. That's what Fifa tried to do."

Frenchman Wenger landed [the role with Fifa](https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/50404854) - his first job in football since leaving Arsenal after a near 22-year reign in May 2018 - in November.

After he stepped down as Gunners boss, Unai Emery was at the helm for 18 months before being sacked and the club are now searching for a new manager, with Freddie Ljungberg in temporary charge.

[Manchester City coach Mikel Arteta](https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/50827836) has spoken with senior Arsenal figures and Wenger thinks the Spaniard is a good choice - as long as he has the right support.

"He's intelligent, he has passion and knowledge - but so does Ljungberg," said Wenger, who managed both former midfielders at Arsenal. "Mikel Arteta has a great future. He learned a lot in his position as assistant coach.

"He will have to deal with the fact that he has no experience at that level. He will have to be surrounded by a good environment at the club."

# James Harden becomes the first player in NBA history to record back-to-back 50-point games with more than 10 three-pointers

James Harden made NBA history this week becoming the first player to record back-to-back 50-point games with more than 10 3-pointers made in each game.

The Houston Rockets guard scored 55 points in the team's 116-110 win against the Cleveland Cavaliers and 54 points in their 130-107 win against the Orlando Magic, according to[the Rockets website](https://www.nba.com/rockets/schedule).

When asked by reporters Friday how he felt about the accomplishment, [Harden said](https://twitter.com/HoustonRockets/status/1205685485357740037?s=20): "I just want to win man, whatever it takes."

It's not the first time Harden scored 50-plus points, though. He's done it five times so far this season and three times in December alone.

Harden also joined Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry as the only players in NBA history to have [back-to-back games with more than 10 3-pointers made](https://twitter.com/nbastats/status/1205689141255643136).

Rapper 50 Cent and Rockets luminary Dikembe Mutombo attended the recent game against the Sacramento Kings, although the atmosphere does not compare to the celebrity-heavy crowd at Los Angeles Lakers games. Still, Harden has inspired the Rockets’ fan base as he has made his way into the record books. So much so that he already ranks high among Rockets former stars, including Hakeem Olajuwon, who helped them to two consecutive NBA titles (1994, 1995).

How does a seven-time All-Star and two-time league scoring champion improve each season amid increasingly swarming defenses? Harden answered that question as quickly as it takes to throw a defender off-balance or bait him into committing a foul.

"It doesn’t just happen because it happens," Harden said. "I work every single day."

Harden can make step-back 3-pointers, floaters or free throws at a consistent rate. As much as the Rockets have marveled at this for the past eight seasons, they believe Harden is just getting started. "This year, he is better again," general manager Daryl Morey told USA TODAY Sports. "It’s unprecedented in NBA history for a guy to get better like this."

Harden has averaged a league-leading 39.3 points, marking the highest total by a player through the first 22 games of a season since Wilt Chamberlain in 1962-63. Harden became the first player in history to average at least 35 points and seven assists. And Harden recently tied Michael Jordan for third-most 60-point performances in history (four) behind Kobe Bryant (six) and Chamberlain (32).

Harden led the NBA in scoring in each of the past two seasons (30.4 in 2017-18, 36.1 in 2018-19); recorded the highest scoring average since Jordan’s 37.1 points per game in 1986-87; and recorded career-highs in free-throw attempts per game for five consecutive seasons.

This season, Harden appears likely to cement new career-highs in points and free-throw attempts per game. No wonder coach Mike D’Antoni considers Harden to be "one of the best offensive players ever."

"He’s getting better every year and even more efficient," D’Antoni told USA TODAY Sports. "We can put him on the hardest player on the other team. He still plays his 40 minutes and doesn’t get tired. I think he’s a lot better this year than last year."

# Red Bull Racing has no excuses for 2020

[Aston Martin Red Bull Racing](https://redbullracing.redbull.com/" \t "_blank" \o "Aston Martin Red Bull Racing)’s [Max Verstappen](https://www.redbull.com/au-en/athlete/max-verstappen-bio) started the Brazilian Grand Prix at the front of the grid after claiming his second career pole position by 0.123s from Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel. He drove a masterful race, surviving a pit-lane near miss and two safety-car periods to win his eighth Grand Prix and third of 2019.

At the chequered flag, the Dutch driver wasn't joined on the podium by rookie team-mate [Alex Albon](https://www.redbull.com/au-en/athlete/alexander-albon), who was only one lap away from his maiden Formula One podium, but instead was joined by [Scuderia Toro Rosso](https://scuderiatororosso.redbull.com/en/" \o "Scuderia Toro Rosso" \t "_blank)'s [Pierre Gasly](https://www.redbull.com/au-en/athlete/pierre-gasly), who claimed his first podium finish in dramatic fashion.

## The race

Max Verstappen made a perfect start from pole position. Behind him, Lewis Hamilton beat Sebastian Vettel into the first left-hand corner to take second place, as Alex Albon survived the opening lap to maintain his qualifying position of fifth.

By Lap 5, Verstappen's lead over Hamilton amounted to almost 2.5s, showing the pace of the Honda power plant on the relatively short, anticlockwise Interlagos circuit. Albon, meanwhile, hassled the Mercedes of Valtteri Bottas in the developing battle for fourth.

On Lap 8, the Renault of Daniel Ricciardo made contact with Kevin Magnussen’s Haas under braking for the left-hand Turn 3, sending the Danish driver into a spin and causing damage to the front wing of Ricciardo's car.

Of the front runners, Hamilton was the first to stop, on Lap 20, followed by Verstappen one lap later. It very nearly all went wrong for the Dutch driver. Despite a rapid sub-two-second stop for Verstappen, the Williams of Robert Kubica was unsafely released in front of him, baulking Verstappen as he exited the pit lane and putting him behind Hamilton on track.

For the second year in a row it looked as though the actions of another team could rob Verstappen the chance of a win in Brazil, but thankfully the pace of his Honda power plant allowed him to get back in front of Hamilton not once, but twice in quick succession.

Despite some dramatic duelling between Verstappen and Hamilton, the Aston Martin Red Bull Racing man made light work of the Mercedes and by Lap 27 was back in the lead, with Hamilton in second, as Vettel and Bottas pitted.

At the halfway mark, Verstappen's lead over Hamilton was a shade over three seconds. The reigning F1 champion was lamenting his tyre choice over the radio, feeling his soft tyres were not the way to go, and Vettel was showing good pace in third on the medium compound tyres.

Hamilton made his second pit stop on Lap 43, followed by Verstappen one lap later, and another sub-two-second stop put Verstappen back ahead of Hamilton with a reduced advantage, but crucially having foiled Mercedes' attempt to undercut.

With Vettel leading, Verstappen resumed the lead when the Ferrari driver pitted on Lap 49, keeping second-place driver Hamilton out of DRS range. The real action was the drive from Charles Leclerc in the Ferrari, as he fought hard to resist Bottas's challenge for fourth.

Any hope of fourth place for Bottas was ended on Lap 52, when a few puffs of smoke signalled a terminal engine problem and the first retirement for the Finnish driver since the German Grand Prix in July.

Crucially, Bottas's retirement led to the introduction of the safety car, neutralising the race and leading to Verstappen pitting for a third time to take soft tyres, as Hamilton stayed out.

Verstappen rejoined the track in second and at the restart passed Hamilton with a stunning move on the outside of the Senna S, with team-mate Albon sneaking into third ahead of the two Ferraris in a brilliant move belying his relative lack of F1 experience.

As Verstappen stretched out his lead over Hamilton, it was Albon's turn to shine and he set about pressuring the world champion for second place. With 10 laps remaining he was within DRS range, but the Thai-British driver was in turn being caught by Vettel and was forced to brilliantly defend his podium place from the four-time champion.