

# Bagnaia clinches pole for Malaysian MotoGP ahead of Martin

AFP — Francesco Bagnaia smashed the track record to clinch pole position Saturday for the Malaysian MotoGP sprint race and grand prix ahead of title rival Jorge Martin.

Spain's Martin is 17 points ahead of Italian defending champion Bagnaia in the title fight, with just one race weekend left after Sepang.

Pramac Ducati's Martin can mathematically clinch his first world crown this weekend, with the sprint race later Saturday and the main event on Sunday.

Ducati's Bagnaia dominated Friday practice, and in more steamy and cloudy conditions, he clocked a scorching time of 1min 56.337sec in a dramatic qualifying session.

Martin was second, 0.216sec behind.

Martin had obliterated the track record to top the timesheets in the qualifying run, only for Bagnaia to roar back and go even better.

Alongside them on the front row of the grid will be Alex Marquez, who was a distant third-fastest, nearly a second off Bagnaia's leading time.

Six-time world champion Marc Marquez was fifth.

The title tussle is a straight shootout between Martin and Bagnaia.

Bagnaia won the grand prix at a wet Buriram in Thailand last week, ahead of Martin, to shave his rival's lead and keep the championship alive.

The season finale had been scheduled for Valencia in a fortnight, but it was cancelled Friday after deadly flooding in that part of Spain and organisers are searching for a replacement venue.

AFP