

[Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / Pressure mounting on Perez | Will Alonso retire at the end of the season?

Hello, everyone. Welcome to this week's episode of the Sky Sports F1 podcast. I hope you are well. To help me make sense of an eventful Mexico City Grand Prix, I'm joined by our very own Sky Sports News Craig Slater. I'm also joined by Formula One content creator Tomo. Hello to both of you. Craig, first time on the podcast. Welcome. How are you? Hope you're well.

I'm delighted to be here. Obviously, a bit of a leg substitute or call out to the squad.

In very old-fashioned tech I've got, which I hope is working all right with cables and then all the rest of it. But yeah, hoping to do well and get on that lucrative podcast circuit if I can.

You're most welcome. You're most welcome. Tomo, you're nodding your head.

Well, in this situation, it's funny because I've been on a few times now. So actually, I'm the experienced one, Craig. Yeah. Well, it's youth and inexperience. It's nice to be sort of not the old-fashioned at something for a change. That's good. Very good. It's a good blend. It's a good mix. It's a good mix. Tomo, how's your weekend? Enjoying Mexico?

Yeah, you know what? For a Grand Prix that I remember last season was a bit of a stinker. Actually, you know what? By the standards, we actually got a sprint race again, really, didn't we? It was almost like three in a row with that split down the middle. So yeah, two races for three weekends in a row, six races in the last three weekends. So I don't know, maybe it was just literally like banging the middle, wasn't it? We got two races, which may have spoiled some stories, but maybe create some others. Yeah, definitely. I think sometimes it's slightly uneventful. I mean, you alluded to it there, slightly uneventful Grand Prix. I thought it did deliver this weekend. Craig, you were to tell us a little bit about how you kind of split your time because obviously you're at some races and you're from the studio for other races. So you were from the studio this week. How do you tell us how you decide which ones to go to across the season and what's the difference in your role between the two? Yeah, I mean, there's several factors at play, not least, you know, is there the opportunity to have a time on Sky Sports News might be a little bit around it. Time of days are a factor as well. I've been, as I suppose, Tom has as well. It's late nights, isn't it, when you're covering these these events in the Americas. So I tried to spread myself over the course of the year. There's obviously more opportunity to get on air when the football isn't on. So that's a consideration to obviously we've had the championship finish a little bit early as well. So yeah, that's been something lacking a bit. But I have to say, I think the races have been good since that that's concluded. It was another decent I thought weekend in Mexico. Maybe we were robbed a little bit because of the red flag of what might have been a more interesting ending to the Grand Prix. But some signs, I think that the field are coalescing somewhat and maybe beginning to get a bit closer to Max, if not to put him under significant pressure. Obviously, he had more of that in Austin than he did in Mexico. And maybe as we'll as we'll touch on later, hopefully, he gets even more of the same in Brazil again. I'm going to guess, Craig, for you, the biggest nightmare is two drivers disqualified after a Grand Prix that starts on Austin time. Would that be fair?

What? Yes, as as as they're all heading away from the circuit, they're actually at the race too, to enjoy their cocktails and the Mexico City nightlife, or whatever, or as it was in the case of Austin, you know, downtown music and all the rest of it going on there. There was a bit of hanging around. I think we all knew it was going to be a disqualification in Texas as soon as the as soon as the floors were declared illegal. So, you know, where you could write for it and

just wait and click the button when that outcome came. But it's we've had a discussion about all of that. Can the FIA expedite matters? Do they need to be more comprehensive with some of these checks given the sample they had and the numbers which are non-compliant? So, I suppose that that's

an ongoing discussion. But I guess that they will have to, I think, think about that because I haven't heard a significant voice within F1 suggest, certainly over the Mexico weekend, that no, it was fine just to check forward cars even if two of them were non-compliant. I think that is going to have to be looked at. No question. Especially if we encounter a similar situation at a future race. Let's talk then about the weekend in Mexico City Grand Prix. I feel almost a little bit bad going in on Perez here because I think that's only in his post-race reaction. He's been very sort of vocal and saying, look, I had to go for it. I had to make that move down into turn one. It didn't work out. Eventually, he finished the first lap but was out after that.

Tom, when you were watching that at home, you saw that happen. It was obviously Mexico, his home Grand Prix. It was frankly just really, really hard to watch, wasn't it? And obviously, it was very emotional afterwards. Yeah. I mean, he tried to pull the move that Max pulled. Was it 22 or 21? I can't remember. He was on the outside of the three.

21. Swung it around the outside. That was it. Yeah. And took the leads. Look, he went for it. It was a move that you can understand the context of he's in this red bull car, this car that can fight for wins. I mean, his long run pace in practice was pretty good. He was, yes, out qualified barracada, but only a tenth and a half off of Max. So this felt like a track that was going to play to his strengths. He smelt that opportunity. He went for it. He misjudged it. I mean, you look at the steel, it's very similar. Lewis said it as well in the call-down room, didn't he? That he kind of did what he did in Qatar and just pulled in that little bit too early. It's a sport of fine margins and yeah, guided for him because, I mean, the support for Chieko, I mean, I would love to attend that Grand Prix and just take it in because, you know, I went to Austria earlier this year and Max Verstappen has a huge, like the Orange Armies is a very serious thing to behold in real life, right? It's super impressive. But the adoration, the work Chieko does in his community as well, you know, the foundation, he's got, he's such a role model in Mexico. He's so well received. And when you consider all of that, it's not just a home Grand Prix. It feels like so much more to a driver like Chieko and for it to end on the first corner with all this speculation around his future as well at Red Bull and maybe in the sport. Who knows? Yeah, tough one to accept that. Yeah, I think you're right. I mean, the one thing I would say it would have been worse that he'd done it earlier in the season and kind of got himself out of championship contention. Did he have a lot to lose? Well, there's the seat aspect and that's another aspect that does what happened there actually materially affect his prospects of continuing in that race car next year. But I suppose in title terms that I'd already long gone, you know, he finishes second, he finishes on the podium. You know, I thought he could have done that

as you've said, Tom, given the base he exhibited, particularly in qualifying, it was the closest he'd been to which happened for quite a while, wasn't it? So in a way, he threw away that good result. And the other aspect to it as well is it's all happened alongside Daniel Ricciardo out driving the Alfa Tauri, getting ahead of him in qualifying and then doing so well in the race as well. So it was a lose-lose situation. But I think the fact that Lewis Hamilton kind of

understood the mentality of it in the cooldown room, to me, that showed that maybe, you know, that it wasn't so crazy as it first appeared. The consequences were pretty bad, but you can understand the mentality still. And he has got races left to make up for, including one in a few days time. It's just given the red flag, given, you know, the whole, you can't win a race at turn one, but you can lose a race at turn one, which is exactly what happened. Like, given all of that context that played out, there was a chance. Even if he'd come out of that corner, you know, third behind Charle, even, there was a chance. There was a chance, isn't it?

And isn't it fascinating that it's the way, has he morphed as a driver into a different mentality? I mean, I always admired him greatly and, you know, was a particular fan of his because of his ability to leave it late in a Grand Prix, you know, to husband his resources in terms of having tire life at the end of an event, especially one, you know, as occasionally chaotic as Mexico can be. It's so uncharacteristic of him to do exactly what he did that you do wonder about his headspace. Has he lost the essential Perez DNA? Is he very much not really thinking or playing to his strengths right now because of the external pressures on him? And that was a, you know, a clearing example of it. What about them? I mean, we mentioned Hamilton sort of almost coming out in support of Sergio and also referencing what he did in Qatar, being of a similar degree of, or similar nature. In terms of Peter in the championship, Lewis is now only 20 points behind Sergio. Lewis is also worth noting has thrown away quite a lot of points in recent weeks. So that almost, you would argue, is very much Lewis's place to lose. And he might still obviously take Peter in the championship. But, Tom, what do you make of that battle for second in the championship? Lewis has obviously said, hasn't he, that it really is all about the constructors, but I mean, that would be a massive blowwood net to Sergio in the, by some considerable margin, the fastest car not finishing P2. I think, you know, Red Bull, we've never had a one two in the driver's championship, even in the Vettel Weber days, you'd always get Fernando sneaking in there in his Ferrari. And this season, the way it looks bad for me is that, yeah, again, you look at Vettel Weber, there was a clear second quickest car and quickest driver in Alonso, typically anyway, you know, we'd consistently get on the podium. This year, you've had the Aston B second quickest car, you've had the Ferrari at times, you've had the Mercedes at times. And for Checo to not get P2, it's a big kick in the teeth for Red Bull considering, you know, how we've talked all year about how dominant this car is in the hands of Max in particular, but Checo's got the same car. And he's a very talented capable driver. We've seen this for many years, seven years of, you know, overperforming in that racing point for Cyndia. In this context, it's that's where it's really tough, I think, from a Red Bull point of view, I mean, from Lewis's point of view, you know, it's going to be a little bit of extra motivation that they are going in the right direction. And Lewis is showing that, you know, he's in a car that he's really struggling with and not happy with, he's still able to drag out these performance. But without that disqualification, they would be level one points. Just saying. Yeah, I think you spotted. It's interesting, isn't it? I think it has, but it has become more of a thing this year that the one too, because they probably did they not have the opportunity last year to slightly prefer Perez's strategy wasn't in the last race to maybe, you know, get him that second spot and didn't do it last year, I'm talking about. But this year, it has been something. And if they wanted an excuse, if they are indeed lining up Ricardo, or if they're coming around to a way of thinking that Ricardo is their preferred option in the car, it gives them the ammunition, doesn't it,

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to put presented in a in as a kind of a reasonable action to take. If he doesn't get that second spot and you spot on, it's not as if there has been a strong second force in F1 this year. There's been various different cars at various points, lead the assault on trying to get close to red, but which would make it, I think you have to say, in terms of Lewis Hamilton, and maybe we'll get on to talking about him a bit later, a very significant achievement indeed, if he could come second. I always think of Jack Nicklaus in golf, who won the most majors with 18, but he also had the most second places as well. And I, you know, for Lewis to get what would it be his fourth, second place in F1 alongside seven championships. I know it's not something he particularly care about, but I think it would speak volumes again, a little bit about just how good he is.

And also I think he's improved this year too. I wonder how much the teams actually care about these things, because points are, you know, we've decided to give 25 points to winners, 18 to second, 15, blah, blah, blah. In IndyCar, they give points to everyone, you know, like that can dictate whether, I mean, again, you know, Sergio was only three points short of Charles last season. So, you know, it's points are a good kind of base look at things, but they do not tell anywhere near the full story. And the teams have, they need to be making decisions based on the full story, not just on points. So I will say that as well.

Craig, put some meat on the bone in terms of the what Mercedes would get from finishing second in the championship with in terms of the financial gain, but also in terms of the wind tunnel time, I guess, I guess they're going to get less wind tunnel time, of course, but more financial gain, right? Yeah, I mean, well, that's right. A little bit more money. What are we talking about? And actually, I think, Tom, you've done a more of an in depth expose of this recently in terms of what the teams get. But I mean, I don't think it means much really to an organization like Mercedes, bedecked with sponsors and all the rest of it, and who will, you know, make the cost cap anyway, and will be struggling to get down to that kind of level of expenditure, you know, whatever they bring in as income. I think from Mercedes perspective, it would be your better finishing second and third. It gives the factory a little bit of a base point if you've only got that the one team ahead of them as well. So I don't think it's necessarily ultra significant in that regard, but it's every place down you fall. I mean, you could probably compare it more to if you're a team like like Aston Martin at the moment, dropping places towards the end of the season. That's not somewhere you want to be. You kind of want to be ending on the front foot rather than the back foot. If you're going to have the team energised and and and morale at a level where, you know, where everyone is mobilized to have a strong winter and head into the new season.

And it's easy to dismiss that stuff, Craig. But like what you're saying, all of those points, this is a sport of fine margins and a little bit more momentum, a little bit more team morale. That can make the difference in a pit stop. That can make the difference over a race distance. It's fractions of a percentage. We're talking about, you know, you see a 10 second win or 12 seconds. I think Max was clear in the end of Lewis. But over the course of a 71 lap race around, that's a fraction of a percent. But that's the difference.

Wasn't it fascinating Lewis at the end of the race, what he had to say? I mean, I wrote down the comments kind of, you know, it wasn't something that anyone was necessarily probing for either. But the little window into where we thought the Mercedes were with regard to Red Bull and looking ahead to next season, what he was, he said, you know, he said he was he did believe absolutely that they could build a winning car again. And then he said there are a lot of engineers.

Nobody wants to copy anybody. They want to find their own way. But I think we are progressing. But I've heard that Red Bull are progressing as well. So we have to be really, really strategic and really clinical. You know, it's I think next season is already being contested in a way that certainly in Lewis Hamilton's head, it seems to me his mind is full of where next year's car is and to what extent some of the upgrades, which will have relevance being brought towards the end of this season already have on next year's battle. And also, he's obviously clearly worried about how early Red Bull started developing next year's car and has a handle on that again. So I think we're all, you know, in these kinds of end of season races, you do get this idea of the teams beginning to marshal their ideas about next year and who necessarily might be where, which I think, you know, yes, from a morale perspective, get some results in now. But you can see Lewis Hamilton very much turning his mind to 2024. He also said after the race, honestly, it's not going to make a big difference to my life whether I come second or third, which I think kind of speaks to your point, Craig, about, you know, actually, for someone like Lewis Hamilton, he's won seven world championships. It's not really about that, but it is about next year. You know, Lewis spent a lot of 2022 wrestling with the Mercedes taking on the burden of development. But had he been outscored for a second successive season by George Russell, there would have been a different public narrative. And you can say, yes, this has been another year of rebuilding from Mercedes. So where they finish doesn't necessarily matter. Or how many points Lewis scores vis-à-vis George doesn't necessarily matter either. But the public narrative would have had an impact. Instead of that, he has, he's a master, you know, a huge gulf in points between himself and George, and is now ahead in terms of head to head qualifying as well, which we all know is one of George Russell's strong points. So I think some of these things do matter. You look at Mercedes trajectory over the last, you know, well, almost two seasons now, and considering where they were last year and how well George was performing relative to Lewis and who knows, like the full context behind that. At the end of the day, it's very simple. Lewis is in the car because he wants an 8-4 title. Mercedes feel like they owe it to give Lewis the opportunity above all else. And actually this gap growing between George and Lewis, I think is actually kind of a good thing, because it's maybe saving Mercedes a bit of a headache if Lewis can really show his star quality, which he's not really been able to show in this car and put himself as and almost make George a default number two. That's essentially what Toto will want. If you want a title fight in 24, you can't have them tripping over each other like Lewis and Fernando did in 2007, and then Kimi Raikkonen comes through and I'll take that. That's not what you, so I think the pieces are in place, you know, Alonso's back in the team as well working on the car. And we know him and Nuri are the two. They're the Messi and Ronaldo of this debate, sure. I think it's going in the right direction, but that's why Lewis is motivated by an 8-4 title. Everything else is just noise. He's more decorated than anyone. I think he's going to be less sensitive to all the noise and speculation than anyone else on the grid in my opinion, because that's the reason he's here. That's the same reason Fernando Alonso's here, but I'm sure we'll get onto him. Yeah, it's quite a significant movement that bringing Alonso back, wasn't it? Especially when you've promoted someone to a theoretically higher role, but realizing he's more effective in that one. I don't know my career's future, but we have to consider this being the rearrangement at Mercedes over the last two years. Not saying Lewis was negative in any way in 2022, but there

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was a kind of sobriety and restraint about the way he would speak. And I sense now he's much more on the front foot again. I think he feels, yes, the building blocks and the right people are in place in terms of where the car development's going. Even that little quote I made there was almost, was that in reference to Mike Elliott or the engineers who wanted to go a different way from the kind of red bull path that Mercedes have now adopted? But you just get the sense, yeah, Lewis feels that at least that the right personnel are in the right spots, as you've kind of outlined with Alison in the lead. It's just, can they set the targets and parameters right now? And, you know, our red bull just a little bit too far ahead. Is Newie beatable on aero over this winter? That's a big question.

And again, like you look at McLaren, how quickly they turned that around. Sider won key out the door. Stellar's in his team principal who'd never done that job before, but a man steeped in experience

both at Ferrari and then at McLaren. And they've turned it around completely. So a lot can be done with the right difficult decisions at the right time. You don't get the chance to make these points out with a podcast. I don't get in my day-to-day reporting, but I can vent a bit on this.

One of the things Andrea Stellar said recently, he was talking about that Ferrari Bellapok of, you know, Rory Byrne and Ross Braun and John Todd. And what he said, the very interesting point he made, he said, all of those guys could have been promoted into bigger jobs. And some of them were, I guess, Ross Braun went and ran his own team. But they kept them in station because they were the best at what they did individually. Now, I kind of looked at Mercedes in recent years and you see Andy Cowell leave to go to something else.

You see Allison take on a different role and get involved in building boats for Jim Brackley for whatever. You see James Viles leaving as head of strategy to go to Williams. And you think, are they promoting too many people out of these vital roles which any top team kind of needs to keep them in? And Stellar was, I think Stellar's got a good handle on that. You know, does not want to hemorrhage his best stuff at McLaren, wants to add to it. You can easily promote people into jobs for good work. But then have you got as good a replacement to come and take their place? I wonder if Mercedes have had to wrestle with that over the last couple of years.

Very interesting point. Yeah, how do you retain talent within a Formula One team if their eyes are constantly being turned elsewhere? I guess, yeah, big question. Just back onto the Perez and the pressure mounting on Sergio Perez. We've spoken obviously about the pressure coming from Lewis Hamilton and from Mercedes in terms of the championship. The other point of pressure, which Craig, you mentioned earlier, is Daniel Ricciardo. And it was a brilliant weekend for Daniel Ricciardo in Mexico. To quote Horner, he looked like the Daniel of old this weekend. Tom, what did you see in Daniel's performance this weekend that makes you think that he's maybe he's back or that he might become a factor in the future of Sergio Perez?

I saw a comfort in Ricciardo's driving that we only saw in moments. We did see in moments at McLaren. Ricciardo last season in Mexico, very, very good drive in that McLaren Australia. Obviously,

Monza, when he got the win, there were examples dotted around. Similarly to Perez, actually, certain tracks would, you know, Czecho can get close to Max, and certain tracks Ricciardo could get close if not beat Norris. It's that level of consistency Ricciardo was never able to achieve at McLaren because he was always having to, you know, consciously think about his

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driving to drive this weird McLaren. You know, Carlos has talked about it being a bit weird. Lando's talked about his it doesn't fit the style that he wants to drive. You know, Oscar's probably adapted in part because he is very green, he's new. He's, you know, Ricciardo and Perez have very learned styles. I imagine, right, that they've cultivated over time. Again, Czecho was at the same team for seven years, so they knew how to set up a car that he could drive quickly. And yeah, look, it's one race. It's a shame with the injury that we've not got to see a bit more of Daniel because is there enough of a sample here for Red Bull to make a well-informed decision that they're not just going to, you know, if they were to replace Czecho with Daniel, that they're not just going to do a like for like change. They what do they want? They don't want someone to challenge Max, but they don't want someone to be so far off Max that they can't support him and the team in a title fight. There is that, you know, sweet spot, you know, maybe two, maybe three tenths behind in qualifying pace, if that can play out across. What Valtteri did relative to Lewis, Valtteri never missed a Q3 in five years at Mercedes. He outqualified Lewis about 30% of the time, which is significant. Like, but he was never challenging Lewis for a title. He was the perfect number two. And that's a very hard thing to come across. And Red Bull have to assume that the rest are going to be close to this seat next season. Sorry, they have to assume that. It might not happen, but they have to assume that. And well, if everyone else is closing up more, if Czecho doesn't start improving, well, he's already qualifying, you know, down the field. If everyone else gets quicker, surely he's only going to go more backwards if everyone gets quicker relative to Red Bull. It wasn't that it was a, well, obviously the race wasn't great for Czecho. It wasn't the qualifier. It was the fact that Daniel did so well in qualifying. He was, he outqualified Sergio in Q1, Q2 and Q3. Daniel did. Yeah, I think you're spot on there. I think, I think the, I think Red Bull are most observers would be cognisant that that was a benign track for Daniel Ricardo at the weekend. So you don't want to get too carried away and say it was a kind of knockout blow for him in what was a kind of, I don't know. And bear in mind, Yuki was flying as well. Yeah, yeah. It wasn't a runoff for the, for the seat. I mean, it's a little interesting. Well, isn't it the second in the championship after, by his own standards, not a great year. A lot has been made of the fact that, that, that Christian Horner used the word intention, wasn't it? It is our intention to keep, to keep Czecho, or to fulfill the agreement they have with him, which I think Mrs. Statue used. She said it was her intention to put her name forward for the second ballot, and then she resigned the day later kind of thing back in 1990. So it's, it's, that was a carefully chosen phrase. Listen, he brings money to the team. He is experienced. He, they seem to genuinely operate without too much friction now. You can list a lot of things why it's a partnership that makes sense. The Mexico Grand Prix for all the, for all the, the chief executive of that was talking about, no, we will carry on and be a success without Czecho Perez. I think there's an appreciation that having, having him as a substantial Mexican driver adds to the overall show now, whether that influences Red Bull's decision or not. Who knows? They sell a lot of cans of that. Trink Mexico as well, and I'm sure that doesn't do any harm either. Why rock the boat when you don't necessarily have to? I think the other aspect to this is, I think there are, there was a plan for Ricardo to, to, to play a significant role in, in Alfa Tauri's slight morphing into something more akin to, to, to the Red Bull works team next year. I think in their mind's eye, they liked the idea of the more experienced driver like Ricardo leading

that project at least next year. So do they really want to upset that aspect of it to, to, to put them in the car alongside Max next year? I mean, it probably still, I think the door is ajar. I think that's, that's, that's, that's without question. On, on balance, does it need to get worse for Chaco before the end of the season? I don't know what you think is a kind of par, you know, over these remaining three races for him to do to keep the seat? Does, if he can get within a couple of tenths of max or two or three tenths of max as he did in Mexico, is that enough? Well, I was, I was going to say as well, the point from this weekend that, that I guess really kicked off this whole conversation was, was Saturday in qualifying by being out qualified by your sister team. You know, and I know it wasn't by very much, but still on paper, you know, Tom, I think I saw your tweet about it, like when you just write it down in factual terms, being out qualified by Dan and Ricardo, and you're in the fastest car on the grid, it can't be acceptable. Yeah, Tom, what do you think would be a good final three races for Sergio for this year?

Podiums. Not even asking him to finish second. I mean, Chaco's finished second four times this year, Landau's finished second five times this year. It's, you know, that has to be the minimum ask. You know, no one's asking Chaco to beat Max because that is clearly in the same car, an incredibly difficult challenge. Pierre Gasly couldn't pass the challenge. Alex Albon couldn't, you know, Chaco has given a lot of service to this team. This will be his third season.

It's mad how time flies. I can't believe he's, this will be the end of his third season at that team. But yeah, it has to be, it has to be podiums and, you know, qualifying does seem to be the bigger issue. But at least put yourself in the top five, get to Q3. You know, it's been far too often that's not been the case. Interlagos, is that a track that would work? You know, Vegas is obviously a lot of unknowns. And then Abu Dhabi, I mean, that probably plays a bit more to his strengths. A lot of 90 degree corners at Abu Dhabi that he seems to thrive at. It's got to be podiums given this car. It's got to be podiums. Well, don't forget as well, Vegas is a street track.

We know that Sergio loves the street track. No, no one's going to know Vegas. So you never know. That would be, that would be quite a story, wouldn't it? Maybe he wins in Vegas.

I was just going to say, because it's street tracks because of the nature of the types of corners you get street tracks, which are typically 90 degrees. That's why he excels at street tracks.

It's not because it's in a city. And it's like, oh, oh, glass crepes. Yeah, go on. Go for dinner tonight. Yeah. Can we get rid of the elephants in the room, which is Fernando Alonso potentially going to Red Bull next year to go on. My understanding is that that is a non-starter that is not going to happen as much as they admire Alonso Red Bull and what he can do. He is, he is not above Ricardo as far as I understand it as an option to drive for that team next year.

So, and this is not coming officially from the, from the team or anything like that.

But that is, it's been out there on the internet, but that is, that is not going to happen as I understand it. From what I can gather, some senior well-placed people have told me that maybe Alonso's management have been doing their due diligence again and have been assessing, are there any other potentially better options for him next year? And perhaps that has been inflated into a, he's going to take Perez's seat rather than Ricardo's, but, but I have it on pretty good authority. There's no chance of that. Lads, Twitter was an absolute right.

Oh, it's so good yesterday. So you had Red Bull Spain tweeting one of them, a little silence, emoji. You had, I think it's Elton Grilo, who do the Real Madrid meltdowns often. That was, they were covering it. It was, yeah, I mean, it's Fernando Alonso. Come on. I mean, he knew

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when he, when he left Alpine and the little stories he was giving and all that playing into that, it was, it would be very Fernando to play that, play that card. And to be fair, I mean, for him, you know, a second Red, second seat Red Bull is a better opportunity compared to Aston Martin, how they're looking right now. So, yeah, I mean, it's probably almost certainly nonsense, but it's good fun. Yeah, I believe the opportunity, I mean, I don't think it is an opportunity that the other question though is, is he going to retire Alonso? You know, does he, is he so pessimistic about asking the next year that he might not carry on? And as far as I understand the appetite for Aston Martin to continue with Alonso is still pretty strong too.

Nor do I understand that there's any prospect of Laurence Stroll selling up and quitting there either, which has been a popular line of online exploration. So, I think most likely he will continue with Aston Martin next year. I think that that looks like as far as I can ascertain at this point what's going to go on there.

I guess the important point on that as well is Lance Stroll. If they did, if they were to lose Fernando Alonso, they'd be left obviously with Lance Stroll and another driver, but Lance has not been pulling his weight, certainly compared to with what Fernando has done this year.

Tom, when you heard these stories of the selling up of the team, did that, I guess the reason why there might be some truth in it or why we might perceive there to be some truth in it is because Lance is not performing in the way that Fernando is at the moment. Yeah, I mean, people got carried away. They saw someone selling off some shares and it's not, it was GBX, not GBP. So actually people thought it was 25 million.

It was actually two and a half million. Like classic kind of people just get a narrative and then run with it. Look, it's just built, it's spent all this money on this brand new massive facility in Silverstone. They've just joined, well, they're joining WEC for 2015 as well.

Lawrence Stroll doesn't just, you know, he bought the team racing, well, he bought Force India and rebranded as racing point. Then he became a majority shareholder in Aston Martin Lagonda, which is now using as a marketing arm, you know, he's using F1 as a marketing arm, which Mercedes did to great effects to promote their road cars. Like

Lawrence isn't good to sell just because Lance has been, you know, has been struggling a bit. And look, maybe in the future, there is a way for Lance Stroll to, if things don't improve, because he's still young, but he's been in the sport for a very long time since 2017. Maybe there is a painless way of kind of giving Lance an opportunity to try something else in world endurance. We saw, you know, Antonio Giovinazzi has gone over there and won with Ferrari. He's had a Ferrari livery dedicated to him, which is pretty crazy to think about. You've had Christian Erickson go, I'm sorry, Marcus Erickson go over to, that's my football brain, Marcus Erickson go over to IndyCar and win the Indy 500 almost on multiple occasions. You've had Brendan Hartley do well in world endurance. You've had Kobayashi, like numerous F1 drivers who never really reached their potential have had opportunities elsewhere. But this is a much bigger play than just, you know, supporting his son now. Lawrence is very invested at a very top level in these, in a massive automotive

name that he's trying to rebuild and bring back up. Because that's the Martin almost kind of, you look at their, their share prices and it really plummeted and it's still got a way to go to get back to its, its height. So yeah, I don't think, I think it's a lot of gas at the moment.

It's interesting though. I'm fascinated by one or two well-placed insiders have told me that maybe

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some ownership within Formula One have looked at the, the value of their teams increased. And I have to ask the question, has the sport peaked? Would, might this be a not bad time to kind of sell out? If you're talking about, you know, Williams being sold for what about 140 million and now being worth, they're about towards a, maybe even a billion pounds, not, not, never mind dollars. Nowadays, you know, it's interesting that Andretti have tried to get in, maybe would be put off by the price tag of buying a team. How are they good value to buy right now at F1 team? Why are the, the big sovereign wealth funds? And I suppose people are talking about Aramco by Aston Martin, aren't they? From, from Lauren Stolpey and paying top dollar for that. Are they not looking at the F1 teams rather than, you know, the likes of Manchester United at the moment? Or do you sense there is still some way to go to increase team value? I think it'd be a bit short-sighted to assume that this is the peak, right? Yes, it's been one of the more, you know, we've gone into most race weekends and it's a given who's going to be competitive at the front and who's probably going to win. And that's how F1 has been through significant portions of its, of its history, right? And almost you kind of, I would also argue sometimes you need these periods of, you know, if you're getting it good all the time, if every season's as incredibly entertaining as 2021, well, no, you kind of don't think, in the same reason that if everyone's competitive, if all 10 cars can win all the time, what happens to, there's no giant killing stories. There's no Kevin Magnussen getting pole in Brazil. There's no Pierre Gasly winning in an Alcatari or Sebastian Vettel winning in a Torosso around once. So I think the value of the asset, you know, it depends on the eyeballs and the interest. I mean, there's a lot of industries. I know esports had a huge boom during lockdown in terms of investor money rolling in. And now loads of big esports organizations, they've realized, oh, actually, there's not the audience. And all of a sudden, those assets are plummeting. I think this sport ultimately, yes, this is, this domination has perhaps stifled its growth somewhat, but that sport sometimes and the nature of Formula One, when Formula One's being dominated, we have 20 races this year, 22 events, 22 opportunities to be entertained. Unlike, you know, Football Premier League has 800 games a season, NBA has over 1000

games per regular season. That's where the value of the asset, you can look at it and be like, oh, if one's struggling now, maybe you should cash out. I think that, I think, hold your stock. I think it's still going to go up in my... I only say it because if you're Darylton or your total wool for your Lawrence straw, who bought it via liquidation, yes, he paid off a lot of the creditors, but you've maybe paid a couple of hundred million or, you know, I think total paid, what did he pay, 50 million euros for his stake? It's now worth three billion or whatever. Does that have its own kind of, I suppose, incentive to settle when you, in a few years, you've made such a big gain, which is why I question, you know, it must be quite tempting for some of these owners to maybe think about, you know, offloading it in the present climate, which is certainly benign compared

to where it was a few years ago. Astronomical figures as well, when we're thinking about it and from a purely business point of view, maybe there is a strong business case to be doing that. Final thing I want to sort of talk about, really, and move on to Brazil, obviously, we're at the end of a triple header this week. And yeah, we've got Brazil again into Lagos. We've got another sprint weekend. We've got, this is now going to be the sixth of six sprint weekends. Tom, I'll start with you. As we reach the end of the season, sprint format, yeah or nay, what would be your

assessment? What would you give out of 10 across the season? So the way I sit on this, yeah, if it was my ideal world, I'm only thinking of me and my enjoyment of what I want, it would be a nay, but that money talks, the situation, right, the tracks want these sprint races, you're getting more people watching on TV on a Friday, you're getting more bang for your buck when you go to a race, because you're getting competitive running on Friday, Saturday, Sunday.

For me, I've just come to think they're not going anywhere. They are going to stay. The productive conversation for me is how do we make the best of it? And the format for me is nowhere near distinct enough to make a difference. Yeah, I don't know about you boys, but I get to a Sunday and who's on pole and I'm like, it's just like the two qualifying sessions have just kind of blended in my head. And then, so I think that needs to be different. They need to make the event feel more distinct, because fundamentally, I don't have an issue with it. I think it just needs to feel more special, more different. I also don't want to overly react making changes to the rules based on a season where we do have a really dominant car in Max Verstappen, driver in Max Verstappen at the

front. Like, I don't want to, in the same, with these, with the skid blocks, with the disqualifications, for example, you know, there's a degree of like, do you, is it wrong to overreact? Because we haven't had anyone disqualified for skid block infringements since like the 90s, I think. So it's, you know, it's not something that's happened for years and years and years. Are we overreacting because it's, you know, are the sprints boring in quotation marks? Because the season as a whole has been quite boring in quotation marks? Or is it because there's a fundamental issue with the sprint?

Maybe we shouldn't expect the sprint to be this transformational entity. Is it better than a practice session? In my view? Yeah, probably. Does I accept it? Does it take away a little bit from the, from Sunday? Yeah, maybe. The fact of the matter is, it is going to be looked at. We will get six sprints again next year. I think we'll find out in a couple of weeks time where they're going to be.

But there will be some formal discussions about how to maybe look at potential changes to the format. But I think, I think the formula one on the teams recognize exactly what you said that you've got to be careful with any change you do make to make it better, not worse.

To my mind though, a lot has been talked about this, this potential separate championship for the sprint, you know, even having a reverse grid sprint race, and it being as part of a separate championship without points being awarded to the main title fight. I don't see how you would

buy into that. I find that quite difficult to kind of get on board with. Anything which is secondary, I think is immediately downgraded. So, you know, why would you bother with that? So, I don't know. Personally, I'd like you, I'd like to see, could you move it to a Friday? But the problem there is that, I think the technical working group didn't think you could come straight in and go into a sprint qualifying without having some rudimentary, you know, to have a practice session to set up your car. But yeah, ideally you'd start with the sprint. Maybe you have a practice then sprint qualifying and on Saturday a sprint race, then qualifying for the main event, and then, you know, away you go on Sunday with the grid. I totally agree with you.

The second qualifying after the sprint qualifying, it is kind of feels weird.

That's my first one, I think. Change that to one shot. Just give it a go. I know we tried it back in the mid-2000s, I think, and it wasn't great. But the amount of cameras we have, the graphics, the way you can build up each driver, send them out in, I guess, I don't know, reverse

championship order. So, you've got that crescendo. Yes, you can argue, oh, it's unfair because of track evolution. But you know what? Normal qualifying is unfair sometimes. We saw everyone holding each other up. You wouldn't get any traffic. It would solve a lot of problems. It would also create other problems, but no system's going to be perfect. And it will feel different. Make something that feels different. For me, that's the first thing. Give it a go. And Fernando Alonso said, suggested it as well. So, I know I'm not crazy because he knows what he's talking about. It was good enough for Fernando. It was good enough for anyone. Exactly. Yeah, I also agree with you, Craig. I think if you could build in a Friday afternoon qualifying session for the sprint, and then Saturday morning is the sprint, Saturday afternoon then becomes qualifying for the race on Sunday, and then you've got the race on Sunday, it then does feel like a better build throughout a weekend. Craig, I know you mentioned there's going to be discussion on which racetracks to do next year. Do you think perhaps some of the issue with the sprint this year has been the fact that some of the racetracks haven't suited a sprint? I'm thinking maybe Belgium or certain tracks just haven't quite worked, have they, in terms of getting exciting racing? There was this anxiety, first of all, to put them towards the end of a season in case the championship would be won on a Saturday, and obviously we had that, didn't we, this year, being won after a sprint, and actually having the extra points from the sprint delayed the championship being clinched by a weekend. So, maybe that's not such a bad thing. I mean, I don't know if it's not so much, I don't think it's as a subtler problem as marrying the sprint with the circuit. I think it's just, does it get in the way of the other stuff, or does it cloud the focus from what you should be focusing on in a Grand Prix weekend? But equally to my mind, I don't see it as a massive problem. I wonder whether I will get used to it ultimately, and even if they do keep qualifying on a Friday, and it's the same format. I think that's spot on. Yeah, change it to one lap for sprint qualifiers, something like that. So it's different, because that does interfere with the thinking of Grand Prix weekend. But I still come back to the idea that it's, and I think the American owners of the sport probably looked at F1 when they came and said, well, you've got three of your five television products are non-competitive practice. Do we want to cut those products, or do we want to make them into something which is consumable? I know that sounds awful and terribly commercial, but that's what they're paid to do to make the sport a commercial success. It needs to be a commercial success if it's to enjoy the many great partners and profile which keeps it healthy. So you've got to bear those commercial concerns in mind, and it probably seemed ridiculous to them that such a lot of the action had no competitive element. I mean, in the wrong circumstances, a sprint can be just a spoiler. You've made the race 30% longer and just put a red flag and then restarted it the next day. In other instances, Austria, it rained. I was there. I was sat up at turn three, where obviously after Checo squeezed Max, then Max returned the favor into turn three and squeezed him super wide. It was great. That was a great sprint race. I didn't mind getting a bit wet. It was brilliant. But I think that context makes a big difference. And I think, again, for me, it's just making it feel more distinct and special. We can try and compare to other sports, but F1 is so different to the likes. Football, you can have cup competitions. But also, again, you literally just need 11 human beings to turn up and they can represent the team. That's pretty much it. That's pretty much all you need. F1 is around the world. It's global. It's at these specific, to make the most, to squeeze all the entertainment we can out of that

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product. I think it's a smart move because that's what's going to keep people watching. But I just hope that decisions around which tracks we go to for sprints is a sporting decision and not a commercial one. I imagine it's probably the latter, though. You could cut the practice sessions out. You could cut the sprint out and just have the consequence of more events around the world. We have fewer track sessions. And maybe that is the better way to go. On that bombshell, we will leave it there. We should have talked about Landau Norris. I mean, what a great performance you've got. Another time, maybe. Another time. Driver of the day, incredible drive from Landau. Exciting, isn't it, to see what else he can do throughout the season. Maybe that win isn't so far away. Can I just... I mean, I'm just... Go on. We know we began and spent a lot of time talking about the second Red Bull seat. Norris drives so well again. Alex Arbonne let's slip the other day that it's an open invitation for him going there. How attractive is that seat, do you think, to anyone, really? I mean, you've listed the number of people that failed in it or struggled in it. It doesn't seem a happy place to be. I think that Landau's form right now is incredible. He's very well... Yeah, he's driving the skin off that McLaren, for sure. I see Landau as more... You know, if Max really does retire in 2028 when his contract comes to an end, I see him more as a Max replacement, not a Max alongside Max because if he can deliver these levels of performances in a Red Bull, then that just creates a Rosberg Hamilton problem for Red Bull racing. They have in a clear number two, if you want to win championships, multiple ones be that. You want your Mark Webber, you want your Rubens Barrichello, you want that driver who will be there, but not be there too much and not knock on the door too much commercially. You know, that's why Red Bull were in the sport, right? And Landau would be a massive coup for Red Bull, but I don't see that getting green lit, you know, unless Red Bull really are worried about losing Max Verstappen. I think that's the only way that materializes. I was reading Plutarch's Lives of Caesar the other day and there's the anecdotes when Caesar is on a campaign in Spain with several of his senior senators, you know, generals around him. They come to this small village and the local chief comes out wearing kind of cloth smoke with a rudimentary kind of crown on or whatever, carrying a wooden staff. And Caesar's acolytes sort of turn to Caesar with a laugh at him and say, you know, this guy thinks he can, he can kind of come and negotiate with us. Caesar turns around to them and says, I'd rather be the chief here than the second man in Rome. And I kind of think that's, that's a little bit like that Red Bull seat, you know, it's, yes, it seems great, but you're always a little bit under someone else's thumb, which is this. And look, Lando scored 12 points in the first eight races. He's now just 14 points off of P4. That McLaren turnaround has got to give him some belief in him. Yeah, totally. Yeah. Is that as, how often do you think about the Roman Empire, Craig? Have you heard about this trend? Clearly, clearly, maybe more than. If you invite me on again, I'll have another anecdote from Clutard Slides, I promise. Very good. But maybe I won't get invited again. Welcome back any time. Craig, thank you very much for your time. Appreciate it, Tom, thank you as well. We're going to be back next Tuesday to look back at the Brazilian Grand Prix. I hope you can join us then. Bye for now.