

Hello, everyone. Welcome to the Sky Sports F1 podcast with me, Matt Baker. And for this one, I've managed to pin down David Croft for a bonus summer Q&A.

Yeah. Yeah. Bonus summer Q&A.

That's what we're going to go with. So basically, we're recording this on the same day that we recorded the end of term half season report podcast.

Correct.

Hence, I'm still in the same outfit. And when you're watching this, I'll be somewhere in the Mediterranean and Matt will be camping in Cornwall.

Well, yeah. Well, maybe if the weather's good, such as our English weather. And there's all sorts of things I want to get into with you, Crofty. And we've got a lot of questions from people at home. So thank you very much for sending in those. I'll try and get through as many as possible. And I want to just go through your career. I want to talk about how it all began. And also, we've got plenty of questions in about F1 now, and maybe as well, the future of Formula 1T. But I thought I'd start off with some maths, okay?

Okay.

I was doing some research on you. Now, on your Wikipedia, it says that your 250th race was an Azerbaijan in 2019. And I did also cross check this with your own Twitter, which I think you did celebrate that as well. So I make Belgium your 340th Grand Prix. Is that correct? Don't know if you keep count.

Yeah, it is. It's easy to keep count. I am Alpha Towery minus one.

Right.

Okay.

2006 was my first race. And Toro Rosso made their debut then as well. And I've had one race off since then, when my eldest son was born.

Pretty good reason to miss a race. I thought it was not too bad. Murray Walker stood in for me. And Daniel, who was three days old, was in my arms as we watched the race. It's a lovely moment.

I wouldn't miss the race, of course.

I haven't missed the race.

So look, 340 Grand Prix, which is an amazing amount. But I want to understand from the start, was that always your plan to be a Formula One race commentator? When you went to your careers meeting, 15, 16 years old, did you always want to do that?

When I said, when my English teacher said, what do you want to do with your career? And I said, I want to be a sports commentator. He laughed at me, which was nice and served as very good motivation to be fair. I wanted to commentate on sport. I spent my years as a kid, kicking a football around the garden, pretending to be John Watson or Barry Davis or Martin Tyler. I remember seeing Martin Tyler once going into the press door, a match that my dad took me to. It was one of the most exciting things I'd seen that afternoon.

He's like, that's Martin Tyler. He's brilliant. And I'd ride my bike and I pretend to be Murray Walker. And I'd be a Formula One driver and I'd be doing the commentary. Whenever I could kick a ball, throw a ball, ride the bike, I would pretend I was the commentator.

It seemed to be the job that I wanted to do. But how you go about that, there is no career progression, no career plan. And I was a theater publicity officer for many years until my friend, my mate Darren, got a job as the sports editor of the local newspaper. And that set

me on my road into sports journalism. He wanted a guy to write about Steven Litchborough, who were a non-league team at the time. I said, I'd do it. I didn't realize I was doing it for nothing. But it was the first of many unpaid jobs.

Welcome to broadcasting.

Exactly. Don't get into broadcasting if you want the money, the first 40 years anyway. But he gave me a byline, which was handy. And I just worked my way up from there and eventually found myself working full-time for BBC Local Radio and then moved to BBC Five Live. And then at Hungary in 2011, the decision was announced that the BBC had asked Sky to come on board and share the rights for Formula One. And I thought, well, I'd better drop Sky a little line to make sure they know who I am. Luckily, I got chosen and here I am to this day.

It's an incredible career in the sense of you've also worked on so many different sports, because what you missed there is from my research, and forgive me if I'm wrong here, but you've worked on boxing, you've worked on darts, you've worked on football, you've covered Olympics as well. So what are the challenges of Formula One compared to those other sports? Perhaps in quite a unique position, having already covered other sports.

Yeah, it's true. The thing about Formula One, the playing area is a lot bigger. And certainly for television, you are constantly having shots cutting from one particular part of the story to the other, which doesn't necessarily happen in darts or football or cricket and certainly not in boxing. And I think the other challenge of Formula One, and the biggest challenge, and yeah, I went from radio, where say we see the audience, the listener can't see what you can see, to television, where people can see what's going on. So it's a different style of commentary. You're trying to tell the story of the bits people can't see. Whilst, you know, keeping an eye on the changes and the gaps, but also trying to develop the strategy, bring Martin in for his expert opinion, his expert knowledge, steer a conversation rather than having an opinion on driving and, you know, press the button so that Martin, you know, can deliver that perfect analysis line, which he does, you know, race after race after race. But it's Formula One's a sport where most of the important bits you never see. You can't see. You can't see the driver's feet most of the time. You can barely see their crash helmet because of the halo these days. You can't see their emotion, can you? This is it. Although the other day I did declare after the race, you can hear the disappointment in Lewis Hamilton's face. So I was getting some sort of signal there from Lewis Hamilton that no one else could spot, obviously. But I think, yeah, you're just, you're trying to, you're trying to give that overall picture and you're trying to tell as best you can the story of 20 individual different moving parts in terms of the drivers in one particular race. It's not just two teams or two boxes or two darts players. It's 20 drivers, 10 teams and everything else that goes with that.

It's complicated, isn't it? Yeah. Trying to stay on top. And trying to keep it simple.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And the best advice I ever had, you know, just keep it simple. Don't try to be too clever. Yeah. What was your, so your first radio commentary in F1? Yeah. Take us back to that moment. What was it like? Is it one of those that you look, I feel like a lot of these things when you ask broadcasters for the first time they ever did something to go, never again. I wouldn't ever, ever watch that back. No, 2006 Bahrain, Fernando Alonso won. Yeah. And were you there? Yeah. You were. Yeah. Yeah. Opening race of the season. And I remember

almost

being on my knees at one stage thinking, how on earth am I ever going to make a career out of this? Because I'd spent, so I'd got the job the previous December, December the 23rd, 2005.

I get called into the manager's office. Yes, we've seen, we've heard your audition. We think you're great. You're going to be our Formula One commentator. Brilliant. And then I phoned my mate Baggy up and I said, right, Baggs, you're a big F1 fan. He said, well, you are too. I said, I know, but you're a real fan. Can you help me out? I need to learn a little bit about F1.

He said, well, how much? I said, well, enough to be a commentator, mate.

He said, oh, you want a job? Brilliant. That's super. So he helped me out a little bit, but I realized I knew nothing in terms of I didn't know as much as I needed to know in those early years. So you spend two or three years listening to people without, you know, walking around the paddock, forming relationships, building trust, listening to what people are saying, and then just banking knowledge as best you can. And after about three years, people then start to ask your opinion occasionally. And then after about five years, people go, hey, Cruffy, how are you? And then you feel, you know, very much a part of it. And it's a very difficult sport when you first come in. I'm not saying we're not friendly. We are in the F1 paddock. I'm not saying we're not welcoming. Of course we are, but it's quite, you're overawed a little bit. Every time I take someone into the paddock now, and I'm sure you found this, the first time you went into the paddock, you just think, blimey, how on earth did this all get here? And then you try to think, oh, God, he's going somewhere else next week. And God, how does this all fit together? And it's so busy. And the amount of people, her team. And I actually remember when I, Nat Pinkham, very kindly, took me in Barcelona in 2020, she took me into the paddock for the first time. And she just knew everyone. She'd be saying, oh, hello, hello, hello, hello. That's a thing. Because you knew nobody. How do you know all these people? But obviously that's been in the paddock for many, many years. That the grid is so hot. The heat that comes off the tires. I did something in my first year with Super Aguri, with the Super Aguri team, where we, for whatever reason, we weren't doing the practice sessions in Manicor. So I asked if I could be a truckie for the week, go down with the truckies, set the garage up, learn how the pit wall gets put together, whatever, make a feature, a half hour documentary feature about it, and learn from the guys in the garage. So in the sessions, I was Frank Montany's front right tire man for the session, which those tire blankets, they make it look so easy, getting them off, getting them back on again. Getting them back on is really hard because the tires are so sticky because they're so hot when they come in. And if you miss, you don't line it up properly, then the things at an angle, you can't shift it around because it's, I was hopeless at it, I really was. But I remember, I remember that weekend, it was when Wampubla Montoya announced he was retiring from the sport.

I got a phone call from the, from the editor, the, the, the, that sports desk editor at Five Life, come on, I need you to come on and do a voice piece. Montoya's retiring when I can't, can't do it. We, you're our Formula One man. We need you. I said, yeah, I'm on a truck at the moment. What are you doing? I said, I'm cleaning it. We, but we need you to do this. I said, I've got to finish cleaning the truck first. Like the lads would not allow me to take any time off. And, you know, they've been ever so nice. Give me an hour and I'll come on. So I finished cleaning the truck before I went on to the voice piece because I owed it to the people that were helping me. And so many people have helped me. And I've made so many great friends, you know, by being

in
F1 and by being on the road and spending time with people. And it's, it absolutely changed my life. And it allowed me as well. I think more importantly to, to absolutely fall in love with the sport of Formula One, which I enjoyed as a fan and I watched as a kid, but I wasn't, I wasn't a passionate, you know, petrolhead. I hate the term petrolhead, but, you know, I wasn't, it's not that I didn't like it. I just, I prefer football. I prefer darts, prefer cricket, you know, but it's, it's just allowed me to have the greatest job in the world, you know, with the most amazing people and to learn some, some incredible things in some places that I'd never have gone to either. You know, and also to have the privilege of being invited into people's homes every other week or every week, as it seems to be at the moment, and, and tell them the story of their sport that they love too. And it's, it's been fabulous. I honestly, 18 years now I've been involved in F1. It's, it has flown by. I still think I'm 25. It's definitely one of those sports. I think the more you know, the more into it you get, the more, the more you'll get out of it. It helps, but there are still things that come up that I, have we had this before? Yeah. It's like, in Spa. I said to Martin, okay, so normally in a Grand Prix, we'd lose a lap from, from the start, if we've got a formation lap. Does that happen in sprint races as well? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Oh yeah, it must do, because of the fuel. Yeah. Cause you can't overfill it, the fuel and the cars. And we, and we do work things out on the hoof occasion. The sporting ranks as much as we try and read them to our best ability all the time to keep up to date with, there's still bits in there that you kind of forget. It's, it's a very complex sport. I want to get to some questions from people at home. I say plenty were sent in. This is a question from Rome on Instagram who asks what your routine is like on days that you broadcast. And I want to follow up also by asking what your week looks like. So when, when do you start to practice? Take, take us into your week, week of a race. I was having this chat with Braden, the F1 junior, one of the F1 juniors who came to Hungary and did so well over the Hungarian Grand Prix weekend. And he's, we were on the Sunday night, walking back to the bus. Yes. We traveled by bus all the time. I've not taken this many bus journeys since I was at school. And yeah, you sit on the back row. I don't, I'm not part of the naughty boys. So Braden was saying that when did you start? I saw Monday, tomorrow. Really? I said, yeah, next races is next weekend. So I've got to be all prepped and ready to get myself to, to Belgium in time and to start really from the, the Thursday onwards. So in that case, I got back from Hungary. I think I finally crawled through about half midnight when I got into the house, did my washing first thing on Monday morning, because you've got to get your washing done, give it time to dry and all that. And started my notes, started compiling the handwritten notes that I do with the double side of A4. You've got the two drivers and some team stats in every box and stats for tires and stuff as well. Then I do a track map with minimum cornering speeds and gears so that if someone has an accident, you can, you can tell people roughly what speed the car was going at without even knowing from the telemetry because we don't always get that. And then there's various stats about the race itself and things that, that are of interest. I might not use them all over the course of a weekend, but you don't know what you're going to need to use. So it's, it's get that preparation done. And we have a stat guy as well, a couple of stat guys that help, help me with that. But what I find is, if, if you put a piece of paper in front of me and I read it, I'll remember

some of it. But if I write stuff out by hand in my own way to help me remember in a kind of a shorthand way, I'll remember all of it. And so that when something happens in a race that's exciting and in the moment and you want to add something to it to help tell the story, I know where I can find something. So by handwriting things out, and honestly, if there's any kids out there, any juniors out there that are thinking, why do I bother with handwriting at school? Trust me, the more you write stuff out, the more you remember it. Type stuff out. There's your heart's content. You don't remember it all the time. And that's what I've always found. So my stats were all done and ready. And off we went to Belgium by train. We took the year of star. So we had a little bit of a train, a train journey day. Normally we'd fly, to be honest, but we decided that Belgium was nice and nearby. So we'd go green and just do something a little bit more environmentally friendly, which I think we're obliged to do. And we should be doing. So we got to Spa on the Wednesday night, finished off my notes Wednesday night, because I hadn't quite got time to get it all done. Thursday is press conference day. As you know, at the track, we have a big production meeting that we're all there, where we share ideas, talk about the features, talk about the likely news stories for the week. And we do one of those every morning. And after the production meeting, I'll go about my business in the paddock, talking to people, getting stories, finding drivers, engineers, team principals. When you've been in the sport for a while, you know, you can stop and have chats. Yeah. And because you've built up those relationships over the years. And there's, I've got several secret, secret, secret squirrel sources that help you out because I was talking to James Vowles, the Williams team principal about this on Sunday night. Actually, I've known James for many, many years now. And he's of the view that the more open he is with the broadcasters and the journalists, and the more open he is with our viewers on Sky, he was our Pitwall team principal. He's brilliant on that. He's magnificent. And not just about his team, but other teams. Yeah. The more he can help explain the sport, the more interesting it is, and the more satisfaction people get out of watching it. And he's all about building a global audience across all the teams rather than just his own. And he was saying, you know, and he can't tell me everything, of course, some things he tells me that he'll trust me on that I won't repeat. But he knows that the more I understand, the easier it is to tell the story. And it's not for my purpose. It's for our viewers on Sky and around the world. So, yeah, so people like James will have a chat with, because it was a sprint weekend in Belgium on duty for FP1, and then sprint qualifying later on in the day. And then you've got, sorry, normal qualify later in the day, then you've got sprint shoots out, sprint on Saturday, Grand Prix on Sunday. And you're basically, you're binding your time, you're spending your time in between our production office and the paddock. You don't want to outstay you welcome in team hospitality units, even though some of them are great. In fact, all of them are great. Some of them are better than others, and some do an amazing bacon sandwich that is actually quite nice to get a hold of, because they weren't doing decent baking sandwiches in our hotel. But you're just learning all the time and making sure that when the microphone goes on, you're ready to speak and ready to tell the tale. But I try and go into the commentary box with a very open mind. I think, have you been in the commentary box? Yeah, yeah, I've been in a few times. So I don't write anything down in terms of a prepared speech at the start. I used to know an old Methodist minister, the Reverend Alan Washbrook was his name, and I've no idea where he is now. I asked once, did you ever, did you write down your sermons? And he said, no, I go up into the pulpit and I offer a prayer

up to the Lord. And then, you know, he guides me with my sermon. Now, I'm not saying I pray before to start, but I do find keeping an open mind and not having anything in my in my head is to, this is exactly what I'm going to say, helps you a, because we have no control over the pictures that that I'm commentating to, they're taken from a world feed. So I'm reacting to something I don't know that's coming up. And B, I'm in that moment with everybody else. So when I say I'm excited, trust me, I'm excited. I'm in that moment, you know, and you just have to have confidence in your own ability that you'll get through that. And that's part of the challenge. It's like, you know, for an hour and a half, two hours or an hour's practice session, we're going to walk a tightrope without a safety net. And let's see what happens. But that's the thrill, isn't it? Absolutely. So when it's lights out and away we go, the adrenaline for the drivers is obvious because they're going racing, same adrenaline for Martin and myself. Because we have no idea what's going to happen. And you still have that from, because he's still now, as to when you, I mean, goodness knows what that adrenaline was when you first started. Oh, with the first race, it was like, I have no idea what's going to happen. Maybe more nervous adrenaline. But I still get nervous now. And I pace around, I can't start moving. But I had all that nerves, all that adrenaline and no experience to fall back on as to what was going to happen. And I honestly got halfway through that first year and I think I'm doing a dreadful job of this. And I had a meeting with our producer at Five Live who said, no, no, we think you're doing a really good job. Keep at it. This is, this is good stuff. And yeah, here we are today, still talking about it. Yeah, absolutely.

Few more questions. As Sean on Twitter would like to know, which track has the best commentary box

and which has the worst? Well, they condemned the boxes in Monza, which is interesting, because I was sat in one of those boxes, 2008, when Sebastian Fettel won for Toro Rosso. And on the practice session on the Friday, we actually had to stop broadcasting before the end of the session, because the rain was coming in through a hole in the roof. Right. And it was running and forming in a puddle where all our electric gear was. And I'm like, well, we're on air, we're live on air, we're going to go live literally in a minute. So we had to get out. The Monza boxes are not great. I guess people forget that these are old racetracks, aren't they? They're not these sort of glamorous locations. Some of them are, but often they are quite run down. Is that the right word? They were built 50, 60, 70 years ago and they haven't been updated.

Very much so. I like a view of the pit lane and I like a view where you can see into the garages and China is the best one because you've got a view of the pit lane and most of the track as well, apart from the hairpin that's kind of behind you. That's a sensational one. I'm not going to name the really bad ones. But what I would say, there's always a story. When we first went to India, for the first Indian Grand Prix, and we found that the commentary boxes were in a building in the middle of the paddock with no windows, we all went to see Bernie Ecclestone and said, Bernie, we need to change the commentary boxes for next year. We can't have this.

The world feed's gone off three times already and when it goes off, we have nothing to talk about. I think Anton and I put a map of Mount Everest, sorry, not a picture of Mount Everest on the wall and then a picture of a shark the next day. We just found these pictures just so we could actually look at something while we're accommodating by the TVs. So we said, Bernie, we need rooms

with windows. We need a view. He said, what, any view? Yeah, we need a view of the track. Yeah,

but any view. I said, no, no, a view of the track, the pit lane preferably, but any view will do. I said, no, not really. We just need a view where we can see what's going on on the track. And we came back the next year and we did have a view because they'd found rooms with windows still in the middle of the track overlooking the toilet block. That was the view that he gave us. So I would say India was the worst in terms of views. There are several others, but they will remain nameless because it's not fair. But I would say China, Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, sensational commentary boxes there, Japan. Ah, Suzuka is a fabulous location. You can see for miles around, but the sun sets quite early. It's the land of the rising sun, but it sets quite early. And on a sunny day, you got to put the sunglasses on because the sunlight streaming through the window on the checkered flag. Just doing that. Fascinating. Michael on Twitter would like to know if you ever rewatch your races to critique your commentary, and if so, have you ever had a, I wish I'd said that moment. Yeah, you often get that. You often think, oh, that's a brilliant line. I wish I'd have used, oh, yeah, I should have said that. Because you are a critique of your own work, and I do. I do watch them back, not religiously, because there isn't time sometimes. Yes, well, especially on a back-to-back. I mean, yeah. I think you can beat yourself up a bit if you think you're making mistakes, or you've not said the right thing. What's done is done. So I do listen back, but not religiously to everything I've done. After all, I'm trying to think, two hours, so Belgian Grand Prix weekend, two hours, three hours, four, five, so that's probably about six and a half hours that I was on air, because of all the rain delays and stuff. That's more than newsreaders, isn't it? I mean, you're on a 24-hour rolling news channel, you might get a four-hour, three-hour shift or something, but that is like, that's an awfully long time to be on air across the weekend. Only once have I ever had to leave the commentary box to go for a week. Only once, Sully Martin Brundle on his own, flying solo, but I knew the toilets were right near, and it was at Silverstone, and we had a bit of a rain delay, I think. He gave me a look, as if to say, like, I understand, but for heaven's sake, hurry up. Yeah. Well, you know, if anyone can man the forwards, Martin. He certainly can. He's got me back over the years. Yes. And one thing I want to ask you about as well is you do the Formula One game, the Air Sports Formula One game. I want to know. I do the both. The manager and the sort of the regular one that you play, that you race. That's right. Yeah, yeah. So what is that like to record? And so many questions, there's how many lines do you record, and how do you, do you just have a big old, do you go in for one day and have a list of line after line after line? Yeah. So working with Codemasters and Frontier Games, they're absolutely brilliant in that they have an idea of what they want us to say, and sometimes you have to deliver the line that they want. But a lot of the time, they're like, if you want to say it in another way, say it in another way, whatever feels natural to you, we've tried to write the line as if it were you, but if you think you wouldn't say that, you say something else, you go ahead and do it. And that's brilliant when they have that trust in you. And working with them now, Frontier for two years, Codemasters, I think 10 years, I've been working with Codemasters as well. You develop a trust and understanding, and you develop a knack for doing it. Because it is a lot of reading the same line over again. So you'll have played the F1 game, you'll have played it as Matt. Yeah, because you can be Matt. And I can say things like, let's talk about Matt. Matt's on pole position. And Matt completes the front row. And there's about six variants. Matt takes over the lead of the championship.

Matt is the new championship leader. There's about six or seven lines. But imagine doing that for every name. Do you have to do that for every name? Wow, really? Yeah. And then we did nicknames. And then I pulled rank a little bit. I said, can we have Crofty? Can we have Crofty Junior? Yeah. Can we have Crofty Junior Junior? And can we have Ava? So I want to get my kids in as well. Oh, very nice. Very nice. And I think we've had a Daniel and a James and all that. So, and then Anne said, can I have a Rowan and a Lottie? We've got a lot of kids' names in there. That's the privilege of doing it. But I think one day, I think one day I did something like two and a half thousand lines in a session, which was fairly good going. But it was we made it the last day. We could have done it the next day, but I can do this. We can get this done, guys. But as long, you've got to do the same emphasis, same intonation on each word. And as long as they're happy with that, I'll just keep on going and going. Normally they're like a four hour recording. Must be exhausted at the end of that. It is quite tiring. I never thought talking was that tiring, to be honest. But it is. We tend to do it in December, January, February time. Whole new batch each year. It's a whole new batch, pretty much each year. And Codemasters, was it this year? Last year? I forget. Forget which game it was. I think it was this year, when they said, right, we're going to do a load of old lines, historical lines, because you did these 10 years ago. And obviously your voice has changed in 10 years. So to keep it sounding realistic, we're going to go back and revisit our whole line. And you wouldn't get contrasting your voice 10 years ago to now. Obviously I do that by watching on the F1 channel, some of the classic Grand Prix, from back in 2012 and 2013. Oh, did I sound like that in those days? Voice is holding up quite well, considering how much talking I've done. It does change, doesn't it? As we get older. Right, a few more questions. Most memorable race you've covered? There's been a few. I think there have been some incredible tussles and battles. And I remember the ones that stand out, 2011, Canada, when Jensen Barton won and took the lead from Sabon the last lap, 2008, Silverstone, when Lewis was just incredible in the wet that day. He was just on a different planet to everybody else. Lewis and Jensen winning their first titles. I remember hungry just after a few days after the funeral of Jules Bianchi, when I think every single driver went out and produced a race that Jules would have been proud, not just to witness, but would love to have taken part in. It was something about that weekend when everyone just went out and raced for Jules. And that was just just phenomenal to witness. When Jules had his accident in Suzuka, that day I'll never forget when Roman Grosjean had his crash in Bahrain, moments like that, where all the fun that we have and all the love that we have for the sport is just put on hold in one instant because you know something really serious has happened and you go into a completely different mode of broadcasting. But I think of all the races I've covered, I could go on forever about the great races. If anything ever comes close to the last lap of Abu Dhabi 2021, I will be not only stunned, but impressed that a sport can do that, to be honest, because here was an incredible championship battle that was a battle for the ages. It really was. And I think you might have, but I was in the office one day, but eight races out, and I went, this is going down to the wire. I said, they're going to have the same amount of points when we get to Abu Dhabi. I could just see it. This is just one of those seasons. And so it transpired. Did we think it was going to go down to the last lap? No. And certainly for most of the race, it didn't look like it was going to boil up into anything. But that's the beauty of live sports. Things change around in an instance.

And you've got to try and put into perspective that last lap with everything that's led up to it. And a slight bit of controversy as well, quite a bit, a big bit of controversy. And then call someone as the world champion. And I managed to find the right words, you know, as Max crossed the line. And then it all kicked off in the paddock. That was an amazing sporting moment. And to be there at the center of it, and to be the lead voice alongside the man who's brought Formula One into the homes of people for a lot longer than me and will carry on doing so for many, many years to come. And for Martin and I just to both be there in that moment and to have the privilege of describing that action, that's what any kid kicking a football around pretending to be Martin Tyler ever, ever aspires to. And it was amazing, that final lap. And I think that maybe we forget the speed at which this happens. You know, we're watching it on telly and we're trying to process what we're seeing. You're having to process it and speak about it and do it without arms and arms and all this other things that broadcasters are trying to avoid. Ross Braun told me he stood up and started shouting at the telly. Yeah. I said, really? I said, was my commentary that bad? He went, no, no, because it was so exciting. Yeah. I was shouting at the telly and roaring, you know, Lewis and Max on. I said, good, that's my job to get you to do that. But it just elevates the sporting moment, doesn't it? Having the right commentary at the right moment brings me on nicely, actually, to ask about your favorite sports commentators yourself. Adam on Instagram wanted to know who do you most admire in other sports? I'm going to say Murray straight away. I don't just admire Murray Walker as a commentator. And without Murray, we wouldn't be doing what we're doing today, quite frankly, as commentators. He brought great personality and knowledge and enthusiasm to the sport. But I admire Murray as a human being. He was one of the nicest, most warm, loving, welcoming human beings I've ever had the pleasure to spend any time with. He was a guy. I first, the night before Sky announced the lineup for 2012. And we could tell people we got the job. I actually phoned Murray up. Murray got something to tell you. How was that roughly? I said, got the job at Sky. It's brilliant, fantastic. And he was so supportive to us. And we used to chat, not as often as we should have done. We used to chat quite a bit. And even well after he'd retired, he wanted to know all the gossip that was going on. But he was just a brilliant commentator because he had a knack of finding the right words. Martin Tyler, I've mentioned a couple of times, I was a big fan of when I was a kid and as a bigger kid and as a 50-year-old kid now. John Motson and Barry Davis with the BBC guys. Used to be a massive dilemma on FA Cup final day when I was a youngster. Do I listen to Motty or Barry? Or do I listen to Brian Moore? It was another fantastic commentator as well. Because once upon a time, they had the Cup final on different channels. And my mate Paul, who lived just down the road, he had the right idea. He had two TVs on the go. All the way on Cup final grandstand. It was fantastic. Sid Waddell was another one who I hugely admired. I never got to work with Sid, but I got to know him because I was commentating for Darts on the BBC. And he was obviously doing the BBC Darts on Sky. Sid was just the greatest. He was a proper wind-up merchant. But just loved his Darts. And if you loved Darts too, that was fine. And Sid and I would chat from time to time. I saw him at his last broadcast at the O2 for Premier League finals night, where I took Martin. Martin and I had done about six races together. I said, come on, let's go and have a night out. He said, where are we going? I said,

the Darts. I have a picture of Martin with a giant foam hand at the end. Oh, that's brilliant. Looking a little bit out of place and wondering what the hell am I doing here? But he loved it, he really did. And I saw Sid that night. And he passed away quite soon afterwards. But love said he was just some of the lines. They matched the sport. And great commentators just find a way to be part of the sport without being the story, if that makes sense, to find the right words, to match the audience, to match the sport. Harry Carpenter was another one from way back in dark as a boxing commentator, John Rawling as well. I used to work with both of those guys and loved their boxing commentary. Steve Cram I think brings great experience and knowledge and success and passion to his athletics commentary. I listened probably more to Steve doing the curling than I do. I'm so into curling. I find out. This is from the Olympics. On as if they ever put the Winter Olympics on at the same time as the Formula One. I would have an absolute time of it wondering what I'm going to be watching. I love the curling during the winter. But the life of a commentator is rewarding and is excellent, but it is not easy because you're a year one word away from being the wrong word a lot of the time. But yeah, they're just some of the people that I absolutely loved. Peter O'Sullivan as a horse racing commentator. Peter Bromley who did it for BBC Radio 5 live. Occasionally I pinch his line from 81 when Sugar won the Derby. Sugar wins the Derby and you'll need a telescope to see the rest.

And I might have used that. Probably more applicable to F1 even than horse racing.

Well, Max was such a long way away. Yeah, very good. You mentioned Martin there that you're going

to the Darts of Martin. I'm intrigued to know when was the first time you met Martin and what was it like? How was your relationship built and developed? Because obviously it is a relationship you have to nurture and develop, right? Being a cocom. Absolutely. We need to know without looking at each other because we've got a lot to look at when you're going to stop talking.

When you need to start and you listen to the nuances in his voice and it is a hopefully seamless non-crossing over of voices from start to finish. First met Martin, obviously my first season. Didn't really talk to him a huge amount until Brazil actually found herself sat next to each other over lunch. And I said, I've got a question for you. He said, what's that? I said, but with radio, if there's nothing going on, we just say what we see and talk about the weather and the pigeons or whatever. But TV, obviously people can see what's going on. I said, do you ever struggle for things to say? The TV commentary went, no, there's always someone to say, Crofty, always someone to say, which is stuck with me throughout my career that it might seem at times that there is nothing to say, I don't know, when you're in the third hour of the race at Spa in 21, that should have been a race if it wasn't. But you'll always find someone to say, there always will be and there was and there will be in the future. But yeah, the more I was in Formula 1 and hanging around the more we talked from time to time. And then I was actually with him. I was actually with Martin the night that the BBC Skydeal was signed, because he left. He left very, very sharp. I think he got a call to say, yeah, this deal has just been done.

And then we kind of talked quite a bit as that autumn went on. And remember, we had a conversation

on the bridge in Korea. If you remember the old Mokpo track, it had this big bridge near the finish line. And he was going one way, I was going the other way. We just had to stop in the middle of the bridge and we're like, you've been in conversations with Skytorn. And he's like,

yeah, have you been in conversations with Sky? Yeah, I think they might want us to be together. What do you think about that? I think it's a great idea. So do I. Right, brilliant. And that's where we kind of first got the feeling that we'd be working together. We did one rehearsal here at Sky. Really? Yeah. Before kind of impossible to rehearse. But I guess you just had to get used to each other's company, right? Exactly. We did the previous year's Australian Grand Prix and our producer and number two, our head of F1, his number two came in and said, brilliant, fantastic. Let's do another one and we both went, no, let's save it for the real thing. But I've thoroughly enjoyed and loved working alongside Martin and getting to know him. He is an amazing broadcaster and has a huge amount of knowledge in the sport. When he speaks, people listen because he doesn't use his words lightly and knows his responsibility and acts accordingly. And I think he's a great ambassador for the sport of Formula One. And it's just a great guy to stand alongside. He's my mate. We travel the world together. We have a chat and someone calls that a job. Okay. We're going to get through some more questions. Jay on Instagram would like to know, if you could drive any F1 car on any F1 track in history, what would it be and why? And also, can you please tell us the story of you driving an F1 car? You actually want me to tell that story? Well, I thought I'd been banned from...

The reason why I wanted you to tell the story is because I think it's quite remarkable that I fitted into it. Yes. Well, maybe. But that it just goes to show the skill of the people who drive the Formula One cars because we might all sit there at home and go, I can do that. Well, maybe not as fast, but I can still drive a Formula One car. It doesn't quite work like that, does it? It is a world away from anything you'll ever drive. And it is. I had three laps of the 2013 Renault Lotus that Kimi Raikkonen won in around Paul Ricard. And I'd managed to spin in the Renault 2.0 twice earlier that day. I managed to go a little bit too fast in the Clio while we were learning the track as well. But I managed to get three laps in that were just pure unadulterated

joy from the moment you put your foot down and realized that actually you now feel part of the car rather than just squashed into the cockpit. And you get out of first gear, which is already pretty quick. And then you get into second gear and think, oh my. And Sky wanted me to do a commentary

while I was driving. I think all I could say for the first lap was all my because it was just taking my breath away, literally. And it just is the sensation, not just of speed, but speed through the corners and stopping speed as well. You've got to trust this thing to do its job. And it does. And you want to thrust forward, but your belts hold you tight when you put the brakes on and change the direction. It's a phenomenal experience. Best five minutes of my life on four wheels ever. And will never, ever be repeated, I'm sure. But at least there's lots to do it.

And very few people get to drive a Formula One car that are not Formula One.

And it's a very small pool of people that have done that. I actually seriously put in a request when we went back to Paul Ricard for the French Grand Prix that I should do the track guide, because I was the one member of the Sky team that had the most recent experience driving a Formula One car around Paul Ricard. And I got voted down to be fair. And it's the awareness of three or four corners ahead of where your front wheels are. And this was before the days of the halo that we have now. There was no other cars on the track as well. I mean, how some of these drivers place their cars with such precision and skill and do it lap after lap. We should never take for granted the talent you need to be an F1 driver. I mean, I got back in and one of the

mechanics went, nice one, Crofty. Got some grips with that then. I went, yes, brilliant, would it? And he went, did you change the diff for any particular reason? I went, did I change the diff? Yes, you did halfway round. It did make you go a little bit faster, but we didn't ask you to do that. Honestly, I had no idea. Getting crossed up. I had tears when it finished. I was so emotional. But what car would I drive? On what track would I drive? I think I'd like to drive the MP4 around Suzuka. Yeah, I'd love to drive that car around Suzuka. And then I'd like to jump in the current Red Bull and drive that around Suzuka and just see what the difference is between the two record-breaking cars. That's a great answer. Not quite a lot for us to organise here at SkyF1. I'll tell you what, I'll get my people, some McLaren's people, you get your people to talk to Red Bulls people, and I'll go on a crash diet because at the moment I'm not fit in either. We'll try to make it happen a bit extraordinary. What else have we got? It's a good idea for a feature. I tell you one man who'd want to do that, Martin Bronn. Yeah, I reckon so. Do you think? I'll text him now. Suzuka, couple of F1 cars. The McLaren to the Red Bull. I think he might say yes. Might make space in his diary. I want to just run out of time a little bit, but I want to talk about F1 today, and we've got a question here on Twitter of what you would do if you were Stefano Domenicali. What would you do to change the rules in F1 to make it more competitive? That's the question. First and foremost, I'd have to stop the FIA being the rules makers, and that's the trouble the commercial rights holder has is that they don't make the rules. They can have an influence because they have a standing on the F1 commission, but they don't make the rules the FIA do. I think the time has come, I think, in F1 to actually bring the two parties a lot more closely aligned, and they are a lot more closely aligned, and these regulation changes I think have been driven by F1 rather than the FIA, but I think we need to think about the show and the spectacle, and marketing sometimes needs to be a bit more important than engineering, but we need to also keep that balance in engineering as well, and I think we're getting there with a sprint, but I would, personally, I think we're at the limit for the amount of races. I don't think we need any more races, and sometimes less is more in that one. We'll do 24 next year, and then we'll revisit it again, and maybe 24 might be a bit too much, because to actually ask people to invest so much time in the sport for 24 races as fans is asking a huge amount, but I understand why it's happening. I think the sprint concept is good. I like it, but I don't like it being part of the world championship. I'd like two separate world championships, like cricket has T20 one day, and the test match, and we'll keep them separate, and have your sprint day on a Friday maybe, rather than the Saturday, and have you, you could go into sprint qualifying, and then the sprint with maybe a 20-minute warm-up in the morning, that's your Friday, and then the cars are not in park fermé for the rest of the weekend, because you then have your practice session on the Saturday morning, Saturday qualifying, race on Sunday, so you're keeping the two very separate for different world championships, and if the teams, and if all the drivers don't want to run in the sprint world championships, fine, there's enough reserve drivers that do, maybe that's a good way of getting the reserve drivers involved in that, so commercially that's kind of what I'd look at, but I think a simplification of the rules, because they get a bit too complicated, and we need to find a way to simplify it, and just put the show first occasionally.

Band blue flags, because I don't, if you're good enough to be leading a race, yeah, you're good enough to pass another driver, if not leading the race, because they're last, without them having to jump out of the way, might make things a lot more interesting as well, and you could do that without any investment in the sport, without any engineering challenges whatsoever, that is, that's a master stroke, a stroke of a flag, wave of a flag, you could actually just get rid, you could get rid of something that I just think is unnecessary, other motorsport categories don't have blue flags, but it's difficult, we have a tradition and a heritage in Formula One that you don't want to, you don't want to upset too much, and you want to keep, because there are a fair amount of fans who don't like the sprints at all, but maybe if you have the sprints at the start, and then the rest of the weekend is the Grand Prix weekend, that might overcome that a little bit, and try not to tinker too much, because by and large, we've got a really good spectacle. Yeah, absolutely, couple more, two more, one is... Sorry, I go on a bit. No, no, I mean, it's brilliant, Chris on Instagram would like to know, if you enjoyed your time at Download Festival this year, just to change the... I'm a proper metalhead. Yeah, yeah. I absolutely adored my time at Download this year, it was so nice to actually go back to a heavy metal festival, I hadn't been for ages, I think I can go next year. Yes, yes. There's no race week. Well, that's the golden ticket, isn't it? It is the golden ticket, but I met up with my chum from Skindrid, who are a top band, and the new album is out now, and it's sensational, it really is, it's absolutely brilliant, unstoppable, they could have written that track about Max Verstappen, quite frankly, caught up with the Parkway Drive boys as well, who were just fantastic, and I just... You know how when you first gave me to the paddock, and I was the same, you see these F1 drivers, you think, oh my Lord, there's my heroes, you know, there's Alan Frost, and it's great, but that's my job, and I can't stand there and queue up for autographs, and take selfies, etc. But I can go to Download and hang around with rock stars and treat them like rock stars, because they are rock stars, and I just... I find music a great release, I find music, I need music to work to when I'm doing all my prep notes, I always have music on. You have it, you've got a bit of metal going on, don't you? Yeah, and I've always been a heavy metal fan, and one of the nicest things, one of the nicest things recently, is I've got to know a guy called Misha Mansour, really well, who is the man who founded a band called Periphery, and he'd love Periphery, they're progressive metal, so you know the shouty stuff I listen to, it's like that, but prog rock kind of went in, and I happen to think that Loon is one of the greatest songs I've ever heard, it's an amazing track, but Misha is a massive F1 fan, and he's the guy that gets up at 5am in California to watch F1, and I'm the guy that listens to his music at 5am back in the UK when I've got an early start, and through a friend of a friend, we've started communicating and got to know each other, he was playing... I can't believe the planning here, he played Manchester on the Sunday, the Belgian Grand Prix, so couldn't get over to Belgium to see the race, and I also couldn't get to see his gig, but they're touring again next year, which is fantastic, so I'm going to see him in London, but it's been lovely to actually just to speak to someone whose music I listen to, whose music I find absolutely inspirational, and he keeps telling me he can't believe he's talking to the voice of F1, which is a bit stupid, because I don't think of myself like that, but no, I do, I love music, music has always been a massive part of my life, and I can't go anywhere without listening to it, so on the way back from this, I'll probably stick a bit of Primordial Radio on, and heaven only knows, they'll put on for me, I was going to wear my Skindra t-shirt today, next time, next time, I like that, because we do, I mean you can walk, especially at Silverstone, you can walk down a

Formula One paddock, and you will see celebrity after celebrity, musician after musician, sports star after sports star, it's quite incredible, the people that you see with your own eyes, but it's quite nice that there's still a part of you that's sort of the child in you, isn't it? It's kind of like, oh god, I love, get a bit excited, get a bit giddy just by meeting certain people. I have waited 10 minutes, right, on both occasions for a couple of selfies, and I don't do too many selfies, I occasionally do, just for the Instagram, if I've met someone, I kept on really well, Sam Ryder, the brilliant voice, love Sam Ryder.

Great interview on the grids. Yeah, absolutely. Well, I spoke to Sam Ryder about an hour before that interview with Martin, and we actually hatched plans to go to Download next year, because he was still with an Iron Maiden t-shirt on, I'm like, no one wears a Maiden t-shirt around here, so we were having a great, great old chat about music, but the two guys I have waited, and waited and waited, and eventually got a selfie with were Vince Neil, the lead singer of Motley Crew, who was in Austin, and last year, so two years ago, Lars Aurek, the drummer for Metallica, I'm like, I'm not turning down the chance here, I'm never going to get the chance to meet Metallica ever again, you know, and I saw Metallica at Download this year, and they were incredible, and they always have been, ever since I first saw them. Yeah, there you go.

Donington 87, they played Donington 87, I think that was the first time I saw Metallica.

Still going strong? Yeah, it was right at the lightning time, which is still their best arm.

I'm going to pretend like- Which means nothing to you.

I'm just, for whom the bell tolls, creeping death, fate of the black?

In the car on the way back, yeah, best of Metallica. Actually, three pronged of Metallica.

Final question, and hopefully kind of sums it up quite nicely, this is from Max on Instagram.

What do you love most about your job? What I love most about my job

is that whenever I wake up in the morning, I have no idea what is going to happen for the rest of that day, and as much as I prepare as best I can, as much as I do the utmost to make sure that I'm completely on top of anything that could go on, you're never totally sure that that's going to be the case, and you live a life that's full of surprises, and you open yourself up to these surprises, and you walk on that tightrope without the safety net, and you get to the other side, most of the time with a big smile on your face. That's what I love about my job the most, that the travel, I think the travel's great, I love traveling the world, I'm not going to complain about that. The people I work with are just, we have a great crew of people at Sky Sports F1, and not just people in front of the camera, but our producers, our guys in the edit suite who can take an interview and craft it and just make it velvety with what they do. Our rigors, our sound guys who trudged their way round circuits in all sorts of weather, always with a smile on their face, and often giving you great lines to say on air as well. We just have a brilliant team of people and working frantically to deliver the best possible output we ever possibly could deliver, and to be a part of that is an honor, to be invited into people's homes is a privilege, and to be able to say lights out in a way we go and then carry on talking and see what happens, that's a joy, and so I've got it all really. That's a lovely answer and a very lovely way to end the podcast. David Croft. Thank you. Crofty, thank you very much for your company. No one calls me David,

no one calls me Dave, Nico did once. Definitely not Dave. Never again. Crofty will do nice.

Yeah, lovely. Crofty, thank you very much for your time. We will be back next Tuesday on the Sky Sports Network podcast. Hope you can join us then. Bye for now.