

## [Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / Should Sprint be scrapped and will Max quit over it?

Sprint weekends are about to be shaken up, but not everyone is happy, not least Max Verstappen, who has threatened to quit the sport over the changes. With the first sprint in Baku just weeks away, how will F1 change the format? This is the Sky Sports F1 podcast.

Hello everyone, I hope you're well and coping just about okay with our F1. We've got 20 days to go till we go racing in Baku, but fear not, we're here to keep you company alongside me for this one is the 1996 Formula One World Champion, Damon Hill, Simon Laysenby and Jess McFaddeen. Hello all, I hope you're well. Damon, you're first time on the podcast, welcome. Yes, thank you for having me. And it's, yeah, I'm not a podcast, what do they call it, Virgin. I have done a few. They seem to have proliferated. I've ended up on one or two. Some of them to do with other things I know nothing or even less about, I should say cricket or something like that. It's fun to be here. Sorry, you've done a cricket podcast?

Yeah, I did something with some cricketers, I'm sure.

They all merge into one after a while. Yeah, so I mean, every sports person seems to have some something going at the moment, but here we are on the Sky F1 one, so it's good to be here. Thank you. You're very welcome. Simon, how are you? Good weekend?

Yeah, I have. Yeah, I've gorged myself on chocolate, which is, you know, you're obviously going to do, but not as much as my kids have gorged themselves on chocolate. So they've been tearing around the house and I've been trying to, you know, put a leash on them, but that's Easter. That's Easter. And Jess, how are you? It's quite busy for us, isn't it at the moment? People might think this is downtime, but unfortunately for us at Sky Sports F1 HQ, this seems seemingly our busiest period. Well, we've done that classic thing of everyone who said, oh, well, we've got that break in April, haven't we? So we'll save it for then. And now the break in April has come around, and we find ourselves with a lot of, I'm going to say, I'm not going to complain too much about it. We've got some really exciting shoots planned over the next couple of weeks that will take us into Baku and beyond. So not going to complain, but yeah, it's definitely not downtime as much as I'm sure everyone else at home and listening are counting down the days you said at the top of the show, Matt, until Baku, which I've got quite a soft spot for Baku. I quite like it as a race. So looking forward to going back, I think it's a good one to come back to after a bit of a time away. Yeah, absolutely. So this is how it's going to work. We're going to talk about some changes to the sprint weekends, which I'm sure we've all got some quite interesting views on. And then we want to get into some of your fan questions as well, which we put out, put a little post on Twitter earlier. So this is what has been proposed. And as far as we understand it, this is what's going to happen. Here's what we have at the moment. FP1 on Friday. We've then got qualifying for the sprint on Friday afternoon. FP2 is on Saturday morning. The sprint is then Saturday afternoon, which sets the grid for the race on Sunday. Now, these are the proposed changes. We would only have one hour of practice that would be FP1 on Friday morning, then qualifying for the race on Friday afternoon. So a critical session there for the points on Sunday. And Saturday would see qualifying for the sprint in the morning. This would follow the usual Q1, Q2 and Q3 format, but descending time, so Q3 should just be one lap. And then Saturday afternoon would be the sprint itself, followed by the race on Sunday. With me, everyone, it's quite complicated. Simon, let's start with you.

What are your thoughts on the current sprint format? And do you think it needs a change? Do I like sprints? Yes and no. I think, you know, from the purest perspective, I kind of like the way that practice sessions built you into a weekend. But as a broadcaster, I think we always want a bit of jeopardy in there. And I'm not meaning that flippantly. I just think that it's wasted time on a weekend when there could be something more dramatic going on, if you want to look at it like that. But at the same time, it's got to be meaningful, it can't be gimmicky. And I think that the thing with sprints is, and I can understand why Christian Horner's kind of getting his knickers in a twist about it, is it's introducing more jeopardy to the weekend. And Red Bull don't want that right now. Why would they want that? They've got the best car. It's absolutely destroying the competition. So if you bring in another element whereby you could damage a car, they don't want that because that doesn't suit their process at the moment, which is going about winning every qualifying and every race. That's just what they want to do. So why would they why would they be pro it? You can see it from their perspective, from the other's point of view, and from a fan's point of view, and from Stefano Domenicali's point of view. He wants more entertainment. That's the way he thinks that the weekend should be going. So I can see both sides. I can. Simon, when you were racing, what would the prospect of a sprint weekend have done for you? So I think it's worth going back a bit, isn't it? Because the reason that we had a change in the whole Lyme formula was because on some occasions, cars didn't go out on a Saturday because the Friday would be dry and the Saturday would be wet. So there's no point. So guys, people paid to come to the race or turn on the TV. There's nothing happening. So Bernie decided that that was bad and the teams decided to make a change. So we ended up with a different formula whereby Friday is just a practice day, effectively, for the Saturday pre race, pre qualifying event. So the Saturday was a little bit more ramped up with the Jeopardy, a meaningful qualifying for a race on Sunday, but no warm-up on the Sunday. So there was actually nothing to do until we got to the race on Sunday. In the past, we'd have Sunday warm-ups, which were at least something for people who were extra running, if you like, for people that were there early, and also a chance for teams that we could change our cars. So what the point is, Friday could determine the grid. So Friday was important. So when I started working with Sky, they changed the, by that time they changed the setup. And I thought, there's no point in me turning up on Friday. What is the point? There's nothing. So I used to turn up on a Friday just to catch up with what was going on. But Friday was very dull. And I think that is the problem with the current free practice setup. It doesn't mean anything. It's testing. It's like going to watch people go testing. So what they're proposing to do, the problem, the floor as I see it with the sprint qualifying setup that they've had today is that the race result determines the grid on Sunday, which I think effectively makes the Grand Prix just, you've got two thirds on Sunday and one third on Saturday. So basically it's a split race. It's like having a, so the Grand Prix itself is affected by the race the previous day. So the sanctity, if you want to call it that, of a Grand Prix has been interfered with. And I think that is, I think we should be mindful of that. Because I think historically when you go back, you don't want to have to go back through the regulations, say, oh, they changed the format. That's why the grid was different. And we have this whole debate about who's on pole and, you know,

what is a pole anymore. So as I understand it, and correct me if I'm wrong, they are now proposing you have a separate qualifying on the Saturday or the Friday for the grid on Sunday. Is that correct? Yes. I've understood it correctly, which is good. Now, that means Friday is important. And I think that's good. And Saturday is also important because it carries points with it. But it's not going to affect the Sunday event. So I think it's actually quite clever. I think it's a genius idea. It's better than the last format because it's now independent, isn't it? You've got sprint qualifying, sprint race. And yeah, it's an opportunity for something else to happen, two things to happen. You've got a qualifying again, which we love. And you've got a race. So lots of excitement. But the sanctity of the Sunday is kept alive. Pristine, if you like. I mean, I do think they should be allowed to change their cars. I think we ought to now consider being allowed in this part Fermi thing. I think it would be great if they were allowed to change their cars before the end of the race. So teams can take a gamble on changing their setup. I think that would be a good thing because it means you don't know what the form is. It could be someone could have changed their, currently what happens is they do a long run. Everyone knows what their pace is. They do the race strategy and they go, well, I know what the result of the race is going to be. But if you can change the car as well before you get into the race, then we don't know what the pace of that car will be. Jess, go on. What did you make of sprint weekends last year? What was your overriding feeling? Yeah, it's interesting. I don't think I really came down to a conclusion as to whether I enjoyed it as a fan or not. And for a lot of the reasons that both Simon and Damon have said, in that it clearly, it was a confusing format in fundamentals because, as we've said, it impacted more than just the days it was running, like the whole faff around qualifying, not actually setting the fastest position for the race on Sunday. It caused a lot of debate. And I could definitely see why. And the fact that we've got now an asterisk in the history books from year one in terms of the pole sitter isn't actually the pole sitter. That's all been very confusing. So I think that was a complexity that maybe just hadn't been thought through very well. So the fact that that's changing, I think, and has changed for this year is better. But there's no denying that what sprints do, and when they first came out, I was definitely in the camp of this is too gimmicky. I don't like this. I'm quite a traditionalist. I like my Saturdays and Sundays staying as they were. There's no denying that every time we've had a sprint, it's massively impacted the race on a Sunday. Because we essentially, again, to Damon's point, having a third of a race on a Saturday and then two thirds on a Sunday, you did get a sense of you only have to think back to Silverstone 2021. But if we hadn't have had the sprint, that race, the result would never have been the result that we had. I don't think Max and Lewis would have come together because Lewis knew, having run the sprint, that if Max gets away on lap one, that's it, race over. So you did have that element of jeopardy. You did have that added information that the drivers and teams had in order to potentially make Sundays more interesting. But yeah, it's jury was still out. The issue I kind of have with the new proposed format is, again, it feels just a little gimmicky. What do we do sprints for? Yes, entertainment, yes, more racing. But it's just, for me, whilst leaving Sunday alone, which again, to Damon's point, I completely agree with, leave the sanctity of the racing alone. Are we ultimately diluting the product by having lots of racing across a weekend? And I think that's something that I'm still, I'm not 100% on board with yet. I'm happy to see it. But I'm also, for me as well, I don't, why are we doing it for six races in a year? Surely if it's a race weekend format, that's the race weekend format.

But also, you could get the championship could be decided, the championship could be decided outside of a main event, be decided by sprint. So, you know, there is that as well, that you think it, if you're talking about devaluing the actual Grand Prix, you could have a whole championship decided on a sprint race. So yeah, you are, I think, I think I'm with Jess, like, you're either in or you're out on this, aren't you? It's, I know they're trialling it this year, but if the trial goes well, then just put it for every make it make it a constant throughout 2024. You think we could be in a position where we get 20, however many races a year, every single race weekend, we'll get a sprint race next year?

Well, if they're changing the format and they're wanting to get rid of just want to have one practice session, I mean, I, there's too much practice. Yeah, I'm definitely all in favour of getting rid of practice sessions because they're just as Damon said, but this is the whole nature of where the sport's going. You know, we never used to televised practice sessions, but we took it because it's more content. And, you know, that's, that's, that's kind of, I guess, an issue for broadcasters like us is that we're greedy and we want to broadcast everything. But, you know, practice was never there to be broadcast. And I guess to Damon's point earlier, when you, Damon, you spoke about why the format changed in the first place, I guess the reasons we had warmups and everything was also to do with how reliable the cars were. Like the cars these days, this day and age are so reliable, you almost want to take away the ability for them to dial it in and get it perfect straight away. And having three practice sessions, you know, we've seen how good the racing can get when there is a rained off FP2, which obviously is for a lot of the race that we go to the most representative session where they get to do their long runs. They, they, they, we take that away from them and things start to shake up a little bit. On the, on the Sunday warmup thing, they used to rebuild the car overnight. Nearly every time the car run, they'd rebuild it. So they didn't know whether the car was, was in a fit state. So the warmup literally was supposed to be just a chance to see if it leaked or not, you know, or the wheels fell off. But it turned into a competitive thing. But yeah, so that's, that's, that's why that happened. Don't think they necessarily need to have a warmup. And I do, but I do agree. Two points you both made. One was

Jess was point about the complexity, you know, explaining the sport to people what's happening now. I mean, just explaining qualifying went up to people who were new to the sport. They're going around as fast as they can to see what's going, how the grid is going to shape up to determine who, you know, who's going to start where in the race. So they worked, someone new to the sport very quickly works out, were you going to put the fastest guy at the front? Isn't that what's the point of that? You know, so, so, you know, it is, it is quite difficult. We take some of the things that happen in our sport for granted now. And, you know, but one of those things is, you know, so adding another complexity to it. When's the Grand Prix? Was it Saturday or is it Sunday? These are important questions that could be complicated. Maybe. But I think that also that Simon's point about the championship could be decided in a sprint race. Well, you know, Max's one of Max's objections is that he does, he thinks a sprint race isn't a really interesting race, because people are protective. And they are, they've got to be if that determines the grid the following day, but they've taken away that protective thing now. So, yeah, there's there are negatives. As far as things being meaningful over three days, I think it solves that question. Whether it would have been fine just leaving it as it was, we have a qualifying on

Friday and a Saturday. I don't know, because the number of times you didn't go faster on a Saturday were very small compared to the number of times you did.

I want to get into some of the driver reaction to it. And this this quote from Verstappen, which kind of I think was really interesting. He said, even if you change the format, I don't find that it's in the DNA of Formula One to do these kind of sprint races. I hope there won't be too many changes. Otherwise, I won't be around for too long. Simon, can you really see Max Verstappen

stepping away from the sport on the basis of the sprint, you know, particularly if we end up having 24-25 sprint races next year? I think it's just it's just him saying it's his way of saying we don't like sprint races because we are winning and we are winning comfortably and why would we

bring in more risk if you know if we don't need to. I object, your honor. I think that's I don't know. Maybe I'm being cynical, but I mean, I get it. Look, he's a he's an old school racer, isn't he? Max is one of these one of these people that believes in the sanctity of the Grand Prix. And you know, that's that's definitely a case you could argue. But I do think that there's an element of, you know, we've got the best car. Why would you bring in any more jeopardy? Do you not think that, David? I mean, I think so. If they were coming fourth or fifth, they'd be like, OK, well, you know, it adds an extra dimension whereby we can we can challenge those that have the dominant car.

I think there's an I think there's an element of this with with Max with him wanting not to waste his time on superfluous things that really are just invented for novelty reasons. I think he's that kind of person. So I think I can imagine him just saying it because he just thinks, well, I I've just come here to want to win Grand Prix. I just want one race to mean something. I don't want to be in a half value race. You know, what's the point of that in your CV? You know, are you want to sprint? So, you know, people aren't going to go, how many Grand Prix have you won? How many

sprints have you won? Now the sprint will, you know, the ranking of number of sprint races that people have won. Yeah, they are they are not worthless because they clearly have points, but you're not going to, you know, test cricket versus 2020, isn't it? That's that's what it is. It's whether you think that the test, you know, it is namaste, but test cricket is the ultimate, you know, that's facing that's facing it is 2020. Yeah, you know, whatever. But but it's a good fun. It's great fun blast. It's entertainment. And it's getting more people into the sport as well.

And it's getting much more inviting, much shorter, much easier. The test cricket thing is an interesting one because we just we just come on after the Masters as well. So you have four days of competition that means something. In test, it's what it could be as much as how many days, Simon, can a test go on for weeks? So anyway, go on for weeks. Yes. And it can all end in a draw. Like that's the thing that the most annoying thing is it goes on for days and days of days and then nobody wins at the end. I mean, what's that? That's what's beautiful about it. Come on, Jess. I mean, maybe we're getting to that point where you know, with middle aged guys, they're going, hey, in my day, it was great, you know, but I mean, look, that's the beauty of test cricket is that it's it's the purest form of the game. It's an endurance to watch, that's for sure. But I mean, you know, the point is that that we've had days for quite a long time now, we've had days in our sport sporting weekend where everyone turns up the whole lot there. But Friday is meaningless. It doesn't mean anything. So we need something we need. I mean, even, you know, Saturday is

is in more interesting because I love qualifying and that call off the book. I like the reason I like qualifying is because it's for the Grand Prix. It's going to decide where they start on the ground. And also, it's a test. It's a competition in and of itself. Who is the fastest over a single lap? And, you know, watching center on his qualifying runs, you know, you get you get that twice used to get that twice on a Friday and on a Saturday. So I enjoy about the meaningfulness of having something meaningful is important. The Grand Prix is meaningful. I don't think we're going to touch that that's got to stay. And it's an endurance as well. It's not a sprint race. It is an endurance race. The car has to last. The drivers have to last. It's a long, you know, concentration for that amount of time. Anyway, so if that's what they're proposing, that's so Matt, it's that debt. We don't know yet whether that's definitely happening, do we? No, we believe that all 10 teams have agreed. That's what Fred Versa said, that all 10 teams have agreed on this. But there's nothing official from F1 yet. I also wonder if this feeds into it as well. But, you know, if we had actually some don't quite well in this tweet from Richard, I appreciate the need for the cost cap, but it'd be nice to see the cars not doing tire fuel engine management throughout the actual race. Maybe drop one practice session to help preserve parts and sort the tire wear situation out, which I think what Richard's trying to say there is, if we had, if all of Sunday's races were epics, we probably wouldn't even be having this discussion. I think the fact that, you know, sometimes we're looking to try and, you know, if perhaps it is a slightly less interesting race, the fact that we might have had a sprint on that same weekend with a really exciting race might, I don't know, make the whole weekend feel a bit better, perhaps. Jess, I don't know if you agree, if that's, you know, if maybe Richard's right that we should try and focus on Sunday and maybe make that a bigger deal and focus on getting the regulations right to ensure closer racing then, I don't know. Yeah, and obviously the new regulation changes were to try and help that in the, in terms of its purest form. You know, fundamentally, we do need to get the racing right and we want a competitive grid. I think the issue is that there are so many variables at play in order to get that to a point and what I've always thought is the F1's problem is, is it changes a lot of things at once and then you don't really get to see the full impact of one change and whether that is, I mean, it's a thankless task, I think, to try and come up with the crux of why racing is deemed boring or what the, what the fix is because, I mean, we've had regulation change, we've had cost cap, we've had sprints, we've had all these different things come into play to try and alleviate boring races because that's fundamentally what this is coming down to, right, is about providing entertainment and making sure that it's, it's at its pinnacle. So, but we tend to see a lot of changes happening at once and then what's the conclusion? What can we put, what can we pin it down to? Fundamentally, what are we doing here? And then added to that complexity, you've also F1 and the, there are so many stakeholders at play that each have a say. So, you know, we're talking about changing a weekend format. A big part of that is the promoters. F1 is starting to command so much money, I mean, it always has command and a lot of money, but is now commanding, like I watering some of money for these promoters to host places, you know, they're talking about, there's rumours that we might even be going up 25 races next year, rather than 24, as previously said. And we've always known that Domenicali's talked about 30 races at some point. Each one of those need to sell tickets. And if we're saying, actually, to get better racing on a Sunday, we drop Friday practice, what have they got to sell for their weekend tickets? All of a sudden, there's nothing for anybody to watch on a Friday at all.

Raised a couple of interesting points in there, because, you know, the question about the Sunday and the tyre management thing, that's something for, that's something for a fishing artist, if you like, can can spot that, you know, we know. Australia was dull, wasn't it? Australia, let's face it, without red flags, Australia was dull. They were managing the tyres all the way around. And as they, yeah, and they were also doing that in the Saudi Arabia as well. And anyway, that's the name of the game these days, is you can't, you can't push these tyres because you get such a massive cliff. Was it a death spiral? I heard James Allison call it, you know, so, so that's that's something that not everyone can get a grip on. But I mean, what the what the Sunday race is supposed to be about people trying as hard as they can to catch the person in front, but they can't because the tyres are restricting them. So maybe there's something to be done about that. The whole idea about that was so that it would make the racing more exciting because the theory was, you get to the end of the race, the last five laps, and suddenly people are in trouble where they used up too much of their tyre or maybe they got a big advantage they could use up. And you have to say, in many races, we have seen that we've seen incredible dices almost on the last lap, where people have suddenly got themselves in difficulty and anyway. So the tyre thing is one thing. But the other thing is, you were talking about was that the demand for Formula One is huge. But that, you know, the Netflix factor has is well known that in the interest has grown largely because people are interested in the soap opera story behind the scenes. That's nothing to do with the racing at all. So how much the demand of the interest in the sport recently is to do with something which is nothing to do with the format of the racing. It's to do with how the sport has been communicated to new fans and even old fans in a way that we haven't seen it before. And, you know, I used to have, I used to, when I was racing, I used to think, why do they always want to try to fiddle with this? Because it seems to me you'll get out of five races, you'll get three good ones and two dull ones. But you'll always get the three good ones. And you might even get in there the absolute classic of all time. And no one interfered with that. It just happened of its own accord, because that's what the sport does. And so it seems like the more I do think there's a danger the more you interfere with it to get that classic race, every race, you're not actually increasing the rarity of that event anymore. You're just what you're doing is you're just making a norm. So that's that is one of the that's one of the catches with trying to make things making things more exciting. I think it's, you know, sometimes you just have to be patient and wait for it to happen. I mean, we know what the limit is of of endurance, because we saw the Michael Schumacher era where he just, you know, kept on winning. And I turned off, I know that I know a lot of other people turned off, but the Germans didn't turn off and they were paying the most for the TV rights. So, so they were happy until it got to the point where they said, this is too much, we can't, we're now losing global viewing figures because it's one person's winning all the time. So, you know, we saw, we saw the almost perfect season recently, didn't we? I mean, 2021 was was absolute. I know I'll be careful. I'll be careful. But let's Abu Dhabi aside, let's put that back in a box somewhere off to one side. But, you know, as controversial as it was, there were some absolutely outstanding races. There were two teams properly in it. It just, it was, and it got everybody, that was the, that was the season that got everybody, whether you were a new fan, an old fan, you know, someone that had fallen out of love with the sport and come back. Like that was, that was the season where everyone went, this is it. Like this is it. This is how we need to

bottle this up and do this. And then, and, and obviously then the regulations changed. And why was that? What we see, that's it. That's the point. But exactly that point is the end of which happens every time, which happens every time. So, you know, 2025, maybe they all come together or maybe Red Bull will be so far away that, that they won't. But I think that that was the result of that, wasn't it? It was just the, the last year of, of the regulations staying the same. And so, you know, law of diminishing returns and the pack closed up and, you know, and you got, and you got that an epic season with, with the end that we got. But, but at the same time, that's what we, we've got a hope for, haven't we, with what's being put in, in terms of the wind tunnel restrictions and perhaps that will kick in because let's face it, you know, that we're not seeing that on the car yet because the penalty hasn't kicked in for Red Bull. But, you know, maybe it will be towards the end of the season that others start to, to close the gap. And maybe it will be as we get towards 2026, that we, that we get the epic season in 2025. Before we change it all again. Otherwise, otherwise we'll do our best to keep it entertaining for you. It's always entertaining. It's always entertaining. I'm only joking. I'm being serious. Okay. Well, I think the other thing you mentioned, Matt, was that Max's retirement threat. Yeah, this is very unusual. I mean, you know, this is kind of strange to hear, isn't it? I mean, what's he going to do with himself? Be on his jet ski, Damon. This is the guy who said he's completed Formula One after winning his first championship. Like he, he does have that very, you said he's like an old school racer, but he's that, you know, I've done, what else do I need to prove? I've done it. I don't need to be, I don't need to be an eight time racer. But you should stop now then really. I mean, stop now. He's done it. He's done it. He's having fun. And I think his point is, is that I'll keep going until it's I'm making 50 million a year. Well, that's quite nice, isn't it that? I'm sure that comes in handy. You mentioned fun. I think that's a very important point. Is he having fun? Because I sometimes think he's not having fun. And I think that's, that's something that, you know, you have to love what you're doing, don't you? Otherwise, it's a grind. It's, I think that's what you're saying. Like if we're adding more races, putting more, like, you know, more strain on drivers, more travel, and then you're adding these mini races into that mix, that I think that's what he was obsessed about. He's saying that the, the, what, what I'm being paid for, what we are agreeing is my base rate. You're now asking me to do more and more and more. And with that, and with all the added interests, we're doing more, like media stuff, like everything that comes with that. And what I think what he's saying is, if you, there's going to come a point where I don't, I won't want to do any of it. It's called the big prize, the Grand Prix. You know, what is the prize? People don't know what you get for winning a Grand Prix. And I think that would be a good change to actually, and, you know, clarify what it is. So if you win the Masters or whatever, people, everyone knows how much you earn in that revenue, you know what you've earned. Everyone knows what you've earned, you know. So, I mean, what's the big secret? Why can't, why can't we have, you know, and the winner of this race, let's say a sprint race is worth more. Maybe sprint race, you know, you add to your sprint, so you get \$2 million for winning that, and you get \$5 million for winning the race on Sunday or something. I don't know. Maybe the figures are out, but, you know, the ratio is about right. So at least people can understand it. Because I think that's one of the things that's



difficult to grasp is, you know, what are they racing for? What's the prize? And the prize money doesn't go to the driver, does it? It goes to the teams. The teams are interested in the constructors. So the whole payola thing, the structure of the money is inscrutable. It's kind of very difficult to work out. And it's not publicized. But it'd be, I think it would be meaningful if the, you know, if people, if the driver went, hey, look, and here's your check for, you know, for what you've won. Well, that's another level of complexity, isn't it, Damian? Because there's all the, the, how do they, what's the politically correct way of phrasing it? The Ferrari fund? The loyalty fund? How many, how many grand prix, how many years, how many seasons have you competed in? You

get another little bump, because obviously there was a time where you wanted to make sure that teams stuck with it. Nowadays, it's so much of an investment, you're probably not going to get as much of a kickback of teams going, actually, we're done. Especially if it was competitive and especially if the prize money was, I guess, the financial structure of it was a bit fairer. I mean, we're going down a whole other rabbit hole here. I think link to all of this is kind of this, which I still find quite amazing, that literally two weeks out from Baku, we still don't know the format of the weekend. And it kind of does go back to the point of like, there is a lack of transparency or it seems like there is, why is this all being decided so late in the day? Should this not have been done at the start of the season? I mean, Damian, if you were going into a season, I would imagine the rules of, the sporting rules that you would abide by would be laid out at the start of the season. Those are the rules which we all adhere to as drivers. To be changing the rules halfway through the season seems to me a bit strange. Yeah, a little bit, isn't it?

But they did put, they did factor that in, didn't they, to the new regulations that they could, they had the right to change things if they felt it was going the wrong way. So that was, I mean, that was extraordinary, isn't it? They factored in this like, yeah, that's a slippery, that's a slippery slope, isn't it, that one, if you're not careful. I mean, I mean, there are, but there are various levels that they have to go through, you know, they're, the World Motor Sport Council has to agree and like, all of the teams have to agree and yeah, so it is, there are levels. You're really not on the F1 commission, are they?

Well, no. And they've already sent them, right? They've already made the selections and sent them out and the worry is, is that there aren't enough of the, you know, qualifying tyres to do two qualifying sessions. It's not tenable for them right now and as we're recording, there doesn't seem to have been a solution offered up in terms of, well, will, will we have more tyres or what, what are we going to have to do? Like it's, it's, that is logistically something that is still a massive, massive question mark. I mean, we all love talking about tyres, don't we?

It's definitely the next half hour talking about tyres.

But that is, that is, that is an issue. I mean, are we going to see people having to go out and qualify on hard tyres? Like that's, that's just, that would just be bonkers. I mean, it would cause a mix up if people, if people have to factor in the, how many sets they want to keep in reserve for, for the different qualifying sessions, etc. But again, like, I mean, good luck to, to, to us trying to explain that to people at home. I just think it's just, I don't know. They're already running on ball tyres as well. It's, it's tragic. The State Formula One is in. I mean, people who don't understand tyres need to, need to kind of appreciate that it's everything. It's, it's everything. You know, I'm sorry. I'm a racing driver. You know, it's like, it's like, imagine you're clinging onto a vertical cliff and it's going to feet up. And the only thing

that's keeping you in contact is your, is your fingers. It's your tyres. That's the only thing that's keeping you in contact with the, the cliff that is the racetrack. So it is, is, is everything is around how you get the contact patch to, to key in to the, to the track surface.

So it, sorry, but it keeps coming back. Tires will not go away as an issue.

Simon's, Simon's. I'm fine. I know you love, I know you love.

Tire chat and rule changes. Two of our favorite things.

One of the other ideas being, being floated as a way of making the sprint weekend more exciting is a reverse grid. Simon on Twitter. Could we see a reverse grid at any time soon? We know that Max and Lewis can get through the field without issues. I, I'm going to open that to the floor with a reverse grid as part of a sprint weekend. Be a good thing. Shaking head from Simon. Damon's gimmick. Damon, you look like you're nodding. I'm thinking about it. I mean, I used to like some of my, some of my funnest races were coming through the field. You know, it's nothing like overtaking lots of cars, even if they, even if you've got a, you know, big competitive advantage, it's still fun to, to side your way through, through the, the field. And it's good for people to watch. So maybe that's the, another complexity we could throw into the sprint racing qualifier. Just a reminder for everybody, not only is this race got nothing to do with Sunday, but they're on Sunday, we're going to start with the fastest guy at the back.

You have to throw sprint qualifying. So you have to do really badly so that you get to the front of the grid for the sprint. You do get that in the junior formulas, right? You make a tactical choice. If you, if you don't think you're going to get to the, to the very front and make, make points advantage, then you go, all right, I'll settle for eighth. And then I'll be on the front of the grid for the next race and granted, okay, the points aren't as, for, for as many, but it's, I think when I'm trying to explain, when people have come to me and said, Oh yeah, love watching formula one. I'm quite interested in getting into the junior categories. It is something that you find hard to explain to them exactly how it works over the course of a weekend, especially with the, the latest updates and changes to series. So it's just, I don't, I think that's where I would agree with formula with, with max that it's not in the, it's not in its DNA. Yes, it's great to see drivers carved their way through. We've had great races, you know, even although max made, you know, very light work of it, Saudi was good to see how far he could, he was going to get up and whether he could win. But I don't know having that as the format rather than on the occasion that something goes wrong or there's a penalty applied, like I'm, I've always been vehemently against reverse the idea of reverse grids. I just don't, I just think it's just not necessary. It's basically what it's saying is that we've not done our job, like everyone has not done its job. If we're having to think about making the fastest driver at the back to make it entertaining. I think that's, that's, that's what it's saying for me. It's, it's making it not a to the, to our point earlier about making things seem special. Those races are the ones we remember because they're such epic drives from people, not the rule. I think it's something beautiful about seeing the two title contenders wherever on the front row of the grid, isn't there? You know, for the, for the main race, it's, it looks good first into the first corner. Six races this year, I think it's exciting and I'm really intrigued to what happens starting in Baku, which we think is going to be this, this new format. Okay, let's move on just to a few, a few questions from, from you guys at home and yeah, a few, some, some interesting ones really, particularly on, on some of the, some of the teams this year. Jay Mac on Twitter, can you see McLaren being even remotely competitive this season or is it still a few years away?

If this is, if this is the case, where does it leave the drivers? Simon, McLaren this year, how do you feel about, about what's, what's happened in the, certainly in the first three races? Well, I mean, obviously it wasn't an ideal start, was it? In fact, it was their worst start for, for a number of years, for 27 years, I think it was. They kind of got a little bit lucky in, in, in Australia. I don't think that the pace was there. They, you know, it helped them out that the two red flags and Piastri and Norris got sixth and eighth and they've leapt up to fifth. Do I think that they can be competitive? Yes, they've got a big upgrade coming in Baku. It's going to be interesting to see what that does to their package, but they believe themselves that they're in the running for at least fourth. That's, that's what's coming out of their communications department is that they believe that with everything that they've got coming, they had a fundamental flaw. They've got their, their new wind tunnel is coming online in June, isn't it? I think. So, you know, I think that they could reshuffle what's that done. I don't know. You have to think about what, what they've got in terms of their, their kind of management structure now and what they, what they had. James Key has gone and they've brought in or they've, they've reshuffled it and Peter Padromu who, who let's face it, he was Adrian Nui's number two and he's been there for a decade now. He was ahead of Dan Fallows. More responsibility for, for him. Will that, will that help them? I don't know. They've, they've got work to do and I know they'll be under a huge amount of pressure from the Bahrainis in particular. Zach's under, under pressure. He knows that, but he's done his job in bringing the sponsors. Now it's about the race team, whether they can deliver. They've undergone a load of changes, but I think just their capacity to, to develop will stand them in good stead. I think that they're, I think that they could still be on for fourth. Yeah. Damon, what, what about the drivers and, and Piastres? He's got his first points in Australia in front of a home crowd. I imagine that would be a good monkey to get off your back through races in having not scored points. Yeah, absolutely. I think he did. I think he's done a solid job the whole way through actually. All three races, I think, given the difficulties in the first one in Bahrain, I think, I think he's kept his head and shows a lot of promise. And it's a, he's a good foil for, for Lando now. So Lando's got to work a bit maybe. So the pair of them are going to be a formidable lineup. The question is whether you get demotivated being in a team that seems to be all at sea. I don't think they will. I think they still, they still have faith in McLaren to, to come good. And as Simon just said, they have at least done something about the system, which may bring about or unlock some things that were locked in a cupboard somewhere.

And well, we'll see. We will see. I mean, I think, I think he's closer, isn't he? He's a lot closer piastri than, than Danny Ricardo was at any point. Already you can see it in the first few races that this kid's got talent, hasn't he? That you can see why he was the F2 and F3 champion. He's, he's, he's the real deal. And I think they know that and they've got two sides of the garage functioning now, whereas they only were fighting one handed last year. Yeah, such a strong driver pairing. Jess, question from Akshita. Do you think Ferrari will be able to have a comeback this season or do we need to wait till next season?

Loads of Ferrari fans would probably like you to say yes.

I'm sure. I mean, I think what Rob Smedley said on this podcast, a couple of episodes ago, in terms of, you know, we need to be realistic. They've had a pretty major change in getting rid of Bonotto totally from Ferrari. I mean, I think a lot, what a lot of people tend to forget is that he was straddling, Bonotto was straddling a number of jobs at Ferrari. And you know, with

hindsight,

maybe that wasn't the right way to go. And he should have kind of given over a bit of his technical directorship over a little bit, which, which was starting to happen, but potentially not fast enough. Fred is, is, is got stuck in straight away. But it's going to take time for that change to essentially become impact and for us to see what's going on behind the scenes. So I don't, I don't want to say, I don't want to write them off. I don't think anybody should be written off. Again, we've only had three races this season so far. And don't forget that we were talking, I know it's, I know it's slightly different. But we were, we were almost writing off Red Bull this time last year because of their reliability issues and look what happened there. So I think it's, it is early doors. There's, there's clearly, you know, from what Fred's reported back already, there's clearly a lot of, that still needs to change. But, you know, everybody wants, we all want to see all of these teams up there and fighting and, and, and getting in the mix and, and at least causing Red Bull a little bit of a headache. And, and, you know, that can pick up on opportunities where Red Bull maybe falls down because whilst they, Red Bull definitely have all the makings of the ability to win most of the races this year, that's still a very tall ask of one team. So we need, we need teams and drivers up there to be able to pick up the pieces when, when they become available. So yeah, I think I'm not going to write them off right now, but they're clearly not massively. Yeah, exactly. I mean, I think it's, I think it's probably going to be a more pronounced development war than, than other seasons because of the immaturity of the, of the regulations and there's some low hanging fruit for them all to pick off. And I think when we get into the European season, we may see, I mean, I think Red Bull will still be ahead of everybody else, but I do think the midfield pack could really, you know, that even though they're talking about it, Tom McCulloch was talking about it from, from Aston Martin saying that because of the immaturity of the regulations, it means that we're going to have a very close pack in the midfield. And, and, you know, you look at Ferrari and they're accelerating their upgrades, they're bringing them, you know, forward. I think it was Immola that it was planned for that they want to get them onto the car as quickly as possible. They've got a problem with their balance. They've got a problem with their time management. We know

that. And it's their worst start, I think points wise, since, since 2009, Ferrari can develop, they all will. They're all working very hard. In fact, they're all putting their eggs into the basket of those, those sort of early European upgrades, whether it be Baku or Imola. And I think, I think we could see quite an interesting development war this year. Alonso has been talking about it as well. I think that's, that's what's going to dictate who finishes second. Yeah. And Imola being the critical race for Ferrari at home.

And they're getting battered in the Italian media, aren't they? They're getting absolutely battered once again in the Italian media. Yeah, they need a strong performance there. Couple more tweet from Krinn. What can be done to improve the consistent application of the rules and regs by the stewards to protect the sport's integrity from a fan of 30 plus years who's baffled sport, not entertainment, please. Really referring to the three red flags we had in Australia and Alonso's podium debacle in Saudi. Is there, is there anything you can see that can, can help fans at home understand what's going on in the sport?

Yeah. In cricket, you don't question the umpire's decision. It's a question of respecting the rules official and his decision is final. And I think it should be final. They, these guys

know the rules and regulations. You have to have that level of belief in the officials and the consistency of their officiating. I know we call that into question all the time with the stewards. It's about that. It's about consistency and getting it right more often than getting it wrong. If you look at football, they brought in VAR. You look at cricket, they have Hawkeye so that those decisions that might have been 50-50 are helped with. And I know that that, that's what's trying to, to happen in Formula One. On-site and off-site, they have historical cases. They have all the equipment they need to make the right decision. Therefore, let's trust that decision. We have to. Otherwise, it, it calls into question the integrity of the sport.

On that note, thanks. I just thought I'd leave you on a really kind of profound message.

I really milked that one.

Crinn's tweet has really set the cat amongst the pigeons there, which is great. It's a good debate. Damon, Simon and Jess, thanks very much for joining us. We'll be back next Tuesday. We hope you can join us then. But for now, bye.