

[Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / Ted's Podbook | First Sprint of the season at Azerbaijan GP

Hello, everybody, and welcome to Ted's Podbook, the return of Ted's Podbook after four weeks away. Yes, how was your four weeks without Formula One? Did you miss it? As much as we did? Good, yes, I'm sure you did. But we are back in Baku, Azerbaijan, and, well, this is the little podcast of 10 minutes or so. I tried to keep it 10 minutes, not very successful than that, where I report back to you after the media day, the Thursday ahead of the Grand Prix weekend, just giving you some of the stories that are around, things people have been saying, and give you some of the atmosphere. So there is plenty of atmosphere going around. We're outside our hotel, opposite me is the Park Boulevard Shopping Centre, and that's the other side of the start-finish line. So everything is always, all together, most of the hotels, all the personnel stay within listening distance, I say, of the paddock. Because if you listen very carefully in the background over the noise of the spring birdsong, you will be able to hear a media welcome party. So it was kind of popular 90s and 2000s dance hits a little bit earlier. I think there's now a Nazare musician doing his own stuff, but you might be able to hear that in the background, and they're serving some food and drink and welcoming all the teams and the media to the latest running of the Azerbaijan Grand Prix seventh time we've been racing around here. Now seems incredible, well done, Baku. But we're looking forward to this weekend because there is a change in format. We have the first sprint weekend of the season. Now there are six of these in 2023. There's here in Baku, Austria and Spa, and then there are three flyaways, Austin, Brazil and Qatar. So that is the six sprint weekends, and we have a different format for those six. Although they have, the FIA have reserved the right to change it if they feel it's not working. But at the moment, it starts on Friday, that is tomorrow as I'm recording this, with Free Practice One, which is the only practice session of the weekend. So just one hour for the drivers to change anything on the cars, get it right, or get it wrong, sort themselves out, or recover from any spins or, you know, incidents. That's at 1.30 in the afternoon Azerbaijan Baku time, so you can work it out from where you are. I think we're British summertime minus three hours, and we're three hours behind anyway, in the UK. So, and then on later on Friday, there is qualifying for the Grand Prix. Yes, you heard it right. Not qualifying for the sprint race, 5 p.m. Baku time. On Friday, there's Grand Prix qualifying. I'll say that again, qualifying for the Grand Prix. Remember this, write it down, right? So on Saturday, there is no qualifying for Sunday's Grand Prix. On sprint weekends, the sixth that I already mentioned, it's on a Friday. So that's the new format, which means that Saturday is its own little sprint race day. So we've got qualifying for the sprint race on what would normally be Free Practice Two, or Free Practice Three, on a non sprint weekend. So that's at 1.30 in the afternoon Baku time on Saturday, qualifying for the sprint race. And then the sprint race itself, 5.30 in the afternoon Baku time, 17 laps of that. And then the Sunday is absolutely normal, Azerbaijan Grand Prix, 51 laps or whatever it is, 3 p.m. Azerbaijan time. So that would be midday. UK time lights out. So, given that there's this big change, what does everybody think about it? Well, you still have the critics. I mean, Max Verstappen is in the pen today, spoke to him earlier. He said, look, you know, my views on sprint weekends are well known. I'm a bit of a traditionalist. He said, I used to sit down and watch the TV and I knew there was qualifying on a Saturday. And then I knew there was a Grand Prix on a Sunday. And I kind of like that in the way it is. And I said, well, look, are you just going

to have to live with it for six sprint weekends this year? He said, yeah, you know, I do, I suppose I do have to live with it. But then he went on to say something interesting, which was that he thinks with, you know, 23 races this year, 24 potentially 25 on the horizon in future years, it's going to be too much. It's too much for not only drivers or some drivers, he said, he just liked to drive, they drive all day long if they could, but engineers, mechanics, to have these intense and they are going to be intense few days of all of this action to do that too many times would risk burnout. And if we're going to have so many races said Max Verstappen, maybe we should

think about shortening the race weekend to only two days. That's an idea that's been out there a lot. We'll see if it actually comes to anything. But he said that otherwise they're all feeling good at Red Bull, and he's ready to get the weekend underway. You can really understand that. But otherwise, a couple of little bits and pieces, but no big upgrades. Red Bull, they had their upgrades at the previous race in Australia. Who was next in the panic? Well, it was Carlos Sainz, who talking about Australia, he's still quite cross about the fact that he got the penalty that took away the podium. And I was kind of expecting Carlos to say, do you know what? I've let it go now. I'm fine with it. He didn't. He was saying, I still a bit angry about it. I still don't really accept it. It was worth us having a go to challenge it, to get the rule, to get the penalty overturned. We knew we weren't going to get it changed because he made a reference to the FIA not wanting change the result after the fact, which is supposed to be true. But the reality is that Ferrari didn't have any new evidence that hadn't been considered or wasn't able to be considered at the time. Carlos said, look, we weren't, you know, we did have to give it a go. We weren't surprised that it didn't amount to anything, but we did have to give it a go. But yeah, it was not able seemingly to let that go. Still a bit angry, Carlos Sainz, about it. Unlike Nika Hülkenberg, who finished seventh and possibly could have been on the podium, had the starting order after the third red flag been a bit different. And I said to Hülkenberg, you know, are you hanging on to the fact that it could have been the podium, the podium that could have been the P3? He said, you know what? No, I'm not that kind of person. I had fun. I enjoyed the race and I'm not thinking about, you know, could have would have should have type of thing. Fernando Alonso was in the media pen as well, the TV pen. He was asked about the rumors about his relationship, rumored relationship with Taylor Swift. He shook it off, really, but had nothing really to say about it. I don't know what the truth is behind this. He did certainly didn't come out and say, no, I'm not in a relationship with Taylor Swift. So maybe he wants to prolong

it for a bit. I kind of heard that it was just some sort of Spanish media outlet that in the four weeks without Formula One didn't have any clicks or didn't have as many clicks as they needed or that their targets were. And they thought, I know Taylor Swift has broken up with her boyfriend or partner. Let's say that she's a Mad Keen fan of Formula One and wrote a song about Fernando Alonso

and actually then they're dating. So I think it was no more than that and that maybe a media outlet searching for clicks as many of them do in this world that we live in, social media world that we live in. But I'm not sure it's much more than that, but Fernando's having a bit of fun with it at the same time. He is actually thinking more about what Aston Martin are going to be able to do around here, given that we're seeing slowly upgrades coming from Mercedes, Ferrari,

getting their act together. And will that mean that the run of podiums comes to a close? Maybe, maybe not. Will it mean that Fernando keeps the run of podiums? Lance Stroll was in fine form, saying that, hey, look, I finished fourth in Melbourne. I want my shot with the podium. I want my podium. Clearly he's going to get this year. And given that he's historically been pretty good around Azerbaijan, get straight into it. Even with one hour only of practice, Lance was saying that he feels he's got a decent, more than decent chance of that podium result quite quickly if it's not actually this weekend. So watch out for Lance Stroll around here. That's my tip.

Who else do we hear from? Yuki Sonoda and Nick De Vries who were being asked about Franz Tost. That's the other, one of the other many stories around the paddock this weekend, that one of the longest serving team principals in Formula One, Franz Tost, is going to be not doing that position by the end of this year. So he's handing over the team principal role at Alfa Tauri to Lauren McKeece, who's currently the sporting director at Ferrari. I did ask Charlotte Clair and Carlos Sainz, is this somewhat of a brain drain at Ferrari? Not only have they got Davide Sanchez who's left Ferrari, who's kind of a chassis concept guy to go to McLaren, but now they've lost their sporting director and a good engineer in Lauren McKeece. Carlos Sainz said,

no, because you don't know who we've got to take over from them, which I thought was intriguing. Okay, who are Ferrari going to announce taking over from their sporting director and one of their chief designers? That will be interesting to see. And Charlotte Clair saying, no, don't worry about it. You know, McKeece is a good guy, but we have other people who can do that job as well. So yeah, but Nick De Vries was saying that he only found out about the changes at Alfa Tauri when everybody else did with a press release. So he was sort of sad to see Franz Tost go because he's passionate about racing. That is Franz Tost, not Nick De Vries, although Nick De Vries clearly is passionate about racing. I wish Nick De Vries and Max Verstappen, as I did get ransom, wishing Max Verstappen

a happy Dutch Kings Day, but yeah, happy Kings Day if you're celebrating it in Holland in the Netherlands.

What else? George Russell, he said we have a few bits, Mercedes have a few bits on the car, but not the upgrade, not the size of the upgrade that's coming in Imola, but it's really the story at Mercedes

is the job swap, is the job swap between Mike Elliott, who was the technical director, going up to chief technical officer where he can take a more sort of helicopter view if you like of the company's technical direction and argue, if you want to call it argue, put Mercedes' case in the negotiations for how the 2026 Formula One cars are going to look and then James Allison, who was doing that role, will come back to the day-to-day leading of the team in a technical direction as the technical director and hopefully galvanize the team to get going. I'm doing a feature about this later on in the weekend on Sky Sports Everyone coverage, so look out for that where I explain exactly how it's going and how George and Lewis feel about it, but Lewis was effusive in his praise of James Allison, not making any comment about Mike Elliott, he's not throwing shade on Mike Elliott by praising James Allison, just saying James Allison is a real fighter and someone who can galvanize everybody and he's happy to see him in that technical position, director position role, again not making any comment about that he's not happy about Mike Elliott or whatever, it's just saying that he's happy to see James Allison back in harness and George Russell making the point

that

look the previous W13, W14, they were not Mike Elliott's cars in that he was the only one who designed it, he was part of a team who designed it and it's that same team who will reverse out of that concept of car and go to wherever James Allison wants to lead them and George Russell making the point that look okay you might see this as Allison replacing Elliott because of supposed maybe if you want to look at Elliott's you know it hasn't exactly delivered in terms of the performance they wanted from the car, it's not that it's the leading of the team, what are they playing now? I feel love, okay nice, so yeah you get the idea of what's going on at Mercedes but watch out for our feature on that explaining how all of that is going, Yuki Sinoda's also talking about how he's going to need a double espresso on Saturday morning

to get into it, he can't afford to get up and have a leisurely free practice three preparing for qualifying because the first thing on Saturday as I said is the qualifying for the sprint race and then the sprint race later so Yuki will be downing the double espressos we had Pierre Gasly saying that the two chassis that were damaged at the end of the Australian Grand Prix for Alpine were actually recoverable which is great news for Alpine because had that been too chassis they weren't able to save that would have been very costly quite literally under the cost cap for the the Endstone team but they were able to save them and they've repaired them and that's good news from Endstone. As for some of the other teams we had Logan Sargent saying he's been kept busy over the last four weeks with some marketing and media stuff for Williams I guess

ahead of the Miami Grand Prix all the people want to get all their previous stuff in the can for that didn't speak to our Alex Albon didn't he was available today spoke to Joe Guan Yu about their thoughts and where they're going to go with with the the Alfa Romeo Sauber didn't ask him about the resurfacing didn't have time actually the resurfacing of turn one which is where he had his accident at the British Grand Prix last year they've removed the gravel and replaced it with asphalt so the cars can't dig in and flip over and then end up where his car he ended up last year but I'm sure he'll welcome the safety improvements that bit or the safety changes I should say at that bit of the track at Silverstone so done Williams done Hasse done the other ones Ferrari yeah Mercedes and Red Bull they were all happy and McLaren oh yeah that was the last one so

let's do McLaren and didn't speak to Landon Norris but did speak to Oscar Piastri started by saying look out of the tens hundreds thousands of points that you're inevitably going to score in your Formula One career were the first four in Australia last time out in some ways the most important he said well yeah in terms of you know just getting off the mark it's good not to have that hanging over me and Oscar also made the point that watch out for this in the sprint and the qualifying that maybe the Formula Two graduates such as him Nick DeVries well that was a while ago that he was

in Formula Two and Logan Sargent might be at advantage because they are so used to having one practice session and then immediately going into qualifying whereas for all the other Grand Prix lifers and old guys older guys they might be a bit like hey what's kind of this what's what's all this schedule all about whereas the F2 guys are a bit more used to it so that was an interesting one I thought for Oscar Piastri and Logan Sargent saying they might have an advantage in that it's

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absolutely used that they're used to this kind of thing just going straight in with not much practice right that is it I've busted over the 10 minutes that I said I do so yeah we're looking forward to to your to your company really so that's the times again 130 local free practice one then qualifying for the Grand Prix is on Friday afternoon at 5 p.m 5 4 3 2 that's 2 p.m lunch time on Friday

I know you have to work but take it and watch it later take it put it on your skybox you know what I mean and then there's the Saturday sprint qualifying on Friday morning and the sprint race on sorry on Saturday morning and then the sprint race on Saturday afternoon and the Azerbaijan Grand Prix 3 p.m local expect the unexpected that's what they say here at the Baku city circuit and we've got two races to see the unexpected look forward to having your company for all that thanks for listening bye bye for now