

[Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / The F1 Academy Preview Pod with García, Pulling and the Al Qubaisi sisters

Hello, and welcome to this bonus episode of the Sky Sports F1 podcast. It's race week. We are all headed for Austin, including the F1 Academy, a brand new female series which is helping to develop and prepare women to progress to the pinnacle of motorsport. For this one, I'm joined by some of the drivers who've been racing in the series this year. Later on, I'll be joined by sisters Hamda and Amna Al-Qubaisi. But first, I was able to chat to championship leader Marta Garcia as well as Abby Pulling. Unfortunately, Abby's recording was not playing ball, such as the way with technology, but I've included as much as possible from her chat.

Marta, you and Abby both raced in W series, but tell me, how is it different to W series? Well, of course, there's quite a lot of difference. Basically, I think the most important day is we get a lot of track time in the F1 Academy. As usual, we have 21 races, so we have like three races per weekend. We have two qualifiers, and yeah, we have like two free practice as well of like 40 minutes. In the W series, we didn't really get that much track time. We just had like three sessions in all the weekend, like a free practice of 30 minutes and quality and then race. So I think it's very good in terms of F1 Academy because it gives us a lot of track time. And I think one of the points to say as well is the teams, is junior teams like, you know, like Prema, like Carlin, Campos, ART, like, you know, those teams are racing in F2, F3. So it's great to be working with such professional teams as well. Marta, you're the championship leader. I imagine it's been a pretty enjoyable year for you so far on the F1 Academy. Yeah, it's been a good year. Actually, obviously, my last years in W series, I had some bad years and some better. But this year, of course, it's been really good since the beginning, since Austria. And yeah, really happy with it. I hopefully can win a championship this next week. And of course, also, it will be great to get an opportunity to drive in another category next year. Obviously, there's been a big gap. The last time you raced in F1 Academy was the end of July in France. So what have you done in this last, well, three or four months in order to stay race sharp, to stay fit, to stay healthy and be in the best possible shape to compete? Well, obviously, I've kept training physically. That's like something you need to do at the end of the day. I think I'm better physically, let's say, because I have some time to actually work out because in the season, we had like three months nonstop, like we couldn't we didn't really have much time because we had a lot of racing. And yeah, of course, we also went to Cota for some testing as well. And yeah, it was good to know a bit more the track, like get some references and just like get the feeling of the of driving in the body at the end of the day, because I think it's quite important. But yeah, of course, this month, not been driving anything just as we did in Cota. But I think it was good for, as I said, not to to make the body feel a bit more in the on the track. But yeah, looking forward for obviously Cota, I think it is it could be good. We've already been there also in the W Series in 2021, but it was also there. And again, looking forward for for the race. Now, obviously, as well as as well as the F1 Academy, you've both been at quite a few Formula One race weekends this year. And Abby, I can see you there in your Alpine attire, because you're obviously part of the Alpine Academy. Tell me what that's like working working with a Formula One team like Alpine. Yeah, they really, really, really, but I would like to help me and to help me be the best version myself. Like I say, physically, I work technically, I go to the upstream quite frequently and pick the brains of incredible minds there. And then, yeah, also, kind of on the promotion side, I do do a bit with them as well. And

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last week, I went to the poor card and was driving, I guess, World Series, you know, I get to have these experiences. Yeah, really exciting, just living like generally living the dream, really. Marta, I saw that you, you gave the Pole Position Award to Max Verstappen in Zandvoort.

How was that? Yeah, that was quite cool, actually. I was, I was just there in the, in the, well, in Zandvoort. And Mario Frampirelli was like, okay, I think we can do this, because you're here. So let's take this opportunity and then get you to give the award. So yeah, it was quite cool. Actually, first time I do this, of course, it was cool. Obviously, it was Max Rees, you know, in Zandvoort. Everyone was there, all the, all the people like that. But yeah, it was quite cool. Yeah, pretty cool. What did you say to him when he, when he put it on pole? Well done. Congratulations. Yeah, I just said, like, well done. Like, congrats, obviously. I mean, he was used to it because he was doing a lot of pole and then winning a lot of races until Carlos, I think, won the one of the last. But yeah, congrats on your, on your pole, of course. Marta, in terms of the future of the F1 Academy and looking forward, I mean, one of the criticisms of it this year was it wasn't shown live on TV. We obviously know that Austin is going to be shown live on TV, which is great news. It's going to be shown on Sky, but also loads of broadcasters around the world. And also, we know that next year, we're going to get 10 teams all with a driver and all using their livery in the F1 Academy. So do you think it's moving in the right direction? Are you pleased with the progress that the F1 Academy has made just in the past year and you optimistic about the future? Yeah, of course. I think they started, obviously, they didn't broadcast the races until this last race in Austin. But I think that's how it everything started. You know, at the end of the day, I don't think it was 100% structured. But yeah, I think it's going to be, it's going to be great. I think Austin is going to be amazing. The fact that they are going to broadcast in almost every country, I think that's where it also, and everyone is going to be able to watch F1 Academy, see how it is, know a bit more about it. And then from there, I think for next year, obviously, they're going to broadcast everything. It's going to be all the races with the F1. So that's going to be also quite good. And I think it's going in the right direction. I think it's going to go pretty well. I hope, and I think it's going to give a lot of opportunities to a young woman. And yeah, I think it's going, of course, great. I will be supporting. If I'm able to obviously win this, this season, I will also be supporting and try to, to help as much as I can. But yeah, I think it's a great opportunity for the young drivers, also with the Discovery Drive and all of this. I think it's amazing.

Abby, can you now see a pathway to get to F3, to then obviously get on that sort of line in order to progress in motorsport? And ultimately, we might already in the F1 Academy have the next female Formula One driver, which is obviously a really exciting prospect. Even if on the grid, there isn't the next Formula One driver, it's, I think the key thing to take away is that when you're watching, that's the really big and remember that they were inspiring the next generation to help increase female participation at a young age. And I see it even now. There's so many more young girls in the car. And, Martha, it's also not just about drivers, it's about everyone around the Formula, sorry, everyone around a motorsport team, that's engineering, mechanics, strategists, but the back end as well and social media. And there's all sorts of roles, which I think the F1 Academy has drawn more attention to. And I think women hopefully now see a pathway into motorsport, but not just driving. Is that fair?

Yeah, I think so. I think it's like this, of course. For example, in Prema, in my team, there is a team manager, it's called Camila. And I know in some other teams, there's also like team managers that are girls. And Camila is also an engineer. So, I think, of course, F1 Academy wants to give us opportunities to women, not just driving, but also like working, as you said, like engineers or like team managers or like people who work in the media side and things like this. And I know a lot of the media girls, of the media team from F1 Academy, it's almost girls, all of them. So, I think it's great, of course, to give opportunities. I think it's really cool to also have a championship that is drawn by women. Let's say like that's, I think that's really, really cool. And yeah, as Abby said also, I can also see more young girls driving now in karting, in the Spanish championship, in the international races. So, I think motorsport is doing a good job. I think there's more to do. But I think also we need time to obviously progress in a good way. Marta, what's the piece of advice you'd give anyone watching now who wants to get involved in motorsport? I think what I always say at the end of the day, if you like it, if you want to get involved, just do it. How you can, like just do it, just go to a racetrack near your house and then just ask, you know, like at the end of the day, you need to ask, how does this work or how do I do this? Or I want to be like this guy or like this girl. I think if you want to do it, just do it. You obviously need to, if you want to work in motorsport and if you want to be a driver and want to get to a top level, you have to work a lot and then you need to sacrifice a lot of things. But I think that's something you will do if you actually want to do it and your passion is motorsport. Sound advice. Abby Marta, thank you so much for your time. Really appreciate it and best of luck this weekend. Thank you for having us. Next up, I should be joined by Hamda and Amna Alkabasey. Hello to both of you. I believe you're joining me from Miami. Yes, we are. Very nice, very nice. So why are you in Miami? What are you up to? We're on a little holiday because we thought, you know, after the first official test in Austin, it didn't make sense to go back home. Pretty long, 16-hour flight and, you know, to adapt to the, you know, time and schedule over here is going to be a lot more difficult for us. So we decided to stay. I'm not surprised. I mean, what a lovely way to spend a few days. So you both drive for MP Motorsport and you're sitting at the top of the Constructor's Standings. Congratulations. Hamda, you're third in the championship at the moment. I mean, how have you found the F1 Academy this year? Yeah, I found it very good. I mean, in the beginning of the season, I struggled a bit because of my injury and it took me a while to adapt to the car again and to be able to extract the most out of myself. But, you know, I felt like it was a good thing because I had less expectations and I started to perform better. And yeah, I think the results came naturally. So it was really good for me. And yeah, I hope we can stay on top of the Constructor's Standings and we finish like this for sure. Yeah. Tell me about that injury because this was an amazing story. You got injured, right? Just at the start of the year and it was a race against time, wasn't it? Was your wrist am I right in saying? Yeah, it was my wrist. Basically, my radius kind of snapped. It was mostly because when I crashed, I kept my hands on the steering wheel and yeah, that caused it. So it was mostly because I didn't remove my hands. But it happened so fast that I didn't really think of removing my hands from the steering wheel. And you know, I was also in sixth at the time. It was the last lap. I was so eager to finish in that position to get some points in that championship. And yeah, I was like always tense and that's how it happened. And then yeah, I was in late February. So beginning of March, I had less than two months to recover. In six weeks, basically, I had to be back in the car for the preseason test in Barcelona.

And I made it, but I only did five laps during that test. So I did nothing. Rita, I was driving with mostly my left arm. Nothing to do with my right arm. So just driving with one arm the whole time. And my father was very scared as well because he didn't want to rush into it. And then I would miss the first round because I rushed things. So yeah, it was risky. But at the same time, we had all the right people around me, all the physios, all the good people around me to help. And yeah, we made it to the first round and it was really good.

It's an incredible story. And I guess, yeah, when you talk there about you have low expectations, like you must have, there must have been a point before the season started where you thought, am I going to make it? Am I going to get to that first race? So how did you mentally stay on top of those emotions and just focus on getting recovery? Because it sounds like you recovered way ahead of the schedule that you were supposed to recover.

Yeah, basically, the doctor told me I needed four months to recover and I did it in six weeks. So it's a bit crazy. But I think in the end, it's all a mental thing. And I had also the people around me was everybody was always supportive and pushing my hopes up. So that helped, that made a big difference. And also like going into the preseason test, even though I was like driving five seconds off in Barcelona, I went to Paul Ricard and then the first session I was already P1 by like one tenth. But that's only because, you know, I'm eager to push myself and do well. And I ended that test around like P5 overall, P6 overall, I think, and it was still really good achievement for me considering I couldn't even use my right arm properly.

So yeah, it was good for me and it gave me more hope because I was like, if I can be six like this, what can I do when my arm starts working like a hundred percent? So it's just the mental strength started to be better. And I struggled a lot also mentally before the injury. So I think the injury helped me a lot and actually strengthened me even more. So yeah.

Motor racing is quite a hard sport at the best of times. But if you've only got one arm to do it with, I imagine that makes life even harder. Anna, tell me about your season. How have you enjoyed the F1 Academy this year? Yeah, I really enjoyed it. I haven't been racing for a full year.

So I was always doing the Formula Three Asia Championship, which happens in January and February once a year. And the last time I did that was two years ago. So I haven't been in the car for a very long time. So for me to be able to join F1 Academy for their great opportunity and to be able to start racing again and going to various tracks, tracks I never had the chance to visit throughout my racing career was something I wouldn't take for granted. I would say I completely, you know, I hats off for Susie Wulf for giving us this opportunity because now I'm back racing and I'm really happy to finally just be behind the wheel. I don't think, I just think I didn't make it clear in the intro. You are both sisters and I want to talk about that because I was thinking of, you know, racing siblings and you've got the Schumacher brothers of course, Michael and Ralph. And then we've got Emerson and Wilson, Fittipaldi. But I'm intrigued to get your take on what it's like racing as sisters. And you obviously race for the same team at the moment. So I guess there's a lot of working together and you have a close relationship. But go on, tell me what it's like for having a sister in the paddock. Actually, you're the first one who mentioned that we worked together. Most people were saying, you know, you guys are probably fighting the entire time or making each other out. So I'm glad you mentioned that. Yeah, we do help each other a lot. She learns from me, I learn from her. We use each other as reference, some corners I'm good, most corners she's better.

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So we kind of like help each other in a way. And I mean, if we were combined together, we would be, you know, the greatest stripes of all time. So you're, are you sharing data? Are you sharing kind of, like you said, all strategy and how to take corners? And yeah, tell me what else you, what other sort of things you share in terms of, in terms of information? Yeah, we share data and video, but also like on track, if, for example, I'm behind Anna, let's say in a race, and she sees that I'm faster, she slows down and lets me pass. We don't, we don't have this thing where we fight or we, you know, just to, we help each other because we know it's, it's like the smart way to go. And yeah, so props to her, like there's maybe three times this season where I was behind and she would let me pass because I was faster and she would continue to follow me. So yeah, yeah, so it's really good. And in qualifying, we also help each other. She uses me as reference or maybe in a track where a slipstream is important, we help each other. So it's good to have a sister in the team because then we can negotiate and we can help each other and it's always clear. So yeah.

I think Formula One drivers could learn a bit about teammates from you guys.

It sounds all very, all very civil over at MB.

And then I'm intrigued to know about your story of how you got into racing. And I guess obviously, I know that your dad, your dad's a racer and just, just tell me about how those early years started. How did you both get into racing? So my, I started seeing my father competing when I was nine years old and I was full-time gymnast. So I was like part of the elite division. And I kind of lost that spark with gymnastics because, you know, the competition is once a year and you train 364 times a year just for that one very competition. I kind of like lost interest in it. So I was, you know, asking my dad that I wanted to start racing at nine years old. And he took my word when I was 14. So I started when I was 14. So yeah, I was pushing him, pushing him, pushing her. I want to race, I want to race, I want to race. Sometimes I would even go to the rental track just to, you know, practice and do well and be like, yeah, you know, look, my time is really good. I'm faster than everyone else. So you really should put me in carding now. And Hamza, how did you get involved in motorsport?

For me, to be honest, it was something like, it just happened because for me, like, I didn't even want to get into racing, which is the weird part. And like, I was watching my sister for a year. She was driving in karting, racing in karting. And when I saw her, she was like very determined. She looked like she, she was enjoying the sport. And, and I was like, I didn't have anything at the time. And I really wanted to try it out. So I tried it out. My dad put me in a rental race just to try. I always said, no, I don't like this. I don't like this. And he was like, just try.

So then when I tried it, I loved it. So he's like, you see,

You were, you were a reluctant racer. I don't think many people, I don't think many people go down that route and almost don't want to do it, but get pushed into doing it. Wow.

It's because I was always like, afraid, or let's say, from the speed and stuff. I was more of like the, the, you know, safety side. She likes the, the, the risk and the aggression, but I wasn't like that. So yeah, well, when I got into it, I really loved it. Cause then there's also a calm side to racing, which I discovered and I really loved. And what was it like growing up in the UAE and how, how easy was it to go racing? What, what, what, what did your weekends look like?

If that's when you raced? I mean, it wasn't very easy because we had school during that time.

And sometimes the race weekends were held during our exams or something. And it was very difficult

to try and make our school understand about the sport because it's very new to them. They didn't understand, you know, karting and the commitment we had to karting. So it was kind of difficult to balance that, but then eventually we, we had an understanding. Other than that, I mean the competition level, I mean, I started in juniors, so it was really hard. The level already was super difficult for me as I started very late. So yeah, I was all about trying to gain experience and it took me around four years to finally like get a podium and win a championship.

So, so yeah, I mean the level in the UAE, the karting level is pretty high. I think people in Europe underestimate the level when it, when it came to karting in our region until they do compete and then they realize, oh, it's actually really hard. And in terms of you progressing and getting more opportunities in the UAE, what, how easy was that for you? And particularly as women, how did you find that process of, because essentially your trailblazers in the UAE and it's, and it's an amazing story and it's great to see. So, so what sort of barriers and challenges did you come up against in that period of your life? For me, when I first had the announcement to compete in Formula Four, people were not very open to it. I mean, I had a lot of criticism. I had a lot of people being, you know, it's not a girl sport. It's mainly for men. Why are you in the sport? You should do something else like something that's meant to be feminine. So, I never really, it never really bothered me to listen to these, you know, assumptions and accusations of others. I just wanted to enjoy what I did. And my first sponsor was Kaspersky Lab, which was a European sponsor. So, they were the first people to believe in me and they were the first to sponsor a woman in general in motor sports. So, I would say the, it was very challenging for, for us actually, because we're from the Middle East and in the beginning it was kind of taboo. But now people are more accepting and more supportive than they were the first time I started. So, yeah, I'm happy to see the changes and I see actually women sending me messages and telling me, because of you and your sister and your support from your father, my father allows me to do this and to do that. So, I'm really happy that we were able to create an opportunity for other women.

That's an amazing story. And Hamda, what, what do you make of your, what did you make of your sister going through that process and how did you support her through that?

I think for me, her going through that process actually helped me. She kind of carved the path for me. So, and for sure to many other girls after me as well. So, I think it was, it was a good thing that she pushed it. You know, she pushed my father together into the sport. She pushed it a lot. So, then it helped me through. And now I get, I know a lot of girls from the region who actually are in karting right now and are racing even in Europe, Imarati girls. So, it's, it's a big change and it's starting to develop. And yeah, I really like what I'm seeing.

What's the change been then? So, I mean, obviously in your careers, which are relatively, you know, short, you're not 40, 50, 60 years old. So, so how, how has it changed in the UAE and indeed the whole Middle East in terms of getting more women behind the wheel of racing cars?

It has changed actually a lot. I mean, we see a lot of girls competing in not just, you know, local girls. There's a lot of girls in general competing in the UAE and karting. We see a few competing also internationally, as my sister mentioned. So, it's really, I'm really happy to see that change coming, especially, you know, now water sports is becoming more difficult.

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I mean, it's not as how it is before. I mean, with a lot of changes, a lot of drivers having so much experience, a lot of money being invested. It's a lot of, it's more challenging than it was before. So, to see girls still taking up on this challenge and competing, I'm actually really proud of them. It's an amazing story. And before I let you go, I want to ask this weekend, obviously, it's going to be a great spectacle. And, you know, we're all looking forward to watching the F1 Academy on TV. What are you guys most excited about this weekend in Austin? I mean, you've just been there for the test, obviously. So, get us excited. What can we look forward to? It's going to be really interesting because, you know, it's a support of F1. It's always interesting when it supports the F1. It's also being broadcasted in a lot of channels and in my region. And I think we're going to get a lot of people from our region also watching us and then they could see what it's really about. So, the coverage is, it's amazing. And, you know, thanks to F1 Academy for it because now people in my country can see what we're actually doing and, you know, how different it is. Because once you see it live, you understand how the racing is. And I'm sure the racing would be really close and very interesting. The season so far, you know, race to race. Everybody has been improving and, you know, the gaps are getting closer. So, it's going to be very challenging and tough.

So, yeah, that's what it's all about. And yeah, we're happy to be a part of it.

See, that was a great sell. That was brilliant. Very good job.

Thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate it. I can't wait to watch the F1 Academy this weekend. And it's going to be broadcast live on Sky Sports. And as we mentioned, loads of, if you're not in the UK, it's going to be broadcast on loads of other channels around the world as well. So, that's the F1 Academy this weekend. We'll be back next week. Until then, bye for now.