

[Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / 'We prepare our athletes to perform' | What's it like to train and work with F1 drivers... and what do they eat?

Hello everyone, welcome to this week's episode and I'm joined by potentially two of the fittest people in the paddock, the Alfa Tauri performance coaches, Michael Italiano, who's worked with Daniel Ricciardo and is currently with Yuki Sonoda and Piri Salmela, who has worked with Daniel Cavia, Pierre Gasly and currently with Nick De Vries. Hello to you both.

It's great to get you on, really appreciate your time and I'm really excited for this,

Chax. I think we're going to learn an awful lot about not only what you do, but we're going to get a bit more insight into what Formula One drivers have to go through, the physical demands on their body. But Michael, kick things off, a performance coach. What is it?

Yeah, I like to sum it up by just saying we prepare our athletes to perform. I like that as like a little summary, quick summary I guess, but if you want to go into the more complex things, I think we can talk more about that today. But essentially we're taking care of our drivers, we're going to every race to make sure that they're physically conditioned also mentally and also from in some standpoint, we look after their nutrition as well. So we're there on a race weekend, I guess, to make sure that everything goes smoothly for our drivers and making sure that yeah, they're all prepared, ready to go before every session.

It's pretty involved. There's a lot of elements, aren't there? On that to your role.

Piri, we're recording this on the Tuesday before the Austrian Grand Prix. So why don't you kind of take us through what this week is going to entail for yourself? You know, usually we receive the schedule like the week before, so we received our plan yesterday and that kind of sets the tone for the week. And mainly for us it's about being on top of the schedule and plan and make sure that we know when to train, when to eat, when to arrive at the right location, etc. It's a lot about kind of managing the schedule and the planning itself. So it's more like being on top of the schedule all the time. I'd love to have you responsible for my schedule.

Okay, we've got lots of questions in from people at home, so I'm going to try and try and inspire some of those throughout this interview. But Erika would like to know, as a trainer, when do you get the most nervous? Piri, let's start with you. I have to say, over the years, I get less and less nervous. You know, I think when I started 10 years ago, I got nervous since Thursday onwards. But now, after 200 races, I think you started to learn how to manage the emotions and actually enjoy the race and the nerve-racking race starts, etc. So I have to say, these days, I enjoy every moment of it. Michael, what about you? I'm similar. As the more experienced you get, you become in Formula One, the more you can control your nerves. But I will say, definitely, quality. If you're in Q3 and you're really pushing, I think I was always nervous in Q3 and the race start. I still do get nervous at race starts, quality, not so much. But yeah, race start is probably the most nerve-racking because that's probably, obviously, because it's out of your control and a lot can happen. Piri, can you enjoy the race weekend now? Are you in a position where you sort of look forward to it and working with the drivers? That's something you really enjoy. Totally. Because now, again, I always say, experience something that you cannot buy. This can't be bought online. And I think the skill comes first and the experience then remasters the skill. And now you can enjoy more and have an overview of what's going on. And you're

more sure about your own actions and the perception what you receive from the drivers.

So you feel like you're a little bit more in control of what's actually happening in that space.

So actually, I would say so, yes. What about you, Michael?

[Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / 'We prepare our athletes to perform' | What's it like to train and work with F1 drivers... and what do they eat?

Yeah, I think as years go on, you tend to enjoy it a lot more. I think when I first started, there's a lot of pressure and there's a lot to get used to in Formula One as well. And especially when results aren't doing too well, you do feel the pressure and you do have that heightened expectation. And it's tough trying not to get too emotionally invested, if that makes sense. Because when you get too emotionally invested, I think that can weigh on yourself where as a coach, you need to make sure that you're on all the time and you're there to be the sounding board and making sure that you're sharp and mentally on. So just learning that throughout the years of just understanding the balance between not being too emotionally invested and making sure that you're there for your role. Yeah, I think you've got to remember that it's a result driven sport. At the same time, we are there for the athletes. So we've got to be there for the backbone, whatever they need to be successful in their own driving and the performance itself. So I think I learned to take a little bit, step back and be there for them when they need to. Yeah, it's a selfless role, isn't it, when you're working so closely for the success of someone else. Piri, take us back to when you started in Formula One and you first came in as a rookie yourself, right, with Daniel Caviar. How was that process of working with not only a rookie in Formula One, but you being a rookie yourself? I would say it was a total shock therapy. I had no clue about Formula One and I even wondered myself what I'm doing here and is there something that I can actually help for. But quite soon after, I realized that okay, human body is the same, whether it's me and you and the same physiological principles applies. And with Daniel being so young, there were so many areas to improve. And when you start with a project like a young driver, you start from the foundation. So that gave me that buffer to take time and learn what this sport is about. But I have to say that the start was hard. I had no clue about this sport because at the same time, it was never really my target. I have to say I got very lucky to get an opportunity in somewhat sport that I didn't even knew that really existed as a performance coach role. So in that respect, it was really interesting times. Michael, how did you start working with Daniel? Yeah, I'd probably say a little bit of luck there, Matt. I was a strength conditioning coach back in Perth, WA. And at the end of 2017, Daniel randomly offered me the role. So I was friends with Daniel Pryor in following his journey. And unexpectedly, just woke up one day, it was in November, one morning, about to head to the gym at 6am for my first client. And Daniel sent me a message saying, look, I want to see if you want to consider coming on board for next year. Can we have a meeting when I come back to Perth in December? Yeah, everything hit real quick. It was like a single swim type of scenario for me and similar to Pryor. I was coming in with a very, very developed driver with a lot of expectations. So I was like, Pryor, I didn't really know much about Formula One. So I sat back and was a bit of a sponge in that first year. I let Daniel lead the way in what worked for him. Because at that time, I think he'd done six or seven years in Formula One. So he had an idea what worked and what didn't work. And then when I wanted to start laying some principles, I think I needed a bit of time before I started making some changes. So I remember in 2018, first year, first race, Melbourne Grand Prix, home race. It was the first year of drive to survive. And I just remember getting out the car and there was just literally about 40 cameras. And he just looked at me because you could tell I was quite flustered. I was completely taken aback. And he goes, oh, don't worry. Then all like this. So I learned a lot in that first year because we had such a fantastic start to the year. And then we had a really, really, I guess you could say mediocre end to the year. So

[Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / 'We prepare our athletes to perform' | What's it like to train and work with F1 drivers... and what do they eat?

I learned the emotional roller coaster of Formula One very quickly.

Pry, what about Formula One when you came in, obviously quite fresh to the sport? What about it surprised you? What were your first impressions of the sport as a whole?

As a whole, really, like the dynamics, you know, it's not a traditional sports environment where everybody's sort of performance stuff. In Formula One, you have engineers, you have mechanics, you have different type of stakeholders, you have so that the organization is much broader compared to other traditional sports where all of the people are more or less, so to say, performance staff or very performance-oriented from a traditional sports mindset. So I think this was the biggest, biggest surprise. And that really took me time to kind of understand that actually the language that I'm speaking probably doesn't translate the same way that I was expecting that it was doing before. So actually now we need to learn a little bit how the different departments and how these different stakeholders fall into the same, you know, game as a whole. And how do I get my own message across the board? Because in the end, we only have, in the end, very few people that has really have this human performance mindset that is really looking after the human performance side of the things. Most of the people are working towards the car and then the image itself of the team or the brand itself. So to learn the dynamics, how it works, also I have to say, it's a very particular sport because you have the cockpit, you have the helmet, so you barely can't see any human action. So you can't really see how stressful actually it is. So understanding that actually what happened, what's happened in the car and how stressful it is. And, you know, it's external forces that is driving the human around the circuit. So that kind of concept was very, it took me a time to understand like how it actually works and what's important, why one driver is today fast, why someone is slow today, and what makes the difference. So I would say this was a really, really important time for me to learn about this sport because I had no motorsport background. So to actually understand what's the important, because I always built my philosophy on what's the most important thing, what's the second most important thing, that we actually, we use our time on those most important elements. So this was the key pillars for me to learn about this sport. Michael, how long did it take you to adapt to Formula One? Because there are just so many, like Piri said, there are so many stakeholders, you know, even in the performance realm, a lot of drivers will have performance engineers as well. So I guess you're having to do a bit of teamwork and work with a pretty broad team of people to get the best out of the driver. Yeah, I'm going to say it probably took me a couple years. I'm probably still am adapting because I've just, I've been bunny hopping teams for the last five years. So I think it's my fourth team now. So just when you think you're comfortable here, you're moving teams. But, yeah, I think to add to what Piri said, I think the two biggest things for me is I didn't realize how much of the car setup can actually dictate the driver's actual performance. That's one thing I really didn't understand until I actually got into Formula One and was sitting in the garage and listening to Daniel speak to his engineer. And the second was jet lag. Yeah, holy, I did not realize how much jet lag is brrr. And as to how much it can just wear on you and your athlete. So that was something I kind of got caught out with, I think, initially, it's just not understanding how to, I guess, combat and manage jet lag accordingly. And I got sick quite a lot in first year. And I think, you know, as a coach, if you're sick, you're no use to your driver. So, yeah, I got a little bit caught out there not taking care of myself enough the first year.

[Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / 'We prepare our athletes to perform' | What's it like to train and work with F1 drivers... and what do they eat?

Yeah, I have to say that the sport is so complex. And that was surprised me the most. You know, like, you have so, so many different elements of what has an impact to the end result. You know, like, as a traditional coach, you think that, okay, if you make them stronger, faster, fitter, probably they're going to improve their performance. But Formula One itself is so complex. There's so many different, you know, elements and stakeholders that has an impact that understanding

that the end game, what is actually important and what's less important and how us as a performance coaches, can we directly impact the performance or is it completely secondary and indirect transfers would be applying to the driver. So understanding this whole concept is, I think, was the key for me. Michael, you obviously spent many years with Daniel. You now have started working with Yuki Sinoda. I'm going to guess from the outside that they're quite different to work with. I don't know if you're going to agree with me or disagree with me. But what's it been like moving from working, you know, with a friend in Daniel to now working with Yuki?

Yeah, spot on mate. It's very different. And I think, I think it's quite obvious, like Yuki, Yuki is into his third year. He's very raw and fresh. There's a lot for him to learn where Daniel was quite established when I came on board. So, you know, very different characters, very different areas of their career when I came in, essentially. So, you know, I've come into Yuki where you could probably argue, you know, it's a bit of a make or break season for Yuki. Usually that third or fourth year in Formula One, you've got to start to show some improvement because you've always got

the next new youngster knock on the door. And with Daniel, you know, there was always expectations

to always do well. So, yeah, very different. Both very equally funny in their own rights, both, to be fair, both very much foodies. So, you know, still eating very well. And Yuki's always taking me to the best Japanese restaurants wherever we go. So, I'm not complaining because I love Japanese cuisine. But yeah, I'd probably say like, yeah, definitely like, definitely a different coaching concept for Yuki when it comes to Daniel. Like with Daniel, you know, he already kind of established his professionalism and his maturity where with Yuki, I think it's pretty fair to say, you know, Yuki wouldn't argue with this, you know, he's still trying to develop his leadership skills and his maturity and also understanding himself as a person as well, because he's still figuring himself out. So, yeah, very different dynamics that I'm currently working with. And you know what? I'm enjoying it. It's been a nice new fresh role for me. We've got a question on Instagram from Eva, which is to you, Peri. How was it working with Pierre for so many years and being by his side about the Red Bull demotion, which obviously he was promoted from Tor Rosso to the main team and then moved back to the sister team mid-season. So, how was that process? What did he need from you throughout that time in his life?

I think these are the moments that you kind of learned from the books, you know, this is something that you kind of be very well prepared for. But it's a moment of crisis. You firstly, you want to stabilize, you want to understand what's happening, then you want to re-plan, and then you just move on. And I think with us, we always had the mentality with Pierre that every day is an opportunity. And we kind of control everything, no matter if it was a practice, if it was a race, if it was whatever, every day was a competition for us in a way. So, every day

was for us opportunity. And also throughout that experience, I think it was a life turning moment for Pierre. And I think he learned a lot and also kind of illustrates who he is today. So, yes, it was a hard time. At the same time, it was life learning moments and times for him. And I have to say, very grateful for being part of it as well. Because I think it also taught me a lot about life, this sport itself, and you know, how to get through the crisis. I always say that you never know how strong you are before you touch the bottom. Michael, we've spoken about the differences between some of the drivers, but are there traits that you see across all the drivers on the grid? You know, obviously, we all know they're great drivers, they're incredibly fast, but are there any other traits that all of them seem to have to get to the peak of motorsport? Yeah, I think I can only honestly comment on my experience with Daniel and Yuki, because I don't really have, I guess, much of a deeper understanding of all the other drivers. But if there was, you know, if I'm to comment on a, I guess, one main characteristic between Daniel and Yuki that I kind of feel definitely can, I guess, define why they're so good, is their ability to focus and to get into that flow state. So, you know, if you are an athlete, everyone knows that, you know, getting into this flow state, this A-game state where you're just in this hyper focus scenario where everything else just almost feels like you're in tunnel vision, essentially. That is something that I've just, I found so fascinating that Daniel and Yuki can do so easily. Literally, as soon as they get in the cockpit, I can, I can see before they put their helmet on, I can see their eyes tighten up, I can see their facial expressions really, really hone in, and I can, I can automatically see that there's nothing else kind of matters, they're fully engaged into what's the, into the job ahead, essentially. So, and that's not easy to do as an athlete, you know, that's, that's, that's probably the biggest, that's probably the biggest skill, like, you know, any athlete could, could, could, could have, if they wanted to, if they could choose something is to actually get into their flow state consistently, and know when and how to do that. And yeah, from my experience, Yuki and Daniel do that very, very well. Yeah, I have to say, like, what's again, very unique to this sport is like the sport specific intelligence they have. You know, it's not only about driving and executing the motor skills, pedaling and steering, but it's actually the processing, the information, delivering and understanding what's going on and being able to adapt so quickly. So I would say like the adaptability, for example, it's something that is like, if we know what's happening in the race, how the creep changes almost every lap and that information that they're able to gather and deliver and adjust for their driving, I think that's super impressive skill, what they're doing consistently. So these are something like, which impresses me and how do they understand the tires, how do they, how the sense of motoric ability for them to understand the car behavior, how the rear moves, how do they need to adjust them, their steering patterns, etc. So I think that's something that sports specific intelligence is super impressive. We've seen, haven't we, in recent weeks, I think Fernando in Baku saw an overtake, didn't he, from Lance or something on one of the big screens and was able to talk on the radio about that. And you just think, you're driving a car at the speed you're driving the car at, how on earth can you process external information and also keep your eye on the road and be able to do everything in the cockpit, it's remarkable stuff. We've got a tweet from Claire, who would like to know what the most exciting moment of your career has been. Michael, start with you, I mean, Daniel's got eight wins in Formula One, he doesn't have to be a win, but I guess maybe one

of those wins might be a highlight for you. Yeah, I think, I mean, the obvious one is Monaco, because he, I think he, I think he had a perfect weekend that weekend, I think he went quickest in all practice sessions, quality and one, but the more I think about it, I'm probably going to say the Monza win. And the reason for that is because there's a lot of adversity, you know, Daniel was clearly struggling in the McLaren and he was, you know, similar to, you know, what Piru spoke about

with Pierre, he was going through, you know, quite a low in his career. To be honest, it probably was the first low of his career, because since he came on as a junior, it was kind of just up, up, up. And I think this was the first time where he was actually experiencing some difficulties. So yeah, I think that win was probably the most exciting, just kind of see him just keep battling away and prove some doubters wrong. That was, that felt like a really fulfilling weekend. And he was good, he was good all weekend that weekend as well. He was good in the sprint, which then put him on, I think he put him on front row. Yeah, put him on front row for the race. So yeah, I'll say, I'll say Monza.

Piru, I was going to suggest that yours might also be based at Monza as well.

It is, I would say it's top two, but I would say even the Brazil the year before, you know, we had the Red Bull year. And then then we went back to, you know, Toro Rosso. And then remembering that the last corner, Luis chasing Pierre and they were side by side to the finishing line and Pierre finishing P2. This was pretty, this was really sentimental moment, I would say for his career. And this kind of had a big booster for his self-belief and, you know, for his career itself.

And that I have to say this, this moment still gives me goosebumps, you know, because you could almost write the book from that year itself. And this is something that kind of captures the moment itself. What did you, did you notice much of a change in him after that result? It was, I have to say, I always say that it was not only those two, three races where he scored podium because there was also many other races that we could have been on a podium or could have scored a good result. It was just always doing our part and doing the best we can and be there where the opportunity is. And those moments just kind of came together. So it was just maybe a confirmation, let's say, you know, we can.

Lena on Twitter would like to know, and this, Michael, is probably the start with you. What are the biggest challenges of switching teams as a performance coach? You alluded to earlier that you've done a bit of hopping between them in recent years. What are the biggest challenges? Yeah, I think the biggest challenge is the unknown of the car, especially for your driver.

You know, they're jumping into a completely different car. So you don't really know how things are going to go. You know, the obvious stuff, you know, new staffs understanding their processes and how they operate and building that report again, right? Because I think people looking from the outside in, maybe they don't quite understand how much of a team sport it is. I know when the race goes on, it's like, yes, there's an athlete in the cockpit and there's one other person talking to him, but it's a very, very team-orientated sport. So, yeah, building rapport with, you know, the everyone, essentially, and understanding their procedures and how things operate. Like, most of it's the same, but it is a little bit different from team to team. So, yeah, I think just familiarising yourself with, I guess, their procedures and then that's pretty much it. Besides that, you're wearing different team shirt colour and you're still in the garage and everyone's there trying to win a race. So, yeah, I think the obvious thing is just trying to get your

[Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / 'We prepare our athletes to perform' | What's it like to train and work with F1 drivers... and what do they eat?

athlete up to speed with everything and trying to get him to adapt to the car as best as possible. And that's always the most probably nervous thing, I think, you know, because you can always prepare

and your pre-season preparation doesn't really change much from team to team. But as Piru was talking about how things change so much in the car, whether it's the feel of the car, where it's the tyres, all these completely changes when you jump into a new car. So, that's probably the most challenging thing is just like, I guess, just waiting helplessly, just making sure to see how your driver goes in a new car. And, yeah, like in the Renault, it was quite seamless, but unfortunately in the McLaren, it was quite difficult.

Yeah, so much of your control there, isn't that?

Yeah, I would say like you would really divide it into, you know, like I said, again, there's so many stakeholders in place. And finding that sweet spot on that working relationship, you know, that always takes time. Like Michael said, it's team sport and there's so many different people that has an impact to the end result. So finding that sweet spot on that working relationship always takes time. It's the same for everybody when they go to a new workplace. It always takes time that you kind of optimize, you know, the efficiency. And then it's a completely different scenario is then the car itself, you know, like not every car behaves the same, that the mechanical kinematics, kinetics itself, the way you drive the functionalities, these are different stories. And we can see that some people are just quicker than others. And it's not only because it's drivers, it is also like, because the cars are just different. And I'm not envious for drivers at all, because, you know, it's not an easy task. It looks so obvious from the outside that when someone is struggling, but people that are inside, they know how complex it is. And then it really, really takes time. And maybe sometimes someone never gets there really. And it's not that they are bad drivers, or it's just, you know, it's just the difficult puzzle to put together.

You have to be so good to get into Formula One. You know, it's even if you're struggling in Formula One, you are still one of the top drivers in the entire world. And I think that's what maybe some people forget is that actually these guys are the cream of the crop. And yeah, you know, it's a tough role. You know, it's been, again, a good, good reminder for me this year, working with the third rookie now, is that what's the learning aching it is when a new driver comes to the sport? How difficult it is to adjust, you know, this year, we got one and a half day of testing before the season start. And then you expected fight for the against the best, you know, like, it's a really, really, really difficult sport to come in. And you really have to be a good to get on top on top on this, these sports. And like I said, again, I've done it now three times. And I always remember every single time how difficult it is. But it's been, again, like a good reminder, like it's really, really tricky. And people who knows what's going behind the scenes, they know how complex and difficult it is actually, get up to speed in this sport, because you really have no time becoming a bit of a rookie specialist, Perry.

You're the go to man for rookies in Formula One. Michael, take us through the physical demands placed on a driver throughout a race. And how do you train for that process? And what goes on to their bodies? Yeah, like, I think the obvious one g force. So a lot of the g forces placed promptly on their on their neck. You also have like the heat. So the heat stresses on the body. So they're obviously in a cockpit. And they're wearing fire resistant suits. So on on hot days, when they're in the cockpit, they got the engine behind them, they're in fire resistant suit.

[Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / 'We prepare our athletes to perform' | What's it like to train and work with F1 drivers... and what do they eat?

They've got the hot rubber ties around them. They've got this. So they've almost got this massive bubble of heat around them. And then they can't their body, I guess, has difficulty cooling down because they're in these fire resistant suit, which isn't ventilated, right? So you've got that, you got that physical demand. And you've also got like the vibrations of the car, which is another physical demand. So, you know, they're, they're fighting the car consistently, you know, through, through, through turning and braking and cornering. So those are probably the three biggest like, like physical attributes of what, I guess, the athletes endure over over a race. How we, how we train for that, I'm sure every, every coach has got their, their methods, but essentially, you know, training the neck is 100% probably the most important reason for it is if, if the driver, you could almost imagine, like if you're driving a car, I probably shouldn't say try this at home. But if you obviously tilt your head whilst driving, your eye line is skewed. And then, you know, so your, your, your, your, your perception changes, your judgment changes, and also, I guess your, your judgment of, of the actual, your, your, your eye line and your race line can change. So trying to keep your head as neutral as possible is, is very important when, when racing. And part of that is having good neck strength, because these guys are, they're enduring some pretty, pretty high Gs throughout, throughout the season, especially because these cars are getting quicker. So, you know, as the cars get quicker and quicker, they are generally experiencing more G force. And, you know, so some high speed corners, you know, they can get up to 5g, which is, which is crazy amounts. So, which is, it's almost essentially, you can always be saying it's about 35 kilos with a force placed on their neck, you know, so that's, so it's the next big one. And I like to focus quite a lot on the posterior chain to the back of the body. So the calves, hamstrings, glutes, and lower back, mainly because of like through the braking, when, you know, people probably don't realise, but the braking force is, is, is a lot. So these guys are slamming the brakes quite heavily. So a lot of force has, goes into the, to braking. So when, so when they are breaking the car down so fast, a lot of the forces is being endured through their calves, hamstrings and glutes. And then through cornering, they're also using their hips to feel the car. So there's quite, quite a lot of load going through their glutes and lower back. So they're probably the main areas of focus. But that's not like, that's not the Bible. And I'll give you an example, because like this year, Yuki has struggled a lot with his upper body strength. So I've focused quite a lot on Yuki's upper body conditioning this year, a lot more than what I previously have with Daniel, because Daniel already had that conditioning naturally, or you could probably say because of his training age, Daniel has just had a lot more pre-seasons and been in the sport a lot more. So yeah, I wouldn't say that's like how I train every driver. It all depends on your driver's profile and what they need. But yeah, that pretty much sums up what I kind of like focus on. It's a difficult and unique sport, because you kind of really see the human moment, because you're inside a cockpit. So you kind of really see the stresses on the body. Secondly, like what's the difference is like in running or whatever, you internally brought it producing the forces. So you're planting the face, the crown, and you, you personally producing the forces. In Formula One, you have a lot of resisting forces. So rather than internally producing, you're externally resisting. So the concept is very different. And that's makes it very unique to other sports or all, and you know, like even the breathing pattern while they're driving is like when they go through Barcelona, it's like two-thirds of the lap,

[Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / 'We prepare our athletes to perform' | What's it like to train and work with F1 drivers... and what do they eat?

they don't breathe because they're holding their breath when they're contracting in the car and the cockpit. And not only is the stress while they're driving is, but understanding the external stress that this sport causes, which comes through traveling and external commitments. So I always say that there's internal and external stressors in this sport. And going through the year requires some serious resilience, body resilience, because it's not only what's happening in the car, it's also what's happening outside the car. And, and I would say this really requires some serious body resilience. I've got a tweet here from Zienta who would like to know, how do you help the drivers deal with the mental aspect of F1? And Piri, I mean, yeah, how do you, how do you help drivers get over bad results? Because obviously you've got the physical side, but I'm guessing there is a, there is a balance, right, between the physical and the mental side of the school. So I have to say that at very, very early years, I already started working with a sports psychologist, because whether it was directly with the driver or indirectly through me, but I found enormous help with having someone on my side, going through the different processes, going through different targets, understanding what's going on, what are the focus points, and being a sounding board. And, and, and it's not about treating an issue, it's really like mentoring and being sounding board there for, for the moments during the highs and during the lows.

And those both aspects, highs and lows are the part of the process. So, so I always have had someone

on my side helping me in the coaching process, whether it was directly with the, with an athlete or indirectly. And, and for me, that has been a super essential part of the my coaching approach. Michael, it's a bit of a cliché, isn't it? Don't work with your friends. Don't go into business with your friends. And obviously you were friends with Daniel before you started that working relationship. So how did you adapt to having to ultimately, you know, when it was business time, you really had to knuckle down as a pair, didn't you, and work hard?

Yeah, that was something that I brought up initially in our first ever chat, when he wants, you know, when Daniel wanted me on board was, I said to him, I said, look, you know, I'm happy to come on board, but you know, you're going to have to put trust in me as a coach, like there's that natural trust as a friend. But the truth is, I don't want to just be part of your entourage, like I want to come on board and make a difference. I don't want to be that guy that's in the paddock just to be a friend. So that was something he agreed on. And I said, look, when I put my coaching hat on, you need to respect that and you need to listen. And then obviously there'll be times where, you know, I put my friend hat on and we're mates. And yeah, surprisingly, Matt, that kind of kind of like happened quite naturally. I think maybe my body language and my tone of voice when I when I need to be a coach kind of changes a little bit and the language I use. So maybe Daniel could really pick that up quite naturally. But okay, hang on a second, he's being a coach here. So that transition actually happened quite naturally and quite easily. I thought it'd be a bit of a struggle at the start, him getting me when I'm a coach and whatnot. But no, that kind of was a bit seamless. So that was yeah, quite lucky on my side. I want to start talking about nutrition and food and what F1 drivers eat. And you mentioned the G-forces going around. And I imagine that's not something you want to be doing is eating directly before you get in a Formula One car. But Michael,

[Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / 'We prepare our athletes to perform' | What's it like to train and work with F1 drivers... and what do they eat?

I guess, Yuki, well, I was looking, I was looking at some quotes on food by Yuki and he's, I think this was at the start of the 2022 season where he said he was getting takeaway for breakfast, lunch and dinner. And I'm going to guess that's not happening anymore since you've started working with him. But what do you know, how has his nutrition changed? And what are you trying to get your your drivers to eat for and during races? Yeah, I mean, like I said earlier, I think as Yuki goes through, you know, year by year, he's, you know, becoming a lot more mature and understanding what what's required from the one, you know, whether it's training or eating well. So all credit to Red Bull, you know, we go to the Red Bull Athletic Athletic Performance Center in Austria every year. And they've got a sports dietitian there. So we get quite a lot of help when it comes to like our hydration protocol and, you know, the type of foods that we should be eating. But Yuki has reminded me of how fast a male's metabolism can be at 22. He eats like a horse and purists purists probably see the portions first hand. But but no, look, like as a rough as a rough example, you know, in the mornings, we probably have like an eggs Benedict. So just having two poached eggs on like some multigrain muffins with with some hollandaise sauce. And sometimes he has like a smoke salmon on it as well. And then usually lunchtime, we might have some like beef tacos, you know, and smash the tacos with some vegetables and some some healthy fats like avocado. But but yeah, as you said, Matt, we probably wouldn't ideally want to eat within a two hour window of jumping in the car. So yes, if he's having if he's having lunch at one, it's because his next session is either at three or four. And then at at night is generally a more carbohydrate dense meal. So we'll still have our elements of protein, but it'll be probably a portion of two to one to carb. So like a seafood pasta. So we might have some prawns in some shrimps in this big seafood pasta for Yuki. So that's probably like a like a nice little rough day of what Yuki eats. And yeah, and then probably in between maybe as a snack, you'll have some yogurt with some with some raw honey and some berries.

So yeah, we've we've got him eating well. He's leaning up and he's he's he's getting some compliments from some other drivers, which is making him happy. So he's finally realized that eating well helps. Yeah, very, very healthy indeed. Harry, what about the I mean, you mentioned, you know, obviously, we've got Austria this week and you got the schedule. Was it last week, you got the schedule for this week? So you actually yesterday? Oh, yesterday, apologies. Yeah. So you got the schedule yesterday. So you now is part of your job kind of going through that schedule and trying to work out things like food and when is a good time to eat. But then more broadly, what else are you putting into into next schedule?

So it's because this schedule is actually already full. So it's more of of going through and optimizing it. Like they have they have their shoot in the shooting with Red Bull tomorrow, that the track activities start on Thursday, it's it's engineering meetings, it's media. So it's already packed is so it's more like overviewing and making sure that we we are optimizing the available time we have. And then we try to, if there's three slots, what are we doing? Is it is it recovery? Or are we doing something that that actually putting some training in? So for example, tomorrow, tomorrow is going to look like if they're going to do shooting in Salzburg afternoon, we're going to do a preparation session for the weekend. And then we're going to have a dinner Thursday, we hit the track, trackwalk, engineering meetings, media. And then we have then quick therapy session,

[Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / 'We prepare our athletes to perform' | What's it like to train and work with F1 drivers... and what do they eat?

and then we are pretty much ready to jump in the car.

Wow, it's a lot it's a lot going on. Michael, do you find that perhaps sometimes it's like over scheduled? You know, it really feels like I guess it has to be but for a Formula One driver, there really nothing is left to chance, is it? Everything has to be planned to a T.

Yeah, it's probably our biggest challenge and probably my biggest pet hate of Formula One is just seeing how much how how the I guess how busy their schedules are across the race weekend.

Like if you look at any other athlete, whether it's a basketball or footballer, if you ask them what they're doing their match day, they'll tell you they wake up at eight, nine o'clock, and they'll just literally stroll themselves into the stadium and they've got three hours to prepare.

Where for us on a Sunday, it's we get to the track and honestly, I only see Yuki for 45 minutes before the race and that's to prepare and set up. But besides that, he's in engineering meetings, he's got meet and greets, he may have to do fan zone, he might do a paddock club appearance.

So and so I'm just making sure that okay, everything's set up ready to go. So as soon as he walks into this in this racing room, we're ready to warm up because we've only got 45 minutes.

So it is a very big struggle for us as coaches because we are very limited on what we can do on a race weekend because their schedules are so condensed and packed. So yeah, from my side, it's like just making sure everything goes smooth so that way Yuki can finish the day

and just get quality sleep because mostly from Thursday onwards, there's no time to train and to be fair, you're not going to gain anything by training in those days anyway. So yeah,

it's just about sleep quality recovery, trying to fit in a massage where you can

and just keeping the headspace good. So sometimes they're a little bit frustrated

because they've had long Thursdays, 8 hours of media, they're mentally exhausted. So you're just trying to keep them in the right head zone. Piri, we're used to probably seeing you guys the most on the grid before a race. I think that's traditionally when we see the balls dropping with Pierre and the reactions and all that sort of stuff. So what is that period of time like?

Just pre-race, you're on the grid, try and describe what you're up to and what you're doing now.

So I would say I would call it, it's about aerosol management. So you know, and every single individual is a little bit different. Someone is really narrowly driven already and they're super pumped up so you don't need to pump up them more. Some other one is like a little bit more sluggish and more laid back so you can need to lift it up a little bit. So you always try to

learn with your athlete that where is their optimum sweet spot, how to get them in the right mind space, that they feel sharp but not overly aerosol, which makes them more nervous and more prone to mistakes. So that's always a learning curve with your own driver. And for us with Pierre, for example, we had these few triggers. We had the music playlist, which was playing on Sunday.

So this was a sign that today is a race day. Then we had these few drills with what we did before the race. So these were just triggers telling to the mind that okay, today is a game day.

And I always say like you don't need to do a big pep talk on Sunday anymore. You know, you've done leading up to the preparation. They have so many information they receive from engineers. So you that you just have these few signs, which is whether it's a music or something else. So it's a game day food or whatever. These are just like the triggers to put them in the right mind space.

And for us, one of them was the ball drill that Pierre is still doing. Talk us through that. How did that come about? What was the what was the purpose of it? This was really just like a switch on button. It was not like, okay, this ball drill will make him drive faster. It was just

really for this arousal management. It was just like this switch on button that okay, now it's time to hit the track. It was really just like it was more for the mind and that now is a game time. Well, we see it a lot. And I think probably even viewers at home when they see it, oh, goodness me, we're pretty close to lights out. I think it gets people at home quite excited. Michael, we've got some shall we say older drivers now in Formula One. We've got Fernando

Alonso at the age of 41. We've got Lewis at 38. What are the challenges with aging? I'm going to put them in inverted commas because I'll definitely get in trouble if I say that they're old. But what are the challenges with with those guys as they get older? And, you know, I mean, how old could you realistically race in Formula One? Do you think?

Well, I think just biologically is probably the main challenge, you know, to think once you hit 30, your test Australian starts to naturally decline, same as your eyesight. So, you know, when I think as you get older, you know, even recovery, you know, you have slower recovery. So I think when you get like past your 30s, it's almost like rather than training harder, you need to train smarter. And that's probably something that Lewis and and Fernando are doing is, you know, training smarter. They will probably obviously they obviously know their body very, very well. You know, they've had that many, that many years of pre seasons, they probably understand

what they what's required and what they need. But I think I think I think just biologically is probably the biggest challenge as you get older, right? You just naturally, you know, your your peak performance will just naturally decline, just based on, you know, your human biology and what your body can and can't do as they get as it gets older. How old can you drive to? I mean, how long is the piece of string that? I think the way the way those two guys are driving, they've got plenty more years in them, they're driving phenomenal, right?

Yeah, I don't think I'm going to I don't think I'm going to answer that question. But you know what, I always like to be proven wrong. So I'm going to say, I'm going to say, look, I'd be very surprised if I see anyone past past 43 to keep going. But I want I want to be proven wrong, right? That's that's the whole point of a sports performance. I want to I want to see someone prove me wrong. Fernando world champion at 44. There you go. I think I think I think the second aspect is actually read the motivation, you know, you know, how how taxing one year of driving a Formula One as a circus all year round. And what it takes, it's a natural like, do you have it? Do you have it in you to put the work and the effort for getting ready, getting through, getting through all the jet lags, doing the work with the engineers? Do I think this is the second very crucial aspect that how is your motivation holding on to put that effort, what it requires? It's same for us, you know, like, when we look at our well-being and health and fitness, it's it's a lot driven by our own, you know, motivation, because it's not getting doesn't feel like it's getting any easier. So it feels like you really need that that mental edge to put that effort and be the discipline and putting the effort. And hopefully we will see a 45 year old world champion in Formula One. And we broke Michael Road. Yeah, I hope so. I'll probably I'll probably also add, I think as you get older, your priorities change too, right? Which is probably why, you know, you don't usually see that many of the drivers is because what I've noticed Matt is, rookies coming in, they are appointed to prove and their their fear factor and risk factor is probably non-existent, you know, because they've just got they got so much to prove. I've seen

and in Formula One, I noticed the younger guys is like, you don't see much fear or risk factor, all they just their their their their fear sensors and risk sensors aren't really as heightened as compared to as you get older as you mature, you know, especially when you look at when you as you get older, you start having a family, then you start to weigh up the risk, right? You start to weigh up the risk of driving. And, you know, you look at someone like Kimmy and Seb, it's like, oh, what will they, you know, that's, is it were they risking a lot more when they were 20 than what they were at 40, you could probably say, yes, right, they got a family, they got a family. And you probably start to look at life a little bit differently when you're in your 30s and your 40s and times not really on your side. And, you know, if you're still in, if you're still 40 when you're in Formula One, you've obviously made a lot of money too, right? So it's kind of like, well, do I need to keep making, do I need to keep taking the risk, you know, because I am, you know, technically you're financially, you technically have financial freedom, right? So, and you probably have a loving family. So, yeah, I think your priorities change as well as you get older. So that's equally more impressive if you're still, still racing at 40. And as Pira, as Pira said, you still have the motivation, you still have the performance factor and your priorities still in check. And, you know, when you're young, you don't even know what you don't know, you just, you just go for it. And, you know, that's, that's your blessing as, as, as your curse as well, you know, when you're young, you don't, you don't really, because you don't know what to fear for, you just go for it. And when you get more aware, more conscious, that's when you start, you know, putting the priorities, like what's important, where my, where's my limit, etc. So that's where you start scaling things differently. Got one final question for both of you. We both know that you're kind of, you know, you're super professional in your jobs, but you must have made an error or two along the way. And I'm just fascinated because you work so closely with the drivers. I'm fascinated, Michael, you're laughing. So I'm going to start with you because there must, there must be a story or two about something you didn't do or did do that has led to something happening. Yeah, okay. One is pretty bad and actually happened to this year, race one. But I'll tell you one Daniel, one new key story to Daniel story, not that bad, but heading into, heading into the race, you know, went to suit up and he's in the car. And the engineers obviously said, all right, cool, you know, let's go. So Daniel's got to put his gloves on. And I actually gave him two left hand gloves. So he's flapping his helmet on. So I can't hear what he's saying. He's just flapping his, his glove at me. And I'm like, what's he doing? His glove at me. And I figured out that I gave him two left hand gloves. And the second one, which is terrible, like, when I say terrible, just a bad, bad error on my side, freak accident. But our first race of the year, Bahrain, I'm so excited. I'm with Yuki, you know, first race together. We've gone out in Bahrain on the grass to do some mobility before Friday, before P1, before heading to the track. And he's, he's, he's warming up. I don't know if Piru knows this one, but and just as a little bit of banter, Yuki like was on the, was on the phone roll and he'd like, I have a little golf ball that we used to release our feet, to release like the outside of your feet. He threw it at me and I hit the back of my leg and I was like, okay, you know, we want to banter. So I like, I picked it up and I just like blindly like just threw it over my shoulder because I knew he was like sitting there. And I know one of the lie, it hit him straight in the eye. And he's rolling over in agony and I've just had a heart attack and it's just well, it's, it's instantly walted up. So I've like, I've run to the bar and I've just asked for some ice and I've just ice, I'm the icing his eye for two hours.

[Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / 'We prepare our athletes to perform' | What's it like to train and work with F1 drivers... and what do they eat?

I've called the doctor. I was like, we need eye drops. Here I am thinking, oh no, my first race with Yuki and he's not going to go into practice. It was a, it was a very stressful Friday.

Oh my goodness. Imagine that Yuki Snowden, the first practice session of the season and he's out because his trainer threw an eye, threw a golf ball in his eye. Oh, what, what a brilliant story. Piri, what about you? I think I have one from the early years. We were flying to Australia and I was checking in and I realized because I was in charge of our flights and I realized our flight was yesterday, not today. And second time, you know, when Pierre won the Monza, I remember

the crit. It was a mess. You know, nothing was working. Something was missing. Something didn't work on a car or like it was just a full mess. Nothing was working. And at the end of the day, we were at the, we won the race. So this was a funny memory that like nothing went on plan on that particular day on a crit, but luckily the end of the day was pretty good one.

Well, there you go. Brilliant stuff, guys. Thank you so much for your time. It's been a fascinating chat. I think, yeah, learn an awful lot about what you guys do. But as I said at the start, you know, what the drivers have to go through as well. So I think it helps us to understand that. So yeah, really appreciate your time. Thank you so much. And we will be back next Tuesday after the Austrian Grand Prix to look back at that. So I hope you can join us then. Bye for now.