

[Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / Will Hamilton win eighth world title? Does Norris regret staying at McLaren?

Two British drivers, Lewis Hamilton and Lando Norris both spent the Bahrain Grand Prix lamenting their lack of performance. Armistades in crisis and can they give Hamilton the car to win his eighth world title? The Lando is he running out of patience with McLaren. This is the Sky Sports F1 podcast. Hello all. I hope you're well. It's race week. We've got the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix this weekend, so plenty to get our teeth into. And with me for this one is someone who needs no introduction, the king of grid walks and Sky F1 analyst, Martin Brundle, alongside Jess McFadden, producer at Sky Sports. Martin, well, it's both of your first time on the podcast, so welcome. Good to have you. Martin, we'll start with you. How's it going? Good, really? Yes, looking forward to Saudi next this coming week, actually. Bahrain served up quite a lot of good stories, big stories and a lot of shocks for some of the teams and drivers as well. Yeah, it certainly did. And Jess, you're relatively new to Sky Sports, so settling in all OK? Good to see you. Yes, it's a lovely bunch of people to work with. I was out in Bahrain with Martin, so first race with boots on ground, which always just feels, it just feels so good to get going. I think there's been so much chatter over preseason, and yet when it comes down to it, it's when we see cars out on track that we know that we've got something to talk about. And as Martin said, some surprise storylines coming out. I know on the last podcast you guys touched on Aston in quite some detail, so no doubt we'll be following them through the season, and hopefully they're going to give us a lot to talk about because the Red Bulls looked incredibly dominant, which I guess kind of leads into the lack of competitiveness that we saw in Bahrain. Is there going to be more to get excited about this season? Obviously, we're going to hope the answer is yes, but it kind of led us into what we're going to be talking about today. There were some incredibly disappointed drivers on Bahrain, and some rather related as well, so lots to talk about.

There really is, there really is. Let's get into it then, and I think the interesting thing we're talking about Lewis and Lando in tandem here is obviously they're in very different situations. Lewis, seven-time world champion, Lando yet to win a race, but they are kind of bound by these underperforming cars for this season, and ultimately that could cost them as drivers going forward. So I want to get into that, and also we'll obviously have a little look ahead to Saudi as well at the end, but Martin, I want to start with you really and get your thoughts on Lewis and Mercedes and where they find themselves now.

Just to remind everyone, of course, Hamilton P5 in Bahrain, Russell P7, it was a disappointing weekend to say the least for them, wasn't it?

Yeah, I think more of the time deficit than the positions, to be honest. I mean, they were 50 seconds plus behind Mercedes-Benz and against a cruising Verstappen out front because he wasn't under pressure, and we know that Mercedes and Aston and Ferrari were pushing quite hard racing each other, so that would have been a shocker. They sort of massaged the W13 all through last year and ended up winning Brazil, but it was a challenging car, and I think many of us expected to see something quite different turn up in Bahrain at the test, and it wasn't really. It was an evolution of last year's car, and I think Toto and Lewis are saying, look, this is not right, this doesn't feel right, we're not going in the right direction here, and the stopwatch never lies in that respect. It is Bahrain, it's

[Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / Will Hamilton win eighth world title? Does Norris regret staying at McLaren?

a specific layout that challenges the rear tyres more than the front, and it has its own particular demands of a Formula 1 car, let's say, and that won't necessarily translate everywhere, but the bottom line is they were 6 tenths of a second slow in qualifying and probably a second-elapse slow in the race, which is forever in a Formula 1 car, of course. I think there's a lot of concern there, and with other teams that just literally got pulverised by Red Bull, I said, hang on, what are we doing? I don't think Lewis is in any different position to, say, Lando or Charles Leclerc for Ari, of stamping their feet a little bit and saying, hang on, what are you doing about this? Tell me what we're doing in terms of updates, in terms of personnel, in terms of moving this game forward, because it looks an awful lot like last year at the moment, and I don't think it's all about, I'm leaving, I'm out of here, it's about, look, sometimes you just have to stand up and go, this is not right, because the mantra from Mercedes through the weekend was, we don't want to go to a different philosophy on the aerodynamics because we've got to learn that all over again, that's a step backwards to go forward, we'd rather finesse what we know, and I think at the end of Bahrain it was, it's not good enough, it's too much finessing to be done. Jess, I was going to ask you if you could just put into context how, I mean, 50 seconds in Formula One, that's how far Lewis Hamilton was behind Max Verstappen, that is so much time, isn't it?

Oh, my God, like Martin said, it's forever, and the amount of development needed to be able to close that gap is massive, and by the time you've caught up, Red Bull have probably brought a few updates themselves, and so it's always kind of how fast can you find the fix that means that the gap can close, and obviously, we've had one race, I think that's the other thing that we need to remember, we've had one race, Bahrain is, I don't know, I mean, it's not as much of an outlier as some of the other tracks in terms of it being non-representative, there are things that we can take away from Bahrain to say, okay, well, this might be the way that it pans out throughout the rest of the season, and we know how good that Red Bull is and how dominant they were last year for a lot of the season, we know that they're good, but we know Mercedes are good as well, I mean, you don't just forget how to be record-breaking

constructors, that doesn't go away, but as you guys touched on the last podcast, Mercedes have gone through a lot of changes, they've lost a lot of people, Red Bull have gained a lot of people, so it is kind of about finding what works and having to find it pretty damn quick because you're going to have a lot of people that aren't happy with the way things are going, but yeah, I think quite understandably from the fans' perspective, the question has arose of, well, how long does Lewis stick it out for? Because as he told us in the lie detector feature that we did that came out on Sunday, he has said that he's going to stay in Formula One until he gets his eighth world title, but will that be with Mercedes?

I mean, I think it's going to be interesting moving more and more through the season, listening to how Lewis reacts because there was a particular piece of interview post-Bar Rain that made the, kind of, later on in the programming where he mentioned how they just didn't listen to me, which I thought that was quite a different sounding Lewis Hamilton from what we've heard before. So yeah, that's what I'm going to be looking out for, the way that he then talks to the media and kind of positions himself within the team when he's looking at another

[Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / Will Hamilton win eighth world title? Does Norris regret staying at McLaren?

season of not being very competitive.

Martin, what did you make of that comment? I'll read it sort of in full. Yeah, he said, Mercedes didn't listen to him over the development of their 2023 car. He said, last year there were things I told them, I said the issues there are with the car, I've driven so many cars in my life, I know what a car needs, I know what a car doesn't need, I think it's really about accountability. Were you surprised that he so publicly called out the team? A little bit, but quite clearly Lewis feels that he's not getting enough traction just chatting to them and he obviously feels they're not paying enough attention and has had to go public with that. It is highly unusual because he is always, you know, the team player, the ultimate team player really. And, you know, Formula One drivers are embedded in a team in both directions, you're comfortable with the people around you, you get to know your engineer and your performance engineers and strategists. And on the other foot, you've got the team, they design a car around you, your size in the cockpit, your preferences are how the car handles, marketing, sponsorship. It's a long term, very, as I said, the word he was embedded. So a driver like Lewis is not going to just want to go somewhere else in a hurry and it's not a tantrum, it is, it just makes, he's obviously felt the need to go public with something because he felt he wasn't being listened to closely enough within the team. And also I think it's the start of a very, very long season. And after the race in Bahrain, when you watched on SkyF1, there were a lot of very disappointed drivers, the emotions, the, the, the sheer frustrations and disappointments there. I think we're pouring out because they realized that Red Bull were in a different race, basically. And I think you've seen quite a lot of comments from George and Charles and Lewis and no doubt Lando about what we do, what we do, because what they know is if, if the team just finds half a 10th here and a 10th there, that's just a normal progression for all the teams through a season. So they know they need a leapfrog, a leapfrog jump with a, with some kind of magical new upgrade. And, you know, as Toto Wolf says, there's no silver bullet. That doesn't happen very often these days. They've got so much equipment and resource to make sure the cars are pretty damn good when they hit the track. But, you know, you don't just suddenly find half three quarters of a second per lap, which is what they need really, at least. And that's over and above what the other teams will find as well. So I think there was an element of, yeah, frustration, disappointment, resignation about some of those comments.

And I guess, Jess, in the context of last year, having already had a disappointing year, you know, they released a statement this weekend from the team, you know, again, echoing what you just said, Martin, you know, there are no silver bullets in F1. There's no quick fixes. This, this is a long-term problem for Mercedes, isn't it?

It is. I mean, I found the letter, the open letter to the fans. If I'm honest, quite odd. Because as we've tried to touch on here, and I think as a lot of fans listening will be thinking, like, it's only the first race. We can't start making conclusions. As Martin said, longest season ever. And we've just done race one and all of a sudden there are people going, Lewis is going to leave Mercedes and it's all going to be over and he's going to jump to Ferrari or whatever. Now, I think it's an interesting topic to discuss, hence us doing a whole podcast on it. But the letter to the fans, to me, was more of a knee-jerk

[Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / Will Hamilton win eighth world title? Does Norris regret staying at McLaren?

reaction than anything else about speculation about him moving on, just because of the fact that it is only the first race. Yes, there's a lot of disappointment. Mercedes on their, you know, they're social, they're digital, they're branding. They are very much trying to be, you know, they've always said, like, we win, we lose together. They're very, you know, fan-centric. They love to include the fans as part of who they are and what they do. But it just hit weird for me that already Mercedes is putting out an apology after race one. Like, had this been a few races into the season, maybe I would be a bit more like, okay, fine. You know, they just want to cover off and say they understand and they see the frustration of fans and they see the frustration of their drivers and they know it's not good enough. But after race one, and the weirdest part of the whole letter to me was the final lines where it says, are you ready to join us for the fight back? If not, then there are no hard feelings. So almost like they know that they might lose fans because they're not the out and out winners anymore. But I just found that very, very odd. Like, it's just, it's just not something I've ever seen a team do before. And just the timing of it for me just is, yeah, it's, it's, it's not what, it's not, I mean, I'm not the head of comms at Mercedes. And I'm sure the head of comms at Mercedes would have something to say to me in terms of, well, it's not your trashy. So I'm looking forward to having that conversation if I ever do. But yeah, I just, it feels quite defeatist so early on that you must, they must have known way, way before testing Bahrain that this is what was going to happen. Because they're not, they've not played it out. They've apologized for it straight away. And yeah, I don't know, like I don't know what Martin thinks. I don't know, did you read, did you ever, did you get a chance to read the letter? Yeah, I did. And I do know the head of comms extremely well. And how I viewed that, I think there's some reverse psychology going on at the end there about, hey, look, if you don't want to support us anymore to stir up, you know, the vibrant support that they have. And I don't think any fans are going to desert their team just because of a few bad results. But the, also, because let's say Toto, let's be kind, Toto and Lewis were less guarded with their words than normal. I think they had a bit of repair work to do. They're trying to calm down the situation because we all jumped on it at Sky F1. So did other media of like, whoa, this is so unusual for Toto and Lewis not to just be, I love the team at Brackley. I love the team at Brackley and we, we race this together. And you know, they were pretty punchy with their words. And so I think that was just managing that down really. And I think that's all, all they could do because they can't redesign the car. They can only do the words and the media. And that's for somebody else to do. Yeah, especially after one race. And I think that's really key, isn't it? This is, this is might happen at the end of a season and kind of a post, post disappointing season letter to your fans. But to be off to one race, I think really shows the strength of feeling. All right, so that's kind of Mercedes as a team, but specifically Lewis, Martin is going for that eighth title. Clearly that is the number one objective now, I would, I would say for Lewis Hamilton. I don't know if you agree with that. And, and, and is it all about trying to get that to number eight? He's, he's 38 years old, obviously Alonso is 41 and still at the very peak of his powers and doing exceptionally well. So where do you see, or how do you see this playing out over the next couple of years?

[Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / Will Hamilton win eighth world title? Does Norris regret staying at McLaren?

I think Lewis feels he was absolutely robbed in Abu Dhabi 2021 along with a lot of other people. I think it took him several months last year through 2022 to get over that. Then he was driving beautifully. And I think it's absolutely clear that taking that eighth title is everything to him now to move that high tide mark on and be right up there and considered the greatest and, and to have one more than anybody else is, is important to him. And I think he will want to drive wherever he can achieve that. Now, if you went to Ferrari, for example, would you be certain you could achieve that better there? You know, they've got a number of their own challenges at the moment. Would he get in the door at Red Bull? Could you possibly have? Because that's the only team right now you'd think he could go to because, you know, but could you have a first step and Hamilton lineup? Could you afford them? You know, how would you manage that? Do you need that? Do you need that kind of, you know, because I think Red Bull are quite happy with a sort of a number one and a half driver in their car. So it's all very well saying he'll go somewhere else, but, but where at the moment, so he's better to make what he's got in a magnificent team work. So I think, you know, he did when he moved from McLaren, I'll never forget him getting out of the car in Singapore that night and didn't even look back at the car when his McLaren are broken down again. And I think I said in commentary, he's had enough of that. Going to Mercedes looked like a risk at the time, but what we didn't know is all the things that Ross Braun and Andy Cowell and many others could tell Lewis and look, have a look at our hybrid power unit that we've got coming with miles ahead of anybody else. So Lewis was able to see that. He won't, I don't think he'll have that kind of headstart if he moves at the moment, but he's obviously in the latter part of his career. I could easily see him having another five years, look at Fernando Alonso, for example, he's three years older than Lewis and driving probably at his best or equal best. So Lewis has got one more role of the dice, hasn't he, to join a team and make them world champions and get all the accolades that he wants. So I think that's where he's at at the moment. But if in doubt, stay put, I would have thought, will be what he's thinking. If I can make this work, that's my best solution. If not, I may have to look elsewhere.

And also, I've got a few tweets here. Martin on Twitter said, Lewis isn't going anywhere. All this Ferrari talk is laughable. He is woven in far beyond his position as a driver with Accelerate 25 and Mission 44. And I guess that's kind of true, isn't it? Because he has been there so long that he's such a strong part of that team. And Jess, I don't know if you've picked up on any other wild rumors online of where Lewis could end up going. It's quite an exciting prospect, certainly garnering a lot of attention, isn't it?

Well, depending on how deep on Twitter and Reddit you go, I don't think any team is without a rumor of him potentially going there. I mean, that is good fun reading all the weird theories that come out about where we could potentially go and find his eighth. They make it for great reading. But yeah, to your point, Lewis has quite a unique relationship in that team. He is so core to it. It's almost like they coexist. They're dependent on each other almost. And it would be quite unfathomable to think of him anywhere else. I've seen all the photo shops of him in red and it just doesn't look right. It just looks odd. But I think in a similar way that Max is interweaving himself into Red Bull, it'd be very difficult to imagine Max anywhere else. But yeah, Lewis does have this very unique position that he's

[Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / Will Hamilton win eighth world title? Does Norris regret staying at McLaren?

got so much freedom as well with Mercedes because of who he is and what he's achieved and the way that he likes to operate. He gets this ability to do all these things like Ignite like Mission 44. And to walk away from that would probably be a lot more difficult for him than had he not got that. So there's a multitude of things keeping him at Mercedes. And I think I probably agree with Martin in that it's better the devil you know right now. But I wouldn't be surprised if he's open to hearing of opportunities. I mean, any team up and down the grid would probably break off their arm to have somebody like Lewis Hamilton driving for them. But yeah, he's only going to move if he believes it's going to be competitive. We have to remember Lewis is in the middle of a negotiation as well. Now, I'm 100% certain that Lewis would always follow the performance and not the money. But who's going to turn down a big paycheck if you can get it as well. So and there might be some pressure at Mercedes Benin to reduce his current pay as it were. So you know, there's a bit of negotiation and a bit of, you know, gameplay in this as well. But I would have thought a lot of Lewis's initiatives that are very important to him and then very important initiatives are transportable. So I don't I could recreate them somewhere else. I don't think that would stop him moving. But I do I do think overall when you look at the picture and we talk about him, you know, the devil, the devil, you know, or embedded or whatever, then there's a lot of good reasons to stay at Mercedes. He just needs them to tell him how they're going to sort this out. But you know, Senna, you know, left, left McLaren to go to Williams, you know, Schumacher went off to Ferrari, didn't he? And I took a long, a long time but made that work. And so these great drivers are not scared of going somewhere and then galvanizing and getting a lot of new people around them and making something happen. And I think, you know, there must be part of Lewis thinks, you know, I'd love to go to Ferrari and do a Michael Schumacher and really turn that back into if I can't win my eighth or ninth right now, why don't I go and have some fun there. But I'm sure these are all playing in his mind and he'll be talking to his dad about this as well and his management team about where do we go from here. And you know, that will that will be exacerbated by the dismal performance in Bahrain really of the car.

I wonder then this weekend in Saudi, because there is a lot of attention now on this on this story and and what Lewis is going to do. And I wonder, Jess, what would a good weekend in Saudi Arabia look like for Mercedes sitting here now?

Well, I think as Marce alluded to, it's going to be about how big is the gap? How how big is that gap? How big is that deficit? And how much can they can they glean through?

But I mean, it's such a that's quite a big ask at Saudi, especially well, and especially race two, like, you know, there's minimal time as we'll find throughout this season.

There's not as much time to be able to turn around upgrades, you know, I don't think anybody does anybody have anything planned for Saudi? Not that I've heard. It's so I think it's it's it's they're going to want to have they're going to want to have seen a reduce in pace, but I don't see how that's going to have been massively achievable. And I think as they all just keep saying just maximizing on on positions, I mean, what Mercedes were incredibly good at last season was picking up the opportunities was consistent, turning up consistently finishing, you know, George was on a run of top five finishes for what was it the first seven or eight races of last year. That consistency is something that they can achieve that reliability

[Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / Will Hamilton win eighth world title? Does Norris regret staying at McLaren?

and that consistency. And where, you know, Charles had a DNF in Bahrain, we know that Ferrari reliability was a bit, you know, on the edge last year. So they're just going to want to make sure that they are the opportunists when they're not challenging out the front, they are the opportunists. And that's what they're going to want to make sure that they they can still deliver if the outright pace is not quite there just yet.

Yeah, you find young people, I think, less than half my age. So you will notice that I choose my words. That's not true. I choose my words more carefully sometimes because my experience is we go to Saudi and Mercedes, Mercedes win the race. And all the all the stuff comes caving in on your head. So it is a different track layout. And it's, you know, they might they might have found some things with it. But the form book suggests not, doesn't it? The form book suggests it's Red Bull comfortably, Ferrari gamely chasing them. Aston Martin have got all the upside potential on development. And Mercedes in there as well somewhere. Mercedes are a mighty team. There's a lot of clever people there. They've lost some clever people, but there were hundreds more left behind. So I wouldn't write them off. But it is absolutely clear that they they do need to find something pretty magical with that car. And as I said, looking at it on the grid, on the basis of if it looks right, it is right. It's not right. It's not a good looking car. It just looks lumpy.

When you look at the side of a Red Bull, it we're nowhere in a dynamicist, are we? But it just looks right somehow. And the same with the Aston and what have you. So unless Mercedes, I think, have already got some kind of change of the architecture of the fundamental aerodynamic architecture of their car in the pipeline, it might take some time. But always leave a little bit spare because you just don't know what's going to happen at the next race, which is what I love about Formula One and live sport in particular.

And this is this is why we've got you on Martin. You're the you're the leveler. You keep us honest and not going down too many rabbit holes. But I think the cynic in me as well says to completely, I guess, just juxtapose juxtapose my entire comment about Martin being the leveler. Maybe you can level me again here, Martin. But the cynic in me says that they just they just could not have turned up in Bahrain or with a with a copycat Red Bull. Like, could you imagine Christian letting Toto off if they dropped their no side pod concept and came out with what more and more of the teams we've seen doing, which is more akin to the Red Bull, you know, Toto would not have heard the end of it if they had abandoned that that concept and come back, come back, come back without this without their no side pod concept. That the cynic in me also says that whilst Martin you're totally right, development wise, you know, taking it back to square one would just not have been tenable. There is also that part of me that goes they love a tet a tet are a Horner and Toto wolf. But and I don't know if they could have survived a Oh, so you have copied us then kind of kind of scenario.

Well Christian would have loved it wouldn't he. And so he's having a good old poker. He's having a good old poker Aston Martin instead. A man's ego is a very ugly thing. But if it gets in the way of your formula one car performing, then you've definitely got the cart before the horse. So I don't think engineers in my experience thinking in zeros and ones and they will have analyzed the whole situation to death. They decided to stick with that. I don't think it would have been based on what I'm what Christian might have said on

[Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / Will Hamilton win eighth world title? Does Norris regret staying at McLaren?

Sky F1, to be honest, or Netflix about Toto. That's not engineers, designers, they're not hardwired like that at all. They're just they're they're sort of into what they do.

So I I'm pretty sure if the engineers and designers and their dynamicists and had gone to Toto, if we do it like that, we think we'll be three quarters of a second faster. I don't think Toto would have parked his ego, to be honest.

I mean, he'd love that conversation with Christian right now, given where they are on the grid.

I bet I bet he's longing for that for that conversation. Right, let's let's move on,

I think to Lando. Because obviously, we've got Lewis trying to trying to get his his eighth world championship. Bless him. Lando still hasn't actually won a race yet, which is still incredible to think. I mean, he's been in the sport five years. It was a disappointing weekend for them for McLaren. He finished P17, which was last of the finishes. And Piastri didn't didn't fare any better having to retire after 14 laps due to an electrical problem.

I guess, Martin, this is a team at the other end of the spectrum. But but for Lando Norris, this is a hugely concerning start to the season.

Yeah, I'm seeing a few traits in Lando's career, in my own career of being so close to winning races and then lucking out or just making a mistake or whatever. He could have won three on the bounce, couldn't he? When was that? 2021, wasn't it? Russia and all that. He could have won three races on the bounce with a bit of luck and a following win. But he didn't. And he's clearly a star of the future. So McLaren at the moment is all about potential. When we get the wind tunnel, we went the wrong way over the winter when we get the new upgrade in Baku. And there is a team that needs to find double the normal amount from an upgrade. And that's a big, that's a tall order. So they think they know where that is. Yeah, to have a to have a slow kind for all the ones, one thing, especially for McLaren, to have an unreliable one. And I'm having deja vu in 1994 here, but to have an unreliable and slow McLaren is a is a terrible thing. So they need to get that sorted out in a hurry. The reliability is, you know, just shouldn't happen these days. So let's hope they have a better, better weekend in Saudi Arabia. I, you know, I want all 10 teams up there challenging for the lead. That's my dream. And so I don't like to see McLaren struggling. And Lando, yeah, he's got time on his side, but the years start slipping past. And he will be asking the same questions as George, as Lewis, as shall. Like, what are we doing about this? How, how tell me how you're going to close the gap to Red Bull, and who's going to do that? And why, you know, where, where, where are the resources coming from? And how does the cost cap affect this? And how, you know, it's, it's a reasonable question from a driver. And I think if he doesn't get the right answers, at a suitable point, if he can jump into what looks like a race or championship winning car, then, then he'll have to take it.

Jess, there was a, we obviously put up our message and thanks to everyone who got back to us on Twitter and Instagram about this. And it's breezy. Great, great Twitter handle. It's sort of summed it up quite well, I think. So looking to 20, 20, 26 and beyond, what strategic career move would give Lando the best chance of becoming a world champion? So four options, sticking out with McLaren, heading a new project, E.D. Aldi, perhaps with Seidel, his, his old boss, waiting for Lewis's seat at Merck, or being number two at Ferrari and Red Bull. I mean, those are four options, all very realistic options,

[Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / Will Hamilton win eighth world title? Does Norris regret staying at McLaren?

I guess, for Lando. What, what do you see him, him doing over the next couple of years? It's an interesting question, is it? Because a lot of people were saying how Lando and Lewis's futures might be interlinked. And it's breezy, touched on it there in terms of, well, maybe Lewis retires, Lando takes his seat, which is an interesting one. Because if, you know, if we're, if we're saying that Lewis potentially has five years, I mean, I don't know how quickly Mercedes can turn it around to give him his eighth title. Because I mean, he's, he's pretty much said he's going to stick around till his eighth and then we'll see, he doesn't really need, he's got nothing else to prove. If he wins his eighth, he has nothing else to achieve in Formula One. So whether or not he would just drop the mic and, and, and leave, or whether he would say, no, I've probably got another season in me will remains to be seen. But yeah, it'd be an interesting one to see Lando move there. I think the, what I, what I hope is that Lando doesn't panic now, because we've seen the likes of, and obviously this is a slightly different situation, but Daniel Ricciardo making those snap judgments to leave Red Bull and go off in search of, of his taking a different path away from the shadow of Max Verstappen. It went catastrophically wrong. Like he now finds himself without a seat at all. Okay, yes, he got a couple of podiums, he got the race win with McLaren. But that's all he has to show for it where Max is now a two time world champion. So it's, it's, you want, you want to hope that he has the right people around him that will give him good advice, because we've seen so many people have the wrong people around them, get frustrated, get flustered, make snap decisions, or what, what on the surface could be, could be assumed to be snap decisions and end up with less than what they had before. Now, two around dead last, there is obviously that that's definitely not where he wants to be. But McLaren have proven to him that they can build a decent car, that wind tunnel project that Martin was referencing earlier, you know, the idea is that that will come into play and they'll be more competitive because they'll have more resource. But, you know, they're already on the back foot a little now. And the rest of the teams, you know, like Aston are just throwing every level of investment at that team. You know, they've got their new factory coming, they've got all these new facilities coming that are going to allow them to stand on their own two feet, even if they are a Mercedes customer contingent. And you just, you just hope that he's going to have those smart decisions that mean if he is considering a move from McLaren, that it's, it is to the right place because there is so easy to get it wrong. You know, the likes of, again, I know we touched on it briefly on the last pod, but, you know, people are now saying again, it's only race one. But Oscar, the drama that he went through, and he wasn't even in Formula One yet, but decided to leave Alpine and go to McLaren and he found himself not very competitive in qualifying. And then DNF with his, with his, his teammates car also having massive reliability issues. So, you know, in terms of making decisions after race one, you would argue potentially a bad call. We've got a long season to go. And I think, you know, Landau's come out and he's, he has been talking, you know, I'm here. I know it's not competitive. I'm kind of at peace with that. I've been told that, you know, but he's also very aware that to get as competitive as he wants is probably going to be post his contract. And I don't know. I think was he, was he ill advised signing such a long contract? I'd be interested to know what Martin thinks on this, actually, in terms of he was so young, he signed such

[Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / Will Hamilton win eighth world title? Does Norris regret staying at McLaren?

a long contract. And now, yeah, again, I mean, I had similar feelings about this beginning of last season. But again, after Bahrain, McLaren did not look like in a good shape. And, you know, he's looking, he was looking at that point, like with a five, five more years of this Paris contract. So, you know, it was that, was that ill advice? Or did you think that was actually a smart move from long contracts? I tend to be about a hundred pages long. And there's lots in them now. He ought to have an exit route out of there. If you know, to sign such a long deal, there's got to be performance clause. My concern, if I was in team Lando, would be that the car, that the performance is dropping away each season. It's not getting better and better, is it? If you look at how he's been going, it looks like it's actually fading. And that that's a great concern in that respect. So if he's got a performance clause in there, I don't see Lando going anywhere as a number two, frankly. I think he's, you know, even if it's, contracts don't say that anyway, but even if he were to be perceived that way, it's soon changed that with his speed. But he will need to see some light at the end of a much shorter tunnel than he's got now, put it that way, in terms of where it's all heading. Otherwise, he'll start getting frustrated that he won't be, he won't be any use to the team. But I could see Lando dropping into Red Bull and Ferrari and Mercedes as a more easy fit than what on Earth does Lewis Hamilton do from here? You know what I mean? So I could see Lando being able to drive for the other three teams, frankly, or Aston Martin, for that matter, they become race and championship contenders. So on the face of it, it was a bit odd at his age to sign up such a long deal. Yes.

It's interesting as well, isn't it? I mean, it's not quite the same, but there is almost that slight mirroring of Lando being the frustrated Brit at McLaren, potentially on what might be the last season of his patience before that starts to run out and he's looking elsewhere and sniffing elsewhere. And maybe he's going to make a side, well, a move that on the surface looked iffy, but could pay out. I mean, it's not quite history repeating itself, but it is quite close, which is to the point earlier, Lewis doesn't have as much time to think. Lando has the best part of his career to think about, and he's definitely not going to want to see that fading away towards the back of the grid. I mean, he's somebody that we talk about as having world championship material. Like he is a very competitive racer. He's very quick, but it's all going to be about how does he make the smart decisions now? How does he protect his career and make those right moves and those right decisions? I was going to say, I mean, Mika Hakkinen, we've heard Nika Rosberg say on Sky's coverage that he sees him as a future world champion. Mika Hakkinen this week said he's on the same level as Max Verstappen. And I think, I guess, even from a British perspective, we want to see him fighting at the front. He was so exciting. I mean, Martin, you referenced Russia, those three races that he could have won. It was exhilarating to watch him fight near the front. And yeah, I think, speaking on behalf of a lot of fans, he's a very popular member of the Paddock as well. When we say we want to see him at the front, we want to see him battling. And yeah, I think that sentiment is felt throughout. I just wonder on the future thing, is there any potential? Do we think the relationship with Andrea Seidel, Martin? Do you think there's a strong enough relationship there with what he's doing, turning that into Audi by 2026? Can you see them uniting at all at that project?

[Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / Will Hamilton win eighth world title? Does Norris regret staying at McLaren?

Maybe a long way down the road, but I don't think Lando's got the time or the patience or the need to, Audi will have to get their power unit up and running. It'll be very much a new team in that respect. So it's not out of the question, but I think Lando will be looking for more certainty than joining a fledgling manufacturer who are just coming into Formula One with a new power unit.

Okay. That's Lando. That was Lewis. We've achieved the fact there of where we think they are at the moment, where we think they'll end up. I want to end on a couple of questions, a few tweets from listeners and viewers, and just get your guys' thoughts really on Saudi Arabia. There's a tweet here from James. He says, looking ahead to Saudi, time for race two of El Plan, looking forward to seeing Fernando Alonso back on track in Blake and Instagram also agreeing Alonso will dominate again. But Jess, I mean, let's look ahead to this circuit, and I've got an Instagram post here from F1CRLewis1. It says, where does Jeddah rank for you in terms of the best circuits in F1 right now?

Oh, so I'm historically not a fan of qualifying tracks just because I live for the racing on Sunday. That element for me is what made me a Formula One fan, and I will admit growing up that there would be many occasions where I wouldn't watch qualifying. I would just tune in for the race on Sunday. Because of that, I think that I'm slightly more skewed away. I can't believe I'm saying this to Martin Brundle, but I'm not a fan of Monaco as a Grand Prix because it's not a racing track. It's a qualifying track. And so I think Jeddah provides, I guess, a little bit of difference. One of the things that I have enjoyed for better or worse with Jeddah is that it seems to be quite a game playing track. We've seen quite a few interesting on track tactics from drivers for better or worse. Last year, we had a kind of a continuation of Charles and Max using DRS as a bit of a tactic, as a ploy, not wanting to be first the DRS detection line and kind of having a play around there. And I love watching clever racing when it's not just about pure speed, pure pace, but actually how do you play the game? How do you play the long game? So that for me has been quite interesting, an interesting addition from Jeddah. But there's no denying that it has delivered some incredible qualifying performances already, even though we're only one on the third round. Max's lap that could have been was one of the most impactful laps I think I've ever watched up there with Lewis Hamilton Singapore 2018. So that I enjoy. But is it in my top 10? No. But again, because it's early on, I mean, they've made a lot of changes this year already, which are there to kind of help with the action. So, you know, it's quite early days, maybe it will grow on me. But again, if we're looking at a track that's kind of leaning on its spectacle being qualifying, you're probably talking to the wrong fan.

Okay, fine. Martin, I mean, it must be the kind of track that keeps you on your toes in commentary. Let's let's say that perhaps we'll build on that, Jess, and say it's it's definitely a track that delivers action. Yeah, I like the elongated nature of it and some of the corner sequences. I like the fact that if the drivers make mistakes, there's there's a wall there to greet them. So there's jeopardy and, you know, making an error and the skillful fast ones can get through and others don't quite make it. I like, you know, variety is the spice of life, as they say. So I like the street circuits, the sprint weekends, the classics at Silverstone and Silverstone and Monaco. And then we have the new venues.

[Transcript] Sky Sports F1 Podcast / Will Hamilton win eighth world title? Does Norris regret staying at McLaren?

I think for the overall show, Jedd looks incredible on the TV app with all the lights and razzmatazz going on. I don't think it's in my top 10 either, but I don't mind the circuit. And I think there are some elements of it that when I go trackside in FP2, make me stand back and gasp a little bit. And that's happened there. There's no doubt about that. Maybe I won't be as harsh to ask you both for predictions this weekend, but maybe let's let's say one one thing we're really looking forward to this weekend. I'll start by saying the drone. Does anyone remember the drones from I mean, Martin, you just mentioned the lighting. Incredible. They had a brilliant drone show last year. I don't know what everyone else is looking forward to, Jess. I mean, yeah, I think I'm just I'm just I'm just hungry for some more action. Like we've only had one race. So at this point in the season, I'm definitely wanting just to see as much as possible. It'd be amazing to see if you know, Alonso is going to come out swinging just as much as he had done in Bahrain. Like that is going to be one of the storylines, I think that keeps us keeps us interested. And I guess, you know, Ferrari, there is hope there, you know, Fred Versailles was quite quite sure that it was a setup issue. So if they can get on top of that, then we could see a bit more of a battle towards the front. So I think there's there is there's plenty to be plenty to be excited for. But yeah, I guess to kind of again, contradict my own points, Saturday looks like it's going to be, it could be a magical day in terms of qualifying. So if you're into that kind of thing, make sure you tune in on Saturday as well as Sunday. So yeah, I think that's that's kind of what I'm looking forward to anyway. Final word from you, Martin, what are you looking forward to? I'm looking forward to the staff and seeing as many cars in his visor as his mirrors. I'd like his mirrors to be worn out by the end of the race and need replacing. I mean, you know, we never know. It might be Fernando Alonso in those mirrors. You never know. Okay, cool. Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you, Martin. Thank you, Jess. And thank you everyone at home for your comments. We really appreciate them. And if you keep an eye out every Monday, before we record the podcast, we'll put out a little post about what we're going to be talking about. So we really do appreciate all your comments. That's it for this week. We hope you enjoy the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix, and we'll be back next Tuesday to discuss all the biggest talking points from the weekend. We hope you can join us then. Bye for now.