



The Great Debates – Is F1 a team or individual sport?

Welcome to The Great Debates, a mini series brought to you by Sidepodcast, focusing on some of the hot topics that surround Formula One that may or may not ever be solved. This is the third episode of our series and we're moving on to another debate that gets the fans talking. We've covered already the specifics of qualifying, and a more fundamental area of the sport, and this is another of the latter category. Let's get going!

Formula One has a championship that features trophies for the team at the end of the year with the most points, and also for the driver that tops the standings come the end of the season. So, ideally, you'd say that F1 is both a team sport and an individual sport, but it's almost impossible for the series to be both as we have seen many times in the past. And that's the thing that fans end up debating – which should take preference, the best interests of the team, or getting a driver to the top step of the podium?

The way this manifests itself most often is, of course, in the form of team orders. A team has two drivers, and the pair are both hoping to get the best out of any given race weekend. But the chances are, one of them is higher in the championship standings than the other, or has a better possibility of getting a good result, so the team may choose to give that one the more favourable strategy or chassis parts, or engine, or worst of all, give the other driver an instruction to move aside, to help the favoured driver get ahead. We've seen it happen, often with mild consequences, but occasionally having a major impact on race results and championship challenges.

Teams will argue that it is their right to choose the strategy, to favour one driver over the other, to do anything possible to get their team the best result, the maximum amount of points and eventually the best position in the championship standings. That is where the money is, after all, in getting a high championship position, which brings in the prize money, which pays the bills to make the team and therefore the driver even more successful.

However, let's not forget that the drivers are actually in the car, doing the job and bringing home those results. The driver's championship is the most notable result, with many fans and team members alike remembering which driver won the series in any given year, but unable to name the winning team, particularly if it's not the team the eventual champion drives for. So it's all very well for a team to take the upper hand and claim that everyone needs to get the best result for the squad, but it's not too hard to see the argument claiming driver success is the thing that keeps the sport ticking along.

And to further support the individual sport argument is the other side of the team orders debate – that if you are pitting your two drivers against each other, or favouring one over the other, it's because they are individually better than the other, despite wearing the same sponsored clothing and answering to the same boss.

The team are required to provide the car, and the pit stop services, but the pressure is all on the driver's shoulders to deliver the goods when it counts. The mind games, the battle against teammates, the concentration required to produce lap after lap of speed, focus and precision, all of that is on the driver as an individual, and without that, there would be no racing.



And yet, overall, it has to be considered a team sport. You need the driver, otherwise the cars would sit stationary on the grid. You need the team to provide the cars, otherwise the drivers would be engaging in a running race. Admittedly that would be entertaining but it isn't what F1 is all about. This episode seems to be easily answered with yes, it's a team sport, but there's still just that niggling doubt that the individual drivers are providing the essence of Formula One itself, and that is where the debate will continue for years to come.

Thanks for listening to this Great Debates episode from Sidepodcast. We are three shows into this new mini series and I don't know about you, but I'm getting a taste for this debating lark. If you feel the same, do join me again tomorrow for our next topic, and it's a hugely important one. Thanks for listening.