



F1 Debrief – You must drink

Christine: This is F1 Debrief, You Must Drink. On this show we discuss ditching the water supply, the merits of being short and what could force the FIA's hand. The subject we have to talk about today is, well it's a bit of a weighty issue.

Mr C: A huge issue, we're talking driver weight, or lack thereof.

Christine: It's been going on for a while but it seems to have really, really hit the consciousness of the paddock and fans this particular week, this back-to-back races.

Mr C: News came out during the Malaysian Grand Prix, I think Martin Brundle mentioned that.

Christine: It really wasn't news, it was Martin Brundle stirring is what it was.

Mr C: He mentioned it in passing.

Christine: A driver who will remain nameless...

Mr C: Yes, passed out at a PR event in Malaysia. Possibly due to the humidity experienced in that climate. That was followed swiftly by Adrian Sutil mentioning this week that he is intending to race without a drinks bottle in Bahrain. I think he did use it in Malaysia which is an exceptionally hot race but during the upcoming Grand Prix he is deciding to save as much weight as he can and thereby potentially putting his own health at risk.

Christine: Yeah, well the Sauber is a heavy car and Sutil isn't one of the lightest drivers.

Mr C: He's a tall guy.

Christine: He's a tall guy, he's one of the heaviest drivers on the grid and this year weight is everything. It's been, like I said it's been happening for a while and obviously last year we had the whole deal with Nico Hülkenberg not getting a top seat because he's tall and heavy and everyone attributed it to that.

Mr C: McLaren definitely said that they overlooked Nico Hülkenberg for a race because, specifically because of his build.

Christine: So it became a talking point then, but then we just sort of brushed it under the carpet because he did get a race seat somewhere and we all moved on. But now this year it's really obvious how gaunt a lot of the drivers are and they're all talking about the things they can't eat and Lewis Hamilton, his whole goal this season is to get to the end so he can have some sweets. And they're all training constantly and still that's not enough, now they have to race without drinks bottles and make crazy sacrifices. I mean Sutil, he knows it's not the right thing to do, I mean he wants to save the weight and he wants to do the best for his team, but then at the same time he's saying this could be a health and safety issue, I literally could pass out in the car.

Mr C: Which, not only is that a health and safety issue for Sutil, but depending on where a passed out driver ends up it could be a health and safety issue for whatever they crash into. So it could be other drivers or marshals, or fences or whatever.



Christine: It's also one of those things where, I mean how much weight is that really going to save because Sauber have said they are looking to get 20kg off their car and you think that litre of water is really not going to make that much difference.

Mr C: No, I do wonder if perhaps Sutil is choosing to make a very public point of the fact. I mean I'm sure he's definitely going to run without said water bottle, but he's also staking a case for tall or the larger sized of the drivers who are under increasing pressure from the lighter drivers.

Christine: Yeah Felipe Massa responded, he is the lightest driver on the grid apparently, but that's mostly because he's tiny.

Mr C: He's a very very small man.

Christine: Yeah. He said – "I think this is a problem with his team, if a team has a heavier engine or a heavier car it's up to them to do a better job."

Mr C: So there's two sides to the argument I think.

Christine: Two sides to every story.

Mr C: It could be boiled down to two basic arguments which is, is it time for the FIA to step in and mandate some kind of rule in order to balance the issue, quite literally, so that the heavier or the larger drivers can have some kind of leeway whereby they can exist in a sensible healthy state whilst the smaller drivers, you know, don't lose any of their advantage. The FIA could come in, they could say here is a minimum weight for a driver plus seat and put it into the regulations and therefore teams would be less inclined I suppose to favour the smaller lighter driver. That's one side. The other side of the coin would be, if you were blessed with a small body, if you were a small boned person should you not be able to capitalise on that build, because I'm sure as many a vertically challenged person will attest, life as a short person when you're younger is tougher than perhaps, you know, the little boys get bullied by the big boys. So maybe when you get older you might want to capitalise on the fact that, you know, you are a small build.

Christine: That's when you come into your own.

Mr C: Mmm. You kind of, I hate to say grow into it because that's exactly what doesn't happen! But you, yeah, you can make the most of your build. So that I think is the two sides of the argument. So the question is I guess where does Christine stand on this argument?

Christine: Well when it first emerged when Brundle did his vague stirring comment I was a bit incensed about that because I just thought it really wasn't very helpful and I wrote about it in my Pick and Mix column after Malaysia, and I just think there is definitely an argument that some sports have different characteristics that you need to have in order to be good at them, tall in basketball or short to be a jockey or whatever and Formula 1 could very well be one of those things. It doesn't seem to have been a problem in the past, but as the sport gets more and more technical and with so many fine details driver weight was inevitably going to become one of the things that made a difference. But then on the flipside to that there's a lot of arguments and as we've discussed many times you know, getting women into the sport and the image of the drivers and teams are portraying whether it's healthy or not, I just think they need to be conscious of the image they are giving out to other people.

Mr C: Right, yes.



Christine: And having drivers starving themselves and putting their lives at risk, I mean it's a fine balance because it's a good message to say that sometimes you have to sacrifice things to get what you want and if you work really hard you will do really well. That's a good message. But then it very easily flips over the edge to – we're putting our lives at risk our future health and other people at risk to do this. And yeah, it's just, it may be going slightly too far now. But I don't know whether the FIA should step in, should they have to? Should drivers not just know better? I don't know.

Mr C: Well the drivers are of course all adults and they can make their own decisions, and if they choose to risk their health as Sutil has seemingly decided to do for this race weekend that's his decision and he's done it presumably with full awareness of what he's doing to his body and therefore he can't nanny, you can't wrap these drivers up in cotton wool and say, you know, you must drink. There was a discussion I think in the Sidepodcast comments earlier today that perhaps the FIA should insist that a water bottle is installed in every car, but then you have to force drivers to drink from them.

Christine: They get reminded a lot because it's hard to multitask don't they? You often hear the engineers going – don't forget to drink. Drink drink drink! But that's not mandating that they drink, it's just like, by the way in case you'd forgotten you do have the option.

Mr C: I mean the extreme of the rule would be a driver must take on board 'X' amount of fluid during a race. That would be the far end of the scale and I'm not sure anybody is really hoping that will happen. But perhaps in the hottest races that also, you know, wouldn't be a bad thing. It depends how far you want to go with health and safety because you could actually say, the FIA take a huge interest in the drivers and maybe they get some kind of feedback. We know the teams can monitor things like heart-rate during a race. Perhaps the medical delegate needs, you know, might have an interest in keeping track of how everybody is performing, you know, you may want to go to that level I don't know. That to me seems a bit too extreme. One thing I would say is that if you take it someone like Felipe Massa, that guy has no hope in a sport such as basketball right, he's been dealt a hand in life which gives him a material advantage in a racing car and he happens to be good at driving a racing car. But if he really really really wanted to be a basketball player and like in his heart of hearts that was what he wanted to do with his life, unfortunately he'd basically have no chance right, because he's just too short and the basket is just too far away from him. I mean he could be, you know, you'd have to be an exceptional shot. NFL is a sport that is similar that favours the big guy and the guy, you know, the large guy who can run fast. That's just the way, that's the nature of that kind of sport. And so, you know, in horse racing you have small people, because that's the best way to make a horse go fast, is to have the lightest jockey available. And so maybe Formula 1 should just be like that, it should be you know, without any kind of rules or regulations, it should favour the kind of drivers which happen to be light and fast.

Christine: Yeah, but it is difficult because there were I think it was Max Chilton who is very skinny at the moment, and he's training all the time and running around on beaches and stuff and he tweeted after the Malaysian race that he'd lost three kilograms and it's not unusual for us to hear about drivers losing body mass in these endurance events but where does that three kilograms come from, he's got nothing on him as it is.

Mr C: To lose.

Christine: There was a great piece on the BBC before the race by Mark Webber where he was showing us what some of the drivers do and some of the ... um, the way they get measured and everything and he was, his body fat was measured at 4% or, no, he put on 1% to 5% now that he's given up racing, and I don't know what normal is but 4% does not seem like very much.

Mr C: I mean Mark Webber is a man who's always looked stick thin.



Christine: Well he's massively tall so he's always had to do that.

Mr C: Yes, he's had to compromise because he was paired with a smaller teammate Sebastian Vettel is not the largest of guys in the pit lane and he worked that advantage anyway he could. Adrian Newey obviously likes or would prefer a lighter driver although Red Bull did go for Daniel Ricciardo this year. He's not a particularly small person. So Mark Webber is a, he was a super-fit guy and he made Formula 1 work for him.

Christine: Well he sort of did!

Mr C: He got the most he could out of Formula 1.

Christine: To the best of his abilities.

Mr C: Mark Webber's problems in Formula 1 were not related so much to his weight.

Christine: No.

[Sweeper]

Christine: There was a great debate in the Free Practice thread today about this subject, because of Sutil's comments and sort of touched upon things that we've said. Lou said "I can't believe everyone is talking about how shocking it is and no one is doing anything. The sport should not be in a state where the drivers have to be dangerously thin and go without a water bottle. How is that a good example to the public? How is that safe?" Janice Marie said, "they are sports people and their judgement about their own health is often terrible. Having played on with broken bones I can attest to this." Crazy people that continue what they are doing with broken bones like Mark Webber, he did didn't he?

Mr C: Yeah, yep.

Christine: Yep, he's driven with broken shins and broken collar bones. I don't understand, if I broke something I'd be crying in a corner somewhere!

Mr C: I'd take a couple of ... well I'd take a few years off!

Christine: Yeah. Steven says "it does need to change but it has baffled me for years why teams sign big drivers, I don't get why they don't limit themselves to smaller lighter drivers. All sports require certain characteristics, I have always used the NBA as Mr C did here, if you are five foot nothing you are not going to play in the NBA. If you are 140 pounds you're not going to be a defence lineman in the NFL." And finally Doctor J said – "Mr C it is hard to fault your logic but personally I want to see the most talented drivers regardless of height, not just the most miniscule ones. There you go."

Mr C: It's interesting that with the current state of Formula 1 and Formula 1 finances that a tall driver like Max Chiltern can still get a drive because actually the funds and sponsorship opportunities that a driver brings to the team currently can outweigh any performance benefits of being lighter. An ideal Formula 1 driver would be a small guy who is light and who has the backing of an international corporation, that's what Formula 1 teams really need right now.

Christine: And is good at driving!



Mr C: Oh, well yeah that too!

Christine: Championship material, any of that matter? No?

Mr C: Not in today's Formula 1 sadly. I mean I'd love to see the best driver, the tallest, you know, the biggest driver do really well in Formula 1, I mean Juan Pablo Montoya actually was infamous for being a large guy. I think Nigel Mansell once couldn't return to Formula 1 because he was too big to get into the cockpit at one point. And so, you know, there have been cases in the past where larger people have done reasonably well in the sport despite their stature and Montoya won races for Williams, he was a big guy. He subsequently got a bit bigger in NASCAR and that's a sport, that's a racing, that's a driving sport that doesn't penalise large guys, you know, you don't have to be a health and fitness freak to do well in NASCAR. Or at least you don't at the moment, potentially in the future that may change too.

Christine: And I think all of this just goes to prove that Hülkenberg really is such a good driver because he doesn't have a lot of backing and he still gets signed and he's not the lightest driver on the grid and still does really really well.

Mr C: Well that guy has worked wonders in some of the worst cars on the grid, I mean you saw again in the last race he was mixing it with the Ferrari in a Force India, he was doing exactly what he's done for the last three maybe more years, which is putting cars into positions that they shouldn't be in, purely because of his talent and yeah, you're right he's a big guy, but obviously his talent outweighs all of the other deficiencies and therefore it doesn't matter that he is tall. On the other hand if you're a small guy I think the small people should be able to capitalise on what they've been given which is, you know, they might not be the best drivers around but they are light enough to still be a contender.

Christine: There was also a comment from Jonathan who said that if smaller becomes more the norm then that might open doors for more women coming into the sport as well because they may have that advantage. I mean Susie's quite tiny really isn't she.

Mr C: Susie and Simona actually are not particularly large and they certainly wouldn't be the tallest in the field if they made it to Formula 1.

Christine: That sort of covers the topic up to where we're at now. We've got the race this weekend to see whether Sutil does manage to get through without his water bottle. I think it's just a really hard topic to make a conclusion about because there are so many different angles to look at, but I think if I had to decide I wouldn't want the FIA to step in and say drivers need to be this level of weight or, you know, mandating that kind of thing, I think that gets a bit too personal, too detailed, too involved, but I think something does need to stop them going too far and I think they might be raising the weight level next year, the minimum weight, and that would probably help a little bit.

Mr C: Well what would help actually would be if Sauber just sorted their car out, because then Sutil wouldn't have to overcompensate. That's the biggest problem, he's trying to account for bad engineering with his, you know, coupled with his own size, so he's doing his best to help the team which is great you know, good on him. But if Sauber could just maybe make the car that much lighter maybe he could take a drinks bottle and not feel too guilty about adding that to the overall weight.

Christine: Seeing as we can't decide we sort of need to hear what you think about it.



Mr C: [Laughter] It's not that we can't decide. It's I don't feel too strongly about it either way. If the FIA decided to bring in a limit then fine and if they decide to just let nature take its course I'm also fine.

Christine: I think it's probably one of those things which will just work itself out in the natural course of events, or the flipside to that is something will happen someone will crash and then they will have to do something.

Mr C: There will be so much bad press that yeah, someone has to step in.

Christine: Either way their hand will probably be forced if that happens. But we want to hear what you think, so you can get in touch with us, leave a voicemail 0121 28 TRACK that's 0121 28 87225 or the username is 'sidepodcast' on Skype. You can email me Christine at sidepodcast dot com [christine@sidepodcast.com] or send us a message via the contact form which is at sidepodcast dot com forward slash contact [www.sidepodcast.com/contact].

Mr C: We look forward to hearing your thoughts and opinions, especially if you have a strong belief on either side of the argument. Do let us know!

[Transcript by Robyn]

