



F1 Debrief – We're not quite ready to let you infiltrate the racing

Christine: This is F1 Debrief; We're not quite ready to let you infiltrate the racing. On this show we discuss elimination style qualifying, the butterfly effect of F1 and an alternative to the closed cockpit solution.

Mr C: Here we are again, the F1 commission/strategy group/mean fiddlers have been twiddling with the F1 rules one more time. We've been here before right, we did this this time last year, someone suggested that refuelling was going to come back, we got all excited, we recorded a podcast, nothing. Am I right?

Christine: You are absolutely correct.

Mr C: And yet here we are one more time, more rule changes, more suggestions, more twiddling about from the people in charge in the hope that they are going to try and find the magic lightning in a bottle that makes F1 exciting again. What is on the cards?

Christine: This time it does seem more likely to go through as opposed to refuelling that just disappeared quietly again. Because I think it is less of an overhaul really. They want to improve the show and for some reason they've decided that qualifying is the thing that needs fixing. I'm not so sure about that, I've never really had a problem with qualifying.

Mr C: Who are they first of all? Who are we talking about, who have made these changes.

Christine: Well it's the F1 strategy group, they met with the F1 commission and said we'd like to change qualifying and the F1 commission said – yeah that's fine. It all has to go before the World Motorsport Council so it could still not happen. But we think it probably will.

Mr C: It's worth mentioning that the World Motorsport Council can't actually make any changes, they can only say yes this is happening, or no it isn't. So what changes have been put forward?

Christine: Well I'm sure everyone has seen it by now, but the point is that qualifying is no longer going to be three sessions, do what you can and see where the chips fall at the end. Now it is three sessions of elimination where the slowest driver is knocked out every 90 seconds. They haven't decided the intricate details but, for example, Q1 is going to be 16 minutes long. After 7 minutes the slowest driver is knocked out, and so on every 90 seconds until the end of the session. The same for Q2, the same for Q3. Until two drivers end up fighting for pole position in the final 90 seconds. So it is very similar to what we have already, it's just more of an ongoing process instead of the bit where qualifying 1 starts and you wait for 10 minutes before anything actually happens.

Mr C: It sounds like we're going to end up with exactly the same grid as we already have. The changes are so minor I'm confused as to why these changes are being required.

Christine: The fastest drivers are still going to end up near the top. I can see that there might be a few bits like, oh my god can you imagine the complaints about traffic we're going to get?



Mr C: True. But we already have a qualifying system whereby occasionally a big named driver makes a mistake and ends up at the back, he's out of position. But the rest of the grid is predictable. Surely that's the outcome that can... that's the possibility that we're looking at here. Somebody makes mistakes, somebody gets put under pressure and therefore they are out of position. But we are not expecting everybody to be out of position. This isn't the magic fix you're looking for in F1 where you don't want the fastest car to be at the front of the field because the fastest driver in the fastest car is just going to run off into the distance. That's presumably the problem they're looking to solve here, but it doesn't sound like this is going to solve that.

Christine: Well exactly. I don't have a problem with this change, except that it's change for change's sake, because it doesn't fix the problem, there's not really that much wrong with qualifying except for those few dull minutes at the start of each session that I mentioned. Yeah, all I can see is that it's going to create other problems like traffic, like how they are going to time it, what happens if there is a red flag, what happens if it rains, all these things.

Mr C: What happens if there is a yellow flag? That's going to cause all sorts of chaos. What happens to the timings then?

Christine: There is also a line in the FIA document says "the final elimination in each session occurs at the chequered flag, not when the time is up." Now to me those two things are the same, the timer counts down to zero and the chequered flag is waved.

Mr C: Currently.

Christine: Yeah. I think they must have put that in there to say, you know that thing where if you are on a lap you can complete your lap even after the chequered flag has dropped. I think that isn't going to happen any more.

Mr C: Ok.

Christine: But that sentence is confusing. So it seems like there are more questions than answers at the moment and I don't really understand what this is going to change.

Mr C: So are you excited to learn about these potential changes. We should say this could potentially come in for this season.

Christine: It is really really close to the start of the season. I mean I'm all for saying it's not that big a change but when it comes to actually doing it, if you've only got a few weeks to prepare it's going to be tricky.

Mr C: And if it doesn't happen this year then it could be put back to 2017. I do wonder whether the right people have been assigned to make this decision because the strategy group is made up of principals from six teams and Bernie and Jean Todt. None of those people are engineers, none of those people are drivers, none of those people are out there during qualifying making the places, making the times and making this happen and I'm not sure any of those people, the people who will inevitably be out there driving will have



to make the decisions will have to make the calls to the pits haven't got any say in the at all. And that seems to be a disconnect which could do with being solved before any more decisions get made I think. It is good that the changes aren't out there and totally radical, this isn't offensive to Formula 1 traditional-ists for example, that's a good thing. But I do wonder if maybe more people could have been consulted. Is there been much feedback or what's the response from drivers or other people in the paddock?

Christine: A few drivers have had their say. Champion Lewis Hamilton said "Generally the format is the same but it just puts more focus on ensuring you get your laps in and it keeps people out. Making sure they are out all the time. Hopefully it will be good for spectators – maybe" Now that 'maybe' at the end makes me think that he doesn't really care either way.

Mr C: yes, or perhaps he just doesn't want to commit right now because, I mean it's only been out for a couple of days really, he hasn't had that much time to think about it.

Christine: Daniel Ricciardo said "There's no limit on how many things they can change but if you were prioritising there were other things which would come first for sure."

Mr C: [Laughter] He's so right. Yes.

Christine: And Carlos Sainz bless him he said of the new regulations or the new proposal "I read it very briefly and I didn't understand it. If it makes things more spectacular than it is welcome. I just hope that the fans that are not big fans of Formula 1 and just turn their TV on Sunday understand it and they know what's happening. That may be my only worry because if I didn't understand it at first glance then maybe that means it's a bit complicated." It doesn't seem that much more complicated.

Mr C: It doesn't. It feels like you have this in games a lot right, when you play console games and that kind of thing, sports games on consoles you have elimination rounds. So I feel like between us we've been through that when we've been playing in the past so it's not a completely brand new concept. I don't know if any other sports do this. Perhaps they do, or whether it's just a gaming thing. But you know hopefully someone's done a simulation, or someone has ran the numbers and looked into this and this isn't just pie in the sky we're making stuff up as we go along, there is actually some backing or background, you know, to prove that this works before you put it on national television and hope to God that it does.

Christine: Fingers crossed. But in the games the car that is eliminated just sort of disappears – poof, into smoke, just dissolves. In real life I don't know how they are going to manage like slower cars out on track at the same time, I'm just very worried about traffic.

Mr C: The cars are going to be on track when it's... likely to be on track, it could be in the pits I suppose, the car is likely to be on track when it is eliminated and then it has to return to the pits. It can't pull over to one side, it can't just disappear, so it's going to be in the way, it has to be. But I suppose it already is in qualifying, you already have that problem.

Christine: Yes, I just think it's going to be a lot worse and we already get complaints about – this car's in my way, and this one, and that one. I'm just concerned.



Mr C: Penalties, that's the concern isn't it? Endless, endless penalties for Sunday for people who are blocking in the way. Especially as people get used to it and get their heads around it. Yeah, that could be tricky. It does feel like there is a lot of pressure on the pit crews, on the people on the pit wall making the calls making the decisions, keeping the driver informed. They haven't got much time to prepare for this at all.

Christine: Pat Symonds said, "This year we have more say in the selection of the tyres, we have already made the nominations for the first few races and we have done that without the knowledge that the qualifying procedure was going to change. I'm sure that as we analyse it we will say had we known this then we would have chosen differently but the fact is we're in the same boat so I don't think it's such a big deal." I do think that's quite a big deal. The tyre nominations had to be made ridiculously early this year because they've changed all that and now everything has changed underneath them.

Mr C: This could be the new plan to spice up Formula 1 is just to change the rules on an add hoc basis and not tell anybody. And so like, by the way the rules change next month – deal with it. And just see what happens. Some people who are concerned I imagine would be the people who are in charge of the F1 timing app. You know the mobile app you can buy to follow F1 live throughout the season, that all needs to be rewritten and they don't know right now whether or not they should start rewriting it because these rules have not been sworn in, but at the same time if they leave it any later they are not going to have time to finish it, so how are those people and the people in charge of timing at the track going to have time to change their systems and make things ready for the start of the season which is only weeks ago.

Christine: It is surprising how many people are affected by, at the beginning of the show I said it's not really that big a change, but actually it affects a lot of people.

Mr C: In very small ways, in very minor ways. It's like, you know, you make one decision but the unintended consequences just filter down to more and more people. So there's a lot of programmers and engineers I imagine who are going to be having a few sleepless nights between now and the opening race.

[Sweeper]

Christine: It wasn't just qualifying that was discussed by the strategy group and the F1 commission. They have also put forward a driver of the day award as the document puts it "Viewers will be encouraged to vote online for their driver of the day throughout a grand prix with the winner to be announced as part of the race broadcast immediately following the conclusion of the race when the driver will be presented with their prize." So on the face of it I'm fine with that because, you know it saves us doing a poll on our website. And driver of the day is always a fun thing to talk about and decide. I am worried whether they've talked to Bernie about this because if the driver of the day is on the podium then presenting them with an award is going to intrude on the podium etiquette and he's very fussy about that. And then also like if they are just going to chase someone down in the pit lane and give them a prize or something, the post-race stuff is always very, always feels very hurried and frantic to me anyway and I don't want them squeezing more things in and doing it haphazardly.

Mr C: I wouldn't mind betting that it's only the pay per view broadcasters that get to cover this. I wouldn't be surprised if it's the bit that happens after the free-to-air broadcasters go off air because they are obviously on a tight timescale and the people like Sky who broadcast forever, who are like broadcasting into the night and into the next day.



Christine: We've got our own channel.

Mr C: We're still at the paddock, we're still broadcasting as the motorhomes come down. Might get an exclusive on that because it sort of seems to be designed for broadcasters to give them more value. Presumably it will be via social media that people get to vote.

Christine: Well it says vote online so maybe there'll be like a poll on F1.com or something like that.

Mr C: It's good, I mean the danger of this is when you put it alongside something like fan boost, the thing that Formula E are doing where you get to actually, fans get to make a difference to the race. You get to have a tiny, tiny influence over the outcome or the events that unfold in a Grand Prix. And here all you do is you get to vote on the driver who gets a trophy and it just seems so out of date. I mean it is good that they are doing it, but it needs to be that and then more.

Christine: It's like, we're trying but we're not quite ready to let you infiltrate the racing itself.

Mr C: Mmm. You can have this tiny little concession to fans.

Christine: It's probably a good thing though because whenever I've watched Formula E and the fan boost thing, whoever gets the fan boost tends to crash out anyway so maybe it is better not to let the fans do that.

Mr C: But the concept that the fans have a direct influence on the racing is a grand idea. And instead of picking that ball up and running with it in Formula 1 they've sort of said well that looks great but that's not for us.

Christine: Not for us.

Mr C: No, no, we're far too highfalutin and above that. But it's nice, you're right. We in the past as podcasters have done driver of the day, it's an interesting bit of feedback you get from fans you know. Perspective is important. The other problem you've got is that when you have someone like Kimi Räikkönen whose fan base is rabid and huge and vast and global and it may well be that he just wins it every race regardless of what he does just because, you know, you know, I guess the worst case scenario is Taylor Swift walks it every time.

Christine: It could happen.

Mr C: You never know.

Christine: And there were some 2017 bodywork decisions made. I don't think they went into too many specifics but the idea is to add downforce, increase speeds, lower lap times, make things more competitive. And the F1 commission are also keen on the cockpit cover and that could be introduced from 2017 onwards.



Mr C: I think they are missing a trick here, just off the top of my head, this has just popped into my head. I haven't thought this through, if anyone is listening to this show back and they think you really haven't thought this through, I haven't. I will admit that way before I say this. But it occurs to me that the cockpit design is supposed to stop errant bouncing tyres flying into the face of Formula 1 drivers and that is its primary requirement if I understand it correctly. And what I think would be better, is you know with the wheel tethers when a car has an accident the tyres fly off and the wheel tethers are supposed to hold them in place up to a certain degree and then they release them. What if there was a bung attached to the wheel tether, it was put in place inside the tyre so when the tyre popped off it immediately deflated. Then a bouncing errant tyre would be inert because it has no internal mass. You know what I mean?

Christine: You've just used a lot of big words there.

Mr C: They may not be the correct words!

Christine: I like the word 'bung'. So you've got a flat tyre rolling instead of bouncing around.

Mr C: Well, yeah. It is going to be effectively flailing rubber.

Christine: I feel like flailing rubber could still do a lot of damage, but a lot less damage.

Mr C: It wouldn't bounce. I mean I'm not saying it wouldn't still be dangerous but it wouldn't bounce off the driver's head, potentially. And I just wonder whether anyone has looked into that thought. Because you've got tethers attached to the centre of the wheel rim, why not thread that through...

Christine: I don't think it is just the tyres though. 'Cause we've seen people crashing into barriers or tractors and also sustaining head injuries so it is more about protection all around, not just things coming in.

Mr C: If they have the glass and one of the ideas is you have like full facial cover which would stop things like the spring that hit Massa. So it could have other uses. Part of me just things why don't you just go all the way and just close the damn cockpit. You know, that would solve all the problems. It makes harder for a driver to get out and maybe it takes away from the essence of Formula 1. But if the fully closed cockpit is a safer solution and it works at Le Mans pretty well and those style sports cars then maybe just go all the way and admit it is now closed cockpit racing because that's what health and safety demands.

Christine: Hamilton would prefer it went the other way. He said "I like a different kind of car. I don't have all the answers I just would have a preferred type of car. I love a V12 and the big wider tyres. I saw a picture of an old Ferrari when the sidepods were super low. It must have been in the mid-80s and it just looked so cool with the wide track, wide wishbones and the slick tyres. Those were the days." Ah, our champion is getting nostalgic.

Mr C: I mean he might be on to something. The thing that you've got with modern Formula 1 is this all-encompassing problem of aerodynamics and you can't unlearn what engineers have already learned and you can't throw that information away and forget that you ever knew that that was a good way to make a Formula 1 car go faster. But there must be some way to reduce what teams are able to do in terms of aerodynamics. Because it is aero that makes it harder for a car to follow another car and makes passing difficult and we have DRS because of aerodynamics. If you could find a way to reduce that, somebody



should be looking into making the cars less reliant on aerodynamics or making that a smaller impact in the world of Formula 1. And if that means going back to older cars perhaps that is the way to do it but, you know, it really comes down to who is being asked and who is being tasked with doing these things. It sounds like for example the closed cockpit the right people have been looking into it. Red Bull I know have come up with another idea an alternative solution that is being looked at. It feels like engineers have had a say. It feels like it is being done correctly, whereas the qualifying changes pretty much seems like it is pie in the sky and out of the blue, but at least with the safety things it feels like the right people are looking at that. I wonder if maybe a taskforce could be created to try and make Formula 1 less reliant on aero which is mostly relevant to the rest of the world and actually makes the racing worse in the process.

Christine: When I tweeted why are they concentrating on qualifying when that is clearly not the problem we had Nick Stephenson replied saying, “because they refuse to believe the real problem is something they are really really good at and in love with, aerodynamics.”

Mr C: Oooh, yes. Yes, that is the truth, that is the truth. No one in Formula 1 wants to make that decision. That is worrying but also absolutely correct. Who said that?

Christine: Nick.

Mr C: Genius Nick, genius. Crushed it. Formula 1 loves aerodynamics despite the fact it is destroying its sport.

[Sweeper]

Christine: Nick may have crushed it, as you say. But I’m sure plenty of other people out there have their opinions too and we’d like to hear them, we’d love to. You can get in touch with us, contact@sidepodcast.com which is a new email address – contact@sidepodcast.com. Or you can send us voicemails 01212 887225, let us know what you think. We are hoping to be back in this podcasting business, we’d like to get your feedback, we can put together feedback shows like we did before, there is more to come.

Mr C: Are you saying that if people bother to get in touch and air their views we might not only read them but we might react to them?

Christine: Yes!

Mr C: What a revelation!

Christine: I know it is a change in policy from the last 12 months and more.

Mr C: I would like to know what people think of self-deflating F1 wheels.

Christine: The ones you just made up?

Mr C: Yeah. Is it even possible? It seems like it should be possible and if you know anything about engineering or inflation – not that kind of inflation – tyre inflation, then we’d love to hear from you.



Christine: You are going to get all finance people and business suits, inflation is all about...

Mr C: Not that, no, don't be silly. I would just like to know if cockpit safety is a solution to a problem that could be resolved by another means, maybe one that is less ugly. That's my simple question for the listeners of Sidepodcast this week.

Christine: That's about it for now I think, but don't worry I think we might be back for more podcasts this year, especially more than we did last year, but that's not a hard number to beat.

Mr C: F1 is back, testing is back, 2016 is going to be a very good year, I can feel it, I have a tingle.

Christine: I'm excited.

[Transcript by Robyn]