



F1 Debrief – We want them exploding in fury

Christine: This is F1 Debrief - We want them exploding in fury. Coming up on this show, we get replaced by a better podcaster.

Alex: Hello Sidepodcast, long time no speak. It's Alex "Giggles" Andronov here. I was motivated to call in after the tremendously fun Mexican Grand Prix. I'd like to start out by pointing out that I'm not an F1 purist. I watch F1 to be entertained. This sometimes gets confused by people into thinking I want push-to-pass buttons and reverse grids and so on. But it doesn't. It does mean, however, that I don't automatically think, for example, that refuelling or DRS are bad. I want an understandable sport and actually rule changes tend to mix things up in a positive way. I don't like it when one team is too dominant for too long, but I understand why it happens. I actually think the sport is in pretty good shape at the moment. But only the sport is in good shape, not the entertainment.

Why? I think it might be professionalism. When did it start? Some might think it was Ron and McLaren with his corporate mumbo-jumbo, but it didn't really because Ron was way too ruthless. I think it was his successor, Whitmarsh, coming at the same time as Domenicali at Ferrari, with Max and Flavio departing, and the arrival of Mercedes and all of a sudden, with a notable exception of Bernie, F1 was suddenly being run by sensible suits. An air of professionalism started to creep into the management, but it wasn't just the management. The drivers too have been PRed within an inch of their lives. Notable exceptions here are Lewis, Alonso and Kimi. They're the only ones who will properly speak out against their team. Guess what? They're some of the most popular drivers on the grid, I feel like I know who they are and what they're about. Vettel has a bit of it when he's under pressure, and Red Bull has suddenly provided us with Ricciardo and his shoe, and Max and his Schui-like aggression. Characters for our play, like them or not, but they aren't fighting for the championship. Even Lewis seems subdued, but why? Is it professionalism again?

The team bosses all do it now. When Bottas injured his back and had to sit out a race, Claire Williams said that while he had not wanted to miss a race, her team had made a considerable investment in their driver and she didn't want to injure him for some short term gain. It was probably the right, logical, professional decision. But it wasn't a passionate decision. And now the drivers do it too. Over the last few years, Lewis has grown increasingly zen when things go wrong, and this year, Nico seems to have copied the plan. He's only focused on the race in hand, he's not concentrating on the championship. But is he? He says that to try and limit the psychological impact of the other factors from the previous race and not bring them forward. If he actually was focusing on the race in hand, he'd just stick one up the inside more often. So he's trying to be balanced, he's trying to be sensible, he's trying to be professional. But where's the fun in that? We want them to get under each other's skin, we want them exploding in fury. Max has clearly put a cat amongst the pigeons, and Seb is feeling the pressure. But I want more.

I want my soap opera back. The political infighting between drivers, principals, the FIA and FOM, were exactly what kept you going when the racing was a bit dull, and I'm glad to see it back. Every time somebody gets annoyed at Lewis, I think, yes, people care! Every time Mr C wants to throw the book at Max, I think, yes, people care! Or at least, Mr C does. You have to make people care. A perfect, purist sport isn't that interesting. The best people just keep on winning. It's the characters and story that make me care. And I want more.



And now, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the fans here at this race. They are absolutely the best fans here, even though I say this at every race. And they gave me a real boost, even though they give me a real boost at every race seemingly. I also want to thank the team back at GigglesAdvent.com who've worked tirelessly on my car all season, despite me occasionally destabilising team morale by sort of accusing them of sabotaging my car but not really. Anyway, hope the rest of the season is as exciting as this race. Bring on the drama.

Mr C: Oh my goodness. How in the world are we supposed to follow that? What a brilliant voicemail. Get that man Giggles his own podcast.

Christine: Yea, he's doing a better job than we are.

Mr C: Much better job, and also managed to get in a cheeky little plug I noticed. Still on point that man.

Christine: He always does that. We must say that the wonderful Giggles actually sent that before we recorded our most recent Joe show, but amazingly, the two have made very similar points that the sport in itself is generally alright but it's all about the personalities and the PR gurus are ruining everything.

Mr C: F1 is close to being good. We've seen more of this year's season than perhaps the last couple of years, we're watching a bit more racing but it does need something extra because the drivers in the car, Formula One drivers look like robots, under their helmets, in their Nomex, they don't look like real people and what you need more than anything is for drivers to be real people when they're out of the car. You know, to have some kind of connection, to have some kind of reason to watch so that you're not just watching machines going round in circles, so you want that personality, you want drivers to express themselves and thankfully we're getting, right at the tail end of this season, we're finally getting more of that from the drivers.

Christine: Yea, it seems to be the topic under discussion by everyone and we have three recent examples of drivers trying their best to have a personality but sometimes being thwarted and we thought we would cover those three now. Our first driver is Max Verstappen and as Giggles said, Mr C does care about him...

Mr C: I do!

Christine: Even though he would like not to.

Mr C: Well, I mean, mostly I complain about Max Verstappen, mostly about his driving, sometimes about things he says off the track but at least he's giving me a reason to watch and a reason to care. Imagine how dull the Mexican Grand Prix would have been if it wasn't for Max Verstappen. The first lap and the first corner, that was worth tuning in for. Pretty much the rest of the race was totally forgettable until Max did his thing in the final closing stages and made it a race worth watching, and now, even two weeks later, a race still worth talking about.

Christine: He is making a bit of a name for himself by being super aggressive on track and I have quite enjoyed the growing animosity between him and Kimi Räikkönen. They always seem to end up on track



next to each other. But he may not be making friends with the drivers but it makes him hugely popular with the fans because he's always winning driver of the day, even when he doesn't finish a race.

Mr C: When he's barely in the race, yea. There is, he's popular with some, he's unpopular with others. They've had to bring in a new regulation to curb his enthusiasm which hasn't happened in a while, and you don't want to get to that point perhaps. You don't want the entire paddock and all of the drivers are gunning for, and also the rulemakers, because you've gone too far. I do genuinely worry that he might do someone a serious injury with the way he's going, but you know, at the moment, it's all been safe enough. And you know, some drivers have defended him, it's not all been, you know, it's not all been bad.

Christine: Yea, Lewis almost came to his defense, was it after the Japanese race, when he asked his team to drop the protest they had against Verstappen's driving. But then again, Lewis is not above causing some aggro himself.

Mr C: He caused a bit of grief in the media, yes. I like that though, I really like Lewis Hamilton expanding Formula One's horizons because if you leave the promotion of the sport to the sport's promoters, it won't get sold. Nobody in the promotion department has an interest in selling this sport to fans, to new fans, they're only interested in selling their wares to the old existing fans who are currently turning off faster than new fans are turning on. Lewis Hamilton's doing a fine job, he caused a lot of upset in the media though.

Christine: Yea, his little antics in the press conference, obviously, with his Snapchatting and stuff. We, actually, mostly blame that on Sky because they broadcast the press conferences and have made them into the spectacle they are, when actually they're not supposed to be hugely interesting to people watching, they're supposed to be for the press to get their questions in.

Mr C: Well this is what happens when you've got a Formula One channel with no Formula One content to show. Anything that comes along which would feature anything to do with Formula One, you'll take it, right? You'll take it because it's cheap, it's already being created, it's already being filmed. It is deathly, deathly dull. I did watch the very, very first press conference and thought 'oh this is interesting, I get to watch a press conference.'

Christine: Yea!

Mr C: Second time, really not.

Christine: Did the novelty wear off quite quickly?

Mr C: Very, very, very, very quickly. Surprisingly quickly. It's terrible television, I mean, the worst kind of television. You look at it and think, who signed this off, and then who is tuning in to take part in this as an audience member. I mean, why would you sit through this? It's awful. It's not interesting on paper when you get to skim read it and speed read it, but actually sitting through it in real time live, my goodness me. You can see why Lewis Hamilton's annoyed at it because his fans are tuning in and they're watching him twiddling his thumbs, on television.

Christine: The only thing is, I kind of like that he made a stand, but it sort of came out of nowhere? He's not



been complaining about it before and suddenly he decided he was bored so he wasn't standing for it anymore. None of that, not even a whisper of that all season, leading up to then, it just sort of snapped.

Mr C: He snapped on Snapchat.

Christine: He did.

Mr C: That's what happened.

Christine: One point I did want to mention about that subject was on the, I think it was on the Chequered Flag podcast, the BBC one. They pointed out that the journalists were all excited about Liberty Media coming in and bringing F1 to modern audiences in the digital age, it's gonna be brilliant, but then Hamilton is trying to do exactly that, he's taken it upon himself, and they hate him for it.

Mr C: That's, yea, that's media hypocrisy for you. There is, I mean, Snapchat is, if you're a print journalist, Snapchat must be public enemy number one. It's like, why is nobody reading your newspaper anymore? It's because they're all on Snapchat with their friends. Nobody wants to read traditional print and that's where everybody is going. And so to, it must be something of an insult for Lewis Hamilton to literally bring that elephant into the room.

Christine: Bring the bunny ears into the room.

Mr C: And just say, I'm not going to listen to you guys who have been doing this for decades, instead I'm going to talk to my fans one to one direct, bypassing all of you in the process. So, I don't know whether, maybe, I'm curious whether Lewis Hamilton is that aware of what he was doing, like, whether he was actually doing it that deliberately and that intentionally or whether he just really likes Snapchat. He just really wanted to be on there.

Christine: He wasn't making a protest, he just liked playing the game.

Mr C: Yea, but he picked the wrong game at the wrong time, perhaps.

Christine: One of the few ways the FIA have made the effort to spice up the press conferences is by very carefully picking the drivers that appear in there, usually ones that have clashed before. You know, Jarno Trulli and his pictures and all that kind of thing. And recently, we've had Sebastian Vettel having a go at Charlie Whiting, so of course, Charlie Whiting appeared in the driver's press conference.

Mr C: Yep, that infamous Formula One driver Charlie Whiting.

Christine: It was very random. But before we talk about that, what do we think of Vettel and his swearing? You seemed to quite enjoy it.

Mr C: Well, I did. It comes back to the fact that I was half asleep at that point in the race and there really was, it was very much a case of why am I sat here wasting my Sunday evening watching these cars go round in circles? We know what the end result's going to be. There's a suggestion that it might build to a climax, we might see a car overtake another car. And then instead, oh my goodness, it all kicked off. And



the thing is, Sebastian Vettel is obviously frustrated about his position in F1's pecking order at the moment, and obviously he was having a fairly decent race by Ferrari's standards and he was keen to keep that position. Max Verstappen, who is known for overstepping the mark, looked like he overstepped the mark again, and Max Verstappen's team told him to give the place back, and Max wouldn't do it, and so it riled Vettel up. But the thing is, just like I said before, these guys look like robots in the car, and the radio is our one lifeline to understand what they're thinking and to understand their mindset, and we now really, really have a clear understanding of what Vettel's mindset was at that time. And to be fair, that's what my... I was... you know, everything Vettel said on the radio was everything I was saying on my sofa, at the time. He was channelling my frustration at Verstappen. So I really enjoyed it. Now, there is a point when you say, look, you don't need to be swearing on the radio and we try and keep Sidepodcast family friendly, you know, you want... you don't want to be putting off young viewers and young listeners with bad language, but Formula One Management are bleeping out the swear words, firstly, it's not... I think maybe one time earlier this year they may have missed...

Christine: One did slip through.

Mr C: One or two words got through, but generally speaking they're quite good at that so you get a gist of what the drivers are saying but you don't actually get the full language.

Christine: You don't get the full impact.

Mr C: So I think that's fine. If the guy's frustrated at Charlie, say so. That's what you want, that's what you want. I'm really annoyed at Charlie Whiting right now. Imagine if that kicked off on the final laps, and you're sitting at the sofa screaming at the television, and then a Formula One driver comes on the radio and goes 'that's not on, Charlie, please have a look at that.'

Christine: 'Didn't much like that.'

Mr C: 'Didn't enjoy that at all there.' You'd be, what on earth? Do you not care about the race? Do you not care about Formula One? Do you not care what you're doing? You want that passion, you want that belief, you want that energy channelled back to your living room, and if it involves some colourful language, then I think so be it at that point. And Charlie, when he was in his driver's press conference...

Christine: Which was so weird.

Mr C: For hopefully the first and last time, he said he was fine with it.

Christine: He wasn't bothered at all.

Mr C: He wasn't bothered by it. There's a lot of people, some especially in the media, trying to create more out of this because they're trying to create headlines because they're trying to create stories but it's good, it's good that we get some kind, this kind of connection. Whether they're mad, whether they're happy, whether they're sad, whatever, we do need that. I do think the opposite problem of that is what we saw at the beginning of the grand prix when Juan Pablo Montoya popped on the radio to have a chat with Esteban Gutiérrez, which was really weird and totally... it seemed completely contrived, like trying to create some kind of entertainment.



Christine: That is weird.

Mr C: Why is Juan Pablo Montoya, who hasn't been on any of the coverage previously, popped up out of nowhere, hasn't been in Formula One for decades...

Christine: If that's trying to get young people in, they're not going to know who he is.

Mr C: No, and then randomly talks to some guy who's not in a title fight, who happens to be a home favourite, whatever. Very, very... that's how to do it wrong, that's how to get radio wrong, you definitely do not want anything, you know, that's the wrong approach. However, letting drivers be themselves, giving us insight into what they're thinking, I think is necessary and if it comes with the side effect of swearing, so be it. It's not an ideal, but I would rather that than no radio at all. Which, by the way, was Max Verstappen's actual suggestion this week.

Christine: No radio!

Mr C: This is genuinely Max Verstappen's best idea, to solve the problem of swearing on the radio, is that any time somebody swears on the radio, don't broadcast.

Christine: Just don't play it.

Mr C: Just don't play it. Except, anytime anybody wants to keep anything secret on the radio, drop in a couple of swear words, then you know it's not going to be broadcast. That's how smart Max Verstappen is, by the way, not that he annoys me.

Christine: Team orders via swearing is what we're saying.

Mr C: Every team order or every piece of secretive piece of information will come wrapped in its own colourful language.

Christine: If you ever did get to hear those radio clips, they would be hilarious. Trying to have a conversation with all the swearing in it, and actually still trying to make sense.

Mr C: Yes.

Christine: I think a lot of the emotion that we hear comes from when drivers are in a bad mood. I mean you do always see them jumping around on the podium when they're happy and stuff, but it's the bad moods that create the emotion and the drama. For example, Romain Grosjean always having a go at his team and his brakes and he's been whining all year about that. I'm a big Grosjean fan and the whining is annoying but it creates a storyline for this year, that he's had a really bad year, he went to this team to try and do good things and it's not gone his way. And we hear him on the radio almost crying how rubbish his car is, he's not swearing but he probably is. So that is a bit of personality that we see but we want more than that, we want drivers to be able to be honest, I think Joe said this, be honest about their teams and if their teams aren't doing the job or aren't delivering the goods, then let them be told.



Mr C: I wonder how much of these problems could be solved if teams and drivers had some kind of invested interest in the success of the sport. So at the moment, teams get their money via their position in the championship and then drivers get their money from teams based on the kind of results they bring. That's essentially the financial structure but nobody loses if Formula One drops half a million viewers, for example. I mean, sponsors, you get less money for sponsorship so teams will struggle, but there isn't a connection between the number of people watching and following Formula One, and the money that the teams get as a result. I wonder if there shouldn't be more of that kind of connection, like, if you lose 500,000 viewers in a week, be more interesting or you're going to go out of business.

Christine: Yea.

Mr C: And that maybe something that, maybe an area that should be looked at. Because until people, until teams care about the audience figures, really care about the audience figures, don't just say 'oh you know, we're really sad that Formula One isn't reaching the heights that it used to be able to do', you know actually care and actually go out and make a difference and put some effort into it, I don't think it will change. I don't think they're incentivised enough to make a difference.

Christine: Yea, that's interesting. Also, what could help is if the interests of the driver and the team were not so aligned, as in, they have one PR person who works for the team and tries to keep their driver under control but what if the driver had their own personal PR person who was obviously trying to promote the driver, the team's got theirs trying to promote the team and then you get more fireworks that way.

Mr C: Yes, that's another way. Yea, that's what you need. You need to break whatever the current situation is, it has to be pulled apart and put back together in a way that better enhances the Formula One experience because at the moment it is definitely detrimental to it when you're struggling to find, you're looking hard to find the interest, you know, you're always like, okay well there's not much going on on track, what else can we discuss, what else can we talk about?

Christine: Also, I think actually the biggest problem is that Giggles said he wanted his Formula One season to be like a soap opera, to bring the drama, and all good soap operas are interesting because they have to have a bad boy, a nemesis, someone to rail again. And there hasn't really been a bad boy for a while, maybe Pastor Maldonado was it, and Max Verstappen is rapidly heading that way. But no one wants to be the bad boy, so they're all trying to be too good and too goody-two-shoes and all that, and that's maybe where we're falling down.

Mr C: Everybody wants to be nice and be liked and just be like wallpaper. Just like, no one is going to stand out from the crowd, they're just going to blend in and that's boring. Yea, that's not what you need. But again, you need to, because they get paid regardless. It doesn't matter to them because they take their paycheck and they just go home, as long as they've been wearing the right watch at the right time, and the right cap with the right logo on it, that's where their focus is. One other thing that's just on this subject is, right now, there are too many broadcasters asking the same questions of drivers at different times, if that makes sense. Certainly in the UK it's worse because we have two broadcasters going to every race.

Christine: Well it's three really, because you've got BBC radio and BBC TV. Uh, Channel 4 TV, and BBC Radio.



Mr C: And Sky.

Christine: And Sky.

Mr C: So the UK are sending three different companies to cover Formula One, all of whom wish to speak to a driver, all of whom have exactly the same questions. Lewis Hamilton is going to go into the paddock this weekend, and he knows every single question is going to be about the championship and how he feels about it and instead of that being one question he has to answer once, it's going to be that one question times every broadcaster, every day, because they all want the same information to cover the same... you know what I mean? This is something else that could be looked at. Lewis Hamilton talks to Sky, answers that question, how's your championship going? Right, well, this is how I think the championship's going to go, this is my approach. Brilliant. Puts the microphone down, goes to the next channel, there's Channel 4 there. Same question. Put the microphone down, go to the next one, it's the BBC. Put the microphone down. Then you've got Spain. And then you've got France. And then you've got Germany. And then you've got Italy. And then you've got Brazil. And then it goes on and on and every single time you answer the same damn question, with the same answer.

Christine: But that's what the press conference is for, isn't it? The guy asks all the questions and then you get a few questions from the floor and generally you should cover everything but that doesn't work.

Mr C: It covers print media.

Christine: It doesn't work for the TV crews and their ninety minutes of preview and everything.

Mr C: That's the issue.

Christine: Again, we're back to filling the time that you have on your F1 channel.

Mr C: When you have a 24/7, 365 F1 channel, and literally no content to fill, you're gonna want to interview everybody and you're going to ask the same questions and if every single country has the same problem, they have the same questions, it's just going to go on and on and on. If I was Lewis Hamilton, I would be going out of my mind with media commitments.

Christine: But also, for example, Sky and their F1 channel, they could fill that by interviewing every single driver but they don't because they are in love with Lewis Hamilton and maybe a couple of others around the edges. I mean, there are 22 drivers out there, that would fill a lot of time, but they just don't care about them all because they're not very interesting, because they are all trying to be too good and wallpary. It's just a big circle, I don't know how we're ever going to find an answer.

Mr C: Well we have to. We only have to go back as far as 2007, 2008, 2009, we used to be able to record one of these shows every single week, and not because we had more time or because we cared more, but because there was more to discuss. There was more to talk about back then, there was more interest. I mean, in 2007, there was the spygate thing, you could do a podcast every single day about that. That was exceptional. But in 2008 there was interest, in 2009 there was discussions, there were topics, there was politics, there was scandal, there were things to discuss. Alex said at the top of the show, he mentioned



Flavio Briatore, we're missing characters. Flavio, not the nicest person to ever step inside a Formula One paddock.

Christine: Singapore crash-gate and all that.

Mr C: I know, I know, but at least he was interesting. At least we could talk about him.

Christine: That did give us something to talk about in a show.

Mr C: And that's what you're missing. I mean, look how many podcasts we've done this year, it's not because we're lazy, it's because there's nothing to discuss.

Christine: It is slightly because we're lazy as well, but shh, yea.

Mr C: It's mostly because the enthusiasm to talk about these things isn't there because it's just bland drivers saying bland things.

Christine: If the drivers had the enthusiasm, maybe we'd pick up on that too. But they just don't seem to, they just seem to want to go through the motions. I suppose it doesn't help that everyone knows how this season is going to go.

Mr C: Yes, at this point in the season. Although, you say that but the tail end of the season has actually got interesting, so it's not like the inevitability of Mercedes winning... that is a problem, and that's a problem that Formula One should work to resolve but that is not what's happening here. You've still got drivers who care and who are getting irate, and we just need to feel more of that. We need to feel that it actually matters. It's only a silver trinket with your name on it at the end of the year, right? That's all it is. The World Driver's Championship doesn't actually matter.

Christine: What!!

Mr C: Don't say it too late, don't tell anyone, that you know, it's just a shiny thing. And it's not really that significant, but it does, it has to matter, or it's not worth watching Formula One. So we have to feel, we have to be made, as audience members, we have to be made to feel like it matters to those who are taking part. Like they're not just out for a Sunday afternoon drive.

Christine: Yea, Giggles said it, he said it best, you have to make people care.

Mr C: I told you, we should have just played out Giggles' voicemail and just called it a day. Really, that was perfect. We've just waffled on and on and we've added nothing to the conversation that Alex didn't put more succinctly at the beginning. That's just the way it is. How does that make you feel? We should do less podcasts, and Alex should do more. That's the answer. That's how you make Formula One more interesting.