



F1 Debrief – Long live F1!

Christine: This is F1 Debrief - Long Live F1! Coming up on this show we discuss champagne and party food, Liberty's new trio, and defining Bernie's legacy.

Mr C: News broke just hours ago that Bernie Ecclestone is being ousted from his position within the Formula One Group. He's being deposed and he's gone, apparently, according to himself. Now, he's broken this news, he spoke to Tobi Grüner from Auto Motor Und Sport, and so we have to take it with a slight pinch of salt because it's not been officially confirmed by Liberty but to all intents and purposes we think it's pretty much the truth. It's a fact. Yesterday, Andrew Benson actually suggested such a move might be happening so it's sort of been an open secret for the last 24 hours. So, given the news, given the fact that we've been waiting for some seven or eight years for this to happen. I think we've been praying for somebody, that there was a big change at the top, and given that it's happened, it's probably worth having a quick chat about it. On the line, we have Class of the Field columnist extraordinaire Adam Barton, hello Adam.

Adam: Hello!

Mr C: How's it going?

Adam: Yea, it's all going well, how are you?

Mr C: Well, we are in... we have party food.

Christine: We're celebrating.

Mr C: We have drink. We're sort of over the moon. What are your thoughts on this, are you in the same sort of boat as we are?

Adam: Yea I am to an extent. I think it's good for the sport, it's never good to have someone running the sport for such a long time and in such a position of power, keeping control in probably less than ethical ways is the fairest way to describe it, to stop the sport growing in its natural course.

Mr C: Yea. Have you got the bunting out, are you celebrating and cheering or are you wary of what might come next?

Adam: I'm sure there's a champagne cork in the background that I could pop.

Christine: The thing is, we have to say, it's never nice for someone to lose their job when they still want it. But that being said, thank god, he's been there for so long and he's got such a stranglehold at the top of the sport. All the circuits hate him, many of the drivers question what he gets up to, lots of team principals... I mean, he's friendly with a few, but I expect there's a lot of people celebrating today.



Adam: It's an example, why the Lewis Hamilton Skype, sorry not Skype, Snapchat incident in Japan, I think it's sort of an example of where the sport is losing out with Bernie Ecclestone being in charge. They needed a fresh idea and Hamilton admitted that the thing was they were bored with the same press conferences, the same routine race after race.

Mr C: We know the methods and the problems that Bernie's caused us. Do we think it's going to change though? Is there like, can we look forward to a better future?

Adam: I think it will change over time, I think there'll probably be smaller changes to start with and certainly Liberty will have been looking at what they can do since the news broke and obviously long before that, before they made the investment. But the, I think the first thing they're going to look at is getting fans more involved and potentially the setup of the race weekend and things, as I said, like the press conference. Maybe shortening it down to two days so it's more about the fan experience rather than the actual racing, because at the end of the day they're into their money rather than their racing, they're not geniuses in how to run sports, are they?

Christine: There's talk that Chase Carey is going to be the man in charge, but he's going to bring in Ross Brawn to take on a sort of sporting view, and Sean Bratches from ESPN to take on a commercial view, so already he's democratising it, you know, getting in more opinions, not just thinking he knows best and he knows how it should all work.

Adam: Yea, it's good to have some fresh ideas, isn't it? And not have, saying, oh the fans will want this, and instituting things that they think will be popular rather than checking and going through rigorous testing first.

Mr C: Todt and Brawn have some history.

Adam: Not again. Well, it certainly worked well the first time, didn't it?

Mr C: It did, when they were on the same side.

Adam: Yea. I think it's a good match, certainly to have Brawn in charge and Todt is, he's... I think he's good at what he does but he has been far quieter as an FIA President than, certainly than his predecessor, hasn't he?

Mr C: Do you think, those two don't have any history, there's no bad blood between them, they left on good terms, didn't they?

Adam: Definitely. I seem to remember when Brawn won the constructor's and Todt who had recently become the FIA president, sort of appeared in the garage as they won the world championship and just floated through and floated back out, so there's obviously a relationship there, but it's a good ten years ago since they were working closely on a day to day basis. It's certainly good to have Ross Brawn back in the picture. He will be the key figure in making sure the sport is competitive and there is close wheel to wheel racing, rather than, sorry I keep getting the name Chase Carey or Carey Chase confused. But I think he'll have a far more bigger impact on the racing than Liberty themselves.



Mr C: Can you see Bernie being a thorn in the side of Liberty going forward? He's claimed he's going to have some kind of...

Christine: He said: "My new position is one of those American terms. It's something like an honorary president. I have this title now, even though I don't know what it means."

Mr C: That's fantastic.

Adam: The microphone's never far away from him, is it?

Mr C: One assumes he went and sought out a microphone to announce this, right? If Liberty are going to make an official press announcement tomorrow, that'll be Tuesday, Bernie must have wanted to get the last word in or at least to break the news his way.

Christine: Get the first word in.

Adam: He'll still have the power of people, whenever he speaks it will be a headline, that's the problem that Liberty could have with him. I think that probably was why they wanted to have him in the position for three years, so that he had to be a part of the solution rather than just attacking it from the outside. They've obviously realised... well, my view on it would be they've tried working with him, decided that he's a roadblock to what they want to do with the sport - whether that is a good or a bad thing in terms of what Liberty want to do with the sport - and realised they're better off trying to do it their own way but risk the retaliation.

Christine: It sounds like he's not going to be around as much, even if he does pop up every now and again because he also said: "My days in the office will be quieter now, maybe I will attend a grand prix some time in the future. I still have many friends in Formula One, and I still have enough money to afford to attend a race." Now this is a millionaire who thinks he might be able to afford a race, which tells you exactly what he's done to this sport.

Mr C: He's the only one that can afford it. Talking of that then, race circuits, circuit organisers have been making noises of late about the costs that they have to bear in order to host a Formula One race. This kind of change might spur them on to request better deals and maybe more than just those. I mean, promoters, you've got teams are going to want better deals, you've got Ferrari who have got a special relationship with the, what's the word for it, not the sporting body, but the commercial rights holders.

Adam: Yea, the veto.

Mr C: Yes, do you think all this is going to be up for grabs now?

Adam: I don't think it'll be up for grabs but I certainly think people will be opportunistic in finding their new relationship with the sport's owners. I think it will affect the, in terms of the relationships, everyone's going to say oh we're not sure we can afford the races, aren't they? And try to get a better deal if their contracts are running out. It'll be interesting to see if Malaysia comes back and things like that, whether they see that it is, the sport is going in the right direction. Obviously it's not confirmed, is it, but it sounds like



Malaysia's going to be gone after next year, and that'll be the canary in the coal mine really, to see how they are doing and whether it is becoming an attractive proposition.

Mr C: Assuming Bernie's gone then, assuming this is his last stand, what do you see Ecclestone's legacy as being? What mark will he have made on Formula One?

Adam: I think it's a positive mark on Formula One but also it's been blotted. He is largely responsible, to be fair, in the fact that he brought a lot of money into the sport in the 70s and 80s, and getting the teams together, making sure that the sport was as commercialised as it could be, having been an amateur sport before him, and others were involved in growing the sport. So that was very positive through the 70s, 80s and 90s, but then the world economy really changed, and particularly since 2000 and since the global economic crisis, you've got to think there's been very few right moves in terms of the sport's governing body that Formula One has made, bar probably the new engines which of course Ecclestone wasn't exactly a fan of.

Mr C: He was dead against them!

Adam: That was more of a Todt thing, wasn't it? But since about 2000 to 2005, you have to say that he's been dragging the sport back, or stopping it reaching its potential and allowed things like Formula E to pop up, when Formula One could have been growing it as a junior formula or something along those lines. But it can't be forgotten that he did do a great deal to get the sport where it was, and potentially keep it running far longer than it should have done, as it would have if it was an amateur sport.

Mr C: Yes. Christine is more of a more recent fan, and therefore, you've only known Ecclestone since 2000 and onwards, and you've only seen the bad side of Ecclestone.

Christine: Yea, I was thinking it will be interesting to see what approach Liberty take and whether they can sell the sport better, because one of the things that bugs me most about Bernie is his interviews when he's being all snippy and he thinks he's being funny and he's not and it's just awkward and cringeworthy and basically, I want to kill myself. So, I think it will be interesting that obviously Liberty are a media company and so they know how to sell the sport in that way, they'll probably have people that are better at interviews and also they might pick up on that problem that Joe often talks about where F1 is very bad at selling itself, all the good things it does, all the technology it's improving and how it doesn't mention anything.

Adam: It's the things like at Formula E they have the podium selfie, don't they? They need that kind of thing, and maybe a very quick sound bite in the pre-race press conferences and potentially post-qualifying and post-race press conferences, just to get the branding out. I think, it does sound like a really small thing, but the giving the drivers their own numbers for branding rather than the traditional teams get two numbers in the past, that will help with the branding, you can get the hashtags and things like that to include the numbers. So it will be interesting to see how that sort of thing is used to brand the sport going forward.

Mr C: What do you reckon the priority should be then? Let's say Tuesday the announcement happens, everything we expect to occur comes true, Brawn is named in this new position, what's job number one?



Adam: I'd say probably getting everything locked down, in terms of, there's been rumblings of certain circuits losing their tracks or not being interested, so much so that we're back to Silverstone being at threat again, and this time without a Donington Park to fill its spot. The other thing I think is making sure that teams feel secure. Manor would be an interesting test case but I think it's too late for them to have an impact on that. What will be will be with Manor.

Mr C: Sure.

Adam: But it seems that Formula One, this is one of the things that Christine is surely frustrated about with Bernie's running 2000 and onwards, but the fact that teams are just left to go, if they go bust, they go bust, with a lot less prize money than the bigger teams. It's an expensive sport at the end of the day with development and everything. Formula One seems to think that they, or certainly has thought that if a team leaves then another team will be coming along. That was true from the 50s up until the 1990s, but think of how few teams, how many really new teams have come in since 2000 and it's actually very few. They've been rebranded about five times each but there was, what, the three new teams in 2010, Super Aguri, and Toyota, are probably the newest and then BAR beyond that, although that was formed using Tyrrell's facilities. So it's actually quite rare since the late 90s for new teams to get involved, so it's all very well saying we don't need you, but if there are no people signing up behind them, or queuing up to fill people's spots then there's no, the numbers will keep going down, won't they? That's my rant against the sport.

Mr C: In terms of what Liberty can do for this season coming, it's 2017, we have no German Grand Prix on the calendar, it's obviously too late to do anything about that I would imagine. And you're right, they're probably not going to make a huge amount of difference this year. When do you think we'll start seeing some, I mean, tomorrow's going to be a sign, but when will we start seeing some more positive action?

Adam: Thinking about changes for this year, I'd point everyone back to where we were this time last year with elimination qualifying, so be careful what you wish for if you want instant change.

Christine: That's a good point.

Adam: Depending on what the rule is, because obviously with technical things whether they need to be, there needs to be R&D on it, rather than sporting regulations. They could be brought in for the start of next year, but I would hope there's a lot more thought that goes into them rather than, well, this is a good idea, shall we do it? That sort of approach that they did last year. In terms of the marketing things, and whether they do, potentially putting more out on social media and that sort of thing, that can be instant, can't it? It's just deciding how you're going to do it and making sure that it's all done correctly and done uniformly as well.

Mr C: Well one rule they can change almost instantly is to relax the current restriction on cameras in the paddock, and broadcasting from within the paddock because at the moment, even teams, official Formula One teams, cannot shoot video of their own garage in the pit lane. Once you're inside the fences of the F1 circuit, everything you record is copyright Bernie, or has been copyright FOM until today. Presumably that could be changed in a heartbeat.

Adam: Could be, the worry that you'll have is making sure that everyone is safe if you are potentially encouraging more people to be around in the garages, and whether that does become a danger. But I think



it could be changed pretty quickly, yes. Certainly what could be shot, and has been shot in the past, can be shared more easily.

Christine: I think what's good about this, the fact that he's got Ross Brawn and this guy from ESPN, is that they'll both have unique perspectives on that. Like Ross Brawn should be able to advise that you can't just make a technical change straight away or you can't just bring in this rubbish qualifying, he should know from his experience. And then obviously the ESPN man is gonna know how frustrating it is being in the media when you can't show any pictures or you can't show any video, so hopefully, the three of them can get their heads together and really make a difference.

Adam: Yep, and three heads are better than one, I would have thought, when you are trying to evolve the sport.

Mr C: How much of a difference do you think Ross Brawn being a younger man than Bernie Ecclestone will make, is he young enough I guess is the question I should be asking. Ross Brawn is what, sixty-something isn't he? Should we be looking at even younger people coming in and shaping the direction of Formula One or will Ross Brawn be enough?

Adam: Well, the argument certainly since I've been watching Formula One which was the early 2000s has always been that it has an older audience, and that's not going to change unless you do have some younger minds or some people who can predict what younger minds want accurately, then it's not going to change, and the audience will keep getting older and keep getting smaller as well. So I think it is important to listen to some younger people, whether that is the actual fans themselves or people who can judge correctly what the younger fans want and what will get younger people involved, be it family tickets to race weekends, things like that, so that younger people are coming along to races.

Mr C: Mm, encouraged.

Adam: And watching on TV.

Mr C: Assuming they can find it on TV.

Adam: Yea, exactly.

Mr C: That's a whole other problem. To wrap it up then, to wrap up this brief summary of Bernie's legacy, and I'm sure we'll come back to this again in the future, this is just obviously a quick whistle-stop tour of our thoughts, but this evening then, will you be raising a glass to Bernie or will you be raising a glass in spite of him?

Adam: I think it'll be a bit... I think it's probably raising a glass for him but with relief that the sport can now move on.

Christine: I'm a bit worried. I sort of still don't quite believe it. Because it's always been, Bernie's just gonna be there forever, you know, he's never going to retire, he's going to live forever and he's always going to be at the top. And so, until we get to the first race and there's like a picture of him at home in his pyjamas, you know, watching on TV and not stalking through the paddock, I sort of don't believe it.



Mr C: Do you think it's a massive ruse?

Adam: I was gonna say, he's made this statement before, hasn't he?

Mr C: That's true. Maybe we should... you know, we could wake up tomorrow and the announcement could be a totally different announcement and we'll have to tear these flags down and the celebrations will be over.

Christine: Re-cork the champagne.

Mr C: Adam, it's been a pleasure talking to you. Thank you for this last minute, impromptu show.

Adam: That's no problem at all.

Mr C: Much appreciated. We'll try and get this out today.

Christine: Yep.

Mr C: And hope things go forward with more positivity and good feeling.

Adam: Yep, long live F1!