



## F1 Debrief – I really give that a thumbs up

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*[Audio clip: Tony Ross – “We still have potential for P4 here Nico, er, Valtteri, so just keep pushing.”]*

Christine: This is F1 Debrief - I really give that a thumbs up. Coming up on this show we discuss the new look and feel of F1, a battle of ex-racers and genuine joy on the podium.

Mr C: I think this counts as a genuine F1 Debrief. We have just had the Chinese Grand Prix and now we are going to talk about the Chinese Grand Prix.

Christine: It's the first time we've done a post race show for a long time I think.

Mr C: Finally the name make sense again.

Christine: And the reason we're doing a show really is just because you are super excited about the season so far and we're only two races in.

Mr C: I am pumped for F1 this year. The last four, maybe five seasons, they've started off not, not great. Not been too inspired. The cars haven't looked amazing. The racing hasn't been great. There haven't been many characters in F1 to get into, it's all been a bit samey the last couple of years but I found with the opening two races, Australia and then China, I've really got... I'm getting a good vibe from Formula 1 this year. I think it's largely down to the new ownership. The changes in regulation for the new cars, the cars look better. They seem to drive a bit better. It feels like it's not hard to like Formula 1 in 2017.

Christine: Yea.

Mr C: In the past it's almost like you have to struggle, you have to put in a lot of effort to get into Formula One, the last couple of years. You want to find a clip online and Bernie's taken it down, or you know, you want to watch some footage and it's on some other channel you haven't got or you can't afford or you can't get hold of.

Christine: Yea, you couldn't be a casual F1 fan before and it was really hard to stumble across the sport somehow.

Mr C: Yes!

Christine: You had to go looking for things specifically in the right places depending on who's got the rights for stuff.

Mr C: That's it. And now we've got paddock videos for the first time this year. Teams, for however long teams have been doing social media and they've been trying to... they've been banned from making videos in the past and they've been using animated gifs which are terrible. They obviously don't have any sound, they're jumpy, low frame rate, a really poor experience for the fan and now they can shoot videos or some



videos. There are limits but they can. They were actually moving pictures shot by people with their camera phones in the pit lane and that's huge.

Christine: And it was worth noting that the highlights of the race were available on the F1 YouTube channel before the Channel 4 highlights had even aired.

Mr C: They were, yes. So in the UK, you have the two broadcasters. You have Sky, which is the pay-per-view broadcaster and then you have delayed replays by the free-to-air broadcaster and F1.com had their footage online and viewable globally before the free-to-air broadcaster even got going. That's a huge change.

Christine: Which is, it's a good thing but then also, it doesn't really reflect well on Channel 4, so it's a shame in that way.

Mr C: It's not their fault. I mean, they're working within the constraints of the old regime and the old contracts and obviously things have got to be updated and things are going to change. But the speed with which Liberty Media are changing the things that they can make adjustments to quickly is quite impressive. It feels like there's actual journalism on F1.com. Like, people who can write about Formula One, are writing about it, in coherent sentences, for like, the first time since that domain name was registered. It's amazing.

Christine: And so far this year, they actually have something to write about. I mean, firstly, I have to say, you mentioned it briefly, the look of the new cars is so much better than it has been previously. The lower rear wing, I really give that a thumbs up.

Mr C: It's been, I don't know when it was now, like 2010? It's been seven years since they uglified those cars.

Christine: Good word.

Mr C: Is that a word?

Christine: It's not a word, but I like it.

Mr C: I'm gonna go with it, I'm gonna own that word. Formula One uglified their chassis' and finally someone got the hint that nobody wants to be looking at these ugly high rear wings and these terrible front wings and they've made it look a lot better. There's still some things that could be refined, the very large sail on the back of the cars is still, that seems unnecessary.

Christine: The shark fin situation. But I was worried about the massive rear tyres but actually I can't really tell the difference when they're in motion so it doesn't make too much difference this year.

Mr C: It seems to make a bit of difference to the drivers.

Christine: Yes.

Mr C: You have drivers who are complimenting their cars for the first time in a while.



Christine: They all seem to be enjoying driving them, it's weird.

Mr C: It is odd, isn't it? After half a decade of doing nothing but complaining about how bad they are and how bad they handle, you've got genuine love for these cars.

Christine: There is some debate over whether overtaking is easier or harder or non-existent nowadays. I think we saw less DRS overtaking in China, but that's actually a good thing because everyone complains that DRS is artificial and so we saw more genuine overtakes.

Mr C: I am totally, totally taken aback by what a difference lowering the rear wing makes to DRS. I assume that's the primary reason it's now less effective than it used to be because it really did not make much difference. There's an argument to say DRS actually did what it was originally intended to do in China which is allow the cars to stay closer together so that they can make a pass later in the lap, which is sort of what we saw. You saw cars that normally wouldn't be able to follow each other in the dirty air, in the wake, through the vortices of one car following another, keeping in close contact. I know that Kimi holding off Sebastian, those cars were as close as you like for many, for five or six laps, and that was really close racing, and I'd be curious to learn how much of an effect DRS had on that. If you completely remove DRS would they still have managed to stay as close, or is it doing just what you want it to do? Not allowing cars to pass easily, still requiring some driver skill and I think it took Sebastian, it took him a while to size up Kimi and find a weakness, considering they both had exactly the same chassis. But it feels like DRS has found the sweet spot. Again, we've only had two races but China is usually, with it's long back straight, it's usually a good example of DRS in action. We'll see how it goes through the rest of the season.

Christine: We've had two good races so far but I am worried because the tyres seem to be, basically, endless. They don't seem to be going off a cliff like they used to, so I worry that they could just one stop pretty much every round of the 2017 calendar.

Mr C: We do need variables. The Pirelli tyres are a major contribution to the unknown variables going into the weekend. There was a worrying point during the race when Mercedes' strategists suggested that Lewis Hamilton, I think it may have been on lap 10 or lap 12, could go to the end of the race on the set of tyres he was on, and that's concerning. As it turned out, he couldn't, and maybe the lack of running on Friday meant that the team didn't have as much data as they might normally have. I do wonder, we didn't have any Friday running, or what was it, twelve laps or something useless?

Christine: No driver did more than eight laps.

Mr C: Right. And the entire of FP2 was cancelled completely, due to the fact that the medical helicopter couldn't take off. And it didn't really make a huge difference to the running of the weekend.

Christine: Well, I think Giovinazzi would argue with you there.

Mr C: Because he didn't have as much experience as he'd like?

Christine: Because he crashed twice after that.



Mr C: That's true. Maybe for the rookies it's important.

Christine: Yep.

Mr C: But I think we lost an entire day of running and the show wasn't affected and perhaps, just maybe, the race was more interesting as a result. And we are entering an era where engineering and engineers and technology allows teams to know so much, to gather so much data, I do wonder if limiting the amount they can capture before going into a race, might increase the number of unknowns.

Christine: Yea. I mean, it's always going to be the way, isn't it, that the more information they have the better they can make strategies and make everything work how they want it to. It's the same reason the Barcelona race is never that interesting because they know everything about that track.

Mr C: Because they test there.

Christine: Yea.

Mr C: So with the exception of rookies, Vandoorne could have done with more running, Stroll could have done with more running, and so could Giovinazzi, who's been thrown in the deep end at Sauber.

Christine: Bless him.

Mr C: But he was doing well until this weekend when it all sort of unravelled. And I guess lack of practice would have a lot to do with that. I presume Giovinazzi has no experience running wet weather tyres in Formula One? I don't know whether he did the wet weather test instead of Wehrlein. I do wonder whether or not it was a complete baptism of fire for the poor chap. 'Get in that car and do a brilliant job, oh by the way, it's hammering it down and you've got no time to practice.'

Christine: So you want to get rid of free practice, or on Friday, anyway. But during the weekend you also said you wanted to get rid of qualifying because Verstappen proved you didn't need it.

Mr C: I did tweet that, yes. Well, what's the point? The guy started virtually at the back of the grid, he gained a couple of places thanks to Palmer's penalty and Grosjean's penalty but essentially he was as good as at the back of the field. By the end of the first lap, he'd climbed to somewhere around seventh. Why bother qualifying? If you can put in that kind of performance, if you have that kind of car skills? I guess he's a guy who can control cars well in the wet, so maybe the wet/dry conditions worked in his favour, he seems to be able to get more out of a Formula One car in those conditions than anyone else.

Christine: I don't know if it's skill or bravery or whatever it is, but whenever there is low grip, he is an absolute hero compared to everyone else. He makes them look stupid.

Mr C: It may be that he can't always come from 17th to 7th in one lap, but maybe he could. Maybe he just doesn't bother, he just saves his tyres on a Saturday, sits it out, goes straight into the race on Sunday and just blitzes everybody.

Christine: He got driver of the day, naturally.



Mr C: Not naturally. No, I don't agree with that. I don't think he was the driver of the day... it was a very good opening lap, but I would say Vettel and Grosjean also put in equally strong performances.

Christine: I was gonna say Vettel's overtaking was really good, and Grosjean did a great pass, but then he was a bit unhappy before the race because of his qualifying penalty, which said he didn't slow down under yellow flags and he was posting data and statistics to Twitter, saying how unfair it was. Poor guy.

Mr C: I do wonder if the stewards, I feel they could have done a better job this weekend. Sebastian Vettel started the race virtually in the middle of the track.

Christine: Yea he did.

Mr C: He was at least a car's width across, if not more. Nowhere near his actual grid markings.

Christine: It's like your parking.

Mr C: He parked his car like I do. It was atrocious, and yet, he didn't even get a reprimand, was it a warning? What did he get for that? It was basically nothing.

Christine: He didn't get anything.

Mr C: Right, that's useless. I mean, you cannot start... that is a major advantage.

Christine: Especially compared to the fact that two drivers were reprimanded for not turning up on time for the national anthem, apparently that's really, really bad but starting in the middle of the grid wherever you feel like it? That's fine, carry on.

Mr C: Is that the standard? That's the standard they were working to. Well, yes. If you could pick your grid spot and say, well, actually, I don't want to be near those white lines which are really slippery in the wet, so I'm just going to move my car to where I feel like starting the race from, I kind of thing somebody might need to put a stop to that.

Christine: Otherwise people will be like...

Mr C: They'll just park anywhere.

Christine: 'I kind of don't want to be near this guy, don't want to be near Hamilton, he's too much of a threat, don't want to be near Maldonado, for example.'

Mr C: I'll just move out the way.

Christine: Yea.



Mr C: Just park where you like. Why even have grid markings? I do feel like they dropped the ball on that one. There were another couple of dodgy decisions and a few question marks over the way they handled the event. They noted a lot of things.

Christine: Yea, well they're supposed to be taking a bit of a step back, but they seem to be...

Mr C: You have to turn up, though. You have to be there on the day. They weren't there this weekend.

Christine: So, Sebastian Vettel did a great job but he finished second, with Lewis Hamilton winning the race. I mean, he was out there, we barely saw him, he was leading from pole, all the way to the end. But that means they both have equal points at the top of the standings, and not only that they are equal on wins and second places, so it really couldn't be more close.

Mr C: You've got two really experienced teams, both know how to win. You've got experienced lead drivers in each of those teams, they know how to win. I do like the post-race hugging between Hamilton and Vettel. I don't think it's going to last.

Christine: They were both so happy, and it was really good to see. But I think it's just because both of them know what it is to dominate and the pressure that comes with that. Leading every race, winning everything, and having that lead in the championship that you have to defend, and so I think having that kind of pressure lifted because they're in the middle of a great battle, and it's really fun and exciting and who knows what's going to happen? They seemed genuinely joyous on the podium.

Mr C: They did! Again, for the last few years, you look up at the podium and most drivers seem unhappy for one reason or another. They feel like they didn't get the most out of their race or they were slighted by their teammate.

Christine: Yea.

Mr C: There was normally three grumpy men on top of that podium, unhappy about something or other. So it was good to see the joyousness of it all. But I do wonder if we take snapshots at the first two races and then maybe later on in the year, and then even later on into the season, whether that will carry on. At some point they're gonna come together and maybe not be best of friends anymore.

Christine: No. But then again, I mean, it is a different dynamic to be battling someone in another team instead of in your own team. It's sort of, I reckon it's easier to be magnanimous to someone in a different team, than, if you're Hamilton to be magnanimous to Rosberg, for example.

Mr C: It's curious that both Vettel and Hamilton have Finnish teammates. I don't know whether that affects their mentality at all.

Christine: It's something they've got in common. They can gossip about them.

Mr C: Well, both have been disappointing. Bottas has been thrown in, I mean, he's had time. He's had enough time to get up to speed with the Mercedes and he did rather embarrassingly throw it off the road behind the safety car. He's going to have to come to terms with that, and deal with that himself, because



that was a shockingly rookie mistake. Kimi, somewhat under impressive, and quite the moaner. He complained almost entirely throughout that grand prix. Did you hear a break from Kimi's complaints? It seemed to be almost near constant complaining.

Christine: Yea, but that's par for the course, isn't it? He wasn't the only one. Verstappen was complaining the entire time there was a Grosjean in his way.

Mr C: There is absolutely no justification for calling for Grosjean to get blue flags in that situation, I don't know what Verstappen was thinking. The guy was not holding him up in any way, shape or form.

Christine: It seems really bizarre as well, because Verstappen has no problem overtaking. He seems to have a good head on his shoulders, it's like he just flipped completely at the sight of this Haas, that he couldn't get past for one reason or another.

Mr C: And remember, this is the same guy that moved from the back of the grid to the front of the grid in the opening lap, suddenly got tripped up by a backmarker. And the Haas is not the fastest car on the grid by a margin and the Red Bull should have been able to get close and overtake or basically stay back and stay out the way. For whatever reason he lost his cool there.

Christine: It was very weird. The Haas isn't the fastest car on the grid but it is by no means the slowest. Who do we give that award to? Would it be McLaren?

Mr C: By rights, it shouldn't be McLaren, and Alonso I think, did an amazing job of showing the world how good Alonso is and how bad Honda is during the race. His radio messages were absolutely sublime in terms of bigging up Alonso, and putting down Honda. It was a masterclass.

Christine: "I'm the best car, in the corners." Oh Alonso.

Mr C: Yes.

Christine: But it was a double DNF for them, so that's brilliant.

Mr C: It doesn't get any better for them, the only thing you can say that was positive is that going into the weekend, Honda estimated that it would be their worst race. They estimated they would be right the way down the order, due to the long straights.

Christine: So the good news is that they know they're bad?

Mr C: Well, they expected to be worse, I think is probably the best takeaway. You can leave China, if you go into it thinking we can barely get down the main straight...

Christine: The first step is admitting they have a problem.

Mr C: Well, they have. They've put some requests for engineers, they've got a recruitment section on their website that says we want, or we need, more Formula One engineers. So they have admitted they've got a problem, they are on the lookout to fix it and get on top of these issues as quickly as possible, but they



should have been doing that last year. They shouldn't be waiting to the second race, the grand prix, before saying hey, do you want to come and work for us, do you know anything about engines, can you help us out of this hole?

Christine: And for the most part, everyone is feeling sorry for Alonso because we all know he's super quick, he's a former champion, he could do a lot better in a better car, where's he going to go, is this going to be the end of his career, all that stuff. But I feel really bad for Vandoorne because how is he supposed to impress anyone in that? In a car that doesn't get to the end.

Mr C: True. Although if Fernando Alonso is your teammate, I'm not convinced he has a hope of impressing anyone, really. Even if you argue that Hamilton and Vettel are maybe better drivers than Alonso at this point, Alonso in the twilight of his career, he still is one of the best. Maybe there's an argument to say he's still the best, and Vandoorne obviously is a rookie, he's got a lot of learning to do, the more track time he has the better it is for him, and that's one thing that Honda are starving him of. The thing he needs most is laps, lots and lots and lots of mileage under his belt. These constant failures are obviously not helping in that situation. I don't think he can do much more than he's already done, I didn't see him actually. Did you see him at all on Sunday? I didn't really see what he did.

Christine: No.

Mr C: No, it's a tough, it's a really harsh position to be in. But at least he's in Formula One. You can definitely look back at Jenson Button's decision to clear off out and never even look behind him. Don't even acknowledge that Formula One exists. By the way, there's a great comparison. If you look at the things that Jenson Button has been tweeted since leaving Formula One, versus the things that Nico Rosberg has been sharing on social media since leaving Formula One, there is a marked difference. I mean, Nico Rosberg is at home watching every race.

Christine: All I ever see from Rosberg is, oh here's me watching this with my family, or he's me with my trophy, doing this.

Mr C: Rosberg is still loving Formula One, and he's still involved, he's turning up at testing during the winter.

Christine: He does have to do that though, as a champion, doesn't he?

Mr C: He's contractually obliged to...

Christine: To do stuff.

Mr C: Yea, to showcase his trophy on occasions and to do PR work for Mercedes, but I don't think he's contractually obliged to watch the race and pay attention.

Christine: No.

Mr C: But he still is, he's still into it. He's still offering his insight from his sofa. Whereas Jenson Button? Nothing. Barely a mention of Formula One.



Christine: He's an Iron Man now, he doesn't need Formula One anymore.

Mr C: He's moved on so quickly.

Christine: It's back to back races, so we've just had China and we're looking ahead to Bahrain. What do you reckon is going to happen?

Mr C: It's only a week, it's very, very quick, isn't it? On the plus side, this works in Bottas' favour. He doesn't have long to dwell on the mistakes he made in China. He has to make an impression, I think, this coming weekend. I wouldn't expect it to rain in Bahrain. I'm assuming it's sunny, well, it's a night race isn't it, but it's going to be clear and dry, I would guess.

Christine: Yea, completely different conditions.

Mr C: That removes one variable for Bottas, he's going to have time to dial in the car on Friday, maybe lack of Friday practice hurt him too. So he's got to stand out, he's got to make a difference I think. At one point I think he was quicker, was it in Australia, he had the measure of Hamilton, but not when it mattered. I think it might have been in Q2 or something. But it looked like he's got the pace, but two races in or three races in, he's going to have to stand up and make a difference. So he's the person I'm watching closest I think.

Christine: And I think I'll be keeping my eye on Red Bull because I want them to be in the battle. I want, I'm not satisfied with just a two-horse race, I want a three-horse race.

Mr C: Do you think that they could be up there? It doesn't seem like...

Christine: No, I don't think they've got the pace at the moment, but you never know, they could pick things up. It's more likely to come as they develop, I suppose.

Mr C: Also on circuits that aren't so engine-related. I mean, Monaco. You can pencil in Monaco. A three way fight would be amazing, I do wonder that maybe...

Christine: Am I being greedy?

Mr C: No, not at all, no. You can always wish for me. I think, what I was just getting to there though, is Ricciardo. I mean, look where Ricciardo started the race and how far ahead he was of Verstappen and look where he finished the race.

Christine: Yea, that is awkward.

Mr C: Where he was behind him. I just wonder, if you're Ricciardo, what's going through your mind now? You ended last season badly, with Verstappen showing you the way, and this season is sort of going down the same route.

Christine: Australia was painful.



Mr C: Well, so far, I think everything has been painful. Has he got any plus points to look forward to? Any takeaways from the opening races to say actually that went my way? I don't think he has, I think it's all been doom and gloom.

Christine: Well, he was closing Verstappen down towards the end of the race. He was chasing him for that podium, but he didn't get it, so I guess in the end you can't really take that away as a positive.

Mr C: Even if you take the safety cars into account, I don't think Verstappen should have been near him, not in a normal situation. And that... I don't know, that's the other person I'm going to be watching this weekend. Ricciardo, what's his mental state? How is he going to respond to the challenge? If it's a dry weekend and if there's no variable weather conditions, maybe Verstappen doesn't have quite the advantage, but I bet he still makes it work for him. Who do you think, right now, putting you on the spot, who is going to come out of Bahrain with more glory: Verstappen or Ricciardo?

Christine: I think, it's gotta be Verstappen. He's all about the glory. The trouble is, it's still early in the season and at this point, it's easy to say 'it's fine, there's a long way to go' but you really, you have to stake your claim now, and say, this is it, I'm doing this. I'm going to take the fight to everyone, especially my teammate, and I don't think Ricciardo can do that.

Mr C: Is Red Bull now Max Verstappen's team? Is he number one?

Christine: No, I wouldn't say it's gone that far yet.

Mr C: Could it change this weekend? How far are we away from it changing?

Christine: I think if he keeps doing what he's doing then, yea, it's gonna happen. It's tough for Ricciardo, especially because he's such a nice guy, he's the defending champion of Christine's Rankings, which is back for 2017. So if you ever see anything a driver does that is, you know, wearing dodgy fashion or tweeting something hilarious, you have to let me know, because what I do all season long, is give them points, take away points, and stick 'em in a rankings chart of my own making.

Mr C: And this is for anything off track. This is the alternative Formula One championship. So any time a driver's out of the car doing anything interesting, Hamilton throwing caps in the crowd during wet practice, ping-pong, pre-race ping-pong, always a good points earner. Or any drivers turning up with pandas, a sure-fire hit.

Christine: And cake.

Mr C: Lewis Hamilton is walking away with this year's championship already, he has a huge lead. So if you're a fan of any other driver and you spot them doing anything interesting, for goodness sake let Christine know. How do people get in touch with you?

Christine: There's a dedicated form on the rankings page which is [sidepodcast.com/rankings](http://sidepodcast.com/rankings) or contact in the usual ways [sidepodcast.com/contact](http://sidepodcast.com/contact).



Mr C: Please, please do that. We don't want a really close Formula One racing competition and then an easy victory for Hamilton in the rankings. At least not at this stage. I mean, we're only three weeks into it.

Christine: Also while you're visiting the site to look at the rankings page and send your suggestions my way, it's also worth checking out the Factbyte Factbox which is live coverage of the races. You can obviously follow along as the racing is unfolding but also there's all the archive, so you can see what happened if you missed anything, if you don't get to watch it live, you can catch up with our Factbyte Factbox replays.

Mr C: And there will be a Factbyte Factbox for Bahrain?

Christine: Absolutely.

Mr C: Wonderful. And just before we head off, one last thing to mention just looking ahead to Bahrain, Renault have said that their development push starts this weekend.

Christine: Already?

Mr C: Renault are bigging up, or Cyril Abiteboul from Renault, is bigging up their chances. They're starting to bring new things on board this weekend, so maybe, just maybe, they could do something. It's a shame to see Hülkenberg back there, and Palmer's not had an awful lot of luck in the opening races, so it would be nice to see if they could turn it around this early in the season and start making strides forward.

Christine: Well, I'm looking forward to seeing what happens in Bahrain, and I reckon, if it's a good race, we might come back and do another Debrief.

Mr C: All for F1, and F1 for all.