



F1 Digest – Prelude to the Indian Grand Prix

Christine: The 2013 championship could be decided this weekend, as Sebastian Vettel and Red Bull aim to continue their domination of the second half of the season in India. A newer addition to the calendar, India hasn't been a natural fit to motorsport, but the drivers seem to love the track, and the locals are starting to take to F1 as well. The race is set to take a break in 2014, to return earlier in the year the following season, so this is the last glimpse of the Buddh International Circuit we will see for a while. With a lot at stake and the season rapidly running out, this weekend's race should be another good one.

Mr C: This is F1 Digest – Prelude to the Indian Grand Prix, a Formula One race preview brought to you by Sidepodcast. For all you need to know ahead of this weekend's action, here is your host Christine Blachford.

Christine: In stark contrast to the constant concern about rain over the past few weeks, Formula One heads to a destination where the sun is going to be shining for the entire weekend. The temperatures for Friday through to Sunday look set to hover around 30 degrees C, the wind set to breeze past at about 7 miles per hour, and the chance of rain is likely to be zero.

The Buddh International Circuit provides something that a lot of the newer tracks are missing, and that is some elevation changes. The circuit undulates around the five kilometres, with three high speed straights, and a handful of tricky corners dotted around them.

As per usual, there's a compromise to be made between maximum downforce and minimum drag, with an eye on the overtaking spots. There are several of them, another thing that newer tracks tend to lack. The first turn in particular should offer up some spectacular passing opportunities.

Another highlight of the track is the long and winding turns ten and eleven, a massive 215 degree arc that challenges the drivers with several apexes. The difficult track seems to be a popular one with the drivers, as it offers them up some unique corners and a good variety of fast chicanes, slower turns and blind apexes. There's also the grip level to worry about, as the track isn't used an awful lot before the F1 weekend.

We've only had a couple of races at the Buddh track, and none of them have featured a safety car as yet. The fastest pit stop in 2012 was a minuscule 2.3 seconds, which will be tough to beat this time out. Drivers spend 60% of the lap at full throttle, whilst the top speed is 321 kilometres per hour.

The Indian Grand Prix is still relatively new so teams don't have masses of data to work from as they head into the weekend. Pirelli also have limited running at the track, but they've decided to switch from the hard and soft compounds in use at the previous two races in India, to the medium and softs this time. Motorsport director Paul Hembery says their previous choices may have been on the conservative side and that "this year we've gone for a softer and slightly more aggressive choice."

The difference between the two compounds isn't expected to be that great, and strategy could play more of a role than ever in deciding who is successful on Sunday and who drops down the order. Last year, a one-stop strategy was the favourite, but Pirelli are expecting two-stops to be standard this year. Paul Hembery again, explains what a challenge the tyres will face: "With varying elevations and a wide variety of corners, India provides the tyres with quite a test, as there are forces coming from all directions... As usual, it should be very warm in India, which increases thermal degradation as well."



The Indian Grand Prix is the last of this late Asian leg of the 2013 championship, and with just three races left afterwards, drivers, teams and all paddock personnel will be starting to see and likely covet the finishing line. This second half of the season has been jam-packed with events as well, so tiredness - as well as reliability on the cars - is starting to become a factor.

The Force India team count this as their home race, and although the owners have always pushed for Formula One to head to India, and are routinely proud of the event now it has arrived, there's still no sign of a return for the Indian drivers to the grid. Karun Chandhok and Narain Karthikeyan have been and gone, and the 2013 line-up doesn't have an Indian to celebrate his home race.

Sebastian Vettel is inches away from snatching the 2013 championship, his fourth consecutive title, but it's the battle behind him that continues to fascinate. Fernando Alonso sits on 207 points, with Kimi Räikkönen third on 177 – the thirty point gap is large enough, but neither has the edge at the moment in terms of performance. Meanwhile, Lewis Hamilton rounds out the top four with 161 points, keeping himself in the fun fight, if not the title fight, as well.

It's to second place that we look for the interest in the constructor standings too, with Ferrari currently ten points up on Mercedes, with Lotus a further 23 points behind. These three positions could change at any moment, and it will be fascinating over the next four races to see who can be best of the rest. The other interesting fight is for sixth place, as Sauber's great results at the last two events see them within 17 points of Force India – who themselves have admitted they are looking over their shoulders with some concern.

The McLaren team have improved from the start of the season, but are still fighting for the minor points positions. They've had some bad luck over the past few weekends, but are encouraged by recent pace and strategy decisions. Jenson Button in particular, hopes this weekend he can try and battle with some faster cars again, and he explains just what he likes about the Buddh track: "This is such a great racetrack - it's fast, flowing and challenging. It's pretty technical too, which is quite unusual for a fast circuit, but the flow from one corner to the next means that positioning the car is quite critical if you don't want to fall out of the rhythm and lose time. Track positioning is also important because several areas of the circuit are extremely wide, and narrow down from corner-entry to exit."

As mentioned earlier, Force India celebrate their home race this weekend and team boss Vijay Mallya hopes it will be another good one for them. "Our home race is always a very proud weekend for everyone in the team: the atmosphere at the track is incredible and we always enjoy plenty of support. The track itself is one of the best in the world. It's also a good one for us - in the last two years we scored points in both races, so a similar result would be a good target for the team."

Finally, championship leader Sebastian Vettel has his eye on just one prize this weekend: "So far everything has always gone perfectly for us in India. There is also a very nice trophy at the end of the race - so it would be great to hold one again this year! It's a circuit that I like, in a country that is very, very impressive every time we go there."

Mr C: You've been listening to F1 Digest, a show brought to you by Sidepodcast. Thanks to Williams F1 and Pirelli s.p.a for stats and information. To keep up with news over the race weekend, stay tuned to Sidepodcast.com where you'll find results, live comments plus lap by lap coverage of qualifying and the race.