



F1 Digest – Prelude to the United States Grand Prix

Christine: The 2013 season is a long and drawn out process, mostly due to the number of events on the calendar, and also thanks to Red Bull's ability to wrap up a title battle weeks before the season end. Abu Dhabi did nothing to bolster our spirits, but the final two events may change that. The season finale in Brazil is always a good show, but this weekend is all about the US. The Circuit of the Americas made a successful debut in 2012, with Lewis Hamilton taking victory. This year, there's nothing left but pride and the honour of taking home another winning trophy, so it really could be a free-for-all in Texas.

Mr C: Welcome to F1 Digest – Prelude to the United States Grand Prix. This preview show covers everything you'll need to know about the upcoming F1 race this weekend. Here's your host, Christine Blachford.

Christine: You'd imagine the weather to be hot, hot, hot in Texas, and the temperatures are a little higher than the European events we have grown used to. However, there are showers on the forecast for Saturday with the chance of rain at 40%, otherwise the humidity is way up at 75%. The rest of the weekend is set to be cloudy, with the sun making an appearance here and there.

The Circuit of the Americas runs anti-clockwise and is what you might call a selection box of the best corners from the rest of the calendar. Unashamedly borrowing from Silverstone, Hockenheim, and Istanbul, there is a lot packed into the 5.5 kilometres of tarmac. The first corner is the most iconic, and the most challenging, with a steep incline leading to sharp, blind left hand hairpin.

A sequence of winding and twisting corners leads to the hairpin at the other end of the circuit, which in turn leads on to the enormous back straight. Ending abruptly with a few sharp turns, the track leads round to a multi-apex bend that echoes Turn 8 in Turkey. A few more ninety degree turns lead back onto the start/finish straight.

There was no sign of a safety car during the 2012 race, so working out the chances of there being one this year is slightly harder than normal. Top speeds reach 314 kilometres an hour, whilst the speediest pit stop was 2.6 seconds. Last year was all about the one stop strategy, but for this year, Pirelli are hoping to mix things up a bit.

The tyre suppliers are bringing the hard and medium compounds to the US race, the same tyres that were used this time last year. The more durable rubber should be able to cope with the demands of a very difficult and demanding circuit, with fast flowing corners mixed up with the more technical parts of the track. Pirelli motorsport boss Paul Hembery says: "This year's compounds are softer, so we would expect around two pit stops in the race, depending also on the rate of track evolution. Even though it's November, we're still likely to have warm weather, which obviously affects thermal degradation too."

As the final two rounds of the season are both in the Americas, we're looking at back to back races to finish off the 2013 Championship. After a week back at base, the teams fly out to Texas for the penultimate round, before packing up and shipping down to Brazil for the season finale. There's already an end-of-term feeling hovering around the paddock, and with several driver announcements taking the pressure off a few shoulders, there should be a few more smiling faces as the weekend unfolds.

Formula One has a tricky relationship with the US, battling with the country's own popular motorsport series, dealing with a lack of US drivers, and of course the 2005 fiasco at Indianapolis. However, the Circuit of the Americas



did a great deal to improve the situation, particularly as organisers managed to get up and running where the New Jersey event continues to be postponed.

After the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, there were no actual position changes on the driver standings table, and of course, Sebastian Vettel is still the World Champion, barring any unforeseen infringements. With Kimi Räikkönen not participating in the final two rounds, he will make no further progress on his current third place. With 183 points, to fourth place Lewis Hamilton's 175, there is every possibility he might drop back before the season is over. Mark Webber is a further nine points down from Lewis, so at this point in the season, the main championship excitement is what position the missing Kimi will end up in.

In the team standings, the fight between Mercedes and Ferrari continues, with 11 points between them. Mercedes are ahead, and they had the edge over Ferrari at the last race weekend. Fernando Alonso is also dealing with a bad back after his bumpy landing at Yas Marina, so he may not be on top form this weekend. The other battle we were watching was between Force India and Sauber, but a strong double points finish last week saw Force India pull ahead. They've now turned their attention to McLaren, but would have to overhaul 18 points to make the step up to fifth in the championship. McLaren haven't had a great season, but that seems like a big ask.

Williams hit the headlines this week, signing Ferrari's outgoing Felipe Massa as replacement for Pastor Maldonado for 2014. That means Pastor is headed into his final two races for the Williams team, and he'll be hoping for a good one this time. Of the circuit, Pastor says: "Austin is one of the better new circuits and it's a challenging layout that I enjoyed last year. Turn 1 is particularly spectacular with its very steep climb and the atmosphere last year was one of the best of the season."

Sergio Pérez will have the closest thing to a home race this weekend, and he says: "For me, this will be the most important weekend of my year, and I'll be especially keen for a strong result to send my fans back home with a smile on their faces. I think we've shown some solid improvement and greater understanding of our car over the past few races, yet, frustratingly, both Jenson and I have had few opportunities to really demonstrate what the car is capable of."

Force India's Adrian Sutil joins the ranks of the rookies who are heading to Austin for the first time, as the German wasn't on the grid in 2012. He has spent some time driving the Circuit of the Americas on the simulator, however, and has this to say: "The first sector is interesting with so many turns one after the other and it looks like there are some nice high-speed corners. The feedback I've heard is very positive and everyone says it is smooth and enjoyable to drive. From what I've seen it appears to be one of the better new generation tracks, so I'm looking forward to getting there and trying it for myself."

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