



F1 Digest - France Preview

Intro

Hello and welcome to F1 Digest – race coverage brought to you by Sidepodcast. This week is the French Grand Prix, and today we're focusing on previewing the event.

Vital Statistics

Date: 22nd June

Circuit: Magny-Cours

Length: 4.4km

Laps: 70

2007 Winner: Kimi Raikkonen

Last Year

Before we get onto our preview proper, let's have a quick look back at what happened last year. A quick refresher, if you will.

[Begin Montage]

Chris: Free Practice 1. Sato crashed in the pitlane.

Me: Yea, he got stuck.

Chris: Blocked everyone in.

Me: Bit of a nightmare at the beginning. The pit lane is quite small in France, I guess there's no plans to upgrade it.

[Next clip.]

Me: Bad, bad news. Was that gearbox issues for Alonso?

Chris: Well, there was a puff of smoke and it looked suspiciously like engine. And Hamilton was told over the radio that Alonso had engine problems but then right at the end of the session, they were talking to Martin Whitmarsh and he said it was gearbox.

Me: Okay, so he's not going to drop ten places, he's going to start the race in tenth position.

[Next Clip.]

Chris: The rest of the field, Raikkonen went fastest and he held that for ages until Hamilton got P1 but he was swiftly beaten by Massa. They all pitted and went again but nothing changed. So, the final positions were Massa, Hamilton, Raikkonen, Kubica, Fisichella, Kovalainen, then Heidfeld, Trulli, Rosberg, and Alonso.

[Next Clip.]



Chris: The first thing we saw of the track today was a big truck going round putting down cement dust.

Me: Excessive amount of cement dust, if I may say so.

Chris: There was oil on the track from a previous race?

Me: Yea. I get the impression that the event organisers were trying to spice up the action by, you know, putting in a bit of chaos. What do you reckon?

Chris: Possibly. It didn't do the trick though, really.

Me: It didn't. No.

[Next Clip.]

Chris: Hamilton is usually the master of the starts, isn't he?

Me: He lost out this time.

Chris: This time Raikkonen got past him.

Me: He was flying.

Chris: He was absolutely flying. Cos Massa got a good start and Hamilton didn't have a chance of catching him really, then another red car went flying past.

Me: And Hamilton had to tuck in behind both of them.

[Next Clip.]

Chris: Alonso had found himself stuck behind Heidfeld again but he did one hell of an overtaking manoeuvre to get past him.

Me: That was blinding.

Chris: It was fast and it was brave.

Me: Overtaking manoeuvre of the season thus far, is it not?

Chris: Brilliant stuff.

Me: Who overtakes somebody through a chicane? The man's mental.

Chris: Now we know why he's a double world champion.

[Next Clip.]

Chris: The top eight were Raikkonen, Massa, Hamilton, Kubica, Heidfeld, Fisichella, Alonso and Button.



[End Montage.]

Insider's View

Ahead of this year's Grand Prix, we just have time to catch up with some of the driver opinions of the circuit. First up Nico Rosberg tells us the best bit of the track.

Nico: The favourite part of the track is probably the first corner. It's quite, it's very, very nice. You go in late braking, and then you have to carry the speed up the hill. It's a very long corner, so it's quite fun. I was really quick there last year.

And Honda test driver Alex Wurz breaks down exactly what makes the circuit a tricky one.

Alex: You have quick chicanes, very quick chicanes, high speed chicanes, 200-230. You enter corners very aggressively and because of the heat and the way the surface is made, it's quite slippery in the last sector, so it's easy to do a mistake. The driver has to remain calm and drive very precise. It's kind of got everything.

Team Thoughts

Usually, the drivers will spend the first few days of a Grand Prix weekend gushing about how much they like the track and how great it is to be driving there. France is slightly different, as it isn't one of the favourites on the calendar. Some like the track but not the location, others, such as Fisichella, simply don't enjoy the entire weekend. He says: "It's the circuit where I had my biggest accident in Formula One, back in 2002 and I had to miss the race after crashing in practice so for sure I don't have great memories of it. Also, I don't see any particular challenge with it." Sutil disagrees entirely, saying the track is one of his favourites. He's had good results there in other series, so would like to turn around his run of bad luck so far this year in France.

This is Renault's home Grand Prix, so the pressure is on for Alonso and Piquet. Both are still smarting from the double retirement at the last race, with Alonso saying the team missed out on a great opportunity and Piquet trying to stay focused on the positives they can take from being more competitive. Talking about the test in Barcelona, last week, Alonso said: "That went well, the team got a lot of information and I hope that we will see more progress this weekend. That is important for the morale of the team because we still have a lot to do in order to catch up with the leaders."

For Honda, Ross Brawn had some information about the test as well: "As our next aerodynamic upgrade is not due until the Silverstone test, we used the three days in Barcelona last week to evaluate the handling and set-up of the RA108 in order to increase our understanding of the car's performance. At Montreal, it was evident that braking stability and the car's ride quality over bumpy surfaces are not our strong point. This leads us to make compromises in other areas which prevents our drivers from achieving the balance that they are looking for. In Barcelona, we made some good progress with addressing this issues and improving the mechanical set-up of the car. We also continue to improve the driveability of the engine and even small steps here can find valuable laptime."

Rosberg falls into the camp that likes the circuit, saying he's happy to return to Europe, and he's had some good races in the past. He is slightly concerned though, as it's never been one of Williams' strongest tracks, and he has the ten place grid penalty from the Canada incident as well. Nakajima says he's looking forward to going to France, not only for the different track, but also to experience the different atmosphere. It certainly will be different.

Jarno Trulli sums up the weekend for most of the Toyota team, as a tribute to the late Ove Andersson. "In particular we want to achieve a strong result this weekend as a tribute to Ove because without him I'm not sure whether



Toyota would be competing in Formula One now. He helped build up the factory from scratch back in the rally times to what it is now; a real Formula One facility with the potential to produce World Championship-winning cars. He loved motorsport and it was his passion to see Toyota success so I hope we can achieve something fitting this weekend.”

Hamilton is another driver looking at the wrong end of a ten place grid penalty, but he’s determined to make the best of it. “Mentally, it’s just something that you learn to overcome quickly. It certainly won’t affect my preparations for the French Grand Prix. We’ve already looked at the best ways of optimizing the strategy to help us move up the field and I guess I’ll just have to pass some cars if I want to get into the points!” Heikki, meanwhile, is not worried about the championships, or how his results are looking, he is feeling more comfortable in the car with every race, and that’s all that matters.

Kubica reckons there have been some improvements made to the car over the Barcelona test, so that he hopes they will be even more competitive. He says most people don’t like the Magny-Cours because they find it boring, but he thinks it’s an exciting track. Heidfeld will be hoping that his extra testing day will help out on track, but most of all, he’s looking forward to the off-track time. His hotel is a castle, with no luxuries. I guess that works for some people.

For Ferrari, Kimi is really fired up for this race. He says: “I don’t remember when I had such a great lust for winning! The team had prepared a car, which was able to be strong on all the tracks, but it didn’t go well during the last races.” And he continues: “It was here in France last year that my season practically started all over again; and this is what I need now, after the two races with no points.” For some reason, Massa’s preview quotes talk a bit about football, which is not something I’m interested in. He also talks about the quiet time he’s had at home between races, so he should be turning up to France nice and relaxed and ready to race.

Sebastien Bourdais will be looking forward to his home race, but as usual, Toro Rosso and Red Bull are being very quiet ahead of the Grand Prix. Vettel will want to continue his points scoring form. David Coulthard for Red Bull will probably not end up on the podium again, so he and Mark Webber will most likely be looking to grab as many points as they can, seeing as at least two of their rivals will be suffering grid penalties.

That’s all for this preview of the French Grand Prix. Join me tomorrow for a full run down of the Free Practice action, or if you are around while the sessions are on, visit Sidepodcast.com to join in the live commenting. See you there.