



F1 Digest - Belgium Preview

Intro

Welcome to F1 Digest from Sidepodcast. We've had time to get over the pit lane antics from Valencia, and now we're looking forward to the Belgium Grand Prix.

Vital Statistics

Date: 7th September

Circuit: Spa-Francorchamp

Length: 7.0km

Laps: 44

2007 Winner: Kimi Raikkonen

Last Year

It's time now to look back at what happened in Belgium in 2007 to see if it gives us any clues on what to watch out for this year.

[Start Montage]

Chris: Free Practice 1 was dull, dull, dull.

Me: It's a circuit where they tested recently so they didn't need to do too much running too early.

Chris: Same problem we had at Monza, then.

Me: The test was slightly longer ago, so there was a few more unknowns, but essentially same track, same conditions, not too much to learn.

[Next clip]

Chris: In Free Practice 3, Kubica broke down, pulled to the side of the track. He had an engine failure, so they decided to change his engine.

Me: As you would do.

Chris: He had the ten place penalty which meant that whatever he achieved in qualifying, it would be his worst qualifying ever.

[Next clip]

Chris: Alonso chopped Hamilton right up, pushed him off the track. Hamilton got some grip whilst Alonso lost some



on the grass, so Hamilton was able to pull alongside, and then they went along together through Eau Rouge, Alonso just kept his foot down, and Hamilton decided it would be safer to lift off.

[Next clip]

Chris: Rosberg and Webber pitted first, together. Raikkonen and Alonso pitted next together. Then Massa and Hamilton came in together. It's like Noah's Ark or something.

Me: They're all working on the same optimum strategy, so if the computer said that's the best way round the lap, that's what all the teams did.

[Next Clip]

Chris: The final points positions were Raikkonen, Massa, Alonso, Hamilton, Heidfeld, Rosberg, Webber, and Kovalainen. The drivers championship has Hamilton on 97, Alonso on 95, Raikkonen is on 84, Massa is on 77 and Heidfeld on 66. The constructors has Ferrari on 161, BMW on 90, Renault on 39, Williams on 28 and Red Bull on 18.

[End montage.]

Insider's View

For our paddock insiders this week, we have Alex Wurz talking about some of the negative parts of the weekend.

Wurz: We have always the problems with the weather. Haven't had one Spa race weekend without rain. Usually when it's raining there it's very grey and cloudy, you have the forest so the visibility is actually really bad. And it's slightly dangerous, so you have to be very disciplined as a driver and very cautious on what's going on.

And because I couldn't possibly leave you with such a pessimistic outlook on the race, here's Nico Rosberg talking about his favourite corner.

Nico: Eau Rouge, that can really be like a roller coaster because you're going through there, you drop away first, then you go straight up, then you drop away again at the end. So, it's quite amazing. Also cos most of it is blind, at the exit especially, so it's a nice corner.

Team Thoughts

Starting with McLaren, and trust me, this is a trend we are going to see a lot through these quotes, Hamilton says Spa is one of his all time favourites, and that he loved racing there on his computer before he ever actually visited the track. Kovalainen points out that whilst everyone knows about Eau Rouge, there's a bigger challenge at Pouhon because it's almost flat but not quite, and getting the right balance of speed is difficult.

Kubica also believes that balance is crucial in Belgium. He says: "The circuit is very long and very tricky. You have to find the right balance and the right configuration of the car in order not to lose any lap time. Another crucial factor is the weather in Belgium. It can rain in one sector and it can be dry in another sector. I am really looking forward to the race." Spa is actually the closest race track to Heidfeld's home town, so he should have plenty of fans in, and wants to impress. Of course, with BMW giving him the hurry up, it's not just the fans he needs to prove something to.

Williams showed pretty well at the recent test in Monza, and Nico Rosberg hopes they can add that to the fact that Spa was a good race for them last year. "I finished sixth, which was one of my best results of the season. The



important thing for the team at the moment is that we've identified where improvements can be made with the FW30 and are making the necessary adjustments to take us into the final few races." Nakajima is once again faced with learning the circuit in terms of a Formula 1 car, although he does think Spa is one of the greatest tracks on the calendar, having driven it in GP2.

Fernando Alonso is determined to make up for the disappointment he faced in Valencia, and believes a lot of it comes down to the machinery: "It's a very long circuit, which generally emphasises the gaps between the cars. It requires a very complete car and so we will have to work hard on the set-up to make sure we are competitive in the quick sections as well as in the slower corners." Piquet is aiming high for the race: "As we have shown in the last few races, we are capable of scoring points and this is what we must keep in mind so that we can remain focused as we approach this race. My objective will be to reach Q3 in qualifying and hope for a good start in the race to try and finish in the points. I have to admit that I would prefer a dry race, but in Belgium you never know!"

For Toyota, Jarno Trulli proclaims this circuit to be the best in the world, and says: "I really enjoy driving at Spa and even after the changes they made to the track for last year's race it still has a unique character; it has everything you want as a driver. Eau Rouge is still one of the best corners in the world but now it is flat-out so it's not as challenging as it used to be." Glock is satisfied to have been picking up points in the last few races, and hopes that they can do so again in Belgium.

Jenson Button enthuses about Spa, as everyone does, but is particularly looking to the weather to help out the team. He mentions the fact that it can be raining at one end of the circuit and dry at the other, and says quick reactions are vital in such conditions. Ross Brawn also agrees that rain would mix things up a bit, saying: "We have seen already this season that our car can perform rather better in the wet than the dry and I for one would certainly not object to an inclement weekend." Barrichello enjoys the circuit for a different reason: "The lap gives you a fantastic feeling in a Formula One car as it is very fast and flowing with some great corners. It's easy on the tyres, brakes and engine as there are an unusually low number of stops from top speed down to a low gear and you have a long time between those corners to cool the brakes."

Massa has his sights set on a win, obviously, but his main aim is to beat one person in particular: "I will also be hoping to be ahead of my teammate, but Kimi has always been quick at Spa, not just in Formula One, but he was also a winner here in the junior categories and he has won the last three Grands Prix at this track. So it won't be easy to beat him and I am looking forward to a good battle with my teammate. The F2008 should be competitive and our aim will be to bring home as many points as possible for the team." Kimi is feeling good about the upcoming weekend but knows it won't be easy: "After Valencia I trained at home in Switzerland and then I went to Monza for a day of testing. We tested some new solutions and the overall package seems to have improved. Having said that, we only know how it will look on the track at the Qualifying at Spa, because you never know how much fuel everybody has on board during the tests. I think that it will be a fierce fight; one test might not be enough to change the season's overall trend."

Amazingly, this week, we have uncovered some Red Bull preview quotes. Only Red Bull though, not Toro Rosso, and it's just Christian Horner. But he's feeling positive about the upcoming race: "We had a good test in Monza and although that was aimed primarily at the Italian Grand Prix, the results of the test answered several fundamental questions about our package. Apart from the track characteristics, the weather always plays a crucial part in Belgium, therefore we will need to be particularly sharp operationally and in terms of strategy, dealing with the fact that sometimes half the track can be dry and the other half wet."

Force India are being pretty slow with their quotes this month as well, but after a relatively good test in Monza, with Fisichella finishing the day third at one point, they're probably feeling good about the weekend.



That's it for this preview show. If you can, join us on Sidepodcast.com tomorrow for Live Commenting during Free Practice 1 and 2, and I will be back with another F1 Digest to roundup the action.

sidepodcast.com
YOUR WEEKLY F1 FIX