



F1 Digest: Australia Preview

Intro

Welcome to F1 Digest from Sidepodcast, your one-stop coverage for all the action of a race weekend. It's only five minutes since we watched Australia, and we've only just had time to process everything that happened, now we're racing again in Malaysia.

Vital Statistics

Date: 23rd March

Circuit: Sepang International Circuit

Length: 5.5km

Laps: 56

2007 Winner: Fernando Alonso

Last Year

Let's take a quick look at what unfolded in 2007, to see if it can give us any clues about what will happen this year.

[Begin Montage]

Me: So, what was news then, on Friday?

Chris: Honda's... very bad.

Me: Right. Woefully off the pace.

Chris: Throughout the whole thing, they were just rubbish.

Me: Really? They said in testing they thought they took a step forward, but I'm thinking maybe they took a step back.

Chris: Backwards, yea, I think they've got their directions wrong.

Me: Yes. Who else was out, then?

Chris: Um, well, Coulthard wasn't. He spent a lot of time in the garage.

Me: He did in Free Practice 1, didn't he? There was some, kind of, gremlins keeping him at bay. He didn't go out until the very last minutes.

Chris: Gremlins?

Me: Yes. Not actual Gremlins. Just mechanical problems.

Chris: But it was the main four on top, wasn't it? Massa, Alonso, Hamilton, Raikkonen. The main four.



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Chris: In the press conference, after Friday practice, picture the scene, you know, all those journalists and everything. Flavio Briatore stands up to talk about his team. When asked how he was coping with the loss of Alonso to McLaren, he said “You turn the page and you try to do the best you can and at this moment, everybody is motivated to give the best to Fernando and Heikki.”

Me: Fernando?

Chris: “I mean, Giancarlo. I’m sorry!” He, you know, looks a bit embarrassed and says sorry again and in the background, Fisichella, poor lad. He’s sat there looking very uncomfortable.

Me: No. Fisichella was in the press conference as well? And he says Fernando?

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Me: Honda...

Chris: Again bad! I think it’s about time we stopped talking about Honda.

Me: Should we just write them off? Pretend they’re not there.

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Chris: It seemed to be me that the third session was almost like a mini race.

Me: Why’s that?

Chris: Because Alonso, when they first came out, Alonso was racing Hamilton at the corner. Kind of like he did with Schumacher last year. And then it all came down to the pit stops. Really, it was like watching a little race.

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Me: So, the race.

Chris: It was a good one.

Me: Hamilton did a blinder.

Chris: His usual. Take everyone on the first corner. Both the McLaren’s actually, ended up in front of both the Ferrari’s. It’s a good start.

Me: So, our conclusion last week that Alonso was back in the UK working on McLaren’s starts? That seems to be true.

Chris: There is evidence to support that.

Me: He was certainly doing something.



Chris: Massa spent ages trying to get his position back from Hamilton, but then he made a mistake.

Me: He made a hell of a mistake.

Chris: It was quite a stupid mistake.

Me: Hamilton read him perfectly, didn't he? He knows Massa's a bit, well, he used to be a bit wild. And he knew that eventually the man was going to out brake himself and he just set him up...

Chris: Perfectly. Massa went off and he let Nick Heidfeld through as well. So, let Raikkonen through and Heidfeld, lost two places, couldn't get them back the entire rest of the race. It was quite a painful mistake, I think.

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Chris: The first round of pit stops was quite funny, because Ron Dennis, he started faffing...

Me: Panicking, I think it a better word.

Chris: Yea, running round like a headless chicken. Apparently, Alonso's radio wasn't working, and everyone was worrying that he wouldn't come in, so it went back to the good old days of holding signs out of the pit wall.

Me: And he spotted it, didn't he?

Chris: He did, in the end, yea.

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Chris: Renault, they went long in the first stint, didn't they?

Me: They did, actually, they kept going and going and going. They got quite high in the running for a little while but then obviously had to come in for their stops.

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Chris: The final finishing positions were Alonso, then Hamilton, Raikkonen, Heidfeld, Massa, Fisichella, Trulli and Kovalainen.

[End Montage]

This Year

The main thing that worries most of the teams and drivers is the heat and the humidity. Most will have headed straight to Malaysia from the first round to spend as much time as possible acclimatising to the atmosphere.

It helps that it was a super-hot race in Australia, but early weather predictions say we may be in for some storms this weekend, which can only add to the challenges facing the drivers. Bridgestone have decided that the suitable tyre compounds are the two hardest, as they are most likely to survive the heat.



BMW are looking forward to this weekend, not only to capitalise on the momentum from Australia but also because it is sort of a home race. Petronas, their major sponsor, is from Malaysia, and so there will be plenty of promotional work in store for Heidfeld and Kubica, but they'll be rewarded by grandstands packed with BMW fans.

Honda are looking forward to this race – Jenson is hoping he might actually get past the first lap, and Barrichello is hoping to have a positive race. Overall, the team seems to be much happier with the performance of the car, and whilst they are only fighting for mid-field positions, this is an absolute bonus compared to last year's performance.

Timo Glock is fit to drive for Toyota this weekend, after leaving Australia with a light wrist injury. He's looking forward to the race as it's his first time at Sepang, and he knows the circuit will be challenging.

The Williams drivers have a mixture of feelings – Nico Rosberg is looking forward to the race and riding high after his podium finish in Australia. He's expecting another strong points finish. Kazuki Nakajima, meanwhile, is positive about the race, but facing a ten place grid penalty for the accident last weekend. This means he's just going to concentrate on doing the best he can.

I'll be keeping a close eye on the weather to see if any of those stormy predictions come to fruition, and I can give you an update on our Free Practice tomorrow. Don't forget to visit Sidepodcast.com during the sessions and join in our Live Commenting threads. I'll be reading a selection out on the show.

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YOUR WEEKLY F1 FIX