



## F1 Digest - Belgium Free Practice

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### *Intro*

Hello and welcome to F1 Digest from Sidepodcast. This is your dedicated race coverage, four shows over four days. Yesterday we previewed the upcoming race and today we'll run through what happened in Free Practice.

### *Free Practice 1*

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The weather forecasts are all about rain this weekend, which is hardly surprising, because it's, you know, Spa. It rained overnight and although ahead of Free Practice 1 it had cleared up slightly, the track was damp. Both air and track temperature were down at 15 degrees C.

Sutil was the first driver out leading the Toro Rosso and BMW boys for their installation laps. As each driver clocked up one lap, it rained briefly, stopping almost as soon as it had started. The Ferrari duo were the last to leave the pit lane, but it looked like they would be the first to set a lap time. Raikkonen started a lap, but dived into the pit lane at the end of it, thus it was left to Massa to set the first benchmark. He was followed by others, and Hamilton managed to knock Vettel out of second, but Vettel took it straight back. The battle was instantly squashed though, as Alonso slipped into second himself. Steven Roy picked up on something in the Live Comments at Sidepodcast.com: "It's sad to see cars cruising through Eau Rouge like it is nothing. At least next year it should be a challenge again."

Raikkonen set his first lap time of the day, finishing seventh, whilst Piquet jumped him to sixth. Kimi wasn't having that, started another lap to improve to third, and then first the next time round. Massa proved that he really does think his team mate is the man to beat by jumping into first moments later.

Rosberg came into the pits and had a new nose fitted, didn't seem to be anything wrong with the old one, so it was probably just a pit stop test. Out on track, things were getting a bit difficult, with quite a few drivers locking up, or running wide. Kovalainen ruined his tyres, whilst Sutil controlled what could have been a slide. Barrichello also had a quick trip off track at the end of a lap. It showed, as well, with the Honda driver sitting last on the timesheets.

Kubica wasn't happy either on track or in the garage, complaining about literally every component on his car. Even changing to the softer tyre didn't work. Many of the drivers were trying softs with Hamilton posting third, and Massa shaving yet more time off his lead.

At the end of the session, the fastest five were Massa, Raikkonen, Hamilton, Kovalainen and Alonso. After the countdown hit zero, the drivers got a chance to practice some starts from the grid, but Bourdais missed out on the fun. The Toro Rosso broke down at the pitlane exit, and Bourdais was left walking back to his garage.

### *Free Practice 2*

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The weather didn't improve much before the afternoon session, track temperature rising just 1 degree to 16, and the air sitting on 17. Race control predicted rain within the next half an hour, so there was no hanging about in the garages for the start of this practice. Alianora picked up on this in the comments: "FOM says rain in 30, BMW says rain in 25... ..I know who'd I trust. I think the next twenty minutes or so will be extremely busy." Vettel put in the first laptime but then Hamilton beat it by almost 2 seconds. Raikkonen slipped into second, only to be beaten by Coulthard and Bourdais. Raikkonen soon regained his dignity though, taking third, just behind team mate Massa.

Despite the half hour warning, the rain started to fall within ten minutes of the session starting. It wasn't particularly hard to start with, but you could tell the track was getting slippery. A couple of drivers ran wide, Barrichello locked



up but it was Webber who got it all wrong. Twenty minutes in, and his car had hit the tyre barriers. Flibster took note of the damage for us on Sidepodcast.com: “Looking at the angle, suspension damage and bodywork around the wheel will be damaged - At least they have time to fix it today ready for tomorrow.” The track remained open but gradually the drivers returned to the pit lane, preferring to wait for the shower to pass.

Bourdais did have a go a few minutes into the hiatus but told his team it was a waste of time and returned to the pits. Fifteen minutes later, team mate Vettel took to the track and started to put down some rubber.

Other drivers began to emerge, but when Raikkonen began his out lap, he spun and hit the barrier. The Ferrari lost it's rear wing, but was able to make it back to the pit lane. Ollie sums up this incident for us in the comments: “Looks like Kimi caught a white line and the Ferrari spun into the tyre barrier. Gentle nudge, but it was enough.” Fisichella was the next one off, spinning backwards into the barrier. Red flags were raised while the Force India was brought to safety. Steven Roy was watching this incident for us: “Fisi spun off hit his rear wing on a barrier did a neat 180 and hit the front wing for good measure.” It looked like Fisichella spun on some oil left from Raikkonen's crash but Lalpedal noticed: “In the replays the track looked dry as Kimi drove away from his accident. No sign of any liquids leaking. Did the oily-water come out of the tyre barriers?”

When the track was green again, everyone took to the track to make the most of the remaining twenty minutes. Piquet was the final driver of the day to visit the barriers. Like Raikkonen, he managed to continue but told his team over the radio that there definitely was damage.

In the last few moments, Alonso pulled out a stunning time to go quickest, with Massa just behind. The Ferrari wasn't planning on settling for second best but couldn't make his final lap work. The fastest five were Alonso, Massa, Kovalainen, Hamilton and Raikkonen.

More practice starts from the grid took place, but Kubica had an issue, possibly stalling, and had to push his car out of the way.

### *Conclusions*

We'll kick off with Red Bull, although they're not known for being particularly vocal at the end of each day. Webber takes the blame for his accident in FP2: “We did one run in the afternoon, but unfortunately I then went back out and made a mistake on an out lap on slightly cool tyres. I couldn't recover it in Turn 8, slid across the gravel and damaged the car. We'll be back again tomorrow.” Coulthard is disappointed with his day, saying: “Tricky Spa weather conditions this weekend, which makes it more difficult to evaluate where you are with the tyres etc. due to the changing conditions. What else to say? Don't come here on your summer holidays.”

Rosberg tells us that Williams made some major setup changes between the two sessions and he feels that the afternoon was a lot better. He also mentions that the team have added some developments that will help them to pick up the pace this weekend. Nakajima feels that the changes actually made his afternoon more difficult, and he's hoping that there will be improved grip later in the weekend.

Honda were also struggling with grip. Button says: “Whilst it is great to be back at Spa... we did have a difficult time in free practice today. It was very hard to get heat into the tyres in the cool and damp conditions.” Barrichello also says the rain was a pain because it cost them some track time, but at the same time, he's hoping for more wet weather because it's the only conditions that favour them.

Adrian Sutil had a great finish to the day, ending up 8<sup>th</sup>, but says it was really just one good lap. “This morning was OK but we lost the final few minutes of the session with a broken damper and couldn't improve the time from the first run. At least we had some more tyres to use in the afternoon, but then unfortunately the rain started and it was



difficult to judge when we could go out.” Fisichella says there was nothing he could do to stop his incident with the barriers, saying the car just snapped away from him.

Kubica had a bad day and wasn't afraid of letting his team know about it. His post-practice quotes reflect that. The best bit from him though is: “When I was doing a practice start at the end of the session the engine stalled.” The engine stalled. All by itself. Heidfeld classifies his day as okay, and says conditions were tricky but the classic line, it was the same for everybody.

For Toyota, Trulli missed out on some of the running so had a difficult day, and Glock thinks the whole day was tricky. Chief Engineer Dieter Gass gives us a bit more information: “The red flag and the weather conditions had a big effect on our programme today. The day was completely disrupted and on top of that we had an electrical problem with Jarno's car. Thankfully we were able to find it and fix it for the second session and we had no further issues. But with the rain drops coming and going the track was changing a lot from one run to another.”

Vettel revelled in the conditions today: “I thought it was cool to drive in these conditions as you have no margin for error: 10 centimetres the wrong way and you can crash. You have to be very precise and it demands very accurate driving. When you push, you start to feel your balls in your pants! It was interesting and I like it.” .....Moving on. Bourdais also said the risks were too great to push too hard. Okay, what he actually said was: “This is the most beautiful track, but the conditions are often a pain in the arse.” What is it with the drivers today?

Alonso admits that Renault weren't able to complete their programme today, but he's confident that all teams suffered with this problem and he's not too worried about it. Piquet felt like the programme was very busy, and he doesn't feel comfortable in the car, which didn't help.

Massa felt like he had a good day, but Raikkonen had some troubles. “When I went off the track at Turn 9, I clipped the kerb and the surface was a bit slippery there because of the rain. I ended up spinning and then hitting the barrier. Unfortunately, not only did the rear wing break, but the floor was also damaged and it could not be repaired in time. A shame as already earlier, when I had gone onto new tyres, it had begun raining and I lost a bit of time. Let's hope tomorrow morning there's no rain so that I can run more consistently in the dry.”

For McLaren, Kovalainen says the kerbs were like ice, and with the damp conditions, neither driver was eager to go out in the afternoon. Hamilton also said that whilst the conditions were typical, there's not that much use in fiddling around with your setup because it's like aiming at a moving target.

That's it for today. I hope you can tune into qualifying tomorrow, and join us on Sidepodcast.com for the live comments. If I don't see you there, I will see you back here tomorrow for another F1 Digest, rounding up all the action.