



F1 Digest – Belgium GP

Intro

Welcome to F1 Digest for the Belgian Grand Prix. We've covered all free practice sessions and qualifying, and they all lead up to today's race. Here is what happened.

The Race

More rain overnight meant that drivers were still making tyre decisions up to the very last minute. During the ITV grid walk, with about a quarter of an hour to go, Alonso said he was still talking with his engineers, trying to pick the best strategy. In the end, everyone but Piquet decided to start on softs, with the Renault opting for the intermediate tyre. Both air and track temperature were around 16 degrees C, and Race Control told us they were not expecting rain within the next half an hour. But as Scott Woodwiss pointed out in the comments: "FOM just displayed "No Rain during next 30 minutes". So I make that in about 10?"

Everyone made it off the grid cleanly, though many, many drivers ran wide at the first corner. Kovalainen had a really poor start, seemingly going nowhere off the grid and losing places from 3rd to 13th. Bourdais had a great start from 9th up to 4th, and Raikkonen got past Massa to tuck in behind Hamilton in 2nd. Trulli also made a stellar start but immediately spun it at the end of the first lap.

Hamilton also spun which allowed Raikkonen to close the gap, and on the following straight, he had the better speed advantage and managed to take the lead. RG got caught up in the excitement, and on Sidepodcast.com said: "HAMILTON SPUN. I'm gonna have a heart attack. Raikkonen past." And Kobito really summed it up nicely: "A-MA-ZING start!"

Heidfeld and Kovalainen, both suffering from bad start syndrome, were pushing their way through the field. Kovalainen in particular, was showing us plenty of overtaking. Piquet, having made the choice to start on intermediates, was clearly regretting the decision, losing time and places and falling back down the order.

Hamilton started setting fastest laps, but couldn't get close to Raikkonen, who had pulled out about a 5 second lead. Flibster left a thought in the live comments: "Going to be hard for Hamilton now. Ferrari are so much faster in a straight line." Kovalainen, in his desperation to get back up the field, made a botched overtaking manoeuvre on Webber. It was a bit half-hearted, and Kovi nudged Webber who spun. The incident was investigated and the stewards immediately handed out a drive through penalty.

Hamilton was the first to come in for a scheduled pit stop after 11 laps, and the McLaren mechanics turned around a really quick stop to send him on his way. Steven Roy had a theory about this: "I think Lewis was pulled in early because he was losing time behind Kimi." He came out right behind Kovalainen though, which may have held him up somewhat. Raikkonen came in on the next lap and easily came out ahead. When Kovalainen served his pit stop, and then had to go in again for his drive through, he was out of Hamilton's way, and once again way down the running order in 14th.

Piquet, struggling on the wrong tyres, then hit the kerbs and spun, hurtling across the run off into the tyre barriers. He was immediately on the team radio, saying: "I'm okay, but I'm out."

Bourdais came into the pit lane, at the same time as Kubica, and the Toro Rosso was released inches ahead of the BMW, an incident reminiscent of Massa in Valencia. No penalties this time round though. Barrichello's pit stop



turned out to be the end of his race, as he had a gearbox problem that was ruining the engine. The team decided to bring him in and call it a day.

During the second round of pit stops, Hamilton and Raikkonen came in on the same lap, with the Ferrari coming out ahead. However, Hamilton was now running on his favoured tyre compound, the harder one, and wasn't about to let up.

Alonso made a late decision to visit the pit lane, eerily similar to his Valencia faux pas, but again, no penalty dished out this time. Massa also pitted and came out in third. Race Control announced a rain prediction for the next fifteen minutes. Kubica's pit stop saw him come out behind Vettel, meaning the Toro Rosso's were running 5th and 6th. On his favoured tyre, Hamilton began blitzing the distance between himself and Raikkonen. Flibster noticed in the live comments: "The Ferrari really doesn't like the hard tyres. Raikkonen lost 1.5 seconds in 2 laps!" Even though they were both having to get through traffic, the gap went down to 2 seconds. With just 6 laps to go, the rain began to fall lightly.

Notably, the drivers started to look a bit more cautious, and a bit more twitchy. Hamilton had a little wobble, giving some time back to the Ferrari, but he was soon close behind again. As the rain got harder, Hamilton was right behind and preparing to overtake. He cut the final chicane, and on the home straight had to hand the position back, but immediately jinked to the opposite side and made it stick round the first corner. Raikkonen actually touched the back of the McLaren at the first corner, which hampered his chances of getting the position back.

No time to celebrate though, as they both ran wide off the track. Hamilton swerved back onto the circuit, but Raikkonen went all the way round the corner using maximum run-off and gaining some traction on the dirty tarmac. Round the next corner, and Hamilton stumbled across a Williams, itself recovering from an off-road adventure. Hamilton had to run wide off track to avoid it, and Raikkonen managed to squeeze down the inside of the corner. The McLaren ended up running all the way across the grass, and the Ferrari was in front.

Immediately, though, Kimi spun round, 360 degrees off the track, handing the lead back to Lewis again. He regained the track, behind a couple of backmarkers, and the pair fought through the traffic for another few corners. Finally, Hamilton wobbled on the kerbs, but managed to keep control, but Raikkonen, finding the same slippery patch of kerb, spun again, and this time ended up in the wall. You could see the disappointment as he sat in the car, shaking his head.

The rain was pouring by now, and we headed into the last lap. Hamilton didn't pit, neither did Massa, whilst the majority of the rest of the field did dive into the pit lane for a change of tyres. The final lap was a slow crawl to the finish, with Hamilton controlling it to the very end. Massa finished second. Amazingly, Heidfeld had changed onto wets and made up 25 seconds in the last lap, passing three cars to finish third.

The rest of the points went to Alonso, Vettel, Kubica, Bourdais and Glock. Scott in Italy commented: "Suggestion: F1 digest for laps 1 to 40 and a different podcast for the last 4 laps. There was a lot in there!"

Unfortunately, the end of the race wasn't the end of it all. Afterwards, it was announced that Glock was under investigation for overtaking under yellow flags, and Hamilton was under investigation for getting an advantage from cutting the chicane. Glock received a 25 second penalty which dropped him out of the points and promoted Webber to 8th. Hamilton, bizarrely, received a drive through penalty (how that works post-race is anyone's guess) which demotes him to third. Massa takes the win, and Heidfeld picks up second. McLaren are appealing the result.

Championship



With the results standing as they are, with Massa winning the race, he closes up the gap considerably to Hamilton in the driver's championship. Lewis remains on top with 76, but Felipe is now on 74. Kubica jumps Raikkonen 58 to 57, and Heidfeld now sits on 49.

Ferrari continue to lead the constructors with 113 points, and McLaren have 119. BMW have 107, whilst Toyota and Renault are far away now on 41 and 36 respectively.

Conclusions

Starting with Toyota, at the time the press-release was uh, released, Glock said he was happy with his hard-earned point. We haven't heard from him since the penalty, but my guess is he's disappointed but philosophical about it. Trulli felt unlucky from the start, because he went from 11th to 6th but says: "I was hit really hard from the back and this damaged the car. After that the car was undriveable and on top of that the accident caused a gearbox problem, so my only target was to finish the race."

Both Williams boys started way down the grid and made up only a couple of places throughout the race. Rosberg says it wasn't a particularly exciting day for him, and that he's just looking on to the next race. Nakajima says the early contact cost him some time, but does feel that his pace wasn't too bad considering he was on a one-stop strategy.

Alonso is pleased with his 4th position: "We finished fourth after a difficult race with plenty of incidents. It's a good result for the team, especially for our position in the championship because our objective was to score some important points. We missed out on a podium today, but we have shown that we can be the third strongest team in the championship." That's right, behind Heidfeld? Conveniently overlooking BMW there Alonso. Piquet is disappointed: "I made a good start and gained five places, which was encouraging, but there were still some damp patches on the circuit and I made a mistake. It's a shame because I'm sure we could have done something today."

Button says he got caught in a train of cars behind his team mate, when Barrichello had the gearbox problem that ultimately retired him from the race. However, he finished 15th and doesn't think the car was capable of much more anyway. Barrichello thought the race was going okay, but he lost sixth gear which meant he couldn't get into seventh, and that meant there was the potential for significant damage to the engine.

For Force India, Sutil finished a respectable 13th, and says: "It was a strong race for us with a good performance. We had quite a lot of fights on the circuit and lots of overtaking." Fisichella had most of the bad luck today: "Unfortunately Nakajima spun and came across in front of my car and I broke the front wing and damaged the car quite a lot. Coming back to the pits I lost a lot of time as I had no front wing and punctured tyres. Unfortunately when I went out of the pitlane I was just in front of the leaders and then had blue flags at least 40 times!" No exaggeration there, I'm sure.

Now, I'm really starting to like Vettel, he's super enthusiastic even when things don't go their way. He says: "Both me and Seb have good reason to smile after a race like that. The last lap was unbelievable and I was shocked as I got passed in the last fifty metres and then Heidfeld followed by Alonso drove past me with a "whoosh" on their intermediates. Overall it was a fantastic race, even though I was stuck in traffic for a while." Bourdais sums up the confusion of the last lap for us: "On the last lap it was a lottery with the car getting away from you with every turn of the wheel. It's a horrible situation, as everything had been under control up until then. But I am not in a situation where I can risk everything and at the end of the race I didn't even know where I finished."

Heidfeld is extremely happy with third, so presumably even more so now he's been promoted to second. He also says that losing lots of places to Kovalainen was a low point, but the decision to change to wet tyres was his and the team weren't sure he even meant it. It definitely worked out for him. Kubica, meanwhile, says he's not happy with



the result at all, and counts himself as unlucky because he couldn't follow Heidfeld into the pit lane for wet tyres, as he would have lost time being stacked up behind him.

Webber thinks the traffic was a real problem, along with the conditions, especially as he was running light and needed some clear track. In his quotes he says it's a shame the team didn't get any points as they worked hard, so he will no doubt be pleased to have been bumped up the order to 8th. Coulthard felt he was held up by the Hondas at the start of the race and that basically made it impossible to make up many positions.

With the controversy of the race, and a pending appeal, it seems unlikely we'll get any McLaren or Ferrari quotes, not in any reasonable timescale, anyway. Therefore, I will have to end the show by just saying that this incident will no doubt be with us for a while yet.

That's it for today, there's just one week now before the action gets going again in Monza, so I will be back this week with the next F1 Digest preview. See you then.

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