



F1 Digest - Brazil Preview

Intro

Here we are then, rapidly approaching the last race of the 2008 season. It's been an amazing year, and F1 Digest is here to guide you through this final Grand Prix weekend.

Vital Statistics

Date: 2nd November

Circuit: Interlagos

Length: 4.3km

Laps: 71

2007 Winner: Kimi Raikkonen

Last Year

Last year's championship showdown at Brazil was thrill-a-minute, so let's remind ourselves of that before we look at what to expect this year.

[Begin Montage]

Chris: Hamilton headed up the queue in the third session, followed by Alonso. There were quite a few of them sat there with their engines overheating, with over a minute to go. Alonso appeared to be hassling Hamilton around the first few corners, but not really close enough for any major manoeuvres.

[Next Clip]

Me: But McLaren have that guy in the pits this week, don't they? The FIA inspector making sure things like that wouldn't happen.

[Next Clip]

Chris: Raikkonen got past Hamilton off the line, and then he was side by side with Massa but had to fall behind at the first corner. In doing so, he held up Hamilton which allowed Alonso to get past as well. Hamilton tried to regain his position but ran really wide, lost tons of places, he ended up back in 8th.

[Next Clip]

Chris: Hamilton got past Trulli straight away and Heidfeld practically let him through but on the next lap, he slowed right down, cars were streaming past him. He couldn't find any gears.

Me: Of all the races.



Chris: He coasted round a couple of corners then seemed to pick it up again. All we know is that his gearbox was sent a wrong command.

[Next Clip]

Chris: Nakajima came into the pits, either at the wrong angle, or he forgot to stop or something.

Me: I think it was both, wasn't it? Wrong angle and couldn't stop because he was at the wrong angle.

Chris: He ran down two of his mechanics.

Me: Nasty.

[Next Clip]

Chris: In the next round of pit stops, Raikkonen came out in front of Massa, and Alonso remained behind, so if things stayed as they were, Raikkonen was on course to take the win and the championship.

[Next Clip]

Chris: The final points positions were Raikkonen, Massa, Alonso, Rosberg, Kubica, Heidfeld, Hamilton and Trulli.

[End Montage]

Insider's View

This week our paddock insiders come in the form of ex-F1 driver Christian Danner and our regular correspondent Nico Rosberg. First up, Christian tells us just how important that first corner really is.

Christian: Well, the first corner's the first chance to do an overtaking, and once you do an overtaking at the first corner, you've saved yourself a lot of time, because overtaking in Formula 1 is difficult, very difficult. So, if you get your enemy in Turn 1, there is a chance that you gain time on him until your first pit stop, and that's a big, very significant advantage.

Now Rosberg takes us through the reasons why Brazil is such a popular addition to the calendar. Please note: Nico doesn't mention Piquet in his line up of Brazilian drivers. Perhaps we could start some tabloid headlines that they just don't get on.

Nico: Brazil is a great country, so I think everybody, the whole of Formula 1 looks forward to going there for the race. It's a nice track, great track, very enthusiastic spectators, also because of Felipe Massa now and Rubens Barrichello, two pretty strong Brazilian drivers at the moment. So it should be again a good weekend this year for everybody.

Team Thoughts

Now let's catch up with our teams this week. We'll start with Honda, and Barrichello at his home track, he knows this one inside out: "The main challenge at Interlagos is to find the best set-up for the combination of fast and slow corners, and particularly the tight infield section where high levels of grip are required. You also need to have total confidence in your car and a good mechanical set-up with a high ride-height to manage the bumpy surface. As always, I'm looking forward to having my family and friends around me for the race weekend and to racing in front of my home fans." Button agrees that the bumps are notorious, but is more worried about a different aspect of the track: "It has an anti-clockwise layout which is quite unusual and this means using muscles in the neck which aren't used to the exertion, therefore the correct training in advance of the race is crucial."

For Toyota, Trulli is looking to finish well, both at the weekend, and in the championship. "It was very frustrating to be eliminated so early in China so I am determined to hit back in Brazil. This has been one of my best seasons, even if I have had some bad luck as well, so I am looking forward to celebrating the final race with another top-six finish. It's disappointing we cannot finish fourth in the Constructors' Championship but it's still possible for me to finish eighth in the Drivers' Championship so I will fight to score as many points as possible to do that." Glock also sums up his year: "This has been a very positive first season with Toyota and I want to end it with a strong result in the Brazilian Grand Prix. I feel I have made great progress this year and I've had a lot of fun as well; Toyota is a great team and everyone has been very supportive."

Heidfeld is slightly more optimistic than the others regarding the bumpy circuit, he says: "I'm curious to see whether the track is still the same as it was in 2007. That was a nice surprise, as the track's surface used to be really bad and very bumpy. It was always being patched up, but it was only when the track was re-asphalted ahead of the 2007 Grand Prix that it really became a good surface." Kubica agrees, says that the race is very tough physically, but he will be going out fighting to defend his third place in the championship.

Hamilton says he is approaching this final race the same as any other, although he is aware he doesn't need to win. He's hoping for a nice, straightforward weekend, just like they had in China. Kovalainen admits that it hasn't been easy for him this season: "It didn't take too long to find where I wanted to be with the team, but it's taken longer to get used to the MP4-23. Sometimes I've pushed the set-up in the wrong direction but, over the year, I've found a better direction. I've been particularly pleased with my qualifying pace; even from the first race, I was competitive. Now I'm working hard to improve my knowledge of the tyres and everything is headed in the right direction."

Nakajima has also been learning: "This race marks my first anniversary in Formula One and I can't believe how quickly it's gone! I've certainly learnt a lot and I'll be using that experience in Brazil this weekend. This race will be easier than some of the others this season because I actually have experience of racing at Interlagos. Our car worked well in Brazil last year, and I hope that's the case on Sunday." Rosberg also wants a positive weekend: "Interlagos is a really fun track to drive as it has a bit of everything - gradient changes, a complete mix of corners and it runs in an anti-clockwise direction which presents a different challenge for the drivers. We had a strong race there last year and I finished fourth. As we haven't had a great showing in the past two races, it would be nice to do well again here and end the season on a positive note."

Piquet is another driver turning up for his home Grand Prix this weekend, and he says he's determined to do well, but there's no extra pressure: "I'm approaching this race calmly and I will use the practice sessions to gradually improve the set-up of the car so that I am in the best shape possible for qualifying and the race. So I'm approaching the weekend one step at a time to try and deliver a great result." Alonso also feels there is no pressure: "It was at Interlagos that I won my two world titles with Renault in 2005 and 2006 and so it always feels great to come back here. This year we have already achieved our objective to end the season fourth in the Constructors' Championship with the third quickest car so we can therefore approach this race with less pressure and be more relaxed, which may help us take advantage of the situation. After Singapore and Fuji, the team now believes that anything is possible."

Both Force India drivers are looking forward to the race, although they know it will be difficult. Sutil adds to the growing voice regarding the bumps: "The track is very enjoyable despite being physically tough. The ambient temperatures can be high and it's sometimes very humid, but the toughest is the bumps." He's also really just hoping to finish the race, as he's enjoyed three consecutive DNFs. Meanwhile, Fisichella says there is no problem with motivation for him: "I've always had a soft spot for the Brazilian Grand Prix since I scored my first win there in 2003 with Jordan. Although a few of the people who worked on my car back then are still around with Force India, a lot has changed with the team since that year. Despite that the same spirit is there and everyone is motivated to do the maximum and get the best result we can, whether that's a win or just one point."



No official Red Bull or Toro Rosso quotes, however, Vettel has said that he's approaching Brazil like any other race, even though it's his last with Toro Rosso. "To be honest, I will not think about this being the last race. We will just go out there and do our job. We will try our best. Then on Sunday night we have a good opportunity to party together." No doubt it will be harder for David Coulthard, as this is the last race of his career.

Over at Ferrari, Raikkonen thinks that the team will be able to learn from their mistakes this season and be much stronger next year. However, there's still a chance for at least one of their drivers. Massa believe there's no pressure on him, although he is seven points behind. He says that his only goal is to win the race and that's all he needs to focus on. "The only thing I am thinking about is winning. After that, the matter is not in my hands and we will have to wait and see exactly what and how much we have won. For sure, Lewis will try and put pressure on me, but I have zero pressure, because I have nothing to lose. I have my people behind me and all the pressure will be on him, especially when you think about what happened at this race last year. I can't wait for the final Sunday of the season." Me too, Felipe, me too.

That's it for today's F1 Digest preview. Don't forget to join us for Live Commenting on Sidepodcast.com during Free Practice on Friday because it makes things a lot more fun. I'll be there, and I hope to see you there too.

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