



F1 Digest - Bahrain Preview

Intro

Welcome to F1 Digest, the race coverage series brought to you by Sidepodcast. After a short break in the action, although not in the news, the racing returns this weekend in the hot and dusty Bahrain.

Vital Statistics

Date: 6th April

Circuit: Bahrain International Circuit

Length: 5.4km

Laps: 57

2007 Winner: Felipe Massa

Last Year

Whilst we are going to preview the events for 2008, it's worth looking back to last year to see how the teams coped and fared during the 2007 race weekend.

[Begin Montage]

Chris: What's it like in Bahrain at the moment?

Me: Hot and dusty.

Chris: As expected then.

Me: Yea, pretty much. It certainly was in free practice.

Chris: Yea, in the first one, everyone was like, skipping off the track. Too dusty for them.

Me: They were trying to find their limits, weren't they? But lots of run off areas in Bahrain.

Chris: So they weren't that bothered?

Me: Well, you can take bigger risks, can't you? I mean, you wouldn't do this kind of thing at Monaco cos you'd be in the sea.

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Chris: At the end of the first practice it was Raikkonen and Massa in front, with Hamilton and Alonso behind them. Am I gonna get sick of saying that this season? Renault were still looking out of sorts but BMW – still looking quite good.

Me: Yea, they're up there too, aren't they?



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Chris: We were on the edge of our seats, we wanted Davidson to get into the top ten because he'd been doing so well.

Me: And he was there almost all the way, wasn't he?

Chris: He was so close, as well, but I blame Martin Brundle.

Me: Why?

Chris: He jinxed it.

Me: What did he do?

Chris: He said "Wouldn't it be great if Anthony Davidson could get into the top ten?" So, of course, he didn't.

Me: He did a Murray Walker on him. Blimey.

Chris: He came 13th which is still really good.

Me: That is good.

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Chris: I get the feeling that Massa and Hamilton are never gonna be friends.

Me: Oh, they had a bit of a war of words, didn't they?

Chris: They were, cos obviously, Hamilton said last weekend he tricked Massa into making the mistake. And this weekend Massa's been saying "I'm not gonna let him through, I'll run him off the road."

Me: Yes. Massa's saying "None shall pass." And Hamilton's come back saying "Not bothered."

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Chris: It was a bit of a slow start to the race, especially for Hamilton. He didn't race away from the line.

Me: Not as he did previously, no.

Chris: No, he didn't get anywhere near Massa on the first corner or anything, like we were expecting.

Me: He almost held up Alonso.

Chris: Yes, cos Alonso got past Raikkonen and then looked like he was trying to get even further but Hamilton was in his way.

Me: Yea, he got in the back of his fellow teammate.



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Chris: Trulli was holding people up as well – the Trulli train.

Me: Yea, the Trulli train!

Chris: There was at least four cars behind him.

Me: Yea, but he's a good defensive driver when he's in that situation and he didn't have a car to really challenge at the front. But I think he did well.

Chris: He'd be a really good second driver, if his team mate was like, defending a title or something, but it's not.

Me: Where was his second driver today?

Chris: Possibly right at the back.

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Chris: Coulthard was overtaking all over the place. He overtook Fisichella.

Me: Fisichella saw him coming down on the inside, thought 'hold on, I saw this happen in Australia, he's gonna take my head off, I'll just keep out the way.'

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Chris: The final finishing order was Massa, Hamilton, Raikkonen, then Heidfeld, Alonso back in 5th, Kubica, Trulli and Fisichella.

[End Montage]

This Year

We're heading into only the third race of the season, but already the FIA have to tweak the qualifying rules again. This time, it's in response to the dangerous situation that occurred in Malaysia, where Heidfeld and Alonso were still on hot laps and coming across cars on their slow in laps. It didn't take too much thought to realise something had to be done to stop this happening in the future, so a maximum lap time is going to be imposed from Bahrain onwards. Although there is no confirmation as yet, it's thought it will be 120% of a normal lap time – whatever normal means, anyway.

A lot of the teams are assuming that those who tested in Bahrain over the winter will get a bit of a head start when it comes to fine tuning their setup this weekend. That means Ferrari and Toyota are in with a good shot at scoring some decent points. However, Bridgestone have decided to change the tyre compounds compared to what they used last year, which should level the playing field for everyone. Bridgestone chief Hamashima said: "After reviewing our data from last year we have changed the tyre allocation for this Grand Prix. The data showed we could go one position softer so we will use the soft and medium compound Potenza tyres this season."



Massa will be hoping he does get some advantage from the tests, as he needs to kick start his championship prospects otherwise he will be left behind. In 2007, Massa achieved pole position, fastest lap, and the win, so if past performance is anything to go by, Massa is one to keep an eye on.

McLaren, meanwhile, have been forced to the back of the grid – their rightful place to be if the championship results are to be adhered to. CEO Martin Whitmarsh is adamant that none of this affects them, garage size or lack of winter testing.

A couple of the teams struggling so far this year are looking forward to getting further in qualifying in Bahrain. Force India believe they can get into Q2, with Fisichella saying: “This always depends on us getting a perfect lap and maybe one of the others making a mistake – it’s very close racing this year, particularly with Toro Rosso and Honda, and I think this battle will continue for the rest of the season.”

Renault believe they are still suffering with the inconsistencies from last year’s car, but they’re hoping to make regular appearances in Q3. Pat Symonds has said the troubles are down to the wind tunnel data from last year, and now they are working hard to regain their competitiveness. He said: “Clearly we haven’t done all the catching up that we need to. What we can do now is redouble our efforts in that area and concentrate on improving the aero performance.”

Free Practice kicks off tomorrow, where we will get our first glance at how the teams are shaping up. Don’t forget to join us at Sidepodcast.com for the live comment thread, and I will be back tomorrow with a selection of the best thoughts, plus of course, a full rundown of events.

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