



Episode 17 (Part 1) – Barcelona Qualifying

[Intro: Rich Reich, Keeping Up With The Race]

Chris: Welcome to Sidepodcast, Episode 17 (Part 1) – Barcelona Qualifying. We’re struggling this week, aren’t we?

Me: Mmm, sans Internet.

Chris: Yes, well, we have limited connection, which makes watching a Grand Prix difficult, it makes researching a podcast difficult. But we’re not the only ones.

Me: No?

Chris: Renault, they had wonderful podcast and now they can’t do it quite so much.

Me: Did Bernie take it away from them?

Chris: They said they haven’t done a pre-race podcast because of “rights issues”, whatever that means.

Me: I think I left a comment on Renault’s blog and the guy who writes on there, he came back and said something about being inside the track and not having the rights to play anything. I think Bernie owns everything within the perimeter of the track which bodes well for when we go to Silverstone, don’t you think?

Chris: Thank god we’re still small enough for it not to affect us!

Me: We’re gonna get sued!

Chris: So you had to watch qualifying without your numbers?

Me: Well as much as we berate the Formula 1 management for not providing decent coverage, when you take away the little coverage they give us, we’re even more lost, aren’t we? We’re like the man down the pub.

Chris: Yea, it’s just like watching F1 like normal people!

Me: It was a struggle.

Chris: It was difficult but we’re still here, we’re fighting.

Me: What did we learn?

Chris: Barcelona’s track has changed from last year. It used to be a long curve, towards the end of the lap, and now it is a chicane thing, and it looks really awkward.

Me: A chicane thing? Is that a technical term in F1 podcasting?



Chris: Yea. The pit entrance is right on the corner, it just looks wrong. It just feels like they've squeezed it in without thinking about it too much.

Me: Have they been trying to bunch up the pack? Cos I mean, Barcelona circuit is notorious for lack of overtaking. So I think what they're trying to do is bunch up the cars before the last corner of the circuit so there's a chance that somebody might overtake somebody else going down the main straight.

Chris: I don't know how you could overtake on that tight a corner, but I guess that was their plan. But apparently it's adding five seconds to the lap but it's only slowing them down by about 10K. So it's not really having the effect they wanted.

Me: Damn it. It's not only the track that's gone through changes, isn't the calendar undergoing some changes this week?

Chris: Yes, well, the Barcelona contract has been extended until 2016, which is ridiculously far away, can't even think that far ahead.

Me: Do you think Fernando's going to be popular that far ahead?

Chris: Still?

Me: They'll have forgotten about him by then.

Chris: And we've got Valencia and Singapore confirmed for next year.

Me: So that's two Spanish Grand Prix?

Chris: That is two Spanish Grand Prix instead of two German Grand Prix because obviously, everyone loves Fernando. Do you think if Hamilton wins this year, we might get two British Grand Prix?

Me: If Hamilton's the world championship? I don't think that's ever going to happen, is it?

Chris: I suppose really, we're struggling to hold onto one British Grand Prix.

Me: So, if Hamilton wins, we'll get to keep the one we've got and we'll be grateful for it.

Chris: Has Valencia been confirmed yet or not, I'm a bit confused?

Me: I think it has. See, Bernie has got himself into a lot of hot water this week, hasn't he? He said something, I presume the media misinterpreted what he said, or he said something he shouldn't have said, but he's come up with a classic line that basically says "If a certain party in Spain remain in government, then they'll be a Valencian race." Which isn't very clever.

Chris: It's not good to dabble in real politics, is it? Formula 1 politics is fine, but... The Vice-President of Spain – not impressed.

Me: No?



Chris: Her name's Maria Theresa Fernandez de la Vega – how very Spanish – and she said: “There are lamentable, unfortunate and worrying statements. In the first place because it shows a clear lack of democratic culture and secondly because it's an insult, a lack of respect to everyone, to the people of Valencia and the Spaniards.”

Me: Ouch.

Chris: It's not very often someone has a go at Bernie, is it?

Me: I think, hasn't he come out since then... Once this whole political furore has blown up in his face, he's gone, actually, I didn't really mean what I said then. What I said was, I'm not going to sign it until whoever gets in. You know, it doesn't matter which party wins.

Chris: Furious backtracking.

Me: Yea. I'll sign anything, what I'm saying is I'm just not signing it this week. Brilliant.

Chris: And Singapore is going to be a night race, isn't it? They've been talking about it for a while, but it's definitely to be a night race.

Me: Word is that it's not going to be a day race. That's about as close as official to a night race as you're going to get.

Chris: What other kinds of day are there?

Me: I don't know. I think, the words coming out of Bernie's mouth were “Let's just stop talking about day races now.” So, let's assume we're gonna have a night race at some point next year.

Chris: And you'd like to see some testing at night, wouldn't you?

Me: Well, it's an option. I forget where I read it but somebody... there was an interesting point made on a blog recently, that for all of Alonso's and Webber's criticism of night racing, and the fact that the lights might go out, it might rain, that kind of things. Wouldn't it, kind of, pacify everybody if they decided to test at night?

Chris: Have a go at it. See what happens, what it's like.

Me: Light up the existing Jerez track and just send the guys round at night and they can test. They can do it slowly, they can do it one car at a time, they can spend all night doing it. That'll keep them quiet. Seems like the obvious answer to me.

[Sweeper]

Chris: Free practice first of all then. We didn't get to see any live timings or anything with our lack of internet access, but the most important thing is that Coulthard continued to be quite speedy. Apart from that it was, you know, McLaren on top, Ferrari next and then BMW. Sounds pretty normal to me.

Me: That... man... returned.

Chris: Oh yea, Michael Schumacher turned up in Spain to help out his friends at Ferrari.

Me: He's still alive then?



Chris: Yes, he's still alive, and still has great taste.

Me: What, in shirts?

Chris: Yea.

Me: Did you see the flowers... there's some great pictures coming out from Free Practice 1.

Chris: It's a nice, white shirt with a flowery thing going on.

Me: Yea, nice kind of... mmm...

Chris: I think it's better than the pink shirt though. Only just.

Me: Yes. Barely.

Chris: In Free Practice 2, Alonso got the better of Hamilton and the Renault's did well, but they were on ultra-low fuel so...

Me: Yea, they did. Right at the very end, they sort of jumped up the time sheets to second and third and a couple of people were thinking, yea, they could be, they might have solved their current issues, their performance issues. But apparently no. They took the maximum amount of fuel out of the car just to see how quick it could really go, and not to be believed those times.

Chris: And in Free Practice 3, it was good for the Brits, with Hamilton beating Alonso, then it was the BMW's, then Coulthard with Davidson in eighth.

Me: Wow.

Chris: Eighth!

Me: Very good. For both Coulthard and Davidson.

[Sweeper]

Chris: Davidson continued to do well into the first qualifying session, he got into 11th, which is really good. Both the Honda's managed to scrape through into the second qualifying session. Webber was knocked out, which is a shame because we like Webber. Scott Speed was caught complaining on his radio again, but we think this time he had a legitimate problem and he retired from qualifying. And Alex Wurz was blocked by about five cars so he suffered from some serious traffic.

Me: I think at one point he claimed it was like the M25 out there.

Chris: Also going out were both Spykers and Ralf Schumacher. I don't know what happened to Ralf, it seems like these days he's just pootling around at the back and no one ever notices him.

Me: Well, maybe he's trying to disappear. I mean, you would if your sibling had a dress sense like his does.



Chris: That's true, he was embarrassed. In Qually 2, there was talk of some kind of pollen or something in the air that was making the track a little bit slippery, so everyone was waiting for a bit before going out. And it seemed to be just Trulli going out on his own, so they were all waiting for him to clear up the track for them. Unfortunately, Davidson made a couple of mistakes which was disappointing after he was doing so well. He blamed the wind.

Me: Oh, right, in that Honda car. The same one that Jenson Button suffers from wind in.

Chris: His team mate Sato stopped on the track and caused a yellow flag which was really worrying because Alonso was doing his usual trick of staying in the garage till the very last minute. He didn't fare too badly though, because he ended up in 4th.

Me: At some point, it's going to catch him out.

Chris: It is. If he makes a mistake or if he crashes into something...

Me: Or worse, it could be something out of his control. It's not likely he's going to make a mistake and crash but if somebody else did and there was a yellow flag or a red flag, that's it, he's going to end up in 14th or 15th.

Chris: Or if he suffers from traffic or from wind or something, you know, he's gonna be screwed. Liuzzi retired as well, the same problem as Speed. I think they've added something or changed something in the car and it really hasn't worked, so they're gonna have to change it back.

Me: Did they go to testing? I'd have thought they'd have tried that at the test.

Chris: And again Coulthard was super speedy, finishing in 7th. Both Honda's went out, Liuzzi obviously, Rosberg, Sato and Davidson. I thought the idea of the third session of qualifying was to go out and basically use as much fuel as possible, so why is Alonso staying in the pits for so long?

Me: Um, well, he did it at the last race and we assumed there was a problem, but he did it here again, didn't he? He seems to have a completely different strategy to everybody else. Maybe he thinks that if he does the same thing as Hamilton, he's not going to get the better of him, so he has to try something different.

Chris: Well, Hamilton was waiting, cos he was first out, wasn't he, waiting for the red lights to turn green.

Me: He was and that's Alonso's usual position. In all of last year, he'd be at the front or he'd be second and would jump to the front to make sure he got round as quickly as possible and burn off as much as he could. Maybe they've figured out a better way of doing it. Maybe some other teams will cotton on to it later on. Maybe, like I said, they've just got to try something different. In a straight fight, you can't beat Hamilton in the same machinery.

Chris: The first lot of flying laps were all about the top four with Hamilton getting first, swiftly stolen by Raikkonen and then Massa came in and took second and then Alonso took first. Twice in the pit stops, they pushed the McLaren car out in front of the Ferrari car.

Me: That was close.

Chris: It was so close.

Me: The second time was even closer, very, very, very dangerous.



Chris: I think the lollipop men are just having a game or some kind of bet between them, you know. “We can get our car out in front of yours.” On everyone’s final lap, I thought it was really interesting in the mid-field because Heidfeld got 5th, then Trulli took 5th and then Kubica took 5th, all following each other within about three seconds.

Me: I wasn’t watching that. I was watching the guys at the front. Is that what happened?

Chris: Well, yea, but the guys at the front are all the same. It was either a McLaren or a Ferrari.

Me: Yes. Well, it was quite exciting because it looked, throughout the whole of qualifying it looked like Alonso might have taken a bit of fuel out to be on terms with the Ferrari’s. And the question was had he taken enough out and had he burnt enough fuel off in the fuel-burning laps to do that. And he just didn’t have enough at the end.

Chris: And the answer is no.

Me: It was so close though.

Chris: Massa took pole, with Alonso behind him, it was three hundredths of a second between them. Then Raikkonen, then Hamilton, then Kubica, Trulli, Heidfeld and Kovalainen.

Me: Kovalainen did well.

Chris: He did very well. He finally got one over on Fisichella.

Me: Very good, into the top ten.

Chris: Yes, and Kubica finally got one over on Heidfeld. Cos it’s always Heidfeld in 4th or 5th. And Trulli’s doing well as well.

Me: He’s Mr Consistent, isn’t he?

Chris: Compared to Ralf who is consistently at the bottom.

Me: He’s been in that position or there or thereabouts for every race this year in a car that possibly doesn’t deserve to be there and that’s pretty good for him.

Chris: Possibly?

Me: Well, it doesn’t have the race pace and it’s unlikely to have the qualifying pace that Trulli’s getting. He’s stretching it’s legs really farther than it should be. Well, at least anyone else can. I would have thought that Coulthard would have got the better of him today.

Chris: Yes, cos Coulthard was on fine form. I hope that continues into the race. Williams didn’t make it into the top ten at all, did they?

Me: No, they had a quite disappointing qualifying, what with Wurz being blocked by traffic, and Rosberg later on not so good for them. So you’ve got an interesting battle of the team mates at the front with Alonso jumping Hamilton but I thought Hamilton was a bit cocky in the post race interview that he did on ITV. Because he came out and said basically he was quicker than Alonso once they figured out the fuel-adjusted strategies. And I’m not too sure Big Ron’s gonna be too happy with that.



Chris: Well, it was probably true.

Me: It was probably true, no question about it but it seems to be a change from his usual: “Yea, I know my place, I know what I’m doing.” Now it’s like “Hey, no, I’m quicker than him. Just listen to me, I’m much quicker than him, it just doesn’t look like it on the track because he’s got less fuel than me.” Which seems like a little bit of a...

Chris: Arrogant.

Me: Well, yea, it’s just like a slight difference in character maybe for this race. Maybe the media hype and the bubble has kinda pushed him up a little bit.

[Sweeper]

Chris: So who are you gonna be keeping your eye on in tomorrow’s race?

Me: Um, the start’s going to be key, isn’t it? Massa is going to have to hold off Alonso, you’ve got to maybe tip Massa for getting the jump on Raikkonen. And then I guess it’s going to be the battle of the BMW’s, it’ll be interesting to see if Kubica can maintain that pace and that position till the end of the race. And I guess see if Coulthard can do another stunning drive like he did last week. If that RBR really is as fast in the race as the testing may lead us to believe, and whether or not he can get some pretty good points. And also, possibly, it’d be interesting to see what the Renault’s doing, see whether they’ve got on top of a couple of their performance issues, and see if they can nail that and get some better points than they have been getting. Should be good to watch.

Chris: So, come back tomorrow, and we’ll find out if you’re right.

Me: Yes. We’re podcasting nowhere near the circuit, by the way, in case Bernie’s listening.

[Out: Rich Reich, Keeping Up With The Race]