



F1 Safety – Defining Moments

Hello and welcome to the last episode of this miniseries, F1 Safety, brought to you by Sidepodcast. We've covered all the small details that go into making a race weekend safe, so today we're going to look at the bigger, more defining moments.

One of the most important moments in the history of F1 safety is the appointment of Professor Sid Watkins to the FIA. Watkins was a neurosurgery specialist and was based near the Watkins Glen circuit in the US. He moved to London and joined the RAC Racing Medical Panel and then he found the FIA.

Watkins became Formula 1's on-track doctor. He travelled to the circuits, and campaigned for the medical facilities at each track to become better and better. When he started, it wasn't unheard of for the medical centre to be a marquee tucked away in one corner of the grounds. Professor Watkins also expanded his campaigns to the local hospitals, ensuring that they could deal with any Formula 1 related emergencies, and he brought the MedEvac helicopters into the circuits.

In 1994, Formula 1 lost two drivers in one weekend, Roland Ratzenberger and Ayrton Senna. This provided the much-needed wake-up call that safety wasn't something to be messed around with. The FIA created the Advisory Expert Safety Committee who came up with many initiatives, including commissioning the HANS device. Sid Watkins was the head of this group, and was instrumental in what they achieved. Watkins retired from his roles within the FIA in 2005 to be replaced by his deputy Dr Gary Hartstein.

It would be impossible to talk about safety in Formula 1 without mentioning Jackie Stewart. The former F1 driver suffered a huge accident in 1966, which left him trapped in the car, and when finally extricated, he had to wait for an ambulance to come from a local hospital and pick him up. Stewart began to campaign for better medical facilities, and whilst waiting for this to be picked up and implemented, hired a private doctor to turn up to races with him. Stewart's legacy includes improved seat belts and helmets, crash barriers, run off areas and fire extinguishing equipment. Many people suggest that Stewart's safety work is as great as, if not better than, his legacy as an F1 champion.

Stewart is one of the drivers to have participated in a Grand Prix on the full length Nurburgring. If ever there was an advert for an unsafe track, it was this circuit in Germany. Some exceedingly dangerous corners, less than adequate barriers and run off areas, plus the fact that it could take too long for emergency vehicles to reach some parts of the circuits, meant that a much reduced version of the track is run today. It isn't unusual for some of the older circuits to be revised to meet current safety requirements. In some cases this can remove some of the much-loved elements and perhaps some of the charm of them, but the FIA need to put safety first.

The deaths of Senna and Ratzenberger took place over a tragic weekend but it is a testament to how much safety has improved that Senna was the last F1 driver to be killed during a race, well over a decade ago. More recently, in 2007, Robert Kubica had a jarring accident at the Canadian Grand Prix. His BMW tapped the rear of Jarno Trulli's Toyota, which set off a chain reaction of events. The car hit a bump in the grass which made it airborne. It contacted the wall on one side of the track, spinning it off in the other direction. It rolled over, spun round, and hit the barrier on the other side of the track, narrowly missing passing cars as it went.

It was a violent and horrifying accident, but Kubica was fine. All that was left of the car was the safety cell but that had done its job. Kubica had to be removed from the car, and was taken to the medical centre, but escaped with a



light concussion and a sprained ankle. He missed one race as a precautionary measure, but was back on fighting form to finish fourth in the next Grand Prix. An amazing moment that proved F1 safety really works.

That's it for this episode and this miniseries. I hope you've enjoyed these seven shows, as we visited all the various elements of safety that Formula 1 employs. If you've got any comments or feedback about this series, please email me: Christine@sidepodcast.com. Thanks for listening.

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