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Press Information

2015 Hungarian Grand Prix Thursday Press Conference Transcript

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DRIVERS – Roberto MERHI (Manor), Romain GROSJEAN (Lotus), Felipe NASR (Sauber), Sergio PEREZ (Force India), Felipe MASSA (Williams), Nico HULKENBERG (Force India)

PRESS CONFERENCE

Well gentlemen, clearly all our thoughts this Hungarian Grand Prix weekend are with Jules Bianchi and his family. Many of you were at the funeral this week. Perhaps we should start with a word or perhaps a favourite memory from the drivers about their colleague. Romain, would you start?

Romain GROSJEAN: Well, as you can imagine, I've got questioned a few times. I cannot pick up a favourite memory because I've got too much with Jules. I think the first time I heard his name was back in 2003. He was a much better driver in go-karts than I was; he was a bit younger. Then he did follow up in all categories what I did and he won everywhere. I think we shared a lot with Jules. It was a very nice ceremony. It was very emotional. His parents were, I think, happy to see us. Of course, this week all our thoughts go with him but personally I will never forget that we race and we race for Jules as well.

Felipe?

Felipe MASSA: Jules, first of all, I mean, he was a great friend. [When] I met him he was still racing in go-karts, because we have the same manager. [When] Nicolas [Todt] started to work with Jules he was still at the end of his go-kart career and I met him in that time. For me he was a fantastic boy, very nice, very humble and an amazing driver. Unfortunately in Formula One he didn't have the opportunity to race in a competitive car; to show his talent. He showed us anyway by finishing in the points in Monaco with a car he was driving which everybody knows was like... it was an amazing thing he did in that race. But for me the experience I had with Jules was also that we did a lot of go-kart together, even in Brazil, and in my experience he was the best go-kart driver I saw. It was amazing the way he was driving go-karts. It was maybe the opportunity we had to race together in a similar kart. It's not nice to see has happened. It was so difficult to be there in the church, to understand what's happened, it was so sad. But I'm sure he is in a good place, racing, enjoying and definitely looking here to all of us, from whatever place he is, I don't know, but I think he was an amazing boy and a fantastic driver that I really hope the best for his family as well. It was a very difficult day to be there.

Roberto?

Roberto MERHI: The first time I met Jules was in 2002 in a karting race. It was a race in Spain and he was coming from France and normally when you are that young to come to a track that you don't know, in Spain, that you have never raced, it's very hard to be quick and I remember I was really surprised to see that guy that was really quick immediately on that track. He really impressed everybody. After that I followed him really closely. He was always *the* driver – the reference. He was all the time the quickest and doing really great things. Obviously, when I jumped into Formula Renault in 2007 we did a few races together because he also jumped in 2007 to Formula Renault and again he won straight away; his first year in the championship. It was pretty incredible, no? For me he was the biggest talent I saw in motorsport. Also, when I raced, back in 2009, with an F3, we were fighting against him because he was the man to beat that year and he won the championship with so many good drivers on the track and he won it really easy; just winning so many races. I think that shows how good he was and for me it's, to be honest, really a

shame that he was not able to really show in an F1 car what he was able to do, because I think he was the best driver that I raced against and it's a bit of a shame what happened in Suzuka, but hopefully he's in a good place and enjoying.

Felipe (Nasr)?

Felipe NASR: I met Jules on one occasion only but we shared the track in this go-kart race that Felipe [Massa] does, or used to do, every year. It was really the first time I got in a conversation with him and you could see the guy was special. Not only as a person – for sure he had a good heart inside of him – but all his techniques, all the junior categories he had been through. As everybody mentioned he was a real reference to all of us. Especially for me, I was always a few years behind him because we didn't have the same age. But you could definitely see he had all the ingredients to be a very good driver and to fight for something bigger in the future. I have all the respect for him, even though I didn't know him so well and I wish the best for his family as well.

Sergio?

Sergio PEREZ: Yeah, I met him when we were both in GP2. When I really spent more time with him was in the Ferrari Academy, when we were both doing the Ferrari Academy. You could see Jules was a very special driver but also a very special person that everyone seemed to like. He was just very humble and very human as well and he really left a big impact on the world. I think we all share the same opinion. I think Jules was a very special driver that didn't have the opportunity to show what he could do in Formula One in his short period. It was just enough to realise that he was a potential champion for the future. He was just a very, very special driver. It's very sad, you know. As drivers we share many moments – every Sunday, every Friday afternoon in the drivers' briefing. We're not the best friends but we always share moments. We do the same, all of us. We see each other every 15 days or so during the whole year, so we spend a lot of things together and not to see him ever again, it really shocks you. It's very, very hard for all of us – I'm sure not only for the drivers, but for everyone involved in the sport – to lose someone, because you know you could be there, it could be your family. I was talking the other day to his father and it's just very, very difficult for the whole family. But his family is our family now and we really want to support them in any way because Jules will stay with us forever. I think what Jules did for the sport... he was just a great ambassador for us and he will always be in our hearts.

And finally, Nico.

Nico HULKENBERG: Yeah, he's been my team-mate twice, in 2008 in Formula 3 and 2012 in Formula One here. I remember in 2008, I was in my second in Formula 3, supposed to win the championship and he came in as a rookie, his first year. I remember his race in Mugello, I was starting from pole and he was starting second or third. Anyway, we take off, I'm leading, he's second and I'm seeing him in my mirrors, pushing really hard, really chasing me down, trying to get me. He was burning his tyres at the time, I was saving them, but it just showed how competitive he was and he was so hungry for success. Even outside the track he was a great guy, a lot of fun, a lot of great moments together and we'll all miss him.

Thank you. Back to you Romain: the first lap at Silverstone was extraordinary, with both Lotus cars out. It seems as though the team is still leaving a lot of points uncollected. What are your feelings at this stage of the season and where you got in the second half?

RG: Yeah, after last year it was important for us to get a good baseline when we started the winter testing, which was the case and then we had missed opportunities, especially in the first few races where actually Felipe [Nasr] did very well, he finished P5 in Melbourne, where we could have finished and it was the same in Malaysia. Then we got in the points, things were looking better but unfortunately we were a bit less lucky in the next races. I made a mistake in Canada, cost us a good chunk of points and in the last race we couldn't do much – we retired both cars at the beginning. I think we still have a very good baseline. We still have a few updates we would like to put on the car and then we could chase a little but more Force India, which just got in front of us in the championship.

Thank you. Felipe Massa, coming to you: you had 19 in the lead at Silverstone, including the opening lap. How did it feel to be in control at the front again and how does the team avoid a repeat of what happened at the other end of the race, where the podium got away from you?

FM: It feels amazing to be in the front! It's really a great feeling. Unfortunately it didn't stay until the chequered flag, but it was a great feeling to be back at the front, to be back fighting for the victory at least, you know. We couldn't manage to win at the end, not just for the first moment we lost the first and I went to second but also for the rain; we were struggling a lot in the rain and it's definitely part of our working to improve the car in the rain. But I think we need to take also the positive things, that the car was competitive, maybe we were very close to Mercedes. Even if they were a little bit quicker, we were not far. I think we were very close in that race. I think this positive aspect needs to stay in our brain and we need to try to understand how we can do that again but also stay in the front and finish and try to win the race. We will keep pushing.

Q: Nico, coming to you, over the last few races we've seen Force India take a step forwards – even before the new chassis arrived – points finishes etcetera. That was on power circuits. What difference will the new chassis make here on this type of circuit, do you think?

NH: Yeah, I think it's going to be good and positive. The B-spec car has really, so far, talking about Silverstone, lived up to the expectations what we wanted from it. So that's very positive and encouraging. I think, obviously having collected a lot of data from both cars in the race, we're able in those two weeks to go through it and optimise even more. Plus there is some more tweaks to the car here. I'm excited to see how we're going to get on here.

Q: Felipe, coming to you, congratulations on your contract extension announced today. Why was staying at Sauber the right thing for you?

FN: Well, I think it only builds up the trust between myself and the team. Although I think it was always the plan when we came to Sauber, for the first time the opportunity came and I thought it was the right moment to take it. It's nice to see the team, they put in a lot of confidence on myself and I think, looking back at the year we've had already, in this seven months we've learned a lot together, we did achieve a lot, I think we did achieve most of what we've expected, especially in the beginning of the year when we had some great results. As mentioned, the Australia fifth place was fantastic and, after that, we saw things becoming a lot more difficult and from the drivers' point of view it's always easier for us to say where the car needs to work and the team is seeing all the limitations that we have at the moment. I think everybody is leaning towards the direction of improving things out there. We saw Mark Smith coming in, joining the team. It's already the beginning of that. And by having the two drivers, the same line-up, I think it only brings more of this information together, and we can be committed together for 2016 and build up something a lot more promising.

Q: Roberto, you're a bit unusual in that you're running a parallel Formula One and World Series programme this year, you were on the podium, I believe, at this track earlier in the season – how comfortable do you feel in Formula One now, and what happened with that accident at the end of the last race in Austria.

RM: The feeling in Formula One, every time is going better through the races. At the start of the year I was struggling a little bit – but I, after Monaco, everything went better, the race pace, after the quali in Montreal and the race pace in Montreal, Austria, and then the race in Silverstone was really good. And yeah, obviously I am going another championship, so far the World Series season, we had so many issues at the start of the year with so many engine problems. In this track we were missing two seconds on Friday, we changed 70 per cent of the car, just pieces, and the next day I was P5 or P6 in quali, something like that, and I finished second in the race. Was a strong result, let's say. Then last weekend in Austria, at the start of the race I had a failure with the steering wheel. All of the race I was driving with the steering wheel bent completely, like 50° to the left, and after the race I wanted to do just a slow lap. I moved to the right, just to avoid the people coming to the left and the next time I check the mirror, the guy behind me was three seconds behind and the next time I checked the mirror he was like five metres behind me, coming much quicker and, yeah, colliding to my back. I don't know, it was a bit strange to be honest, the situation I think was really unlucky. Thanks God nothing happened to both drivers, we are both OK. He could race the race afterwards and nothing else happened.

Q: Sergio, coming to you, obviously point in three of the last four races but in the in-house battle Nico recently has the edge over you on qualifying. How's the match-up going with Nico? How do you feel about it?

SP: Obviously it's been, the last three races, he obviously has scored more points than what I've done. I think with the B-spec and the upgrades I haven't got on as well as he did in the last race. Still plenty of championship to go and I think it's important that we keep improving. I'm very optimistic coming into this track. I think what we've shown in Silverstone was just the proof that the car has improved massively. So I think in a track like this it will be really interesting to see how we go because obviously here the engine is not so important. I think our car has improved a lot and we have plenty of data to analyse from the weekend before, so I think we have plenty of reasons to be optimistic into this weekend.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Livio Oricchio – Globoesporte.com) To all drivers, I'm sorry to come back to the subject of Jules Bianchi. This was the first time your generation has faced a death in Formula One. We saw many of you very touched at the funeral, couldn't be different. Do you think even maybe unconsciously you start avoiding some high-risk manoeuvres from now – or maybe even different approach to the races?

Will it change the way you drive. Nico, do you want to take that one first?

NH: I mean it opens your eyes and tells us what we're doing, the sport we're doing, there's still some risk involved. I think you just have to be aware of that and make your own choices at times in the car, how much risk you're willing to take, and be comfortable with it. Yeah, I think for me, personally, it won't change much.

Felipe?

FM: I don't think it changes. When you close your visor, you want the best, you want to finish in front, and you want to do the best you can and manoeuvre overtaking, the way you drive, your thinking, I don't think it will change. When I had my accident here, when I start driving again here in Hungary, always when I pass that place I don't remember that I had the accident there. So, you don't think about it, it stays in the past. Maybe when you go out of the car you remember about Jules or about other things which is... now I remember about my accident but when I'm driving, I don't know, y'know? So I don't even think I have a mother, father, my son, my wife or whatever, you don't think about it. You just think about your job, your work. I don't think that will change. But now, I have Jules all the time on my mind.

Sergio, go along with that?

SP: Yeah, definitely. Obviously when something like this happens you know that there is a big level of risk. It's what we love to do and when something like this happens to our colleague, we all know it could have been ourselves in that car – but it doesn't really change anything. I've had some accidents in the past and you know that the risk is there. We all know. It can happen in any practice, any day, as soon as you jump into the car, you know that the risk is very high but it doesn't really change anything. As Felipe says, we want to give our best, we want to succeed, we want to take every tenth out of the car. So we just give it all. I don't think it will change. We all have to make Jules very proud.

Roberto?

RM: I don't think it changes much but for sure you think more about it. For example, I was racing here with the World Series, as I mentioned and out of the fastest corner on the track was a car crash and a tractor came in to recover the car and they didn't put a Safety Car and, to be honest, when I saw that situation and a yellow flag I really slowed down. So maybe in the past I would not have slowed down so much because, after that, you think more about it. You're more afraid that you know things can happen. To be honest I didn't feel so comfortable in that situation and I really lift from that corner and maybe losing three tenths per lap because I think it's a dangerous corner and a dangerous situation, as we can see. But obviously, I think for a single lap or for a start – a normal situation – I think will not change. But, for sure, this time, when I left my house, was not the same the way I say goodbye to family and that – because you know things can happen, and maybe before we never even stop a minute to think about that.

Romain?

RG: I think thought our career it's in our nature to take risk and think, when you drive, especially a Formula One car going that quickly around the corner, you need to be 100 per cent in the car and not thinking about what could happen if and if. We know it's a dangerous sport but I think that was a hard way to remember that. But when helmet is on and visor is closed, it's racing 100 per cent. That's what we've always been doing and that's what racing drivers will always do.

Felipe?

FN: I agree with what everyone else said. We are racing. That's what we come here for. We do face some risks sometimes but I think since then, the Virtual Safety Car thing was a good positive point to have in a way to avoid the kind of circumstances like it happened with Jules. But it's also linked to us drivers to know this kind of situation and to be aware of it. In dangerous conditions out there or whatever it's something you... we all have to know what is good for us. What we have to do, what is safe for us to do. As all the others do, like I do as well, when we are racing, we are not thinking about this thing.

Q: (Péter Vámosi – Vas Népe) Question to Romain. In 2010 you had the opportunity to drive a Ford GT car in Le Mans. Next year Ford is coming back – are you interested in that, driving again in Le Mans? And are you allowed to do that?

RG: Well, of course that experience was a great experience. If I do it again Le Mans it would be LMP1 because I got tired of watching the mirrors in the night, and the day. I was quite jealous of Nico winning the race, I think all of us, but, to be fair, I haven't thought about it.

Would you recommend it Nico?

NH: Yes!

RG: Just for the watch or...?

Q: (Oana Popoiu – F1 Zone.net) Felipe, do you believe you can benefit from the new starting procedure? If we look at Silverstone, you had a very good start there but it wasn't enough to stay ahead of Mercedes.

FM: On the start, yes, it was enough but afterwards not. I believe I can still be competitive at the start. To be honest, I've always had a great start. Even last year I had a trophy for the best start of the season and this year I did many many good starts as well. I believe I will still be competitive at the start and I don't think it should really change a lot. The procedure is more or less similar. Maybe you have less information but I don't think the procedure will change completely, so I'm really not worrying about that.

Q: (Daniel Johnson – The Telegraph) Felipe, I just wonder about two things especially after your accident here: first of all, what view do you take on the whole open/closed cockpit debate and touching on something Roberto said about the recovery tractors, are you and the rest of the drivers comfortable with them still being in use as they are?

FM: Well, I think if you go back to what's happened to Jules, many things changed after that so unfortunately, we need to see that type of accident to understand what's happened. I really agree that Formula One has changed a lot, especially after Ayrton Senna's accident. I believe the car is very safe now. We always need to keep working to improve the safety, you know - not just the cars but the tracks and everything is very safe now – so what happened in Japan was a different situation. What happened in Japan is something that we cannot... I cannot accept, because a car crashed into a tractor. It was a race that... it was a very strange weekend so we had the typhoon, we had people asking to run the race at a different time, we had the red flag already at the beginning of the race. It was already a different event and I am sure after that accident that so many things changed and people understand that what's happened there was something that was not supposed to happen. We had some different rules after that, for the virtual safety car, for more safety cars especially if the car goes off the track and everything. Unfortunately we need to see that type of accident to change something. The most important thing is not to see that again. Unfortunately Jules is not here any more. So many things changed in the past because of accidents, it's unfortunate, but it's important that we don't see that any more.

I'm not completely against it (open/closed cockpits). I think it's something that needs to be... if it's better for everybody and it doesn't change the aspect of Formula One – or maybe not closing the cockpit but doing something that they always did since years, to improve the safety on that area – I'm not against it.

Q: (Gabor Joo – Index online) Felipe, basically could you clarify for us your contract situation with Williams, for next year especially? Will you stay there?

FM: I hope so. Nothing's changed at the moment, I don't see why I should not be there. I'm really enjoying working with the team. The team is really respecting me 100 percent and I think enjoying the way I work with the team as well. I see that the team is growing, growing and getting stronger most of the time, but what people wrote a few days ago or maybe a week ago, I don't think really this guy has the right information. I think he just put (it) in the paper... I believe I will drive for Williams next year but I think maybe the chance that this guy is correct is bigger than... he's risking the way that he can be correct.

Q: (Istvan Simon – Auto Magazin) To Felipe again: Nelson Piquet has admitted just recently or a couple of years ago that he's had serious problems with his vision after he had the big accident in 1987 at Imola. You've had the big one here, in Hungary, a couple of years ago; is everything alright 100 percent with your vision now?

FM: Oh my God, it was in 2009. I'm still racing after years and if I cannot see, you understand, before that... you understand maybe the race after or two races after so I can see very well.

Q: (Tomas Richtig – AMC/Sport1) Question to the drivers regarding the 21 race calendar next year, so it looks like it's ever increasing. How difficult is it to adapt to your already busy schedules and do you think there is actually some kind of limit of number of races per year which is feasible for you as Formula One drivers?

RG: I think the limit would be the divorce!

FN: As I say, racing is more time away, for sure. All of us, all of us drivers but every one here, I'm sure they have other parts – apart from Formula One – everyone has a life behind that. But in a way I'm young, I'm in the opposite direction to him (Romain) so I'm fully open to as many races as they can do and let's go for it.

RG: You see, they want to get rid of the old ones, more so even those with kids!

NH: Nothing more to add, really. I think it's fine, it's a job, you know. We'll do as many as they tell us.

SP: We already have 19 now, so two more doesn't really change a lot, I think.

RM: Yeah, obviously I'm doing 19 F1 races plus nine World Series races and so to do only 21 races next year will be less races than this year. I am the same as Felipe (Nasr), I am not married so I can go for it.

Q: (Zsolt Godina – Best of Radio) Roberto, your team is very young in Formula One but it has had two tragic accidents in the past few years. How difficult is it to manage this within the team?

RM: Obviously I think they are really... to be honest, you cannot really complain about the team for these situations. It can happen to everyone. The team doesn't have anything to do with that. The people from the team are really nice people, the best team bosses you can have and they are really open to speak with the drivers and the treatment they give you is really good and I am sure that they always do, since I met them in 2009, and I feel really comfortable to work with them. It's just a kind of a bad luck that they had in the team. It's nothing to do with them what happened. For sure they are the first ones that are really down with this situation.

Q: (Louis Dekker – NOS.NL) Felipe Nasr, your new contract, does it mean that the future of Sauber is solid now? And are you 100 percent sure that you're only two drivers under contract?

FN: We've seen this before, but I believe the situation is a lot better than it was a few months ago and all we're trying to do is to improve, to develop the car as much as we can and as I said, I've been driving a pretty much similar car to the one I had in Australia, so as I said, we achieved the goals we had from the beginning of the year. Now of course it's getting more difficult because all the teams are improving their cars, the development rate is much better in other teams but by having this confirmation early on, starting from now we can think about 2016 and I can tell you there are a lot of more positive things coming.

Ends