



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L' AUTOMOBILE

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TEAM REPRESENTATIVES –Toto WOLFF (Mercedes), Maurizio ARRIVABENE (Ferrari), Christian HORNER (Red Bull Racing)

PRESS CONFERENCE

A question to all of you to start with, what sort of shape are you in relative to each going into this new championship? After all, one of your is likely to be the world champion team at the end of it. Christian, why don't you start?

Christian HORNER: First of all, it's great to be back in Melbourne, good to be going racing again. It seems like a long winter this one. A positive first session for us, though obviously difficult to read too much into times but you start to get an bit of an idea. You can see Mercedes taking off where they left off; they look in great shape. I think we made good progress with the car over the winter. The drivers seem happy and I'm envisaging a quite tight battle with Maurizio but I'm not sure at the moment what the delta is to Toto's cars.

Toto?

Toto WOLFF: Again, like Christian said, it's good to get started again. We've had a pretty good test, much better than last year. But you're never very sure where that will end up in the first race and the first session was OK, as expected. We didn't see the Ferraris on the tyres that we have been running, and we need a little bit more time to understand, but I would say it's a decent start.

And Maurizio?

Maurizio ARRIVABENE: I totally agree. With the weather we had in Barcelona, by the way it's the same for everybody, but at a certain point I was a bit laughing because I saw all the engineers panicking but it was for the temperature, for the weather. One day Pirelli didn't provide to use the winter tyres, the snow tyres, so it was quite difficult and we had a day off. Seriously, though, I think I saw Mercedes in very good shape, also Red Bull in a very good shape and I think we are in quite a good shape too.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Yianni Mavromoustakos– Talkingtalk.com.au) Just for all three team principals, how are you feeling about tyre changes for 2018?

CH: I think Pirelli have introduced a broader range of compounds this year, hopefully better suited after 12 months of experience last year that we won't just end up with one-stop races. I think the conditions in Barcelona... plus the new surface there made it very tricky to get a clear picture and understanding of those tyres, so it's going to take a few race to see how things pan out.

Toto, more strategic variation this year, do you think?

TW: Yes, more variation I think. I think the hypersoft is going to be an interesting tyre because it has the biggest performance gap to the next hardest one, but it will be difficult to make it last during the race so that might end up in some interesting strategies. I'm looking forward to it.

Maurizio?

MA: As I said before, we didn't collect a lot of data in Barcelona of course due to the weather conditions, but the target was quite clear, to have a bit more pit stops during the race, to make the race more interesting and I think we are going to see interesting races with these new tyres.

Q: (John McEvoy – Daily Mail) Toto, a few things about Lewis: what update is there about his new deal, how do you see his state of mind on the eve of the opening race, and what do you imagine is Lewis' view that he could equal Juan Manuel Fangio, one of the greats of racing, and what would it mean if he did it? I know there is a long way to go.

TW: On your first question, the contract we have been discussing before going into the winter holiday and then we kind of left it there to get away from Formula 1 and picked it up again in January and these discussions are going in the right way and we finalising the last topics and there is no reason to not think that is not going to happen soon. He is in a good frame of mind, I've seen him coming back strong from the winter. And in terms of the record. I think whether it plays a role I don't know but clearly with the four championship he is within a very good group of drivers and obviously the next one is to be achieved, but I don't think it's a good omen to discuss it or think too much about it. It's better to look at those records afterwards.

Q: (Phil Duncan - PA) Toto, we saw that Lewis posted a video on Instagram yesterday about a lack of diversity in Formula 1. I just wondered what your views on that are as the team principal of Mercedes and do you think he's got a point and does Formula 1 need to do more to encourage more participation from ethnic backgrounds?

TW: I think that is one thing that is very important not only for Lewis but for all of us. The more diversity we can get into Formula 1 the better it is. We had yesterday an event where we launched Dare to be Different in Australia. That was a good success and whether it is different ethnic backgrounds or girls getting into motor racing, overall I think this is what needs to happen. Eventually this will grow and the balance will be better in future.

Q: (Lawrence Barretto – F1.com) A question to everybody: yesterday Lewis Hamilton was talking about the threat from Red Bull. Daniel Ricciardo has talked about how you guys could all be within half a second this year. I'd just be interested to know where you guys think you are in the pecking order. I know we've had just a bit of testing and on practice session but just from what you can gather, where do you think you are relative to each other?

Maurizio, do you want to nail it down to a guess of how many tenths?

MA: It's difficult to calculate, because we have no clear evidence in Barcelona. I hope we are above my friends here but how I can predict exactly?

TW: Very difficult to judge. We have seen last year with the new rules that each of the teams has certain strengths on different tracks. I think we could see a similar pattern this year. I don't see somebody running away. But as Maurizio says, it's very difficult to read in a glass ball at that stage.

And I suppose, Christian, it's a long season. At the end of the year last year, Verstappen has the same points as Hamilton in the closing stages, you finished very strongly?

CH: Yes, it's a long season and form will vary from race to race. Twenty-one races is a grueling calendar this year and by the time we end up in Abu Dhabi in November. It'll be fascinating to see how teams have developed during the course of the year. The cars are effectively prototypes at each grand prix and it's really the rate of development between now and November that will dictate the outcome of performance over the course of the season. But you have to say that Mercedes look in great shape and I guess it depends on how fast Lewis wants to go.

Q: (Heikki Kulta – Turun Sanomat) Maurizio, every year, the same question: a lot of speculation that this season will be Kimi's last season. How do you see it?

MA: Kimi was driving quite well in FP1. We are at the first FP1 of the first race of the season, let him drive quietly please.

Q: (Arjan Schouten - AD Sportwereld) Question for Christian about Max. When you're 20 years old and you already have sixty races and three wins, are you still a 'talent' or are you already a more experienced driver?

CH: Max has achieved a huge amount in a very short space of time. He's got that benefit of those three seasons of experience now and I think he'll put that to go effect this year. He's already got that databank of knowledge. And last year what impressed me was how he dealt with the difficult

days as well as the good days. I think that's all part of developing your character, developing your experience and knowledge – and I think it stands him in great stead. I think there's no further obstacles to him in terms of experience. He's gone through that now and I think he's in great shape. He's trained hard over the winter and looks sharp for the season ahead.

Q: (Dan Knutson – Auto Action / Speed Sport) Gentleman, a new season, the same story: the big three and a gap to the rest. If you could make one or two suggestions to Formula One as a whole to close up that gap, what would you do?

TW: Difficult one. I think, we don't want to make excuses and say it has always been like that. If you look back the last 20 or so years there's always been two, three or four teams that have been more dominant – but clearly looking into 2021, it is something we need to address, everybody wants to see a tough fight at the front and wants to see the odd freak result, an underdog being capable of making it all the way to the front – but it's not trivial. It is a resource game and there is one factor that you can't change and that is time. Organisations are built-up over time, intellectual property is being created and that doesn't happen from one year to the other, and once the wheel turns – and I guess that's the case for all three teams being represented here – it's quite difficult to just put something in the wheel and stop it. In so far it's about, I guess, reducing the gap in terms of resource in a clever way – but this is not going to change overnight.

Maurizio?

MA: I mean I agree with Toto, you can't change overnight the overall rules, or you can't ask Cristiano Ronaldo to not score, because otherwise Real Madrid is too strong. It takes time, for everybody, effort. It's quite a complex matter to create, as Christian said, a prototype every year and especially to develop this prototype during the course of the year – but it's not impossible. Having said so, I think we have many years ago the wave of Ferrari with Michael Schumacher, than another wave with Christian, with Red Bull, now it's a wave of Mercedes. This is a sport and you can't stop a top team playing just to make the game fair. Because otherwise it is becoming an unfair game.

Do you see it that way?

CH: I've got a slightly different slant on it, I suppose. For me the most damaging thing over the last five years has been the introduction of the current engine regulations. I think if you look at Formula One as a whole, I think the regulations for both chassis and engine are too complicated. That drives cost, it drives complexity, it drives distance between the teams, so for me, I'd be all for simplification. Simplification of the power unit, simplification of the chassis, go back to basics of making the driver the biggest variable, whereas at the moment the driver is not a big enough variable. We want the best drivers competing against each other. I think you're always going to get variances depending on the skillset of the teams, and even if the teams have all equal budgets, you will still have teams that will perform better than others. That's competition. We see it in other formulas. For me, the biggest issue in Formula One at the moment is the regulations that dictate cost, performance and divergence in terms of powertrain.

Q: (Louis Dekker – NOS) For Toto. History teaches us domination never lasts forever. So, will this be your most difficult season, the fifth season with these engines. Is there an indication of how long you will be on top, and is the climb easier than staying there?

TW: Yeah, I tried to find to find a statistic in whatever sport of a team winning every year. There isn't any, you're absolutely right. At some stage, somebody else picks up the ball and runs faster. I think, coming back to your question on engine regulations, the longer you leave regulations alone, the more convergence happens. We have seen that definitely every year we have been in these regulations, the gap has become smaller. We just have to be on our toes. Every year we try to have a mindset of all points going to zero and you just need to do the same job again. We're trying to be energised and motivated, not take anything for granted, respect the other teams and the work they are doing. We will be running around with a target on our back and everybody's trying to get us, in so far as we're pushing hard every year and trying to maintain the advantage for a bit.

Q: (Phil Brannigan – Auto Action) Toto, can I take you back to the Dare to be Different programme. Would you support a similar programme being implemented to encourage diversity, as mentioned by Lewis yesterday? And if you did support that programme, should that also be part of discussions with Lewis regarding his ongoing contract with the team?

TW: I think that... I don't think that it should be part of his contract. I think as a general mind set we should be supporting diversity, as I said before. You're absolutely right, more diversity in the paddock would do us good, would make us think differently and be more open-minded. For me personally and for the team, we are very supportive for whatever actions we can deploy.

Q: (Julien Billiotte– AutoHebdo) Maurizio, before Melbourne we learned that Ferrari has hired Laurent Mekies from the FIA which doesn't seem to go very well with other teams. Do you understand their concerns and to Toto and Christian, how did you react when you heard about the news?

MA: First of all, there is nothing wrong with that because we were absolutely respecting the local law, the Swiss local law where Laurent was hired. And afterwards we went even further than that, because we gave him six months of gardening (leave). Having said so, normally what we discussed before the strategy group, we signed a confidentiality agreement, that means that we are not allowed to discuss or to share in public what we discussed there. Having said so, I heard comments related to us, supposedly, also called a gentleman's agreement. I think they are comments because a gentleman's agreement on libel law is illegal. I thought that they were comments... just comments, no more than that, I hope.

TW: First of all, I didn't see any gentlemen in the room when we discussed it. Second, for me the situation is completely different to Marcin (Budkowski), both intelligent engineers but Marcin was involved in issuing technical directives just a few weeks before he decided to join a team and had a lot of inside (information), and Laurent was involved in totally different activities that are not as sensitive, in my opinion, as with Marcin. He's joining the team in seven or eight months from now and for me it's not a big deal.

CH: For me it is a big deal because I think the disappointing element about this is that we have a thing called the strategy group where the FIA, FOM and all team principals attended and we discussed the Marcin issue where there was great unrest about a key member of the FIA going to a team, in which case this was Renault. Renault diluted that by putting him on an extended gardening leave but then ensued a conversation about it's unacceptable. Every team found it unacceptable. Of course you're dealing with employment laws across different states, different countries and to try and police legally something like that, it was agreed in the room all the lawyers in the world couldn't come up with a contract that could police it. But there was an understanding and a clear statement by the teams to say 'right, let's have a clear position that there should be at least a period of 12 months in the garden for a member of a team going from either FOM, FIA to a team or a team going vice versa'. Certain teams were pushing for that period to be three years but in the end it was agreed upon being 12 months. What's disappointing is that that meeting was less than six weeks ago; arguably, discussions were probably happening at that time and it almost makes those meetings pointless if we can't agree on something and action it. Of course you can hide behind 'well it's not in the regulations' but as a group we agreed something, it hasn't been adhered to and so one questions... what's the point of having those meetings?

Q: Maurizio, you're shaking your head.

MA: Yes, because we gave a mandate, that's the main thing, we gave a mandate to the FIA, to the lawyer of the FIA to check national law and to come back to us in the next strategy group and this is what the FIA is going to do in the next strategy group which is on April 17.

CH: I think that what's most disappointing about it was that it was Ferrari or Sergio who was pushing for a three year period. On one hand you get a team pushing for a three year gestation and then a few weeks later, we're in this situation, so as I say, it makes discussions at that forum more or less a waste of time.

MA: That was the discussion but then the conclusion was to give mandate to the FIA to come back... to the lawyer of the FIA to come back with a proposal.

CH: I've said my piece.

Q: (Ben Hunt – The Sun) I think that might have been Chase Carey on the phone. It's becoming quite apparent that you guys can't agree on anything. Are we in a dangerous situation now where we're going into the crucial period of their ownership where we need you guys to work together to benefit the sport, but you can't even agree on anything it seems?

TW: I think this is as much a battle on track as much as it is off track for an advantage and it has always been like that. Certainly, I guess we're providing some good headlines for you. And we have all the very best for our teams at heart. We have different agendas, depending on the strength in the team and how we view the future and then each of us have a holistic side and probably also very personal opinion, how we see the sport going forward. And we are going to be vocal about it and say it. It is clear that the current governance and how the rules are being made is not very functional, there is too much different opinion when the agenda's on the table and we need to sort it for 2021, for the best interest of the sport, but it shows that the debate that we just had a minute ago is that it needs tight rules to have a common legal ground to fight on track and if there is no rules and it's not written down in the regulations it doesn't work.

Q: Christian, you've been saying all winter that these two teams do agree with each other.

CH: We're about the only teams in Formula One that do agree. Look, my view on this is very simple: trying to get a consensus between teams that have got varying objectives, different set-ups, is going to be impossible, so it's down to the commercial rights holder and the FIA to get together, come up with a set of regulations, what is the financial framework, what is the distribution that they want to have, put it on the table and it's down to the teams whether they want to sign up to that or not. Of course, as Toto says, there will be a lot of positioning, the media will be used, it's history repeating itself. It happens every five or six years, every time the Concorde agreement comes up for renewal, but my feeling is, Liberty, together with FIA, need to get on the same piece of paper to say this is what we want Formula One to be, this is the financial distribution surrounding it, here's the deal and laid out to the teams.

Q: And Maurizio, your chairman is saying that if the DNA of Formula One as he sees it is not respected, Ferrari will walk.

MA: I'm not commenting the statement of my chairman. My chairman knows very well what he's talking about and my only suggestion is please take him seriously.

Q: (Mike Doodson – Auto Action) This relates to what you just said: the word breakaway has appeared in a few recent headlines and your chairman, Maurizio, has made certain threatening remarks. Subsequently, Toto seems to have asked us to take those remarks seriously but how practical, Toto, is this for you, would a breakaway be, because 35 years ago Bernie Ecclestone tried it and he ran up against the problem that national governments have respect for and like to see established federations organising sports and do not look favourably on breakaways or rebels. How practical would it be to have a breakaway?

TW: More than practicability, it is about responsibility for Formula One. We are all carrying the torch of a great series and a great brand that was built 40 or 50 years ago and has tremendous value and nobody is taking that lightly. Headlines are being created based on things that are being said and like Christian mentioned before, it is about the new Concorde agreement going forward, everybody's trying to position themselves but all the time with respect for the series. And comments that are being made maybe from Mr Marchionne's side also, it is also because he cares I guess. I don't want to speak for Maurizio but we all care for Formula One and we all have a certain vision and perspective of Formula One and how we want to see it going forward and it needs to fit that opinion and this is why these statements are being made. They of course are being blown up in the media like it has always been the case but I can assure you that whatever is being written is that we care a lot about responsibility and we owe it to Formula One and we need to give it all. We have at least three more years together in this great sport, regulated by the FIA, owned by Liberty, run by competent men and we just need to give our input support in the best possible ways so it's great and we're not devaluing it.

Ends