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Belgian Grand Prix

Saturday Post-Qualifying Press Conference Transcript

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DRIVERS

1 – Lewis HAMILTON (Mercedes)

2 – Sebastian VETTEL (Ferrari)

3 – Esteban OCON (Racing Point Force India)

TRACK INTERVIEWS

(Conducted by David Coulthard)

Q: Great to see the sportsmanship there, Lewis congratulating Seb. I don't think he feels as good as you do. Your 78th pole position, your fifth here in Spa. You needed that rain at the end, Ferrari were very strong in the outright dry, but congratulations, great job.

Lewis HAMILTON: Thank you so much. That was one of the toughest qualifying sessions I can remember. It seems to get harder and harder all year long. I don't know if they definitely had it, we were very, very close, you saw it in, I think, Q2, we were split by half a tenth, so I was hopeful I could make that slight difference but I knew it was going to be very close, they were very quick on the straights. But then the rain came and none of us have been driving this weekend in the rain, so I can't even express to you how difficult it was. You saw that I went off in Turn 1. You're tip-toeing, you don't know where the limit is, you don't know... the track looks dry in some places but it's actually wet. That was definitely some of the toughest... even though at the last race it was very wet, but that was different circumstances, where you have more grip on those extreme tyres. With these ones it was so hard. I went off twice but I'm so glad I managed to keep it together for that last lap.

Q: Great job, Lewis, it gives you a great place to start this grand prix tomorrow. This championship battle is very much alive.

LH: It's painful. I think everyone is on the edge of their seats, but that's what's great about this sport and it's so great to see so many people here in Spa. It's a beautiful place and an incredible track to drive and I'm really grateful for all the hard work the team have put in to give me the chance to be here today.

Q: Well done, enjoy the moment. Seb, it looked like Ferrari had the edge. Lewis thought that in dry running maybe he would have had the pace, but to me it looked like in dry running it was going to be a Ferrari front-row lock-out, but that rain suddenly changed everything. Was there much more left?

Sebastian VETTEL: Yeah, I think so. I think we didn't time it great. Look, in these conditions it can be anything. You might as well take second from where we are. I think we had the pace today for pole but we'll never find out; obviously Q3 was a bit different. I think the gap was quite big, so deserved for Lewis to get the pole, but tomorrow I'm quite sure we have good pace in the car, also for the race, so looking forward to that.

Q: Just when you mention timing. It looked like as if there was a little bit of... I don't want to say confusion, but uncertainty...

SV: It was confusion! When all of a sudden it starts to rain like this, from a team point of view you have to manage two cars and Kimi was rushing to get back out and then in the end, now you look, it's sunshine and it's nearly dry again. I didn't also know what to do, I had a bit of traffic, then I had the track drying up and I wanted to save a bit of tyres, and I had a bit of traffic with Esteban in front, and then you know that any lap could be the lap but equally you know the lap will be at the end if it continues to dry up. Yeah, maybe I was also not as calm as can be in the car and in the end happy with second, first row for tomorrow and we have strong pace, so anything can happen.

Q: Congratulations. Esteban, welcome to the top three! Your best ever qualifying. This is a big opportunity for you, uncertainty about where you are going to be next year, a result like that in tricky conditions – just how huge is this for you?

Esteban OCON: Yeah, it's fantastic! Hi everyone, hello, thanks for the support first of all. It's awesome to be in P3 after such a difficult time with the team we had. But now we are starting afresh and definitely happy with that result, third wasn't expected today. The job did a fantastic guys... the guys did a fantastic job! Sorry, it's the emotion! We changed the tyre really quickly and managed to go out and that was fantastic and I put in a clean lap and managed to get third, so yeah, let's bring it on tomorrow.

PRESS CONFERENCE

Q: Congratulations Lewis, a very tricky session. Just how difficult was it out there?

LH: I think that was one of the hardest sessions that I can remember for a while. Obviously in the rain in the last race it was different, it was obviously incredibly difficult there, but this one, going straight from slicks straight to inters and you only had a few laps really to find the grip, to get the tyres up, to understand where the track was dry and where it was wet, because it was really patchy throughout the whole lap. So you come to Eau Rouge and you don't know if you have to have a life, well obviously we all had to have a lift, but towards the end it was drying up in some patches and it was quite wet in other patches. I really can't find the words to express the words to express how difficult it was. If you look at the laps... I don't know how it was for other people but you saw that I went off in Turn 1 massively and then again into Turn 12, and so I only had one lap left, otherwise I would have been a lot further down the order. I knew I had the pace, it was just really about finding the balance of not pushing too much, but not backing off too much, and it's different in every single corner and at no point can you ever be complacent. It's awesome, I love that kind of... I'm super happy obviously, the team have done a great job. The rain is always a friend of mine, so...

Q: Sebastian, Lewis says the rain was a friend of his, you were fastest in all three practice sessions, Ferrari, as a team, in the dry, do you think the rain took qualifying a little bit away from you today?

SV: Maybe. We don't know, we'll never get the answer of Q3 in the dry, simply because it wasn't dry. Like that, obviously it didn't help. It was a bit strange, not easy to get your eye in and so on. It was a weird... it's not rain, it's not dry, it's something in between. I knew that all of the laps don't matter but the last one, so I was pushing, because you also don't know whether you will have a red flag or somebody loses it in these conditions, very likely. So I stayed on track and everything was fine, but I never closed the lap but the last one. Obviously it was a bit chaotic and not great from a management point of view, I think. You don't know how much it's going to dry up and if there's more rain coming, but I don't feel we put everything together in the last lap. We ran out of battery and that was quite costly for nearly the whole lap and yeah, I just think it wasn't a nice ending to a great qualifying up to that point. I mean, very exciting with these cars. Even in the damp conditions in the end it's quite impressive, you know, you do Eau Rouge and you don't have to downshift, you do it in eighth gear and it's sort of flat even if it's damp and you're on intermediates. So great fun but obviously not very rewarding when you know that you could have done a bit better, but we start in second now, which puts us in a good place, and tomorrow we have a long race. We have a car to fight, a car to overtake so it should be good fun tomorrow.

Q: Very well done. Esteban, moving on to you. Congratulations on the third place. Did you know at the end of that qualifying session just what was on offer for Force India today, that you could score such a good result?

EO: Well, what I knew is definitely that when it's damp conditions like this you have an opportunity and something to do. It's always closer between the cars when the conditions are like that and today we maximised the potential of our car. Last time it rained I was also starting third. It's the second time it rains and I'm starting third, so it's a fantastic result. Great to perform like this after a

difficult time for Force India. That's totally behind us now and we are focusing on this weekend and the car has been strong, even in the dry this weekend, so hopefully we will get a great result tomorrow.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Jerome Pugmire – AP) Question for Sebastian. You said moments after the qualifying “maybe I wasn’t as calm as I could be.” What was that referring to? Was it because of the rain or something to do with your mindset?

SV: No, I think we had a wobble, obviously, I guess everybody had in these conditions, swapping tyres. I think there was a bit of miscommunication, I was stuck in the pitlane for a while. In the end that didn't matter but it was just not as calm as I think it could have been. After that, well, looking back it's always easy in these sessions but as I said the lap that mattered was the last one. Before it was nearly irrelevant, other than keeping your tyres warm. But that you don't know. You don't know whether the rain increases again. The laps that I had before also I couldn't close due to traffic. So, I knew that if I closed them the next lap will be compromised but the next lap will be drier... so what do you do? I think, as I said, it didn't feel as if I got everything out for various reasons and therefore it was a bit of a scrappy session. But in the end, if it's scrappy like that, you also saw the others not putting enough fuel in until the end, so it can be a lot worse and taking that into account, I think second is alright.

Q: (Christian Menath – Motorsport-magazin.com) Question for Seb. You said you ran out of battery in the last lap. It looked a bit like in the penultimate lap at the Bus Stop chicane you went a bit wide to have full throttle on the main straight, so usually you know when you run out of battery a bit earlier – so why did you do it and why didn't you put it all for the penultimate lap then?

SV: If it's that easy, maybe you should drive the car then you know everything! As I said, you try to close the lap before, you also try to get your eye in, stay on top of the track, and yeah, the way we set up normally it was fine to run until the end but I surprised myself when I crossed the line and saw that the battery was quite low – which then was very costly. But, y'know... You're absolutely right, in the end we should have managed better as a team – but in these conditions, could have been a red flag in the last lap and then it doesn't matter. I always try to open a gap in the last sector, last corner and slow down, charge the car – but obviously it wasn't enough for the end, so we got caught up.

Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) Esteban, you referenced the team situation in recent days. Obviously at the moment there seems to be a few question marks about your short-term future and what happens there. What do you think the significance of this result is in that? It seems a bit ridiculous to be P3 on the grid and have those sort of questions. And to Lewis and Seb, what do you think of the performance of someone like Esteban in the team and car he's in at the moment to be P3 on the grid.

EO: Well, you know for sure, my future is not done at the moment. At the moment I don't know where I will race next year, what I will do. So, y'know, as I said, the only thing I can do is do well on track, to focus and do the same job as before, try to do the best. And if you do a strong job in Formula One, the teams, they can't skip you, they need to have you. So, that's what I'm trying to do.

Lewis, your view of Esteban's performance in that Force India?

LH: I've always been a supporter of Esteban. I think, how he conducts himself and how he performs on track is exceptional and unfortunately we're in a weird place in Formula One where you've got some teams that, rather than take a new up-and-coming kid, they'll take whoever's got the moment, which means the structure of the sport is probably wrong, and how the funds are distributed, or whatever it is. I also know, once I'd signed, once Sebastian had signed, things start to fall into place, and you've got to be and you've got to be super-super quick, and make sure you've got good management, so they're sharp and make sure they do their diligence and they're ready to quick-fire in the right direction. I've not read of who's signed where and what seats are available but he needs to be in a great car because he's one of the top drivers here so I hope that opportunity is there for him.

Seb, your thoughts on Esteban's performance?

SV: Well, I think from the outside it's always difficult to judge but I think he's doing everything right. I think it's very good for him to get this qualifying session under the belt and get the car in P3 where it

doesn't belong. I think that shows enough. Also, in a session like that where it can be quite chaotic and you can easily do a mistake, to keep your head together was crucial. That's what he did. Then, I think, unfortunately it's our times, a new guy comes in and he's the superhero, then another guys comes in and he's the superhero, then another guy comes in and then he's the superhero, and then another guy comes in and he's the new superhero. And by that time, the first guy is easily forgotten, even though he's doing a very, very good job but not really considered any more, as in talked about and written about, so that's why I think it's good for him to have this result today, and he should get mentioned. Yeah, I think it's his day and obviously for us, you sort-of expect to be there. We've got the cars and the consistency but, as I said, whatever the car is called he's driving now, it doesn't belong in P3 and he managed to do so, so well done, that should also be considered for someone signing him next year.

Q: (Phil Duncan – PA) Lewis, we've seen in your career, time and time again that when it rains you often always seem to deliver. Do you think you're virtually unbeatable in the wet?

LH: Definitely not. Definitely not. I think I also tend to do the job in the dry every now and again as well too – but no, not at all. I think it's... I wish you could see how tough it is out there for us all, maybe you could see it by all of us falling off. It's really about balance of circumstances and compromises and maybe Seb, as he said, he'd got a battery problem, or something like that. I'd managed mine myself and made sure I had enough power. Also the team helped me in being aware of that. So, I don't really know what to say. Ultimately it's for you to decide, to create an opinion about it. I love driving in the wet. I didn't want it to rain. I was looking forward to it being really close in the dry. I think the Ferraris may... clearly had slightly the upper hand but I really thought maybe it would just be... I might just be able to do enough to get ahead of them in the dry. Maybe. Which is an exciting prospect. But when it rains. I mean, it was horrible! It's not a case that I love it. It was absolutely terrifying for all of us because we were all tip-toeing around. It's fun also – but you just don't know when the front wheels are going to lock. When a front wheel locks, the car seems to speed up. I don't really understand when that happens but you lock up and then it doesn't stop after that. You're just praying that doesn't happen.

Q: (Oliver Brown – The Telegraph) Lewis, I was interested in your answer a couple of moments ago about Esteban's situation. F1 seems to have got in this situation where perhaps further down the grid things are being governed more by money rather than merit. I just wondered if you had any further thoughts about how that situation has arisen and what the sport can do about it?

LH: I've not put a lot of thought into what the sport can do about it. The best drivers need to be in the best car. You can't let somebody who's got more money leapfrog a better driver. It shouldn't happen. I think the governing body definitely has to somehow... and it starts from the low classes all the way up through Formula Four, Formula Three, Formula Two. Obviously there's no space in my team, there's no space in his (Vettel's) team, there was a space in Red Bull. Then has to be some sort of a shoot-out of some sort maybe. I don't know what his options are. In some ways, I wish I was managing you and maybe I would be able to help.

EO: Maybe we can speak later.

Q: (Jerome Pugmire – Associated Press) To follow up on that Esteban, how much does it mean to you to have such loyal support from both Lewis and Sebastian, and also how annoying is this for you, this situation?

EO: Yeah, for sure, it's awesome to hear that. I'm very happy to hear that. Of course, I want to be racing next year and I'm doing everything for it, I'm working very hard every day for it and to hear great things from those two champions is fantastic. I will see what the future is going to bring. I'm managed by Mercedes and they have been taking great decisions for me in the past so I'm sure it will be the same again for me in the future, hopefully, and I will be sorted out.

Q: (Flavio Vanetti – Corriera della Sera) Lewis, in the dry, Ferrari was very strong. Do you feel they can be favourite if it is dry?

LH: They were favourite today and they will be favourite tomorrow. That doesn't necessarily say that they are going to win. They've been favourite for quite a few races now and we've managed to somehow turn that on its head and come out ahead. Tomorrow's going to be a very tough race. Sebastian's long run blitzed everyone's yesterday so I don't know if I will be able to create the pace that I will be able to build a gap but tomorrow I will find out and I will give it everything I've got. It's

always a tough race down to turn five here at the start and so... and these guys are obviously incredibly quick on the straights. We will see.

Q: (Livio Oricchio – Globoesporte.com) Lewis, a personal question: you were pole in the wet, pole in the dry, street circuit, high speed circuit, no mistakes, you win starting from pole, starting from the back. You've already won the World Championship four times but from outside you never drove so perfectly as this season. What is the reason, are there any particularly reasons for that? Can maturity explain that?

LH: Well, I definitely don't think I've driven perfectly this year but I think our goal as drivers and athletes is to try to... there are so many elements that you have to try and perfect and I'm trying to work on all of those. It's how you manage your time away from the track...

Q: (Livio Oricchio – Globoesporte.com) For example?

LH: What are the elements? Well, it can be how you engage with your team, it could be how you strategise your time away from work, how you switch off, how you switch on, how do you train, how do you grind yourself down, how much do... when it comes to driving, how do you improve practice, how do you improve consistency, how do you reduce risks, mistakes, how do you encourage your team to push to the limit and build you a reliable car? It's not a case of them just doing it, you have to do it as a team. So there are so many elements and naturally with experience that helps but you have to keep working because you've got youngsters coming along who have the new fresh motivation so finding also the motivation to replace that. It does help when you get to fight great drivers like Sebastian and you have this kind of battle because it requires you to have to dip into the unknown and really raise the bar beyond what you thought you could raise it to and I think that's the challenge that all of us have and that is what me and Sebastian are having this year which is exciting.

Q: (Bart Van Dooijeweert - NU.nl) To all of you: it will be the coldest Grand Prix of the year, temperature around 15 degrees. How will it influence the race and tyre strategy?

SV: Well, it's a bit easier, it doesn't get so hot in the cockpit but it's still summer. I don't know the weather forecast for tomorrow but what I heard it should be dry but then it's Spa so anything can happen, a bit like Nurburgring, it's not far from here. No, it doesn't change much. As I say, it's probably a bit nicer. It's difficult to tell how it would this weekend with 30/35 degrees because we didn't have it. I think it's been like this the whole weekend.

EO: It's the same for everyone so we have to deal with the cold conditions. Last time we had conditions that cold was winter test and it was not easy, so we will see. It's never an easy race anyway.

LH: I think it might be better for blistering so it might be better for all of us. The hotter it gets, the more likely these tyres blister. The actual better tyres, which they're not using currently, is the tyre with the thinner tread in terms of blistering, so cooler makes that a bit better.

Ends