



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L' AUTOMOBILE

2018 FIA Formula One World Championship

Azerbaijan Grand Prix

Thursday Press Conference Transcript

26.04.2018

DRIVERS – Daniel RICCIARDO (Red Bull), Nico HÜLKENBERG (Renault), Kevin MAGNUSSEN (Haas)

PRESS CONFERENCE

Q: Daniel, if we could start with you, last time you were in the press conference room you were very emotional after winning in China. Having had two weeks to reflect on it, why did that win mean so much to you?

Daniel RICCIARDO: I haven't had many, I guess, so they still feel very special. The wins. I guess it had been a fairly long time since Baku. A pretty long time between drinks, the last win and the whole race, I guess the weekend in Bahrain, the kind of... I just feel that the biggest disappointment in racing is being out of the race at the beginning, y'know, before it's really started. You're out of the race on the first lap or something, it's tough – because you've worked all weekend to get to the Sunday and then it's over like that. After Bahrain, I was obviously relieved to have a race the weekend after and have a chance to back it up. Well, to try again. And then yeah, the whole weekend, Saturday, FP3, another kinda head-down moment, but then to get out for qualifying and how the race turned out. It was cool. I guess jsut a lot emotion, happy emotions for sure. Yeah. The highs and lows of the sport can do that to you.

Q: Have you seen enough from Red Bull Racing to think about the Championship this year?

DR: Probably haven't seen enough from everyone yet! So, I'm not thinking about the Championship in that sense. Obviously, I want to think about being there. But yeah, naturally because we won everyone's asking can we fight for the championship now? It's still early – but I think we've proved, if we're there, we can do a lot with it. That's the plan: to continue to be there for the next few races.

Q: Nico, coming on to you, you've qualifying seventh at every race since Mexico last year. You've only been out-qualified by a team-mate once in the last 27 races. It's an impressive stat, so let's start by talking about qualifying. Have you made a step in this area?

Nico HÜLKENBERG: I think I've just managed to... yeah... to hit it on the head each time. I quite enjoy qualifying, I like getting out there where it counts and putting a lap together. I feel also the last 20 or so races I also had a car that allows me to do that and gives me the support that a driver needs also. Since last year, with this generation of cars, when you have the downforce, you've got more grip to work with. It's just been a bit more fun and probably helps the way I drive also, a little bit.

Q: Let's talk about where Renault are battling in the Championship. It looks, at the minute, a tight fight between yourselves, Haas and McLaren for fourth. Is this where you see yourself destined this year – or do you think you can start to challenge the guy on your left?

NH: No, I think for now it's more, like you say, about Haas and McLaren, these kind of teams, to try to keep them at bay but it's very tight. Each weekend will be a bit different depending on the tyre compounds, different tracks and layouts. What favours one car more than another one. But for sure it's a big development race in the midfield also. But yeah, we're trying to get ahead but still got a lot of areas to work on to catch all the three guys ahead.

Q: Kevin, coming on to you. While we're talking about this battle for fourth place, perhaps we could ask you about Haas. Do you think they can maintain their current level of competitiveness, going forwards?

Kevin MAGNUSSEN: It's not going to be easy for sure. We've started with a good car and done a good job over the winter. I think we're in this situation and we haven't had a perfect start to the year so I think there's more in it if we can get through the races and clear out any mistakes. Then I think we're in good shape. Whether it will stay like that for the whole year, I think it depends a lot on how the other teams do: obviously, Renault and McLaren. Last year, consistency wasn't our biggest strength, so I think that's an area we have improved, it seems. Our car this year is a little easier to work with and seems like it has a broader window for its performance. I'm hoping that we can at least be much more competitive thought the whole season than last year – but whether we can keep up to those big guys, it's not going to be easy but we'll do our best.

Q: You mentioned consistency, and one area where you have been very consistent is qualifying. You appear to have made a big step since last year. Can you explain how that's come about?

KM: It's only been three races but I think the car is obviously better than last year. It's performing, as I said, it has a broader window for its performance and it's easier. You can set it up for what you prefer as a driver, in your driving style and it will still work. It's just a little easier to drive. A little more forgiving, more predictable and it obviously has more grip. In terms of aero it's more consistent. I prefer a consistent car, especially on the rear, a rear that I can trust and depend on and predict. This car has a good consistency in that regard. I think that helps – but generally just being more competitive makes things easier.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Arjan Schouten – AD) Question for Daniel. You won in China from sixth place. Only one of the previous 72 races, there has been a driver starting outside the top five who also won. That was you, here in Baku. What is your secret? Is it patience? Can you tell me something about it?

DR: I'd like to qualify on the front row. It's not always the case. I don't know. Obviously the race is the race and qualifying is super-important in the sport but you can also have a different car on Sunday. You can take more opportunities and more opportunities can present themselves in the race – and that's ultimately what we get to the weekend for, is the Sunday. The race obviously had the mid-race safety car in China and bunched everyone up and gave me a second chance to attack. I sensed an opportunity and made sure I capitalised on that. I think that's something I really demand from myself and, I guess, expect from myself. A bit like Baku last year. Mid-race we were at the back but it was kinda just... you see a car in front and you try to pass them, you see the next car, you try to pass them, you see the next car and try to pass them. Obviously, I knew Seb was going to have the penalty, Lewis had the headrest thing. It was crazy – but again I sensed an opportunity and knew the restart was super-important to try to pass the Williams in front and in the end, for me that was the race-winning move, so I think yeah, just being aware of what's available. Because we're not winning every weekend, when you have a sniff of a victory, that's all the motivation and the hunger I need. It's enjoyable when you can see it in front of you.

Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) Question for you Daniel, you have a big decision to make at some point over what you do for next season, which team you'll be driving for. Red Bull is an environment you know extremely well, it will be a big change of scenery if you did go to another team. Lewis was in a similar situation a few years ago, left McLaren for Mercedes. How curious are you to find out if the grass is greener somewhere else?

DR: It's a good way of putting it. I don't know. The curiosity will not overcome the facts, I guess, in terms of what options I will have, I guess and then which car is ultimately the fastest I can be with. Obviously that's really top of my list. So yeah, I wouldn't just... to answer that differently, I wouldn't just go somewhere else just for a change. If I did move on obviously I'd want to make sure it was something I feel would potentially be better. That's all really.

Q: As a follow-up to that, do you feel a loyalty to Red Bull?

DR: There will always be a bit of that, for sure. It's kind of like, the start of it, 2008, it's ten years since I was in the Red Bull Junior Team. So it's a long time and they really set it up for me, to make all this happen. There will always be that. At some point you've got to weigh-up what does what but regardless, there will always be something and I'd always show love, I think, nonetheless.

Q: (Livio Oricchio – Globoesporte.com) Daniel, you said you can go to one place potentially better. After watching the last race, we saw Kimi competing for Sebastian, not for himself, and he was faster than Sebastian all the weekend, except in qualifying. Aren't you worried that eventually, if you consider the possibility of Ferrari, that people you ask the same function as Kimi, to work just for another driver and not for himself, being a world champion like him?

DR: These are certainly things that I would... wherever I may be, or go, I would always make sure that there was some clarity. I wouldn't want to go somewhere where I didn't feel I had a chance. At the moment that's what I'm chasing is to try and be world champion. That's my goal, my dream, something I really believe I'm capable of, so yeah, if someone said 'we'll let here but you can't do this', that's not an attraction option to me. Is that the case somewhere? I don't know. I honestly don't know what's going on with other teams. At Red Bull there's always been really good clarity and I would say fairness, since 2014, since I've been there. That's been certainly a nice environment and I would expect that environment everywhere.

Q: (Louis Dekker - NOS) A question for Nico, Kevin and Daniel. How surprised are you that Mercedes didn't win yet and do you think it might change this weekend? Is it good for the sport?

NH: I think there have always been some circumstances that stopped them from winning. In Melbourne it was a safety car, in Shanghai as well, in Bahrain I don't remember. I tend not to look at their race so much. I think they will get a shot at it pretty soon. Again, I think they have one of the best packages, so it's just a matter of time.

Kevin?

KM: Nothing to add to that.

Are you surprised?

KM: Oh yeah, very surprised.

Daniel?

DR: They're still very competitive and probably for circumstances and maybe not executing the perfect race yet are perhaps why. I think it is a matter of time. It is good for the sport, I think, to have that little bit of a change for now, but I don't think it's going to be necessarily a trend. As Nico said, I think it is a matter of time. They do have a fast car. They do have certainly a good package. We'll try to keep holding them out as long as we can. But for sure, I expect them to be strong every weekend.

Q: (John McEvoy – Daily Mail) Daniel, to what extent have you had any talks with Ferrari or Mercedes or Red Bull about next year, and how would you feel going side by side with Lewis?

DR: So, I've only had talks with Red Bull. Even already last year, we've been pretty open with each other, and through the media as well, I think everyone is aware they're interested in keeping me. We've had some talks regarding that obviously. I'm aware of other reports, but there hasn't been anything else. They're not true, at least up until now certainly not. Lewis: I would love to be challenged against the best and Lewis is arguably up there, so for sure that would be a good challenge. I've got a good challenge now obviously with Max and I had Seb, so I don't want to say it's just Lewis I'm looking for, but that would be a good challenge.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines, Racefans.net) Daniel, to date Red Bull have managed your career, so you've driven for them and they've also been your managers. Now at the end of this year you're on your own. What sort of infrastructure do you have? Do you honestly believe you could negotiate a crucial contract for your future and concentrate on delivering your best on track this year? Do you have a manager? Do you have some advisers? What do you have?

DR: Yeah, I've got a small little group, a network, around me and as far as the real negotiations go. I've got a guy doing that for me. Look, I'm obviously super aware and invested in what I want and where I see myself I guess, but as far as the real in-depth talks and all that, I think it's best for me not to really focus on that too much. I've been getting asked the same questions since Austin, since Max re-signed. I think it was in Austin. So, it's been probably been more than six months now, and it hasn't got me. I don't overcomplicate it. I guess with the people around me I keep it pretty small and I'm happy with that.

Q: (Alan Baldwin – Reuters) Daniel, as a follow-up to the earlier question. Could you specifically rule out that you have any kind of pre-arrangement with Ferrari, because that's what the reports have been in Italy?

DR: No, that's not true. Yeah, I can say that.

Q: (Ralf Bach – Autobild Motorsport) The question goes to Daniel...

DR: I'm going to buy these guys a drink... Jeez!

Q: (Ralf Bach – Autobild Motorsport) You're brave driver, I expect now a brave answer. Do you think you would have won the race in Bahrain with the Mercedes in this situation?

DR: Oh, I answered this question in Shanghai. I know you weren't in Shanghai. All I said is that I would have tried. I don't want to say tried like... I would have had a look in Turn 1. If it worked, I don't know, I don't want to say it, because I wasn't in the race and it's probably not fair, and it's probably a bit disrespectful when I wasn't in Seb or Valtteri's shoes. But I would see myself having a lunge for sure, so that's the way I would answer it.

Q: (Maksudov Teymur – 1news.az) Daniel, Baku was the only race you won last year, and how do you feel now when you are again here and does it give you more confidence before the current race?

DR: Well done, Baku. I've been waiting to say that. Felt good! Obviously some good memories. I think when you come back to a track that you've had success on, I don't think it necessarily changes your confidence. I think every race you go to you come prepared and that gives you confidence. So I'm not coming here thinking I'm going to be better than I was last week or anything like that, but there is a good feeling. There's a nice feeling coming back, some good memories, so there are happy thoughts, I guess, and that's nice. But the approach to the on-track stuff and the way I'll approach the weekend, that doesn't change.

Daniel, you've had fastest lap in two of the opening three races. Are you favourite this weekend?

DR: I wouldn't go that far! Maybe a fan favourite, is that what you're saying? I hope we're close, but I think it's too early to say we're favourites. I think we have a good race car for sure. I think one-lap pace we've still got to show a bit more. At least for Saturday I think we'll probably not be there but Sunday, who knows, that can turn around.

Q: (Louis Dekker – NOS) I was going to ask you Daniel, but the question fits all three drivers: the three of you have had a better start to the season than last year and I know the season is still long but does this give an amount of confidence, a boost?

KM: Yeah, definitely, it's a much better season, getting off better at the start of the season so yeah, I would say the answer is yes, it's a nice feeling and it's more and enjoyable and easier to look forward to the races when you know you've got a good car and can fight for points.

NH: Yeah, for sure. It's definitely fun if you have a good couple of races and straightaway you get a couple of points and good results on the board. For sure that helps yourself, you know, but also the whole team, all the people are working hard; back in the factory, it puts a spring in their step and helps to create a good atmosphere and motivation inside the team.

Q: And Nico, how are you enjoying the intra-team battle with Carlos Sainz this year?

NH: I enjoy it, it's good so far.

DR: Yeah, I think the team one's a big one. For sure it's getting a good start like that it's... there's a lot of people back at the factory and for them to have that kind of motivation and that drive, it's a long season and to get that kick-started early with some results is really important. I definitely feel that and believe that so that's cool and I think from a personal point of view I think it's just nice to get the season started well, because there's a long break, obviously, between the... the off-season, then you do your training and you obviously prepare as well as you can so when that then correlates to good results on track that's also a little bit rewarding.

Q: Bahrain was only two races ago for you guys, are you worried about reliability?

DR: I don't want to use the word worried because, at least from my point of view, I've just got to drive the car. In a way it's out of my control so I'm not going to drive around worried. You're going too fast and too focused to be worried, but yeah, right now I'm not really in the short term. Maybe once we get later in the season it's likely we'll come across some penalties or whatever but right now... baseline chill.

Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) We know now that next season Formula One is going to raise the fuel limit slightly. From your perspective, do you feel a bit too forced to manage your races at the moment and do you think this is going to make a significant difference in terms of flat-out racing next year?

NH: Yeah, it will definitely help the fuel saving situation and not really having to worry about that too much, on that front, definitely allows you to push to the limit. Obviously it's not always just about fuel sometimes, it's linked in with what the tyres are doing, how they behave. Weekend for weekend that's quite different. There might be some of that left still but for sure it's a positive thing I think and in the right direction.

DR: Yup, I don't see any real loss for the... Like races like Melbourne, that's quite a high fuel demand circuit – there's probably a better word but you know what I mean. So there's a lot of lifting during the race, a lot of fuel management I guess. We all do it, part of us, like now, we're all used to doing it but for sure it's going to be better if we can race with real intentions for every lap.

KM: Yeah, I think it's good that it's been raised. There are some races during the year that can be really really tricky like Russia for example, it can be almost ridiculous there. So it's nice to see that going up so you can push a bit more. I don't mind a little bit of fuel saving... sometimes even before you had these limitations, like five years ago they were doing some management because they would start the race with an anticipation of safety cars or whatever. A little bit is fine but sometimes it's too much. I think it's a good change.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines, Racefans.net) Daniel, what exactly are you looking for in your next contract? You've been reported as saying you don't want anything longer than two years because Formula One's going to be changing post-2020. The other top teams have all got somebody established in there already. What are you actually looking for? You've said you've got key requirements that you want, what are they, please?

DR: Did I say key requirements, Dieter Rencken? I don't really know how to answer any more contract questions. I don't know if I'm getting bored of it but no, look, the real requirement obviously is to try and put myself in a position to win a World title. As I said, it doesn't mean where I am currently is not that place but I think that's why I'm trying to take my time with it because it's still too early. Obviously we won the last race, that was great but realistically we need to win more than just once in the season to fight for a title so that's why I'm going to take my time, but that's the priority for sure and I guess the financials and all that are definitely behind that.

Q: Daniel, how concerned are you about the regulations post-2020?

DR: I guess I haven't thought about it too much. We're aware of it but I don't know if I'm concerned about it. I don't know. I feel like every year something changes, as in like life changes, things change, so looking beyond, like two years after this, seems like a long way away so that's more for that but for the sport itself, I think all us drivers will do what we can to make it – any change – to make it for the better, we will, for the racing, for the atmosphere, for all of that. We are, let's say, investing some time in those discussions, amongst us drivers, but I'm not necessarily concerned about the sport or where it's going. But yeah, for me personally, I think just thinking about 2021 now seems like a long time away.

Q: (Ralf Bach – Autobild Motorsport) Daniel, my last question about your future, for the moment: you said you didn't speak with Ferrari or Mercedes at the moment, only with Red Bull. But are you patient enough to wait, that people come to you or do you have a deadline maybe in summertime and nobody, apart from Red Bull, was talking to you? Would you then go to the people from Mercedes or Ferrari, to ask what's going on? Or would you just wait until they come to you?

DR: I guess it's not a bad question. For sure, like the summer seems fine. I guess I don't really fear not having a seat next year so I don't feel that I need to sign something tomorrow or I will have nothing, so I guess for that reason I feel like I can see until the summer what's happening. If nothing has happened since then, then yeah, I guess I think of Plan B or whatever that is and if it's only then Red Bull, then that's where I am at so yeah, but I don't really feel that I need to push anything until then.

Q: (Livio Oricchio – Globoesporte.com) All of you drive cars with power units that have won races this year: Ferrari and Renault. Mercedes out of first place until now. Can you comment what improvements your partner took for Renault to win the races and also Ferrari?

Q: Your thoughts on the Ferrari power unit this year, Kevin, compared to last year?

KM: Yeah, it's a step forward, not only in power – a little step in power but in reliability. We need to see a little further to be sure that the reliability is there completely but it seems like it is. No complaints about the power unit. It's not the power unit's fault that we're not winning, for sure.

NH: Yeah, I think for us at Renault it's the step in reliability that we've managed to fix. Obviously the second half of last year we had a lot of problems, lost a lot of points and results and I think they've managed to cure and fix a lot of the issues there. On top of that, also worked on a lot of the installation things. Powerwise, I think we've made a step too so they've done a very good job on the Renault power unit over the winter. Doesn't mean that there's not more work to do but I think we've done some good improvements.

DR: I think, in race trim, I think on Sundays... I guess it's no secret we don't have as much power available on a Saturday as Ferrari and Merc power units but I think on Sunday, when everything kind of settles down and you run a race mode-type of engine, I think we've closed the gap on Sundays so yeah, following the quicker cars in China, for example, even Kimi in Melbourne, from

what I remember last year, it felt like we were certainly losing out a lot less in those conditions so that was nice, that was positive, for sure.

Ends