



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L' AUTOMOBILE

## **2018 FIA Formula One World Championship**

### **Monaco Grand Prix**

#### **Thursday Press Conference Transcript**

**24.05.2018**

**TEAM REPRESENTATIVES – Zak BROWN (McLaren), Christian HORNER (Red Bull Racing), Toto WOLFF (Mercedes), Frédéric VASSEUR (Sauber)**

#### **PRESS CONFERENCE**

**Zak, if we could start with you, please. there's been a lot of McLaren news in recent days, most of it financial, so can you tell us what's going on?**

**Zak BROWN:** Yeah, we've had some great. We've had Mr Latifi, who had invested in McLaren Group, which is fantastic. We're a very fast-growing company, both our automotive business, of course our Formula 1 and racing efforts, as well as our applied technologies business, so great to have Mr Latifi as part of our shareholder group. And then, announced this morning, is a new partnership with FxPro, which is going to be sponsoring our team and there are a couple more yet to come out this weekend, so it has been a good week.

**What impact will Mr Latifi's shareholding have on the racing team specifically?**

**ZB:** Ultimately his investment goes into McLaren Group, so the board and the shareholder will ultimately decide where they want to invest that money. I presume it will ultimately be sprinkled into all three business in some way, shape or form and Formula 1 obviously has a big thirst for expenditure to try to keep up with the teams here to the left of me that have a larger budget, so I'm sure some will go towards investing in our racing team but also developing our road car and our technology business.

**And what will it mean for the drivers in the F1 team. Will there be pressure to put Nicholas Latifi, son of new shareholder Michael, in the car in the future?**

**ZB:** No, it's never been a discussion. He's doing quite well in Formula 2. At McLaren we're always looking for the best drivers we can get. He's doing a good job but it's never been part of the conversation.

**Thank you. Christian, there was a lot of pre-race hype surrounding Red Bull, and it seems justified after the first free practice session, with your cars first and second. How do you view this weekend, do you view it as your biggest chance so far?**

**Christian HORNER:** Firstly, it's only Thursday morning, so it doesn't mean too much, but what we can say is that the circuit is very quick this year. The re-surfacing has definitely improved lap time and the cars are circulation close to 1.5s faster than this time last year, so that's encouraging. Both drivers seem reasonably comfortable in the car. But as we've seen, Saturday has been our weakness throughout the season. We've always had a strong race car, but Saturday is where we've tended to struggle, at the business end of qualifying. But hopefully with the shorter straights here and with this circuit layout, it offers us our best qualifying chance of the season.

**You've got a lot on your plate, looking ahead, with both an engine and a driver still to decide upon for 2019. Are they interlinked? Does the identity of next year's engine impact on your ability to keep Daniel Ricciardo?**

**CH:** No, not really. Daniel is fully aware that we are wanting to make the best choices for the future regarding the power unit, to put us in the most competitive position we can possibly be in, and of

course that is absolutely in his interest. So, during the next month or so engine things will probably pretty much come to a head and then drivers will inevitably follow on from that.

**Drivers do tend to think shorter term than race team though, don't they?**

**CH:** Yes and no. I think Daniel has been with Red Bull for a long time now. He's aware of the capability of the group and the team and he is very comfortable in the team. So once the engine scenario is sorted I think things will move reasonably quickly.

**In percentage terms, how confident are you of keeping him?**

**CH:** It's always difficult to put a number on these things. But we're very, very happy with Daniel. He does a great job in the team, he's a popular member of the team and there is a desire for us to retain him for next year.

**Sixty per cent?**

**CH:** That's your number.

**OK, thank you Christian. While we're talking about drivers, perhaps let's move on to Fred. You've worked with a lot of young drivers in your career, so tell us a little bit about Charles Leclerc. How impressed have you been by him this year?**

**Frédéric VASSEUR:** For sure, he is doing a very good start of the season, but it is very difficult also to compare from 2018 to 2006 or '07 and you don't have to do this kind of exercise. He is on the learning curve for sure. If you have a look at the start of the season he struggled a little bit on the first two events and then he made a good step from Shanghai or Baku, but still a lot to do. I think he is very focused on the next events and he avoids to be focused on the future and that is a good thing.

**You mention China there, did he change something on the car or did he change his driving style, because that seems to be the breakthrough race for him?**

**FV:** From an external point of view you have a big change after China, but it was not really the case. A small mistake at one stage of the race could change completely the situation. He did a very good first stint in China before the spin and I think the pace was already there. In Melbourne he did also a good race. The method is just to put everything together at the same stage. There is a huge step between Formula 2 and Formula 1 and step by step he is managing the situation.

**We haven't spoken to you in this forum previously this year. Can you tell us a bit about the car, the C37? How good is it and the improvements from last year to this year, is it solely the engine? How pleased are you with the chassis?**

**FV:** I hope it's not only the engine, thanks! No, the fact is we're pushing like hell, but for sure the process is a long one. We have a huge inertia on the system, on the chassis side, it's very difficult to recruit and when we identify someone they don't want to give the green light – thanks to you – but step by step we are improving. I think on the chassis side we made a good step also, not only on the engine, but it will take time. But we know exactly what we want to achieve.

**Toto, Monaco was your bogey track last year. Have you seen enough evidence this morning that you've overcome the problems from last year? How's it going?**

**Toto WOLFF:** Thursday morning was very good for us last year too. In terms of pure lap time we were the fastest car out there. But we started the weekend in a tricky place – the set-up didn't make a lot of sense, but the lap time was quick – so we got a little bit lost through the weekend. We know what happened. But the fundamental issue, that you can see certain cars perform circuits, remains and this hasn't been one of our top circuits in the past.

**The drivers said yesterday that you are better prepared for this race this year. What have you done differently?**

**TW:** We have understood what happened last year in terms of set-up. We have improved our simulation tools and I think we know our weaknesses. We will be trying to put the car in a place where we can extract the maximum performance it is able to deliver around Monaco.

**Lewis said yesterday that he is not in a hurry to sign his new contract. Is that feeling mutual?**

**TW:** It's a funny situation because we have been discussing for a long time. We get together and sort things out and then get busy in our daily operation jobs – us on the team side and Lewis on his preparation. It shows that we have great confidence in each other; nobody is pressuring each

other. We haven't set a fixed date where we want to announce but I can tell you that I don't see a reason why this shouldn't be happening.

**When will it become a priority for you?**

**TW:** It is in the process of just closing. There is a bit of an email ping-pong on details. I don't want to set a date because then you will be asking me why, why hasn't it been done, but maybe we choose one of the nice grands prix in the future, in the next couple of months.

**QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR**

**Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) Toto and Christian, Ferrari is an immediate competitor for your respective teams. There have been some rumblings in the background leading up to this race about the processes they may or may not be engaging in on the energy recovery side. I just wanted to know your respective understandings are of the situation, and how happy you are with the actions that appears to have been met by the FIA this weekend?**

**CH:** We're not an engine supplier, so maybe Toto can answer more on the engine specifics but there have obviously been some rumours that no doubt you guys are cottoning onto as well. I'm sure that the FIA have all the competence to be able to measure, administer and look at the car that's presented for scrutineering and during a grand prix weekend, and of course it's the team's obligation to ensure that that happens. I think the FIA are probably the best people to point that question at.

**TW:** Yes, Christian is absolutely right. We have legality topics come up regularly. Some are more controversial but it's the daily business of the FIA to check what the teams do. It is the obligation of the teams to comply with the regulations and this is an ongoing process. I have great confidence with whatever issues are coming up, be it on the engine or the chassis, the FIA has been on top of it a lot. And as far as I understand this is a process that's taking place as we speak and we will see what the outcome is.

**Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines / racefans.net) Fred, on that topic, it's no secret that you obviously get your power unit and energy storage etcetera from Ferrari. I believe that from FP1 this morning, Ferrari have had an additional piece of hardware built into their car at the FIA's insistence to check whether they are running anything. Have you had to add anything to your car at all?**

**FV:** No. I'm not aware this kind of thing, that we have just to deal with the engine we have into the car, and I trust Ferrari on this point. I don't care about the situation.

**Q: (Jerome Pugmire – AP) Question for Toto. Lewis was saying yesterday that he's in no hurry to sign. Today you're saying there's no date set. Seems to be a bit of confusion about when this is going to happen. Is it a case that Lewis can decide when he wants?**

**TW:** No. This is, as I said, a pretty normal procedure, that you talk to each other and you negotiate in a completely normal procedure, similar to what happens in some of the other teams. I mean, Daniel's and Christian's situation is maybe similar. This is work in progress and we see no hurry to pressurise each other into signing a document that will eventually anyway happen. I don't know what he said yesterday but we've had very good conversations and there is no desire for him to leave the team and we have no desire for us to lose him.

**Zak, this might be a question that we could put in your direction as well regarding Fernando Alonso.**

**ZB:** Well, I think our situation is the same as everyone's. It's a little early in the season. Of course, we're all talking to our drivers, probably talking to each other's drivers to a certain extent up and down the pitlane. I think that we're now back in Europe, it's usually around the summer time that things start really taking shape as far as our conversations with Fernando. Just like last year, we decided to wait 'til about the summertime and I think Fernando will let us know what he wants to do here pretty soon.

**Q: (Dan Knutson – Auto Action / Speed Sport) Zak, a two-part question. In the short term, where do things stand with a title sponsor and in the longer term, where does the group stand with having maybe more shareholders?**

**ZB:** More shareholders would be decided by the shareholders. I'm not aware of any conversations going on in that sense, I think everything's quite settled and everyone's quite happy with the shareholder makeup that we have. Then, as far as title sponsor goes, y'know, we've got a great commercial team that is trying to find partners, as does every Formula One team, every day. I wish

I had a crystal ball to predict exactly when that will come on board – but we're making good progress, we've brought on four or five partners, which I believe is more than any other team at this point, in the off-season. So I think, happy with the progression that we've made, and we announced yet another one this morning. We'll just keep going: you can never have enough partners in Formula One.

**Q: (Jonathan McEvoy – Daily Mail) To all but Mercedes. In your minds, is Lewis still available – or is it such a done deal that he's going to stay at Merc, that that's that?**

**CH:** Well, I can only imagine that a delay can only involve money. And I should think it's such a grotesque amount of money that Toto's talking about, it probably is what's making his and Niki's eyes water at the moment. So, yeah, he's got an expensive lifestyle. He's a four-time world champion and I doubt he's cheap. I can only envisage that that's probably got something to do with the delay.

**Zak?**

**ZB:** I'd be very surprised if Lewis wasn't in a Mercedes next year. So I'm of the view that it's just a matter of time before until the arm-wrestling... someone wins. But I think Lewis will be in a Mercedes next year.

**Fred?**

**FV:** I trust Lewis and Toto and I think they will continue together.

**Where do you think Charles Leclerc will be next year?**

**FV:** I hope with us. They look very happy with their respective drivers. I will do the same.

**Q: (Matthew Marsh – Fox Sports Asia) Question to Zak. We've been delighted to see Gil de Ferran in the paddock the last couple of races. Can you clarify his role with the team?**

**ZB:** Gil's a good friend of McLaren, we have brought him on as an advisor to McLaren. We want him to help with our young drivers. We are looking at some other forms of motorsport, most notably Indycar is under review – he obviously has great history there, having owned a team, won the Indy500 – and generally is a great racer that knows his way around a garage, and so any expertise he has that he can volunteer to help us improve, we're very open-minded to that. So you'll see him around: in Detroit at the Indycar race in a couple of weeks' time and around our Formula One garage often.

**Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines, Racefans.net) Zak, with reference to Michael Latifi, you called it exceedingly good news, or very good news – yet your group kept his identity hidden behind a BVI – British Virgin Islands – entity until we revealed it. Is that sort of opacity any good for a company like McLaren? And second, after his investment, what is the shareholder breakdown now of the Group please?**

**ZB:** Shareholder breakdown is, I believe, published, so anyone that's interested in that can look that up accordingly. And any time you have, whether it's a sponsor announcement, a driver announcement, an investor announcement, you have a time in place in which you hope to announce that and you did a good job in getting ahead of that story. So that news was going to come out in due course. We chose to accelerate that news after the word got out.

**Q: (Agris Lauzinieks - Kapitals) A question to the whole panel: how disappointing is it for you to have grid girls this weekend on the track and do you feel that if they wanted to, they should be at other races too?**

**FV:** I'm not very disappointed to have the grid girls back. I think that at the end of the day it's up to the track also to decide if they want to put grid girls on the grid. I think it's a good move.

**TW:** I think if you ask five people you will have eight opinions on grid girls. I think it was not discriminatory at all, it was part of the history of Formula One. It has become sponsorship property, thinking about Emirates or Heineken and not to have Hawaiian Tropic girls we remember 30 years ago. So I'm happy to see them back on the grid in Monaco.

**CH:** Well, the girls here I think are provided by TAG Heuer, our partner, for this weekend and I think it's a subject that has obviously raised huge debate across different spectrums. To be honest with you, I think the girls make a welcome return this weekend. I think that it's something that should be open to all categories, so some races will choose to have grid kids, others will have mixed grids and I think that so long as it's done in an appropriate manner, then it's ultimately down to the promotor.

**ZB:** I don't really have anything to add beyond what my three other team bosses have added on the topic.

**Q: (Louis Dekker – NOS) Can you tell me your first impression of the hypersoft; will it change the outcome of the race? Or will it just be another tyre?**

**ZB:** I landed about 30 minutes ago so I've not had my debriefing yet so I don't have a view yet.

**CH:** It's certainly the softest of the Pirelli suite of tyres and there's quite a jump between that and the next compound. I think probably what you'll see is as the circuit rubbers in with all the cars running around and the Formula One mileage that goes in over the next few days that by the time raceday comes, that tyre will probably be absolutely fine. It's a very low degradation circuit around here, there's no big inertia corners so that's why, compared to other circuits, we're running at the softest level of the Pirelli compounds.

**TW:** In the morning the jump was quite big. We have been running the hypersoft and the ultrasoft and it was more than a second between the tyres. We have seen quite some deg which was expected on the hyper; you could see that on the other team, Ferrari, running it. We observed that Red Bull had a different run plan but as Christian said, the circuit is going to rubber in and the picture could change over the next three days. I find the tyre exciting. With the new asphalt and these cars and the hypersoft, the lap times are going to be absolutely mind-blowing.

**FV:** Yeah, the gap with hyper was probably the biggest one in Barcelona last winter and I think it's the same today but we will have also to have a look at this during the weekend because the track will have a huge grip evolution, it will completely change the system. We will see on Saturday.

**Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines, RaceFans.net) Given the uncertainty of Formula One post-2020, how difficult is it to sign major deals such as drivers, engines, major sponsors etc?**

**CH:** Well, we have a meeting tomorrow where hopefully a lot of detail will be put on the table as to what Liberty's next steps are. They need to be responsible steps, because some of the things like budget caps involve literally thousands of jobs through teams and suppliers and sub-contractors. It's certainly heavy in the UK. But we're waiting with interest. It will be interesting to see what the next stage of that roll-out is.

**TW:** Highly complex matter because the cost cap or potential cost cap... it's about technical regulations, revenue distribution so there's multiple balls in the air which you need to catch and insofar I hope also that the meeting tomorrow is productive, so we understand more and can act accordingly.

**FV:** No. I think that we had our first meeting in Bahrain and the meeting tomorrow morning is an important one. We need to have clarification on the different points and it will be the start of a new era but we need to move forwards quickly, also for F1, I think.

**ZB:** Well, I think the question was around the difficulty of signing drivers, sponsors and making engine decisions, so everything the guys to the left of me mentioned as far as addressing how you're going to run a team is all accurate and we need to know pretty soon and definitely to be able to respond accordingly but as far as signing up sponsor partners, they all know Formula One's going to be here in 2021 and under the direction of the sport, should be more competitive, should be higher fan engagement so I think sponsors are excited about the future direction of the sport. I think drivers either want to drive in Formula One or not so I don't hear any drivers contemplating whether they want to drive in the new era of Formula One and then maybe engines because that isn't yet defined. That may be the one area that's a bit difficult, sitting here today, to make decisions on because I'm not sure every engine manufacturer is definitively committed for 2021 so that would be the one area that would be difficult to maybe make a decision on today, but I think we have to have faith that everything is going to go in the right direction and the sport's only going to get more exciting so I don't see anyone leaving.

**Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) Fred, I believe Marcus and Charles have a new combustion, turbo and MGU-H for this weekend. Is that just for reliability reasons to freshen up after the first five races or is it related to a performance step, a spec two from Ferrari?**

**FV:** No, we are sticking to the plan that... it was planned from the beginning we will change the engine for Monaco. It's a performance update like as planned.

**Q: (Maximilian Wendl – Mannheimer Morgen) For many drivers this is a special track, Monte Carlo. How special is it for you and what is special in Monaco for you team bosses?**

**TW:** Monaco is the signature track, I would say, for Formula One. It's a street, city circuit, very difficult to drive these cars around here and the environment is very special. It's glamorous, it represents – for me summer represents Formula One like it was in the old days and it's good that we are keeping to the tradition in racing in Monte Carlo.

**CH:** Yeah, look, I mean all the races have the same points, but this one just means that little bit more, the history. I think this is the 76<sup>th</sup> Grand Prix this year and to win this race is something very very special. You know working conditions have changed dramatically over the last ten years here. We've seen another step up this year with the pit complex which is hugely impressive. So it's got its uniqueness, it's got its challenges. Obviously it's a track that is probably the hardest on the calendar to overtake at. It's probably the most expensive hotel room you'll have all year but it epitomises Formula One and as Toto says, there's a huge amount of history surrounding this event.

**ZB:** Yeah, I don't have a lot to add, other than that it is certainly the most prestigious race on the Formula One calendar. Other racing series, whether it's the 24 Hours of Le Mans sports cars, the Indianapolis 500 or in NASCAR the Daytona 500, each racing series has its most famous event that I think any driver... if you kind of said pick one race to win other than maybe their home race it would be Monte Carlos so it's always great to race here.

**FV:** It's probably one of the most exciting races throughout the world, not only in Formula One and the test for the winner is also a particular one. Even if you only score 25 points like everywhere else, the test is particular. Also because I think it's more driver related than everywhere else so for them it's an exciting challenge.

**TW:** Bernie's place in Paul Ricard is more expensive than the hotels here.

Ends