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Thursday Press Conference Transcript

PART ONE: DRIVERS – Daniil Kvyat (Toro Rosso), Kimi Räikkönen (Ferrari), Stoffel Vandoorne (McLaren)

PRESS CONFERENCE

Q: Kimi, if we can start with you. We're back at a street track this weekend. You took pole position in Monaco a couple of races ago -- how confident are you of a repeat here?

Kimi Räikkönen: Unfortunately it doesn't give you any guarantees. It's in the past, and a completely different circuit. Not really any similarities than Monaco, but nevertheless I think we have a good car everywhere. We'll see how it goes, we can only give our best. Hopefully we'll be at the front again; we'll see what happens.

Q: Pirelli are turning up this weekend with slightly harder tyre compounds than in Monaco. How do you think that's going to affect the battle between Ferrari and Mercedes?

KR: I don't know. It's been close, more or less every race this year. Obviously, like I said, the circuits are so much different and it's not a big surprise that the tyres are slightly different here. I don't know. I'm not really interested in guessing what will happen, but I guess it's going to be close like it's been at other races; I'm surprised if it's only one team is way ahead of another.

Q: You don't want to guess what's going to happen this weekend, but after the technical problems you had in Canada last time out, do you feel you're due a lucky break here?

KR: No, not really! It's not something you can count on it. I've had some not so good luck for quite a few times, but it's an unfortunate thing to happen, something completely new that we never found out and it's fixed now. Things usually go wrong when it's the worst time it could happen, but at least we managed to finish the race and at least score some points. Obviously it was far from ideal, but that's how it goes sometimes.

Q: Thank you Kimi, good luck this weekend. Stoffel, if we could come on to you now. This is your first time in Baku. Can you give us some insight into how you prepare for a track you've never races at? Is it more time on the simulator? Has Fernando given you any tips?

Stoffel Vandoorne: Definitely spend some time in the simulator, like I do before every grand prix. A lot of laps in there. At least our simulator is reliable, so I managed to do a fair

amount of laps there! And then also last year; I watched a lot of the races that happened here, GP2, Formula One as well. Some stuff on onboard videos. That's about everything I did.

Q: Is Fernando generous with his advice?

SV: So far I've not had a chance to chat to him, but I'm sure I will do over the weekend.

Q: You were quiet outspoken about the car's performance in Canada -- fuel saving, you referred to being 'a sitting duck' on the straights. Given the nature of this track layout, what are your expectations coming into this weekend?

SV: It is a street circuit as well, but like Kimi said it's very different to a circuit like Monaco -- here we reach very very high top speeds, I think similar to Canada. I don't think we have high hopes, but we'll try our best from our side. We have some penalties already to start the weekend, which isn't ideal, but it's the situation we're in, so we'll try our best, focus maybe a bit more on race runs, and hopefully we can play a bit during the race.

Q: Just to be clear on that, we knew about Fernando's penalty coming into this weekend. Have you had penalties as well?

SV: Yeah, I will have a penalty as well. We're probably competing to start at the back of the grid.

Q: Good luck this weekend. Daniil, thank you for waiting. Coming on to you, you had a very frustrating race in Canada. Having had time to reflect on what happened, what's your version of events?

Daniil KVYAT: It was a frustrating race; it brought us zero points. It all started on the formation lap when we couldn't get away, so we lost a lot of time. Then, trying to recover positions I was already side by side with the cars I had to overtake ... had to take the start from the grid, and we got a penalty for that -- two, actually -- and then, of course we couldn't with the pit stop, yeah... It was all a bit of a spiral: when it starts to go bad, it goes bad. We did 55 laps on one set and we were on course for a point, but still???

Q: Let's hope you have better luck this weekend. Talking specifically about Baku, you qualified sixth here last year. Are you confident of being a Q3 contender again in 2017?

DK: I think, once again, last year there are two different stories. Of course we had a good qualy last year, but quite different, you know, circumstances, cars, even though conditions will be similar. Car has been similarly competitive between most of the tracks, so hopefully we'll be in a similar place to usual. Also here, this is one of the longest straights of the championship; it's still not our favourite part of the track, but we'll try to minimise the laptime loss through there and try to be competitive in the other parts of the track and try to really be strong.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: Simon Lazenby (Sky Sports) Question to Stoffel. Stoffel, we've heard your management, senior management, teammate be very outspoken about the relationship with Honda just now. Perhaps it was the first time in Canada we heard you reiterating the woes. It's obviously making your first full season in the sport very difficult. Which direction would you like to see McLaren take with any future engine partner?

SV: To be honest, it's not up to me to take such a decision. Yes, it's been a difficult start to the season; it's definitely not an ideal situation for everyone. We'd like to be fighting much

higher up the grid, but as McLaren we're trying to put McLaren's interest at the top, and that's what's the most important for us now. We need to fight back, and I'm pretty sure the team is moving in the right direction. Hopefully at some point we will be competitive again, and hopefully that is sooner rather than later.

Q: (Ben Edwards - Channel 4) Question for Kimi, the situation in the championship between Mercedes and Ferrari is obviously pretty tough; it's very tight at the moment. Are you in a position where you have to play a support role to Sebastian now in the way that in the past things have happened when you've been at Ferrari? Obviously Felipe helped you a bit in 2007, you returned the favour in 2008. Are you in that position now of having to help Sebastian?

KR: I think we have very clear roles in the team -- what we're allowed, what we're not allowed, and what the team wants us to do. You know, it goes by those rules and, I don't know. I don't know if I have any interest of, to do, to tell what we talk inside the team in here. I think Maurizio has said something and nothing has changed and we know exactly when things will go either way. That's fine, that's how it's always been, at least in the teams where I've been. When I don't have a chance mathematically anymore to fight for the championship, for sure I will help him. I have no issues with that, I never had in the past. I think it's just a very easy decision for all of us, at least in our team, and obviously the first thing is to try to make sure that we can be on the top with Ferrari. That's the most important thing. And then obviously if Seb can win, then fine. If I don't have any chance then that's how it goes. The first thing is to work for Ferrari, to put them in the best possible position.

Q: (Livio Orrichio - GloboSport.com) Kimi, using the same subject. In your view, what is the reason for the difference in points? You have some difficulty with this car? You were unlucky in some races? Because it's big difference.

KR: It's a big difference. When you have bad races, you adapt, and obviously Seb has done very good races so far and has been strong everywhere. I was not starting very well the first races -- I was not too bad, but I was not where I want to be. Here and there little problems, we have one DNF, the last race was not ideal. That's how it goes, unfortunately. When your teammate is on the podium more or less every time, a lot of points quickly. That's racing.

Q: (Alex Popov – Match TV) For Daniil. You just posted a very special video of your training – close combat training – on social media. It's a message to somebody, or it's just a coincidence?

DK: No, it's not a message! Training for sure, I do it in Monaco, it's my hobby and I have a very good trainer there for that sport and really interests me a lot and very enjoyable. It's not easy to find time with the Formula One calendar for some other specific training. Usually it's either running or cycling and everything else gets quite boring – so tried something else for once and really liked it, so like to do it, so simple as that.

Q: Daniil, for people who haven't seen the video can you just elaborate what it is you're doing?

DK: Come to see my video! No, I just like to train, I got to know a very good boxing trainer in Monaco and because in my gym there is a ring, they can put you in to train. I just ask him to help me a bit to learn it. Very interesting. Very interesting sport, very exhausting for 12 rounds to be there. Very interesting.

Q: (Simon Lazenby – Sky Sports) Question to Dany – I suppose that could come in very handy if you have any more disagreements with Carlos? Speaking of which, what happened in Canada with a couple of penalties, the retirement for you and then

the disagreement over the towing issue in qualifying. Have you got to the bottom of that? How have you resolved it?

DK: Starting with that double penalty, I think we spoke behind closed doors after it with the correct people. With Charlie Whiting, with Jean Todt. It was all very straightforward, all very simple and everyone said his opinion and everyone understood perfectly and the end of the conversation was very positive and everything has been said on that matter. So everything is clear now. Regarding the other matter which you just mentioned, everything has been told already as well and everything will be tried to keep inside the house. That's what I hope for, at least, from my side.

Q: (Ben Edwards – Channel 4) Question for Stoffel. You mentioned you're going to have to carry some engine penalties this weekend. Are the engine bits that are going to be on the car this weekend going to give you any more performance or reliability from the bits that will be on there?

SV: Difficult to say, to be honest. I think it's probably more a question for Honda. I don't think there's many new introductions this weekend, so I don't think it will be too different.

Q: Just as a follow up to the towing in qualifying that Daniil was asked about, is it something, given the length of the straight here this weekend, that you're going to work with your team-mates during qualifying to get a tow to improve your lap-time? Kimi, perhaps you could answer that one?

KR: No, we haven't had any plans. I mean, we haven't really done it in any place so I don't see that's going to happen. Probably the biggest reason is that it's very difficult to manage with all the cars you get. The most important thing is to try to get the free lap for yourself. When you try to plan it like that it's actually quite difficult to make it happen every time and it can easily make more harm than good for both of you. So...

PART TWO: DRIVERS – Valtteri BOTTAS (Mercedes), Esteban OCON (Force India), Romain GROSJEAN (Haas)

Q: Valtteri, if we can start with you. There's no doubting the speed of this year's Mercedes – the four wins are testimony to that – but it has proved tricky to set up. Can you predict how competitive you're going to be this weekend – particularly as there's no ultrasoft tyre? Or is it something you're only going to find out when you take to the track tomorrow?

Valtteri BOTTAS: No, I can't predict. As we've seen it's been extremely close in some races, well, most of the races between us and Ferrari, so it is very difficult to predict, especially on a track like this. Some sections, a bit like Monza, some a bit like Monaco. I think it's going to be close again but, like you said, we sometimes had a bit of difficulty to get the car set up well and get the real confidence with the car and also to get all four tyres to work with each compound. So, impossible to predict.

Q: Do you think the harder tyre compounds this weekend will help you?

VB: I don't think it's going to help us in any way. The tyres are going to be the same for everyone, it is up to us to get them to work well and that is going to be through the set up.

Q: Your boss Toto Wolff said this week at the FIA Sport Conference in Geneva that you're in an uncomfortable position at the moment: still without a drive for 2018. Do you feel uncomfortable in this situation?

VB: I feel normal – because every single year in Formula One for me I've had the same situation. I've had no idea at this point what's going to be next year. So, for me it's a normal situation.

Q: Has the team told you when they'll let you know?

VB: Yeah. I know some kind of plan, when they're planning to have things sorted – but that is between us. There's no rush.

Q: Esteban, Force India were attracting a lot of headlines after the Canadian Grand Prix, specifically about team orders. Can you just talk us through the closing laps from your point of view.

Esteban OCON: Yeah. At that moment I had a different strategy than Sergio. I did push on the first stint a bit later, so I changed my tyres later than Sergio and I was a bit quicker. But the team took the decision to let us race, both, which is respectable, and great also to see that they trust us and let us race. So no, we had a good discussion after the race in the debrief. And I also called Sergio during the week when everyone was relaxed, and discussed our points. We're all good now. All set for a new weekend and there is no tension between us.

Q: So Sergio is still on your Christmas card list?

EO: Yes! No problem.

Q: Vijay Mallya said after the race in Montreal that there would be some new rules of engagement starting in Baku. So, having had those discussions in the debrief, can you tell us what those rules of engagement are?

EO: You know what the headline... what Force India always does is let both drivers race. Of course, if there is a big difference of speed between the cars then they will for sure try to do something to always benefit the team at the end. But they didn't really want to do that in Montreal, which I think is very respectable, as I said. Now we will see if we get other opportunities here to do a great result.

Q: So if there is a role-reversal this weekend and you're ahead and are asked to let Pérez through, would you do that?

EO: I always respect team orders if there are.

Q: Romain, it's been a really encouraging few races for you. You've scored in three consecutive races for the first time in your Haas career – so where can you and the team go from here?

Romain GROSJEAN: Afternoon. It's a good question. I think from the first year we've shown that we've gained consistency and that the team is growing up and capitalising on good calls, good strategy, getting the best of the situation even though maybe the performance in Canada, for example, was not really good – but in the race it was a very aggressive strategy and, with a bit of luck at the end, we managed to score points. Monaco, we were pretty fast where we struggled last year. So I think we've moved a long way. Every time I look back and see what we're doing I'm very proud of the team and kind of myself, because I was in there since day one and everything we're achieving today is actually work that we've all done together. It's a very special experience to build a team around you.

Q: Just looking at this weekend specifically, you said in the team's preview to this weekend that Baku is a mix of Monaco and Monza. Can you just elaborate what you

mean by that and give us some insight into the set up challenges that this track presents?

RG: Well, I think you've got the first sector, first part of the track where you've got a big, straight line, big braking and low speed corners which is what you've got in Monza: so, top speed and braking stability is important. Then from Turn Five onwards you've got much trickier sections: bumpy, up and down, tight, up and down again which is more like Monaco type of corners, so yeah, it's a pretty tough one to set up the car: which compromise do you do? Which parts to you... yeah, get better? We've seen last year that some teams reduced a lot of the downforce for quali performance but then in the race after a few laps the tyres were gone. It's just finding the right, and the sweet spots in between that quali pace and the race pace and where you're going to set up your car.

Q: And I guess you're hoping for no plastic bags this year...?

RG: That would be lovely! It didn't help much our race last year.

Of course, it got stuck in the radiator, didn't it?

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Jerome Pugmire – AP) Question for Esteban, you said you rang Sergio to discuss things. Can I just ask why you felt the need to do that if you'd already had a debrief beforehand?

EO: Well, first of all we had a plane to catch just after so we were in a bit of rush to debrief. It's always good to do it a little bit after, to talk when you know everyone's relaxed and the weekend's finished. To have a further talk was quite important I think. And we just discussed our points, discussed freely, just us both, together. I think it was important to do that. As I said, now everything is settled-down and we are ready to attack that race.

Q: (Simon Lazenby – Sky Sports) Romain, just following up on Tom's question there with regard to Haas and where you are at the moment. When you first came into the team you said you were happy, they're building a team around you but right now do you think you're ahead of the curve, 15 points, eighth in the championship? And at what point does your frustration - if you like - with wanting to become competitive boil over? For example, with the relationship with Ferrari, do you feel you would be first in line should a seat become available?

RG: Well, good question. I don't know. I don't know the answer. Life is full of surprises and if you ask Valtteri what he was doing on the 15th of December I'm sure he would say yeah, I'm going to go again with Williams and next thing you know, you're in a World Champion's car. So it's a phone call and the best we can do is to do the best job on track. I'm frustrated sometimes because I love winning and that's all that matters to me in Formula One and obviously you come from other categories where you've won everything and then you come to F1 and you don't get the chance to win a race because it's like you were starting the race ten seconds behind the others. It's done. But it's great as well to see that we can start from zero – a new team – and we can build and we can surprise a lot of people. Everyone was 'ah yeah, Haas coming into Formula One and they've got four years fulltime in the wind tunnel and they could be great' and then last year we struggled a bit and then people were like 'yeah, you know...' That's normal for Formula One but actually the whole process was to prepare for 2017 and we're already on 2018 and trying to get better every year, and that's finding resources, the effort and do what it takes to get there; it's pretty important. I think the year started well, the problem of this year is that there are two Mercedes, two Ferraris and two Red Bulls in the first six positions and they're already locked so the race kind of starts from P7 onwards and then Williams and Force India have been very fast recently so you've got one spot, maybe two spots in the top ten to score

points so it's pretty tricky. We lost a fair amount of points in Melbourne as well because of the issue in the power units when we were ahead of the midfield but generally I think we are working hard and I'm hoping that we can join a bit more the fight for bigger points.

Q: (Livio Oricchio – GloboEsporte.com) Valtteri, last year you reached 370/380kph here, the highest speed in a Formula One race. Do you think that with these new cars with more downforce it will be difficult to reach this speed?

VB: I don't think we're honestly going to see that kind of speed now that the cars are more draggy, so it would nearly be a miracle if we can hit those kind of speeds with these bigger tyres and bigger wings. That's my opinion.

Q: (Livio Oricchio – GloboEsporte.com) Lap times?

VB: I think lap times will be quicker, I think it will be quicker. We are quite a lot quicker in the corners and apart from the two kilometre straight it is a lot of corners and that's where you need the grip and downforce.

Q: (Jerome Pugmire – Associated Press) Valtteri, with regards to your future, you said there's no rush. When do you think you will know, when do you want to know by?

VB: I don't know when I will know. The timeline is quite flexible but like I said, there's no rush really. For sure discussions will be opened soon, because as a driver, at some point, it's always nice to know what you're going to do next year but no more to say than that really. It's still a bit early days for that and for sure I'm keen to have a long term relationship with Mercedes, that is my target, and that's why every day I work hard and try to make the most out of every single situation and the race weekend.

Q: Valtteri, are you in discussion with other teams, just in case?

VB: No.

Q: (Livio Oricchio – GloboEsporte.com) On the same subject, if you were a team principal and you had a new driver who is in a top team for the first time and makes pole position and win races in six rounds of the championship, until now, would you keep the driver?

VB: Of course! Yeah.

Q: Would you re-sign yourself?

VB: Of course.

Q: (Ben Edwards – Channel 4) Valtteri and Romain, can you just give a bit more comment from both of you about driving this circuit, the challenge of driving this track and the sort of combination of types of corner, not just from a set-up point of view but from the driving point of view? And turn 15? We saw quite a lot of action in turn 15 last year. Is that still a critical corner here?

VB: So yeah, it is definitely a challenge here. It is one of those places like Monaco or Singapore that you just can't afford any mistakes when you're going so close to the walls, sometimes even slightly touching them, so that's always a challenge and there's nice excitement as a driver and it's one of those places where if you put in a nice qualifying lap for example, it's really satisfying and you need to take some risks, can't lose focus at all. I think the high speed section, leading to the main straight, those corners, last year, with new tyres, low fuel, they were just about flat out but this year it will be easier so I think in qualifying for example, it's not going to be a big challenge to make them flat out but in the race, high fuel, worn tyres, following other cars, it's still a challenge over there.

RG: I think turn 15 is a tricky one from the nature of the corner, coming up the crest and then downhill and then it's kind of a blind corner and the braking zone is not straight. It's fairly tricky to find the right braking point and you're in the corner and then you've got the off-camber feeling when the car's on the edge and you go above that and you can lose the rear end. Turn 8, the tiny one, was surprisingly safe last year because I think it's slower and when you get the line it's a bit easier but with the wider cars this year you just need to be a bit careful because 20cms around there is a like a good 40 on normal corners.

Q: A lot of people were predicting incident and accident in last year's Grand Prix here but that didn't happen. Eighteen of the 22 cars finished. Are you guys going to take more risks this year?

VB: We were kind of lucky, you know, after seeing all the GP2 races, now F2, how many safety cars and virtual safety cars they had whereas we actually had none and there was not much action. I think it is a track that normally with this type of track things will happen so my guess is that we're going to see a bit more of a mess than maybe before but who knows. We're always taking risks and always calculating risks, how much you take and there's no other from last year to this year that you...

RG: It depends how the race goes. Rosberg last year was far ahead and then Lewis was at the back having various issues and then there were many fights in the field. We're human beings; after seeing all the GP2 races everyone I guess was like yeah, let's take it 99 percent and not 101 and that's why the race went very smoothly.

Q: (Simon Lazenby – Sky Sports) I know it was a long question, my last one Romain, but sorry to press you on it but can I just clear up with you what your relationship is with Ferrari right now and whether your people are talking to their people about your future?

RG: I've got an engine, a gearbox, suspensions so... I think it's early days and we're not even in July. Who knows what the F1 grid is going to be like next year. Valtteri is of course waiting on Mercedes, then there's the Kimi case, what is he going to do? Everyone thinks he's going to be out of Formula One since 2010 and here we are in 2017 and he's 38 and he's still here doing a decent job. So I don't know. If there is an opportunity, if there is a seat, I believe I'm in a good position but it doesn't necessarily mean anything.

Q: (Jerome Pugmire – Associated Press) Esteban, just before the Monaco Grand Prix you were speaking, you said you were confident you could get a podium fairly soon. Given the last race, how encouraged are you that this is just around the corner, the podium for you?

EO: Yeah, this is my target to be scoring a podium before the end of the season, that's the goal I've set myself and that's what I want to achieve and I'm pretty pleased with my progression since Melbourne. I've been feeling more and more comfortable with the car and just improving step by step and now I'm starting to feel really well and I think if we have a great car here why not, we can achieve it. I will definitely push for that so we will have to see where we are after practice but if it's not here, I will keep pushing 100 percent to get it later.

Ends