



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

Press Information

2014 Japanese Grand Prix Thursday Press Conference Transcript 02.10.2014

DRIVERS – Nico HULKENBERG (Force India), Jules BIANCHI (Marussia), Romain GROSJEAN (Lotus), Sebastian VETTEL (Red Bull Racing), Kamui KOBAYASHI (Caterham), Jenson BUTTON (McLaren)

PRESS CONFERENCE

Kamui, as we're at your home race, can we start with you? Last time we saw you here you were on the podium. Just tell us what that was like for you to be on the podium at your home grand prix?

Kamui KOBAYASHI: Well, first of all, thank you for this special seat! I think in 2012, my first podium ever, in Suzuka, it's a great memory. After 2012 I break for a year and then come back in 2014. It's a very difficult situation right now but still I'm back at Suzuka. Of course, I think we have a lot of rumour before coming here but at least we can announce that we are here and we will race this week. I'm very happy about that.

Indeed. In terms of the likelihood of being on the podium, it's perhaps a different story this year, but what do you say to those who have supported you. You've got a huge amount of fans here and of course it's a fantastic grand prix in terms of the home crowd?

KK: Yeah, I really appreciate all the support. I'm here because of only fan donation and these donations are very important for me and we show how the Japanese supporter is always supporting Formula One, also myself as well. Next year, Honda will be back and I think this will be helpful for all the Japanese fans and also maybe other Japanese companies as well. This could help one day. At least I'm here for this year and I think it will be really exciting and still it's only Thursday so many fans try to get [things] signed and it's still very nice to see for me.

Thanks very, I hope you have a great weekend. Jenson, you sometimes say that this is a home grand prix for you as well and I remember being told you're very much a Honda driver as well, which we'll talk about in a moment, but first tell us what you feel about this race. You've finished 14 out of 14 Japanese Grands Prix, plus one win, it's a remarkable record.

Jenson BUTTON: Yeah, I think the one win stands out for me as a result, rather than just finishing 14 races. Winning here in 2011 was a very special victory for me and also being chased down by Fernando and Sebastian at the end of the race was a proper climax. Really stands out in my Formula One career.

But a little bit of a shadow on the horizon at the moment, in that we don't know which way your career is going. What do you know? What can you tell us? Is it likely to be decided fairly soon?

JBu: I... I don't know! As you know I can't discuss anything to do with the contract.

It's the same with your team-mate?

JBu: Exactly.

So, what are your hopes for the grand prix this weekend?

JBu: I hope that we can race on Sunday, that's the first thing, I think. With a typhoon coming this way it's always very tricky. Hopefully it will miss us. It's going to be a mixed weekend in terms of weather; tomorrow there's a good chance of rain as well. I think it's really just thinking on your feet and staying on top of all the different weather forecasts. But this is a circuit I think we all love. It's fast, it's flowing, there's a lot of support here from the fans, not just for Japanese drivers but for every driver in Formula One as a whole, so it's always great coming here and I'm looking forward to getting out there tomorrow.

Nico, if I can come to you next. Since the summer break you've been beaten by your team-mate at every single race. What's changed? What's happened there?

Nico HULKENBERG: I think obviously race weekends didn't go as flawlessly as before and for one or other reasons we didn't always achieve our maximum on my side of the garage but nothing too concerning I think. Obviously Hungary was a mistake, technical issues in Monza, unlucky in Singapore, so there is always a story behind it. But overall, if we put it together we are still a candidate for points and still looking competitive.

And your team principal is full of praise for both drivers, so what does the future hold?

NH: We'll see. I think there's not much to report at the moment but everything is looking quite positive.

OK, Jules, just rate your season so far, how do you think it's gone?

Jules BIANCHI: After the break it was a bit more difficult for us. In Spa I had an issues and in Monza we were not so competitive and then Singapore was a difficult race again. I think overall it was a good season and I'm quite happy. Now I hope we can do some good results again.

You've sort of served your apprenticeship, if you understand that expression, at Marussia. Do you think you have achieved all you need to achieve there to continue in Formula One and to move up?

JB: Well, you can always do better for sure but it was a good season for me. I'm still trying to do my best in the next races we're going to have and we will see. But for sure I have no regrets.

Q: Romain, also rate your season so far if you would.

Romain GROSJEAN: Kind of missed the podium. It's a tough season for all of us. We started a little bit on the back foot and it takes time to recover but things are going slightly better since Singapore. I think we have seen that the car was a little bit more competitive and hopefully it will be the case until the end of the season. There are a few updates coming. Even though they are small pieces it makes a good difference in how you prepare for the future. I think the key now for Lotus is to get on top of issues to prepare as good as we can for next year.

Q: The frustrations clearly spilled over a little bit in Singapore, as we heard on the radio messages. How difficult a season has it been for you?

RG: Well, the season is difficult. Of course part of the frustration... part of that radio message was frustration from the beginning of the year. When you're racing in Singapore it's certainly one of the toughest tracks to race, qualifying lap, you give 120 per cent of everything you can, you take every single risk to get close to the walls without kissing them too much and the straight line your engine cuts – so I wasn't very happy with that. I think it was clear. But we've found the issue with Renault, they solve it for the race and things were going better. I think it was just the fact that it was hot, humid and trying to get 100 per cent of everything and suddenly you get issues on the straight line where it's easy not lose time.

Q: Sebastian, you've obviously had a remarkable record here, you've been on the podium the last five years plus the wins as well. And you've just had your best result of the year in Singapore. Has a corner been turned? Is it the new chassis? What's made the difference?

Sebastian VETTEL: I think it's all the small bits coming together. Obviously we hardly ran the first half of the season, we had lots of issues in winter to overcome and then a lot of issues on my side in the first half – which is never great to get the right feeling and get things lined up the way things should be lined up. I think now we had a little bit more consistent weekends, a bit more time to look at all the stuff and I think it's coming our way – but there's still huge potential which I feel we are getting closer but there's a lot of work ahead of us to make sure we extract it in the next couple of races as well.

Q: You know the podium here very well – is there the possibility to be back on it?

SV: I think there always is. Yeah, there's some discussions on the weather. Kamui just gave me a brief update on the Typhoon. I think chances are a bit 50:50 but there's always a chance to do well, race well. This circuit suits me, suits our car so I think we should be a little bit closer this weekend again. Whether we are as strong as Singapore is difficult to say. It's a different nature of track – but a track I definitely enjoy and an atmosphere that I really enjoy, so I'd love to be on the podium, yes.

Q: But there is a little bit of a shadow hanging over a lot of drivers at the moment with the possibility of penalties. How do you approach that?

SV: Well, I'm one of them! Yeah. The rules are as they are but surely at some stage we have to take some penalties, which penalties those will be is not entirely clear yet. We're waiting for some parts, we're hoping that we get as far as we can but it's inevitable to go for an extra engine on my side – which is already ten positions after qualifying. Potentially there is more waiting for us – which is only a consequence of the poor season we had, first half of the season, in terms of reliability. But that's something we knew back then. Now we have to figure out what is the smartest plan, let's say, and the smartest track to come up with a penalty.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Anne Giuntini – l'Equipe) Question to Jules. Considering the many rumours developing at the moment, if it would occur that a seat would become available – vacant – at Ferrari, would you feel ready to go there? And why?

JB: Well, yes of course I feel ready. I have been working for that since I'm in the Academy, end of 2009. So, now I did nearly two seasons in Formula One. I think I have good experience and I feel ready for that, for sure. It looks like the logical step for me if something happens like this. Obviously at the moment both drivers have a contract so it's not the question but if there is the opportunity I feel it would be good for me and I feel good.

Q: (Paolo Ianieri – La Gazzetta dello Sport) Jenson, is it for you McLaren or nothing more for the future?

JBu: In Formula One I'm hoping you mean. It's the best option.

Q: (John Westerby – The Times) Question for Sebastian. We have a 17 year-old driving here this week. I wonder if you could compare when you came into F1, perhaps with the cars in particular. Does this mean cars are easier to drive now then when you came into the sport?

SV: I think one of the biggest differences is that I was able to drive myself from the hotel to the track – which I think he isn't. He doesn't have a driver's licence. I think Formula One has changed a lot, especially this year so it's not a secret cars got slower. Different to drive to previous years, probably a little bit more technical but less demanding in terms of the corner speeds we are taking. Especially on a track like this. But, y'know, I'm as excited as you to see him running. Obviously he was only done half a year, three-quarters of a year in Formula3. I think he has a remarkable record in go-karting. So, yeah, I think he has the potential. On the other hand, you need to give him time, as much as he needs. When I was 19, joining Formula One, the first time. Of course, you always feel ready and you don't say no if somebody gives you the opportunity to race or drive a Formula One car – but you have to take your time to get used to all the things. Not just the car but also working with the team, which is completely different in Formula One to all the other categories.

Q: (Daniel Johnson – The Telegraph) On that topic, Seb, you have a number of the records for youngest race winner, pole position, World Champion, I think. From what you've seen of Max so far and he's part of the Red Bull family as it were, do you think he's set to take those records from you?

SV: Well, I think records are there to be broken. Obviously he starts quite a bit younger than all the rest of us but it's hard to say, but one day I think there will be somebody to break these numbers and one day there will be somebody again to break the numbers again, so I think that's normal.

Q: (Anne Giuntini – L'Equipe) Romain, it's the usual question yet I would like to know how can you keep motivated during such a hard season, to keep going?

RG: Well, because you wake up in the morning and you're still a Formula One driver. It took me quite a long time to get to Formula One. I lost it once, at the end of 2009 and when I came back in 2012, I realised... you know, when you lose something, you realise how much you like it. So even though it's a tough season, I still have mechanics that give 100 percent of themselves and I still love what I'm doing. Of course, it's much more fun to fight at the front and for victories but it's still a very good job.

Q: (Paolo Ianieri – La Gazzetta dello Sport) Sebastian, even if you say that your future next year is with Red Bull, your name still comes up a lot and it comes to Ferrari and Fernando, who might possibly leave. Anything to say to that?

SV: Well, I think there has always been rumours over the last couple of years, especially around this time of the season. I think probably more for Jenson; he already has 17 teammates for next year. I have been one of them, a couple of weeks ago, maybe next week I will be again. It's not really in my head. As I said, coming from back... coming from the back at Singapore we made some progress and I hope that we can carry that momentum into this race and that's really where the focus lies.

Q: (Ben Edwards – BBC TV Sport) Just a quick question for everybody following on the Max Verstappen question: what was the most powerful car/engine that you drove when you were 17 years old?

JBu: I'm trying to think. It was a long time ago now. At 17, I will still be racing in karts, I was racing in – as it was then – Formula Super A. I'd driven three Formula Ford cars before that, when I was 14 so 30 horsepower, I guess.

KK: I think I did Formula Renault but I think that's it, and I don't remember how much horsepower.

SV: I think I did a test, when I was 17, in ChampCar in America so around 750 horsepower.

NH: Same as Jenson, karts.

JBu: Yeah, I was racing go-karts. I think I did a test in Formula Renault, so 180 horsepower.

RG: Technically, in horsepower, I think it was my mother's Subaru. On a race track, for the record.

Q: (Daniel Johnson – The Telegraph) Kamui, obviously your home race gives you lots of reasons to be cheery and look forward to the weekend but back in Oxfordshire, the team is going through its own troubles at the factory. I wonder if you could summarise what the mood is like in the team, has that affected it at all or is it as usual?

KK: Well, first of all, I won't get the same information to the boss because I think that our boss is flying over here, so we are waiting what happens really. I think it's very difficult to say. At the moment, I think we can still communicate with the UK so I think it looks as if the company is OK but I don't know the rest really. Unfortunately.

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