



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

2011 ABU DHABI GRAND PRIX

FRIDAY PRESS CONFERENCE TRANSCRIPT

11.11.2011

TEAM REPRESENTATIVES - John BOOTH (Virgin), Ross BRAUN (Mercedes), Stefano DOMENICALI (Ferrari), Saul Ruiz de Marcos (HRT), Frank WILLIAMS (Williams), Martin WHITMARSH (McLaren)

PRESS CONFERENCE

Q: A first question for all of you. To go back to your Geneva meeting and the talk about third cars. There seemed to be a certain amount of difference between teams about third cars. What was your view about third cars, Ross?

Ross BRAUN: I don't think third cars are out of the question, but I think what we mustn't do is create a situation that harms the financial and sporting environment for the smaller constructors because if we do something that makes their situation far more difficult than what have we achieved? We have achieved a smaller group of manufacturers and I don't think that's good. It can be a solution if we are getting short of cars, but I would far rather see a healthy group of constructors and as many as we can, that's my personal view.

Q: Stefano?

Stefano DOMENICALI: First of all, we didn't discuss it in Geneva, as it wasn't on the agenda. Just to clarify that point. As Ross mentioned, it is a point of discussion for the future of Formula One but, as always, I think it is very important to understand the pros and cons of all these things and it is fundamental to discuss with all the stakeholders, the constructors and the teams that are involved in Formula One. But, at the moment, I cannot say more than that. This is, for sure, something that we need to put on the table and if it a solution for a better Formula One we will go for it. Otherwise we will see.

Q: The (Ferrari) president seemed to be in favour of it?

SD: Yeah, absolutely. He has stated that and, for sure, this is an element for discussion.

Q: Martin?

Martin WHITMARSH: I think there are some interesting ideas about a third car. We would all be excited to have (Valentino) Rossi or Sebastien Loeb or someone in a Formula One car. It would be great but, as Ross said, I think we have got to act responsibly. I think the DNA, the structure of Formula One, requires the variety of teams and we have got some new teams and we have got some smaller teams and we recognise that it is very, very challenging to get the budget to compete in Formula One. If, today, Ferrari, Red Bull, McLaren, Mercedes all fielded third cars then I think, in my view, it would be damaging for

the sport. There are pros and cons and I think it is right to have the debate and people have different views but at the moment I think what we should be concentrating on is ensuring that we have got a viable and sustainable model for all of the teams in Formula One.

Q: John?

John BOOTH: I think first of all we have a very healthy grid of cars at the moment. I don't really see any need to change the formula. From our point of view it is important that every entrant is a constructor.

Q: Saul, I don't know if you have ever thought about third cars?

Saul Ruiz de Marcos: Yes, us being a small team it has pros and cons. In abstract, we cannot say if we are in favour or deny it. I think there will be a discussion and let's see an actual proposal to see if we are against or in favour.

Q: Frank?

Frank WILLIAMS: Well today we see a number of very fine car manufacturers in Formula One, but the men who run them run them for a profit and if sales are down costs are slashed. All I can say is that as long as we have money in the bank Williams will always be racing in F1. I hope for many, many years to come. I am not so certain than some of my brethren here can control their own destinies as much as they would like. There may be someone above them who has less of an emotion regarding Formula One as some people here.

Q: Ross, it was interesting to hear from Nico (Rosberg), who you have re-signed for an indefinite amount of time. He says how he is pleased with your future plans. Is Michael (Schumacher) equally pleased with your future plans as well?

RB: Yes, I think so. Any team that is not quite where they want to be, at least a serious team, looks at how they can improve their competitiveness and we have been fortunate in putting together some additional, very strong engineers and I think everyone is excited about that. We have got to make sure they all work well together. That's my role, primarily, to make sure that we can keep everyone going in the right direction. I think knowing the people involved I am very excited about the future. But every team when it is not performing where it wants to be has to look at how it can strengthen its organisation and if you look at the three of Mercedes, McLaren and Ferrari we have all done things to our team over the last 12 months to try and improve the organisation, improve the strength. It is a constant process and when you get there, when you get to where you want to be, then it is more fine tuning perhaps. We are very excited about the next few years. Michael is very excited, everybody is very excited, but we have got to start delivering.

Q: Stefano, one of the great mysteries of Formula One at the moment is Felipe Massa's front wing.

SD: Yes, actually it is very good here in the dark. You can see good sparks. It is adding a lot to the show.

MW: I don't think it's a mystery at all.

Q: Alright, maybe it isn't a mystery. In India you said you were going to investigate and yet it still seems to be doing the same thing here?

SD: Yes, it is true. I mean, it's pretty obvious. The reality is that we found something that was not correct in terms of the structure of that wing but apparently it seems that there is still a problem. It seems we haven't fixed the issue yet on that.

Q: Why is it Felipe's wing only?

SD: I don't know. The thing is the wing was supposed to go to Felipe's car. I have got engineers much more expert than me here that know that an effect on a wing can depend on a lot of issues, a lot of things, sorry. It depends on the set-up of the car, depending on tyre pressure and so on. Maybe it is a combination of all these elements for our engineers to understand and react as it is not what we would like to see.

Q: Is it uncomfortable to drive. Does Felipe feel that?

SD: No.

Q: Martin, we saw Sam Michael in the garage today. What is his role at the moment?

MW: Well Sam has just been with us for a few days so he is an observer at the moment. He has moved across from Williams as I think everyone knows. He will be the Sporting Director of the team next year. It is a good opportunity. I think we came to a good arrangement with Williams to allow Sam to come and have a look so that during the winter he can take a more informed view about how we make ourselves a better race team.

Q: So he is just watching at the moment?

MW: He is watching. I am sure, and would be disappointed, if he is not giving us some opinion and view. It would be very unnatural if he wasn't. But that's what he is here for. We are running the team with the structure that we have run all year. Clearly, we've brought Sam into the business because we think he can make us stronger, improve our competitiveness, and that's his challenge next year.

Q: John, a lot of teams next week are running young drivers here and you have announced your three young drivers. There seems to be a lot of different agendas for running young drivers, whether it is for a revenue stream or testing new bits or whatever. Some of the drivers aren't that young either, but tell us about your three and why they are there.

JB: Well, first of all it is my favourite time of the year, starting working with young drivers for the future. I think we have got three very exciting young drivers, all proving to be competitive in the arenas in which they have been competing this year and it will be great to give them a chance of tasting Formula One. Maybe they can put themselves in the picture.

Q: Are you looking for a second driver?

JB: As we said before we are evaluating all our options and we will make a decision after Brazil. Jerome (D'Ambrosio) has done a great job all year, but, like I said, we have got three very exciting young guys chomping at the bit, so we will wait with anticipation.

Q: Saul, tell us what your plans are for HRT. There are a lot of question marks over the team?

SdM: Well for next year, since we entered into the team in July, we have been working basically on three fronts. One was improving this car and the car for next year and we have signed an agreement with Williams, which is an extension, in time and in contents, to what we already have. Next year's car will have KERS for the first time in the small history of HRT. We are also working on our headquarters. We are moving to Spain, which we know that from an economic, logistical thing is not the most efficient thing to do but I think it is in our ID. We have a Spanish licence and it is a way to get closer to our sponsors, which will be a Spanish and Latin focus. The other thing is our drivers which, also I think, after Brazil we will announce who will be our drivers for next season.

Q: Frank, again a bit like Mercedes there have been a lot of staff changes within the Williams team. What are your thoughts on the changes for next year – personnel, engines, even drivers.

FW: Well the engine choice we felt will be the right one. We have long-term memories with Renault and they have always served Formula One and ourselves extremely well. Various other personnel changes within the company. We will see how they work. I think it would be inappropriate for me to describe what is expected of any one individual.

Q: And drivers as well?

FW: Not clear exactly who will be in both cars. I am sure Pastor (Maldonado) will be in one car. Rubens (Barrichello) maybe, we haven't really made up our minds what we want to do before we talk to Rubens.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Heikki Kulta –Turun Sanomat) Frank, 10 years ago you were interested in getting Kimi (Raikkonen) to your team. Now, 10 years later are you still interested to get him now you can do so?

FW: I knew this would come up. But my view, as you might well expect, goes as follows: a lot of supposition and I cannot make any comment about supposition, sorry to be so unhelpful.

Q:Are you following his rally career?

FW: I am not a rally fan.

Q: (Joe Saward – Grand Prix Special) Just to follow up on that question. Martin and Stefano, Kimi drove for both of you, what advice would you give to Frank on this subject?

MW: Try and sign him. Kimi, we all know he is quick. I think people underestimate how intelligent he can be. I hope that he is hungry. I am sure he hasn't lost the capability to thrill us in Formula One so I think it would be fantastic for Formula One. I wouldn't ordinarily presume to advise Sir Frank who he should sign but I think it would be exciting if he did.

SD: Of course, I would not give any advice to Frank. He has long experience. A lot longer than me. For sure, I know Kimi very well. He is very talented, very strong, and if he wants to come back he has something that wants to show to everyone about him, about the fact that he was the last driver to win the World Championship with us and he will want to show he is still one of the strongest.

Q: (Joe Saward – Grand Prix Special) Can I follow up with a question for John and Saul. You are both moving your teams shortly. One is going into motorsport valley and one is going away from it. Who thinks they have got it right?

JB: Both are going south so it is something in common. Valencia is a wonderful town, but we will settle for Banbury.

Q: Can you go into some details as to why you are going to Banbury?

JB: We just feel it is the right thing for us to be under one roof now. We made a pretty bold move, in June I think it was, when we decided to take our destiny into our own hands and I think it is the right thing to move under one roof instead of the three we were in before.

Q: And Saul?

SdM: I think the decision is something positive. Normally, because of being one of the slowest cars and also because of that we have to go and look for something a bit different to the rest of the teams. They are in the same area, very similar background. In some time we will see if I was wrong, but I think it is the right strategy to do an approach which is slightly different to what everybody's doing. If I was one of the (*inaudible*) I wouldn't do it, but I have to try and do something different.

Q: (Simon Cass - Daily Mail) Stefano, what is more difficult to cope with; the pain of losing the World Championship in the manner that you did here last year or a season where basically you haven't delivered what was expected of you?

SD: Well, I think that with regard to your first question, for sure from the sporting point of view when you come back to a place where you were really fighting for the championship and you have lost it and you have seen in your mind so many times that race that you can remember every little metre it is natural that the first time you come here you think back. But the nature of the sport to not look back, it is look ahead so it is already back and the fact that we didn't deliver really a good season this year is the most relevant point at this stage. All the focus is, as Ross mentioned before is to try to do everything that we can in order to make sure that we do the right move and the right step for the next season. That's why we have anticipated a lot of things that we could have waited, but that's the only target we have so that's the (inaudible word) we are living now.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – The Citizen) Two part question for Saul. The first question is about the time-line of moving to Spain. Last year you had a car that was designed and partially built in Italy, finished at the circuit, then it moved to Germany. This year it's the same car, which has been upgraded, also done in Germany. Now you talk about moving to Spain. What sort of time-line are you talking. Part two is why is Thesan in Formula One in the first place? Is it here for the long haul? Are you looking to sell the team? How did you get into it?

SdM: With regard the first question I think the difference compared to last year is, I don't want to enter into what happened as we were not here but I think that it was not part of a plan. Things were happening. Here it was a plan and our policy is to be very discreet in the things that we are doing so we are only announcing things that we have already been working on for some time and we reach a point where it is obvious that somebody will notice like we have a headquarters in Valencia so we have to tell. One thing is we are moving the race and test team and most of the back office to be under the same roof to this very nice building that we will have in Valencia. The different thing is that the technical office, we will still keep it in Munich where the car is being designed and developed since the end of August. Also, different to last year we hope not only be at the first race but also the first test with the new car. That's the answer to the first question. Regarding the second one we are financial investors. It is obvious. If you enter into our website you can see. But I think Formula One is a totally different business for us as it brings business itself so here we have no urgency at all. The investment is not in one of the funds that have a definite exit so we could be here for ever or sell it. I wouldn't say before three years as we have to do this project. Of if we like it we can keep it forever.

Q: (Manuel Franco - AS) Saul, will there be a Spanish driver in your team next year, for sure?

SRdeM: I hope so. I don't know yet what we can guarantee. Our rookie test driver for next week is Dani Clos who is a young talented driver, who was second in qualifying for GP2 today. He will probably win GP2 next year so if it's not next year – in the next two seasons – eventually the team will have one Spanish or Latin American driver.

Q: (Kate Walker – Woman Racer) I am curious about the details of the (F1) Commission meeting last week in Geneva, particularly with regard to the problem with Q3 and extra tyres. Could you tell us what was discussed?

MW: I think firstly, I should qualify something by saying that within Formula One we have a variety of different meetings and I think inevitably there is a lot of interest in what happens behind closed doors, a strange amount of interest in my view. I think we have to respect that some of these meetings are and should be private. But I think to try and answer and be helpful to the questioner, there has been a debate, not just in the Formula One Commission but there has been a debate in Formula One about whether there should be extra tyres for Q3. And this is based upon – as I think we all know – the fact that some teams have

tactically chosen not to run in that session. I think, generally, when that's been discussed, it's been the view of the teams that actually qualifying is quite an interesting format now. Some of us will remember that we went through a stumble of changes for qualifying over a number of years and I think often they weren't thought through and we made it worse. So I think we should exercise quite a lot of caution before we change what is, frankly - certainly for those of us sat on the pit wall – pretty gripping. Even if you think you're a top team, the opportunity to go through Q1, potentially, on the harder, slower tyre makes it quite a tantalising session, whoever you are and I think that's quite a good format, it seems to work quite well and makes it a little bit more interesting. I think that by the time some of the middle teams have got through to Q3 they've typically done more running than maybe some of the faster teams, so on balance, I think the consensus view appears to be that we shouldn't change the format. We don't think there's a fundamental problem that some people choose to run tactically in Q3. So there has been a discussion, as I would summarise it, but if any of my colleagues want to elaborate. I hope that helps.

RB: I think Q3 is very exciting. Quite honestly, when you get into Q3 the fans' focus is primarily on the guys at the front and I think the ability for other teams to take a more tactical approach to try and compensate their performance is an added dimension. As Martin said, we should be careful not to fiddle with it because it's actually quite a good show. I think that last run in Q3 for pole position or whatever it is is a great show. I think the fact that some teams choose not to run in Q3 is not really very significant.

Q: (Alan Baldwin – Reuters) Question for Frank and the three in the back row: you've all got Middle Eastern backers of some sort. With what's going on in the Eurozone at the moment and the risk of Europe falling into pretty serious recession and austerity measures, I was wondering what your take was on the impact on Formula One finances and sponsors and whether it's going to force you more and more to look beyond the Eurozone in future?

FW: Working backwards I've no comment to make as I'm not knowledgeable enough about where the money will come from in the long term future. I believe it will still come from Europe because the sport is based in Europe, most people who watch it are from Europe but I think the people behind me and the people who have gone before and come after me, they're very adept at sniffing out the dosh. There will always be money to keep their teams in business. The determination within those teams is immeasurable.

RB: I think the teams will find solutions. As Frank said, they're incredibly resilient. I daren't bring it up but we're working hard on the Resource Restriction; if we need to, that can be tightened even further, if we see that it's justified. So I think the teams are incredibly resilient and we will cut our cloth to suit the climate and that's what will happen.

SD: I think that it is not only a matter of Formula One but the world is moving, changing and that Formula One as another business company has to – let's say - adapt or try to anticipate the move in order not to be the last to arrive where potentially there is a new market of new potential interest. So in that respect, I think that, as you know we were one of the first companies that had the opportunity to receive investment from this area and now we are looking also in the other parts of the world because we as Ferrari, as you know, we have a business that is not only Formula One but above all is a car manufacturer that is selling cars in different markets and this is for sure one of the most important areas at the moment that has a future and it is important to keep the attention of this new world in Formula One. I think, on that, that Formula One, generally speaking, has a great potential and has to react in anticipation to all the other sport businesses to make sure that we capitalise the brand that we have at the moment.

MW: Firstly, it is incredibly tough out there for any team to go out there and get the funding to come racing, which we all love to do. I think one thing I would observe though, is that we had a crisis – or the world had a crisis – but Formula One had a crisis at the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009. We had Honda, Toyota, BMW exiting right at a critical moment for the world economy. In some ways, those of us that were involved at that time, I think it brought the best out in Formula One because for a while... we react well in a crisis and I think we did react well. Perhaps we are all a little bit too comfortable now - some of the teams - and another bit of a crisis might focus some minds on what we need to do together.

Q: (Stephane Lemeret – La Dernière Heure) John, what does Jerome d’Ambrosio have to do to stay with you next year?

JB: Well, Jerome has been doing it all season, he’s done a fantastic job all year in his rookie season and I’m sure he will continue to do it in the last two races. If he keeps performing like that, he will put himself in the frame for a drive.

Q: (Joris Fioriti – Agence France Presse) I would like to talk about the RRA; Stefano said a couple of weeks ago that there was a big lack of trust within FOTA and that this question was endangering its very existence. I would like to know what you two think about it, Ross, and anyone else. Is there a solution to this question, to solve it, and when do you think that will be?

MW: Firstly, I think you have to put this in context. The technical regulations, sporting regulations of the sport are well developed, it’s a pretty thick tome. I guess it’s the nature, the competitive nature, the creative nature, the paranoid nature of Formula One – there will always be questions about whether a car is legal, is the wing too flexible – sorry Stefano – or other parts of it, but that’s the nature of our sport and I think occasionally we have some moments of tension and I think that now we’ve tried to act responsibly and controlled the amount of resource, and inevitably we’re going to push and probe and see what we can do. I think the nature of Formula One is that we have some very creative people who will try to find the loopholes and that’s in the nature of the competition, so whether that’s trying to find loopholes in the technical regulations, the sporting regulations, financial restrictions, resource restriction etc. Occasionally people will push that boundary and some tensions will occur. I think we can focus on those tensions, I think we can also focus on a lot of things that have been achieved in the last few years. There is some challenge. At the moment the teams need to want to co-operate for this to work and I think at the moment there are some tensions but I suspect we’ll find a way through, we’ll find ways in which we can have greater levels of trust, but this is a continuum, this will continue next year, the year after, just as if that’s on the regulations, any aspect of this sport. We’re all competitive, we want to beat each other, we’re going to try and find out if we can maximise our performance within the constraints that are applied.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – The Citizen) Frank, you were the first team owner to have Middle Eastern backing back in the late seventies, early eighties. Did you ever imagine that the Middle East would embrace motor sport and Formula One in particular to the degree that it has now, two races on a Formula One calendar?

FW: (Holding) Races is quite different to being a sponsor of a team but I am surprised that there are presently two taking place. I think they could last a long time, because the people who live in this area want to be a part of the entire world and they certainly are mostly – in the main – wealthy, they like travelling a great deal, they want the best of everything and I just think they always will be wanting to have, as they have here, to try and demonstrate that they can make the best Grand Prix in the world happen and there will be enthusiasm to do that for many years to come.

Q: (Heikki Kulta – Turun Sanomat) Frank, what kind of plans do you have for the future of Valtteri Botas?

FW: Depends how quick he is. I don’t know enough about him. He looks very good, he does look very good, but beyond saying that, I don’t know him. We have to keep testing him, I guess.

Q: (Gaetan Vigneron – RTBF) John, to eventually start 2012 with a rookie would mean that once again you would start from zero, so in which way do you see that it could improve the team, knowing that normally stability is a good platform to improve?

JB: First of all, the stability we have in Timo, a guy with massive experience and committed to the team’s long term future, so we have stability there already. I know the question you’re referring to but as I said before, we’ll assess where we are with the drivers after the young driver test and then we will look to make a decision after Brazil.

Q: (Naoise Holohan – Manipe F1) We've got a young driver test coming up next week with some teams treating it as a quick payday and then we have McLaren running a driver who it's difficult to call a young driver as such. Do you think the concept of the young driver test should be revisited?

MW: I think Gary still thinks he's young and as far as I know, all of us still think he's young. I think he's still young enough to be in Formula One. Incidentally, he's a very talented driver. He's someone who deserved and still does deserve an opportunity in Formula One so I think we are very proud to be able to showcase him. He has been driving for Mercedes and McLaren for a number of years. I'm sure if one of the teams below or elsewhere want to sign him, I suspect we would be releasing him.

JB: I think the format for the qualification for a novice driver or a rookie driver works pretty well. I don't see any reason to revisit it.

Q: (Joe Saward – Grand Prix Extra) Gentlemen, from a business point of view, the fastest way to improve your revenues is to get hold of the revenues of the sport. Can each of you tell us if it's possible that you can get together and buy the commercial rights and divide up the money between you, and borrow the money from a bank, because that's what CVC did, and if not, why not? Martin?

MW: Well, it depends on who you talk to whether Formula One's for sale or not at the moment. I think anything's possible, but I think making public pronouncements really doesn't generally help create the environment to do the right thing. What we need is co-operation between the teams, the FIA and whoever owns the sport. We can't rule out the teams being equity participants at some stage in the future. I think it would be healthy, I think it would be good but I think we've got to make sure that there are the right economic conditions to provide that.

SD: On my side, you know that we have certain obligations not to speak about sensitive subjects, any kind of declaration we may make can be used and – let me put it this way – manipulated for the wrong reasons, so I would say that I cannot comment on that.

RB: I think that what's involved is a kind of natural order of things, in terms of the teams being focused on their racing, and the commercial rights holder being focused on the races and the promotion of those races, and the governing body being responsible for making sure that the sport is run properly and fairly. Of course, the issue is the division of the income for Formula One. If we can find a good solution, a compromise in the future for that division, then I think that role and function of the various parties works very well. I think the problem will come if that division isn't fair, then things may change, but fundamentally we're happy with the way things are but like all teams we want to see how we can improve the income for the teams.

FW: I would like to compliment Ross on being extremely perceptive and accurate on what he said. He is absolutely right.

JB: I think the only comment I would make is that it may be worthwhile looking at how other major sports in other countries are run to see if we can learn any lessons from those. It might be interesting to see those results.

Ends