

Dual games, current games

By Guillaume

As we are getting closer to the first F1 Grand Prix of the 2010 season, and to that very intense moment increasing your heartbeat rate while cars set up on the grid; I will provide you a quite subjective analysis with the comparison of each driver within his own team. Because I think the hierarchy remains quite hard to determine right now and somewhat wronged by testing and their traditional chase for sponsors making the results look artificial, let's have a look on duos provided by each team. I have to say that these duos are more than interesting for the most part.

Let's start with McLaren: Button VS Hamilton. I won't hide it: I thought for a long time that preventing teams from pitting would suit Button best. But I didn't think at that time that we'd keep that stupid one-stop rule (at least) to change the tyres. Bridgestone thinks this solution is better, for they can't provide teams sets of tyres made for entire races. We all do remember the 2005 failure. So let's come back to Woking. Button's softer style will be less significant thanks to this (these) pit-stop(s). Moreover Hamilton seems to have acquired the ability to adapt his driving to a somewhat restriction, as all the greatest drivers in F1 always did. That means I think Hamilton will be a step ahead from Button, but the latter will be way closer than some may think. Hamilton's main rival will be both his teammate and himself. Woking will do the rest.

In Mercedes, they've brought us a Schuey-Rosberg pair. It's hard to tell you what's going to happen. Rosberg disappointed me last year. He drove a Williams that had this "miraculous" diffuser, though. And yet he performed no podium, even at the beginning of the season. However, it might not be the same this year. The old guy will be motivated by the enthusiasm of the young one, being himself boosted by that challenge. Is this a kind of sporting, Contador/Armstrong-like animosity? What is it going to be if we mix this with the most corporate mood you can imagine as well as this Germanic rigor? As for McLaren, the leadership could be given to one or the other depending on a hierarchical decision. But I find it difficult to see Schumacher coming back on top straight away. I think Rosberg has to take this leadership at that moment before he turns into a new Barrichello.

Red Bull's Austrians propose us the same pair as it was last year: Vettel VS Webber. I know that many of you think Vettel will carry on improving and that he's going to eat Webber alive. I very much doubt about it. Let's remember what Webber did last year when he did more than being at the same level as his teammate was – I mean before he did five races without scoring any points. The Aussie will have learned even more from last year and he's coming back in really good shape at the peak of his career. Plus, if he can seize the occasion, he won't hesitate to fight with wild virility, which I'd love to see. He knows that being older than most of the rest of the field, he won't have many occasions any more, if any. Webber's going to be a contender, no doubt, although I won't deny Vettel's undeniable gift. However I believe he is slightly overrated this year. Anyway, both of them will be threatening.

After A1 Germany and A1 Great Britain teams, err, I mean, Teams Mercedes and McLaren, here is the Latin Ferrari duo: Massa VS Alonso. True, Massa has improved. True, he may come back stronger than before. But let's be serious: Alonso is one of the most complete drivers in F1 right now, while Massa is still more or less lacking performance in several aspects of his job. And it's not by putting them on slower cars from new teams that his love rate will increase. And the fact that Alonso has been criticized – the first one who did was Räikkönen – the Spaniard will be motivated to show that the

price of his transfer and especially the one of his contract are worth it. Even though he hasn't the best communication adviser, he appears to be humbler and more motivated than ever after he had stagnated for two seasons – which seems to have brought him a certain amount of maturity. Who wouldn't be motivated in such conditions?

In Williams, old and fresh are also associated: Barrichello VS Hülkenberg. Hülkenberg has made miracles everywhere he'd been before. I've never really seen him fail in five years. This year, quite logically, his first aim will be to beat Rubens. He is able to do so, no doubt. In my opinion, Barrichello's 2009 season has been the swansong of his career. What I fear is that this is the one too many season for him. All will depend on the performance of the Williams but Hülkenberg is as a bet for the future, and it is very promising. The same bet on experience for Barrichello is, to me, a kind of logic of transition, so that the little German boy gets stronger as far as his technical baggage and the finesse of his ability to find the balance of the car are concerned.

With its Oriental duo, Renault includes Kubica and Petrov. Kubica shouldn't find it hard to dominate the Russian. But Petrov has a huge improvement margin and he has always had since the beginning of his career. And he never did any karting. He could be a great challenger for Kubica in the second half of European GPs. Plus, on a wet track, Petrov can be a real client and those who saw what he did in GP2 know well what I'm talking about. Renault's bet on reconstruction is like heads or tails: with Kubica they secure the technical side and with Petrov they secure the financial one – as well as making a huge bet. Although mocked, this duo remains interesting because the two of them have come to Formula One in atypical ways. It will be funny to watch this, as well as determining for Renault's future.

Force India's Indians are also one of the three teams to keep the pair they had at the end of 2009. Sutil, who had slightly disappointed me in 2008, didn't amaze me in 2009 either. True, he still appears to have a certain potential and be quite regular. True, his qualification performances can be an asset to illustrate his talent but – but still nothing really amazing. You want a proof? He's still in Force India. On the other hand, Liuzzi – for whom the drawing aside from Red Bull tasted bitter for me because he seemed to be improving – has managed to find a seat, showing at the same time that in 2005 Red Bull might have preferred him to Klien. Liuzzi seemed to be quick, although regularity wasn't as good as it was for Sutil. In my opinion, the two of them appear to be evenly matched in the rank of the future ex-youngsters-promising-although-too-puffing.

Toro Rosso doesn't excite me, neither do their drivers. Buemi appeared to be slightly better than what he had shown in GP2. I remain persuaded that a Jani would have done the same, though. Alguersuari hadn't much to demonstrate on the grounds of the testing limit as well as some other things. Some huge mistakes could have been avoided and learning can't explain all. So it's true that he showed that he was really quick in feeder series but then again there was nothing transcendent. It's now his duty to avoid falling in the trap of drivers who came into F1 way too young because many of them got too close to the sun. Meanwhile Buemi will be more confident and will have fewer excuses. Alguersuari has yet to learn certain circuits. The Swiss may take a certain advantage over the Spaniard, but the gap may well be decreasing at the end of the season.

Lotus is back with an old duo. Trulli should be in front in qualifications, although both of them are quick in this exercise with no fuel. However, both of them appeared to collapse in a race, with rhythm reminding of a carrier in a kart race. Kovalainen should be suffering less from the bleak McLaren mood while he will look for improving his image (is it a Fisichella-revival?). Trulli finds himself once

again with his Mike-the-pit-bull-Gascoyne. Their complicity is already proven. Plus, the Italian must be motivated with the idea of finding again a mood he had known soon after the beginning of his career with Prost. This should bring us a good and homogenous duo, with the Finn being slightly better. I feel he is very slightly faster in race conditions. Then, he shouldn't miss the opportunities to score some points, as there will be very few.

Campos Meta 1 is dead-alive, so here it comes: Hispania. Besides, there aren't much Spaniards for a Spanish Team. Furthermore they order the chassis to Dallara – Italians! Chandhok hasn't shown much yet, but still he is there. Maybe this is not undeserved, eventually. After all, he had indeed made some testing with Red Bull about more than a year ago. As I believe Red Bull doesn't need so much money, I guess it wasn't undeserved. But, let's face it: his opponent is Senna: the so-much-limited-by-his-family Senna who was also stolen by Honda's departure last year. He has shown really great things in a short time, with a maturity found really quickly on the wheel. Plus, his career until the end of 2008 has been more than quick. These are nice promises to make real, and compared to the Indian, he shouldn't be disappointing. But, if we look at what we were telling about Kobayashi before he moved to Formula One...

Talking about Nippon, let's talk about this team with its incredible name: BMW Sauber Ferrari. It's amazing to see how far they get to keep this pathetic money given by FOM! Anyway, the drivers' cast is also surprising: de la Rosa VS Kobayashi. I thought de la Rosa had done his career as a F1 driver, that Hungary 2006 was the peak of his career. But, no, he wasn't done. The test driver decided to taste what race was like again, good for him... Pleasure will be what Kobayashi's going to take! Maybe he is less talented than PDLR technically speaking, but he is definitely impetuous than the Spaniard. To conclude, it's a pair which is only unequal by age. As for the rest, the aim is to score and in this game, the opportunist Kobayashi appears to be fit to this role, in my opinion.

Finally at Manor-Virgin-Wirth-Marussia-Cosworth – we're losing ourselves here. They already lost the wind tunnel. Let's remember the last testing made by a F1 designed without a wind tunnel, the 1997 Lola-MasterCard-Ford: they were 11 seconds late compared to Villeneuve, pole man this day, and 5 seconds late compared to the last qualified. I'm not against progress but someone has to tell Nick Wirth – the one who is already known for the Simtek failure – that if the CFD as well as the study of fluids is working on ALMS prototypes, this may be because fluids from a ducted single-seater are way less complex than on... say, a F1? Of course, if McLaren and Renault – among other teams – use Flubber, it's just a matter of style, that's a well-known fact! But I'm wandering here. It may take a long time for technique to work: it may be a matter of too early anticipation. So Glock VS di Grassi. Wait, I thought we were serious... Let's see, even though Glock may suffer from lowering himself so low, it's a brave challenge that he's offering himself, and just for this, Glock would deserve to get a powerful car. Otherwise, the VR-01 will be his first hearse. As for di Grassi, well... It's a guy who has made several couple of years in GP2 with a car that allowed him to clinch the title without even achieving this – I notice, even before GP2 he did the same! – It's somewhat a chronic pathology or bad grace. In a weird way, I'd rather choose the first option. Glock will go through this adventure, but for di Grassi I'm afraid he won't be viable.

But all this is only a subjective analysis, of course! The first answers to our questions will be brought to us some hours after the third day without sleeping that we still have to face before we switch on our mince-pies.