

Spanish Motorsport Shame

F1 hit the headlines for all the wrong reasons recently as Spanish Grand Prix fans racially abused British driver Lewis Hamilton.

The first weekend in February 2008 saw teams testing on the Circuit de Catalunya in Barcelona. These teams are preparing for the upcoming Grand Prix season, which commences with the Australian Grand Prix in March.

Some Spanish racing fans hurled taunts, insults, and racial slurs at Lewis Hamilton during his walks to the track. There is much hatred and resentment seething in Spain because of Hamilton's rivalry with Fernando Alonso.

Alonso is a Spaniard and a former teammate of Lewis at Mercedes-McLaren racing. Although he is now part of the Renault team, Alonso felt McLaren gave preferential treatment to Hamilton last year. Alonso expected special status with McLaren and was upset when he didn't receive it. In last year's driver competition, Alonso finished directly behind Hamilton in the standings.

There were televised reports of some spectators wearing monkey suits and slinging racist remarks at Hamilton. Hamilton was also the target of booing.

Spain's motorsport authorities condemned the behavior of these so called 'fans'. Anticipating trouble, the Catalunya authorities had extra security on hand for the practice sessions. They also had fencing around the team areas for protection. Should the Spanish Grand Prix in Barcelona be cancelled it would have an impact on the Barcelona economy, especially the [Barcelona hotels](#) which are full to capacity during the weekend.

Spain's racing community fears Formula 1 will take severe action against them if this abuse continues. The FIA (International Automobile Federation) has the power to suspend races in Spain. They could cancel the Spanish Grand Prix if they feel further volatile and repugnant behavior will manifest itself. The European Grand Prix in Valencia, Spain could face a similar fate if these disruptions continue.

Many Spaniards dislike, and even hate Hamilton because of his rivalry with Alonso. He is a firm favorite though in the wider world of Formula 1 due to his racing skills.

Lewis Hamilton, born in Stevenage, UK, is twenty-three years old. The 2007 Australian Grand Prix saw his debut on The Formula 1 circuit.

With McLaren, he chalked up 17 starts, 16 finishes, and 12-placings at the podium last year. He won six pole positions and was the winner in four Grand Prix races. These victories occurred in Canada, the United States, Hungary, and Japan.

Hamilton started racing at age eight and at age ten won his first British Kart Championship. At age thirteen he became the first (and still the only) teenager to sign a contract with a Formula 1 team.

This achievement came about when Mercedes-McLaren signed him to their Young Driver Support Programme. He continues to impress and develop as a racecar driver.

The racism in Spain aimed at Lewis spurred Gerry Sutcliffe, a British government sports minister, to take the FIA to task. He wants to see an end to this cycle of abuse against British athletes when they visit Spain. English soccer players were targets of racial abuse in the past few years during games in Spain.

Rio Ferdinand, a leading Manchester United and England player, issued a call for rectifying action from F1's governing body over the Hamilton incident. He played for England when they met Spain in a soccer match in Madrid in 2004. To Spain's shame then black players were subject to verbal abuse throughout the match.

Formula 1 wants to solve this problem quickly and take measures so it doesn't happen again. They do not want the aura of 1985 lingering over their sport. In 1985, there was much controversy as F1 decided to continue their race in South Africa that year.

South Africa's apartheid policy caused many international sporting events to avoid the country some decades earlier. The apartheid system segregated people by race and discriminated against blacks.

Formula 1 insisted on racing in South Africa 1985 under apartheid. It became a blemish on their history, and it is something they do not want to see

again.

About the Author

The most glamorous Grand Prix of the season, the [Monaco Formula One](#) is being held this year on Sunday May 28.

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