

Spy-gate

I thought long and hard about subjecting the members of this club to another automotive themed paper and concluded that you all could handle it. I will admit, my interests are not varied and automobiles, the manufacturers, motorsport, its history, and the indelible mark it has all left on our society is not only vast but deep. As such, there are so many stories one could tell without seeming too repetitive. So with that, sit back and allow me to entertain (or possibly lull you to sleep) over the next 40 minutes.

The focus of my paper this evening is the 2007 Formula One race season. Few years in motorsport history encompass so much of what I love about the sport. And to be honest, at its core, it's the same things that can be said of just about any sport we love. First off, it's just fun; everyone likes unpredictable entertainment. Then there's the competition, the teamwork, and the camaraderie. Sports are the closest thing we have to a true meritocracy. The desire to win supersedes the penchant to discriminate. Finally, it's a great test – of ourselves against others. Who here hasn't imagined themselves on the field, or in this case, on the track, battling for glory?

Specifically, what I love about Formula One is the exoticism of it all. With its near universal appeal, Formula One is a sport of great diversity, both geographically and culturally. With races on five continents and 17 countries it is rivaled only by soccer in its popularity. Formula One is also a sport of rules of near-Byzantine complexity, technology to rival a space program, unimaginable speed, fierce competition and a cast of dramatic characters both on and off the track.

For those that have never been to a Formula One race, allow me to paint a picture. Along the starting grid the cars are arranged into ten staggered rows of two-by-two. Each car is wheeled into position on a specially designed dolly and surrounded by a team of mechanics and engineers. Milling about the track with the drivers and their team will be the press, celebrities, politicians, assorted VIP, and undoubtedly more than one member of the Saudi Royal Family.

The stands, positioned in various locations around the track, will be filled with nearly 100,000 fans, many adorned in team colors or waving their favorite driver's national flag.

Ten minutes before the start the track will be cleared, tires fitted and the cars started. Nearly instantaneously, the air will be filled with the noise of 16,000 unrestricted horsepower. At exactly ten minutes past the hour the cars will set out on a formation lap – warming their tires and returning to their grid position. Once all the cars have come to a halt on the grid the start sequence is initiated by the race director. Engines revved, the drivers' eyes will all be fixed on the starting light gantry, where a sequence of five red lights will illuminate. When the red lights go out the race is underway.

As the field accelerates away from the grid towards the first corner there is an incredible amount of jostling for position as drivers try to either consolidate or gain ground. It's not unusual to see four or five cars spread across the width of the track and, as such, contact is sometimes unavoidable.

On to the rules. Not only are the rules of Formula One complex but they're also ever-changing. Each year F1's governing body the FIA (or Federation Internationale de l'Automobile) updates or amends these rules. Traction control may be banned, new aerodynamic restrictions are implemented, or engine specifications are changed. As a result, the manufacturers have to go back to the drawing board and start again, working in accordance with (or around) the rules to get an edge on the competition. It's a world where improvements are measured in just hundredths of a second and just a few seconds separate the fastest driver from the slowest.

Allow me to give you a little idea of what the cars look like. The current F1 cars are nearly 19 feet long but weigh only 1600lbs, including the driver. To put that into context, it's longer than an S Class Mercedes, yet is only one-third the weight and has twice the power.

The complexity of a Formula One car is just staggering. A modern F1 car is made up of approximately 80,000 parts. Meaning, even if 99.99% of the parts are assembled properly, there are eight that are not.

The current generation of cars are fitted with a 1.6 liter V6 turbo-hybrid engine that creates over 800hp, accelerating the car to 60mph in less than two seconds, on the way to a top speed of over 220mph. Engine tolerances are so tight that at normal ambient temperatures, the engines are seized and must go through a special warm up procedure before they can be started.

At speed, body aerodynamics create so much down-force that manhole covers on street-circuits must be bolted down so that they aren't sent flying when the cars pass over. An F1 car is the fastest man-made product to ever complete a predetermined circuit. Nothing maximizes the physical capabilities of a human being or pushes vulcanized rubber to the point of unpredictable failure like an F1 car. Simply put, Formula One is the pinnacle of auto racing.

Finally, there's the drama, both on and off the track. Frequently, a team's desire and strategy to win a constructor's championship is at direct odds with the driver's goal of becoming world champion. Often times, a driver's greatest rival is his own teammate. Behind the scenes, Formula One is a world of in-fighting, alliances, sabotage, and secret deals with driver's vying for the best seat and manufacturers wrangling to get the best driver for that seat.

So, if this is what you like about the sport, the 2007 season did not disappoint. Storied teams were accused of espionage and sabotage. A reigning world champion clashed with a rookie upstart. There was blackmail and disqualifications, a nine figure fine, and even a prison sentence; all in the span of just eight months and 17 races.

To see how it all started we must go back in time two years to the Grand Prix of Brazil, just as Renault driver Fernando Alonso clinched his first world title. While waiting for the ceremony to commence, Alonso was approached by McLaren team principal, Ron Dennis and asked if he'd like a drive with the McLaren team.

Never one concerned with how much he was loved, Dennis was legendary for his controlling nature and OCD tendencies. However, he helped push the sport to new levels of technology, introduced a level of professionalism that left other teams flailing and whose own team, at its peak, dominated the sport like no other in history.

As a boy, Alonso watched the unbeatable McLarens of Alain Prost and Ayrton Senna and dreamed of exactly that. What started as a casual remark quickly became serious negotiations resulting in a three year drive for McLaren starting in 2007.

Alonso Joined McLaren as a double-world champion, winning the 2006 season after having battled legendary F1 driver Michael Schumacher for the title. With Schumacher's retirement set for the end of 2006, Alonso was F1's new 'main man'.

Unfortunately, his relationship with his new team started to sour almost immediately.

Alonso had signed with McLaren long before they decided to promote Lewis Hamilton, who they had nurtured since the age of 11, as his team-mate. Hamilton had been signed to McLaren's Young Driver's Support Programme in 1998. After winning the British Formula Renault Series, Formula 3 Euro Series, and GP2 championships he was making his Formula One debut in 2007. Alonso wondered, not so quietly, whether employing the rookie was a good idea for a team with Constructors' Championship aspirations, but was not worried.

First, his self-confidence assured him he would have no problem beating the rookie driver. Second, while not stated in his contract, Alonso believed team boss Dennis verbally promised him priority status within the team; an assertion Dennis insisted was not the case (but was later revealed to be the truth).

Alonso's expectation of preferential treatment might not have been such an issue for the team had he been decisively faster than this team-mate but he wasn't. Hamilton was on-pace out of the box; giving Alonso a hard time on track, and the senior man did not like it.

In Australia, at the season opener, Hamilton announced his intentions by passing Alonso around the outside of the first corner of the opening lap. Alonso returned the favor, passing Hamilton in the pits to finish second behind Ferrari's Kimi Raikkonen.

Alonso won the next race in Malaysia but Hamilton's performance was unsettling to the reigning world champion. Hamilton's handler was consistently making the case for his driver to team management while Alonso argued that the two drivers should not be racing each other for the points. Team harmony was beginning to fracture.

Meanwhile, there was trouble behind the scenes at Scuderia Ferrari. Race Technical Director, Nigel Stepney was not happy with his job at Ferrari, and he wasn't trying to hide it. Stepney began his motorsport career in the 1970s, working for

Broadspeed Touring, before stints with both Shadow and Lotus – where he worked with F1 great Ayrton Senna. By the late '80s he was at Benetton as Chief Mechanic, earning a reputation as a detail-oriented organizer and good manager. By '93 he had been recruited by a former Benetton colleague to join Ferrari.

Stepney knew Michael Schumacher, Ross Brawn, and Rory Byrne from his time at Benetton, so when they all came to Ferrari by the '97 season, it was the reuniting of an old gang.

Throughout the Ferrari/Schumacher years of dominance in Formula One, Stepney received much of the credit for getting the team on track, particularly in terms of reliability and race preparation. There was no reason to suspect Stepney was anything but happy at Ferrari until some time in 2006 when he casually mentioned in a conversation that he was hoping to switch to another manufacturer's team for 2008. Schumacher was about to announce his retirement to commence at the end of the 2006 and Ferrari Technical Director Ross Brawn was going on sabbatical for 2007. With those two out of the picture Stepney felt the team would no longer be the same and he wasn't too keen on the prospect of being involved with a team on a down-hill trajectory with a new regime in charge. In fact, much to Ferrari's displeasure, he made these feelings known in an interview with Autosport Magazine in February of 2007 in which he was quoted as saying:

I am currently looking at spending a year away from Ferrari,

I'm not currently happy within the team – I really want to move forward with my career and that's something that's not happening right now. Ideally, I'd like to move into a new environment here at Ferrari – but if an opportunity arose with another team, I would definitely consider it.

Just later that same month, Ferrari announced a change in team structure which saw Stepney appointed to Head of Team Performance Development. The Ferrari press release stated “after many years spent on the Formula One circuits, the last 13 of those as part of the Ferrari Race Team, Nigel Stepney, with the approval of the company, has chosen to take on a different role that will see him no longer have to attend races.” And just like that, Stepney was essentially demoted and out of the paddock. Within weeks the rumor-mill speculated Stepney would be at Honda the next season with his colleague, Ross Brawn.

Things were no better at McLaren. By the fifth race at Monaco, tensions were quite high. Hamilton had taken four consecutive podiums and led the championship over his team-mate Alonso by two points. Ferrari drivers Raikkonen and Massa, with a win apiece, were close behind.

Before the race, Hamilton was quickest during practice but Alonso took pole at qualifying. Alonso dominated the race, taking the chequered flag with Hamilton in second. Back in the pits, all hell broke loose. Hamilton felt he could have won the race

but the team was not convinced he could have due to excessive tire wear and Hamilton's fuel strategy.

Publicly, team principal Ron Dennis indicated he basically had to decide who would win the race to secure the one-two finish and prevent a battle between the two drivers from playing out. Hamilton seized on this at the post-race news conference, stating that as he had the #2 car he was the #2 driver, not so subtly indicating that he, not Alonso, was the rightful winner, which was how the motoring public interpreted the events.

Alonso was furious. He had led the race from the beginning and quickly built up an eight second lead. Hamilton suffered badly with tire graining. Additionally, Alonso had managed his fuel better, altering his pit stop strategy and reducing the number of laps between his refueling pit stop and Hamilton's. Hamilton maintained he could have made up the lost time had he been given the chance to attack Alonso with a lighter fuel load. The race data, however, indicated otherwise. This strategy played out until the final pit stop, after-which Alonso was told to hold back due to potentially overheating rear brakes. This allowed Hamilton to catch up, who was told to hold position, securing the one-two finish.

After the race, Alonso was upset he had to push to hold off Hamilton. Hamilton was equally angry as he felt he wasn't able to race his team-mate. Dennis, in making the perfectly understandable call in preventing his two drivers from battling it out, then

justifying it, had inadvertently annoyed both his warring drivers. As time would tell, the consequences of this would prove immense.

While the drama at the McLaren garage, up to this point, could be chalked up to a contentious relationship between the seasoned veteran and rookie driver, things were about to get down-right weird over at Ferrari.

Just less than a week before the start of the Monaco Grand Prix an unknown white powder was found in the fuel tanks of Ferrari drivers Kimi Raikkonen and Felipe Massa.

In the week beginning June 17th, 2007, at the United States Grand Prix, Ferrari filed a formal complaint against their own Nigel Stepney, leading to the commencement of a criminal investigation by the Modena district attorney. Five days later, Stepneys' house near Ferrari's Maranello base was raided. Among other items, the police confiscated a canister, presumably related to the aforementioned white powder.

In the days that followed and as the rumors swirled, more information began to come to light – specifically, in addition to the 'white powder' business there were whispers of industrial espionage. The most logical conclusion was that Ferrari was contractually blocking Stepney's move to Honda, causing him to exact revenge on the team in the form of passing sensitive information along to a future employer. However, word on the street was that McLaren were the recipient. So just what was Stepney up to?

Shortly thereafter, on the morning of Tuesday, July 3rd, Ferrari revealed that Stepney had been fired. That afternoon brought the stunning news that McLaren were indeed involved, with the Woking outfit issuing a statement revealing a “senior member of McLaren’s technical organization was the subject of a Ferrari investigation regarding the receipt of technical information.” McLaren’s statement further revealed that their senior staff member “had personally received a package of technical information from a Ferrari employee at the end of April.” McLaren concluded by saying the individual had been suspended by the company, pending a full investigation.

Inevitably, there was considerable interest in just who might be involved at the Woking team, and logic suggested it was someone at McLaren who had worked with Stepney in the past. There was certainly more than one high-profile name that fit the bill.

Shortly thereafter came a statement from Ferrari which confirmed they had instigated legal proceedings against Stepney and a McLaren employee, both in Italy and England.

It did not take long for it to emerge that the McLaren man under investigation was chief designer Mike Coughlan. He had worked with Stepney at Benetton and from '93 to '98 at Ferrari.

Shortly thereafter, Coughlan’s home was searched and nearly 800 pages of Ferrari documents were found there. Interestingly enough, Ferrari did not know of the theft of

their technical information until they were tipped off by an employee of a photocopy shop near McLaren's headquarters. Allegedly, Coughlan's wife had copies made of the stolen documents. The employee noticed their confidential nature and contacted Ferrari's headquarters in Maranello.

On July 4th, 2007, McLaren announced it had conducted an internal investigation and concluded that "no Ferrari intellectual property had been passed to any other members of the team or incorporated into their cars." Additionally, the team invited the FIA to inspect their cars to confirm these facts. McLaren also provided a full set of drawings and development documents to the FIA, detailing all updates to their team's chassis since the incident occurred in April.

On July 12th, 2007, The FIA announced that it had summoned McLaren to an extraordinary meeting of the FIA World Motorsport Council to answer charges they had breached article 15c of the International Sporting Code. At the hearing, the FIA concluded McLaren was in possession of confidential Ferrari information and therefore in breach of the code. However, as there was no evidence that they had used the information no punishment was levied. The FIA did, however, reserve the right to reconvene on the matter should any evidence subsequently come to light.

Ferrari labeled the decision 'incomprehensible.' McLaren called it 'fair and balanced.'

While the industrial espionage investigation came to a close the rivalry between Alonso and Hamilton threatened to tear the McLaren team apart – which for all intents and purposes, it did during the weekend of the Hungarian Grand Prix.

Hungary was the 11th round of the 2007 season. Team principal Ron Dennis and Fernando Alonso were no longer on speaking terms. And, six races on from Monaco, Hamilton and Alonso were in exactly the same position in the Championship standings – the rookie leading but just two points.

As with all things Formula One, the rules can run from complicated to downright bizarre and qualifying was no different. The 2007 season saw the drivers begin the session with the fuel load with which they would start the race. They then drove around doing what were called ‘fuel burn laps’ before setting the lap times that would determine their starting position on the grid. Before the race, drivers would be allowed to refill their tanks with the amount of fuel used on those ‘burn laps’.

The direct relationship between fuel loads and lap times (more fuel means a slower lap time) would only serve to heighten tensions on a team where both drivers were going for the championship. Additionally, there was always an optimal time for the first pit stop of the race – and therefore, an optimal number of fuel-burn laps. However, two drivers on the same team cannot pit on the same lap of the race. So, how do you decide who gets the optimal strategy?

McLaren's solution, after the controversy of Monaco, was to ensure both drivers had equal fuel loads for their qualifying runs and to alternate who had the favorable race strategy. In Hungary, it was Alonso's turn to have priority.

Under this scenario, Alonso should have left the pits first and did the most fuel-burn laps. This conferred a double advantage – it would not only give him a lighter car when he did his qualifying run but also more fuel for the start of the race.

As you've probably guessed at this point, this is not what happened.

Hamilton left the garage first and was at the head of the queue waiting to go out at the start of the qualifying session, with Alonso behind. As soon as the cars left the pits, the team radioed Hamilton to let Alonso past so they could run the plan. Hamilton ignored these requests, even prompting Ron Dennis to get on the radio. Still, Hamilton did not comply.

Alonso was now at a terrible disadvantage – he would not only have a heavier fuel-laden car for his qualifying runs but he would also get less fuel back at the start of the race. Alonso was shouting on the radio, asking why Hamilton would not let him by.

Realizing he'd been tricked by Hamilton, he took matters into his own hands. Alonso slowed down on his fuel-burn laps, gauging it so that he was nearly ready to be lapped by Hamilton and then entered the pits just before him.

Both drivers then went out to do their first qualifying runs, with Hamilton setting a faster time, before returning to the pits, with Alonso just ahead of him. The team prepared to stack the cars. They were to service Alonso with fresh tires, send him out, and do the same for Hamilton so that they could complete their final qualifying laps.

After his tires were fitted, Alonso stayed put a full ten seconds before accelerating away, delaying Hamilton's tire replacement. The delay was just long enough. Hamilton missed the cut-off to start his final qualifying lap by just four seconds. Alonso went on to take pole position.

The race stewards immediately called up the two drivers and asked them what happened. Taking everything into account, Alonso was given a five place grid penalty.

On Sunday morning, the day of the race, Alonso was still fuming. For quite some time Alonso had argued to Dennis that he and Hamilton should not be racing each other. While they were battling it out for their points the Ferrari drivers were inching ever closer. If they weren't careful, Alonso believed, they'd end up losing the title.

What happened next would go down in Formula One folklore and ensure Alonso's departure from McLaren.

With just a few hours to go before the start of the Hungarian Grand Prix Alonso, with his team manager in tow had a meeting with Ron Dennis. Alonso told Dennis he

needed to right the wrong Hamilton had done him the day before. Hamilton, he stated, double-crossed him on the fuel-burn laps, causing the events that resulted in his five place grid penalty. As retribution, Alonso insisted the team make sure Hamilton run out of fuel during the race. Alonso then threatened Dennis, saying that if the team did not do as he demanded, he would reveal to the FIA sensitive emails relevant to the espionage case, which McLaren had just recently escaped punishment.

At this point, Dennis asked Alonso to stop talking. He then called in his second in command, Martin Whitmarsh and asked Alonso to repeat everything he had just said, which he did. Dennis sent Alonso away, turned to Whitmarsh and asked what he thought they should do.

Dennis and Whitmarsh agreed that they would inform the FIA president, Max Mosley of the situation. Additionally, it was agreed that they could not allow Alonso to race that day. They could not have a driver blackmailing the team.

Dennis phoned Mosley and told him what happened. Mosley basically asked ‘what are you going to do about it?’ and suggested they not prevent Alonso from racing.

Now, it’s widely believed that this phone call led to the second spy-gate investigation but Mosley says that is not true. Mosley has been quoted as saying that he was informed of the existence of the additional emails by Flavio Briatore, former Renault Team boss and manager to Fernando Alonso. Fernando had told Briatore about the

emails, who informed Formula One boss Bernie Ecclestone, who in turn told Mosley about them. As such, Mosley was aware of the emails before the events that transpired at the Hungarian Grand Prix qualifying session. So it seems Alonso had already made good on his intent to blackmail the team inadvertently. Unbeknownst to Dennis, a second spy-gate investigation was already in the works.

Shortly after the meeting, Alonso apologized to Dennis, saying he had lost his temper and completely retracted everything he said.

As to the race, Hamilton did not run out of fuel that day. In fact, he went on to win the race from pole position. Alonso finished fourth, gaining two positions after his five place grid penalty.

Almost immediately after the Hungarian Grand Prix Mosley announced his second spy-gate investigation. He demanded access to all of McLaren's emails and, approximately one month later, summoned the team to attend a second hearing. The results of which were near catastrophic. McLaren were thrown out of the constructors' championship and fined \$100 million. For their cooperation, Alonso and Hamilton were able to keep their points and continue to compete for the driver's championship.

His relationship with the team now totally broken, Alonso and his lawyers met the McLaren management and negotiated an early release from his contract.

As the season continued, Alonso's predictions about how the driver's championship would play out came true. Alonso beat Hamilton in both Belgium and Italy, leaving the McLaren drivers just two points apart with three races to go. In Japan, Alonso crashed out in the wet, trying to keep up with Hamilton, who won. In China, Hamilton crashed in the pit lane, coming in to change badly worn tires the team had left him out on too long in an attempt to beat Alonso. Had he been brought in earlier and finished the race, he'd have secured the Driver's World Championship and had the best rookie season in the history of the sport. Then, at the final race in Brazil, Hamilton ran wide, attempting a pass on Alonso and dropped back, finishing seventh with an electronics glitch. Alonso ran a trouble-free race but could not keep pace with the Ferraris. Ferrari's Kimi Raikkonen went on to win the race, and the Driver's World Championship, by one point. Alonso and Hamilton finished the season tied in the points.

So, where are they now? Lewis Hamilton stayed on with McLaren and won the Driver's World Championship in 2008, becoming the youngest driver to even win the title. After that, he had four more lackluster seasons with McLaren, marred by on-track controversy and numerous penalties. Hamilton then signed with Mercedes-Benz for 2013 – a move met with surprise and one that many considered to be a gamble as Mercedes had no recent history of Formula One success. However, with the introduction of the turbo-hybrid engines in 2014, Mercedes and Hamilton dominated the sport. Hamilton won back to back titles in 2014 and 2015, and again in 2017 and 2018. Mercedes has won the Constructor's Championship for the past five years in a row. These successes have propelled Hamilton to the top of the sport. He is statistically, the most successful

British driver of all time. He has more World Championships and more race victories than any other British Driver. He currently holds out-right records for all-time career points, most wins on different circuits, all-time pole positions and most grand slams in a season (meaning pole position, fastest race lap, and leading every lap of the race).

While many would say Hamilton has led a charmed F1 career there's no doubt it is his talent that has cemented his position as one of the sport's greatest. He is a tenacious and aggressive driver who has unbelievable pace and is nearly flawless in the wet. He has been praised for his ability to adapt to variances in car set-up and changing track conditions. He has also become one of the sport's most consistent performers; finishing 33 consecutive races in point scoring positions. FIA President Max Mosley has been quoted as saying "Hamilton hardly ever puts a wrong foot, winning not only the races he should but also some where the opposition was stronger, and that is the true mark of a champion."

So what of Fernando Alonso? After his break with McLaren he returned to Renault for two forgettable seasons. After which, he signed with Ferrari for the next five; finishing second in the driver's championship three times, missing the title twice by just one point. Finally, in what might be the most surprising move of his career, Alonso returned to McLaren for the 2015 season at the request of none other than Ron Dennis. Unfortunately, on-track success eluded him at McLaren, never finishing above 11th in the driver's standings. Alonso retired from Formula One at the end of the 2018 season.

Despite this, one can't look at Alonso's trophies (or lack thereof) to place him in the history of Formula One. As a driver, he is defined by his consistency, adaptability and relentlessness. The essence of his qualities is that he's a very complete driver. One would struggle to find a weak spot. While some racers may be the best at one or two of the individual qualities that define a Formula One driver Fernando is very high in all of them. One only need to look at the results he has achieved with the equipment he has been given. During his years at Ferrari, Alonso was considered the best driver in the world. In a car that was considered the fourth fastest on the grid he lost out on two World Championship titles by just one point. In 2010 he overcame a 47 point deficit to lose the final race due to a bad pit strategy. In 2012, despite having the slower car, he dominated the season only to see the title slip away due to being taken out at the start of the Belgian and Japanese Grands Prix when he was hit by other drivers. And finally, despite being hampered by severe unreliability, McLaren finished the 2018 season sixth in the Constructor's Championship. This was a remarkable feat considering they had the second slowest car on the track. Alonso scored 50 of the teams 62 points for the season. Thanks to him, McLaren finished three places higher than they deserved to.

Ron Dennis continued on as the McLaren team principal for the 2008 season, handing the reigns over to second-in-command Martin Whitmarsh for 2009. As founder, chairman, and CEO of McLaren Technology Group, Dennis continued on in a management roll, focusing on building McLaren's brand as a road car manufacturer. However, he couldn't stay away from Formula one. By the end of 2013 he had ousted Whitmarsh after and number of lackluster seasons, placing himself back at the helm for

2014. However, in December of 2014, he attempted, unsuccessfully, to purchase back 50% of the company from a number of minority shareholders. In the wake of worsening shareholder relations, he was removed from the Board in 2016. By July of 2017, Dennis had sold back all of his remaining shares, ending 37 years of service with the company.

While Ron Dennis might seem an unsympathetic character, one cannot deny his contributions to the sport were many and great. He had an excellent eye for spotting and nurturing talent, on and off the track. The McLaren team had an outstanding safety record and contributed greatly to the safety of the sport. McLaren's F1 hypercar was the last road-going car to win the Le Mans 24 hour race. His Formula One team has won 182 Grands Prix and eight constructors' titles, making them the second winningest team of all time. There are very few people who built or changed the direction of Formula One and Ron Dennis is certainly one of them.

Finally, there's Nigel Stepney. After his termination from Ferrari he was recruited by Gigawave, a manufacturer of on-board racing car camera systems, as the Director of Race Technologies, for their FIA GT Championship Series team. His quick return to motorsport management prompted the FIA to publicly denounce him, issuing a statement directing teams not to collaborate with him and urging any team that did so to perform appropriate due diligence. By 2010 he saw himself appointed Team Manager of Sumo Power, another team competing in the FIA GT Championship. Shortly thereafter, he was convicted of sabotage, industrial espionage and sporting fraud and was sentenced

to one year and eight months in prison but was able to avoid jail time due to a plea deal. Nigel Stepney died in a motor vehicle accident in 2014.

So, as you can see, the 2007 Formula One season had it all. There was an incredibly close four-way title fight, a cast of compelling characters, and no shortage of drama on and off the track. Now, while much of this paper was just a superficial retelling of plot events it serves to highlight what we find compelling about all sports. It's why my nine year old daughter's basketball game is just as compelling as a March Madness match up. We love the competition, the personalities under pressure. It's about, how as humans we're drawn to pushing ourselves and striving to be better. Watching any sporting event allows us to reflect about our own mettle and what we're made of. It's the human element.