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Neil's Corner



Back in the mid '90's when I was driving with Wayne Gardner at Coca-Cola Racing a young Formula Ford bloke spent a day at my house talking about pursuing a motor racing career.

We covered all kinds of stuff... the importance of technical knowledge, commercial savvy, presentation, media, outright speed and all the usual stuff. What matters. What doesn't.

Over the years I've had this style of conversation many many times. Fathers, mothers, relations, businessmen - you can fill in the blank. They all think little Johnny is next Michael Schumacher and what advice can I provide?

I always try do my best to be courteous, respectful and informative. But the odds are, well, frankly, the odds are crook. 6 billion people (and growing) on this planet and 20 Formula One drivers? You do the math...

Fast forward to 2009 and the same "young bloke" is now 33. He's contested 138 Grand Prix races and he has just wrapped up his best ever year in Formula One, including 2 wins!

The Mark Webber story is a truly great story.

He's living proof that if you work hard enough in life - virtually anything is possible.

This kid had next to no money, bugger-all local support and a snow flakes chance in hell but those cold facts didn't account for his laser focus and a heart the size of Texas.

I love motor racing. You already know that. However, it has a massive flaw. If you're a gifted tennis player, golfer, footballer... it's not overly complex to display your talent, get recognized and prevail. You certainly don't need a bucket of money, great equipment, marketing skills, a pool of smart people. In motor racing, money speaks. The money buys opportunities. For drives, for the best equipment, the best engineers etc. etc.

Wealthy Europeans, Asians, South Americans often bring serious \$ to the table in all forms of top level motorsport.

So just imagine how tough it is to make the world stage for an Aussie?

I was frequently asked if Mark would make F1 in those very early days and you may be surprised to learn I said NO!

Now don't get me wrong, I've always considered myself a strong MW supporter. The answer was not because he lacked the skills in any way but stemmed from simply knowing he needed massive \$\$\$ support and had to beat those outrageous odds.

Watching Mark prove me wrong has been truly fantastic... Even better that he has made it to the very pinnacle much to the dismay of many tossers in the local ill-informed general media who seem to punish him for some unknown reason?

His maiden win in Germany this year was not only a brilliant highlight for him but a monster moment for Australian motorsport and all of us who enjoy the sport.

The last race in Abu Dhabi highlighted his skill and resolve. The car balance wasn't right. The rear tyres in the final stint were shot.

World Champion elect Jenson Button was all over him. They raced and raced and raced hard. Thousands of k's away I was sweating and fidgeting in the middle of the night. It was simultaneously great to watch and nerve wracking...

Mark finished second in front of Jenson. A lovely full stop on a mega season.

And after a pre-season that got off to the worst possible start last November with that shocking Mountain Bike accident in Tasmania.

For not sitting on a pile of cash. For beating those odds. For doing it with sheer grit and skill. For never surrendering and for simply being a good bloke I would encourage every single reader of this column to raise a toast this Christmas to Mark Webber for being one of our finest ever exports!



Straight advice, specialists you understand and... No Bull

