

Formula 1: The GOAT

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Fatih immediately pushed the penalty to the back of his mind, his focus narrowing to a single, all-consuming task: drive faster, open the gap. Just as that resolve hardened, a new mission screen appeared in his vision.

[Urgent Recovery Mission]

You have been given a five-second penalty, which some might argue is unfair. But the greatest of all time don't complain about the fairness of their circumstances; they prove that despite the unfairness, they are still capable of winning.

Objective: Win the race.

Rewards: Doubling of all championship points earned in this race.

Punishment upon failure: NONE

[ACCEPT] [DENY]

Although [Zone] didn't trigger, he accepted the mission without hesitation. The lack of a punishment was telling; the System had most likely deemed the incident was not his fault and would only compensate him if he managed to overcome the odds and win.

Just because there was no punishment, however, didn't mean he wasn't going to try his absolute best. He was fiercely competitive. He hated losing more than anything, especially when it came to driving. He focused his entire being on the task ahead, planning to maintain that razor-sharp concentration for the remainder of the race.

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Lap 3: Gap to P2: +0.290s

"He's just opened a gap of nearly three-tenths of a second in that last lap, bringing his lead to over half a second! Wow! He is not putting a single foot wrong, but the chasing pair are trying their absolute best to make sure that gap remains as small as possible," Süleyman said as the timing screen updated.

"If he continues at this pace, he will most likely be able to build that five-second gap before the end of the race, but will he be able to continue at this pace?" Zakir added. "On that last lap, he came very close to the track record again, only missing it by a few hundredths. It seems our speculation was right; the penalty didn't rattle him. If anything, it has caused him to push to his absolute maximum limit."

As Fatih entered the triple hairpin for the fourth time, Selçuk and Jackson seemed to realize the danger. They started pushing harder, knowing that if they maintained their current pace, they wouldn't be able to benefit from Fatih's penalty. As Fatih crossed the start-finish line to begin his fifth lap, he once again broke the track lap record, this time by a hundredth of a second, increasing his lead by another four-tenths.

"Oh my god, this is amazing!" Süleyman roared. "He's improving his time with every single lap as the track evolution sets in!"

The gap continued to grow, lap after agonizing lap for the chasers.

Lap 4: Gap to P2: +0.720s (+0.430s gained)

Lap 5: Gap to P2: +1.070s (+0.350s gained)

Lap 6: Gap to P2: +1.485s (+0.415s gained)

Lap 7: Gap to P2: +1.795s (+0.310s gained)

Lap 8: Gap to P2: +2.130s (+0.335s gained)

Lap 9: Gap to P2: +2.510s (+0.380s gained)

Lap 10: Gap to P2: +2.960s (+0.450s gained)

Lap 11: Gap to P2: +3.445s (+0.485s gained)

Lap 12: Gap to P2: +3.955s (+0.510s gained)

"It is unbelievable what we are seeing!" Süleyman's voice was strained with excitement. "For the last eleven laps, this young kid has been relentlessly increasing his lead over Selçuk, consistently breaking the track lap record one after another! As he starts his final lap of the race, he has already opened the gap to **4.591 seconds!** If he improves by only another four-tenths, he will fully recover from that unfair five-second penalty! But will it really be that easy? Or do Selçuk and Jackson have another gear? They seem to be pushing even more, trying to make sure the gap remains below five seconds! Their coaches are showing them the pit boards with the gap to Fatih written on them! They see the possibility of still winning! They're over-driving, over-braking, doing everything they can to stay within that distance!"

Fatih started navigating the triple hairpins for the last time this weekend. He trail-braked into the entry, keeping as much speed as possible, taking the perfect line while preparing for the next hairpin. He took it gracefully, getting on the power as early as possible as he entered the short straight. He took the right-hander, went wide, then took the last of the triple hairpins, exiting T8 and keeping his foot planted as he took T9 flat-out. He barreled through the straight, braked for T10, got on the power for a moment, then lifted for T11 before returning to full power as he crossed the finish line!

But the race wasn't over. We see Selçuk and Jackson navigate the final corners! They too get on the power as they exit T8 and take T9 flat-out, pushing to the absolute limit, knowing they still have a chance to win this race! Selçuk out-brakes Jackson, keeping his lead into T10! He mirrors what Fatih did, takes T11, gets on the power, slides for a moment but keeps it pointing in the right direction, and goes through the start-finish line! Was that enough for a win?! YEEES! SELÇUK WINS THE ANKARA ROUND OF THE CHAMPIONSHIP! HE FINISHES UNDER FIVE SECONDS BEHIND FATİH, AT EXACTLY 4.913 SECONDS, DEMOTING FATİH TO P2! Fatih, who had driven a masterful race with one hand tied behind his back by a penalty, breaking his own and the track's lap record more than six times, is dragged down by that unfair penalty! Despite crossing the checkered flag first, he officially finishes the race second! Selçuk takes first place, and Jackson misses the P2 position by less than a hundredth of a second! The race, marred by a controversial decision at the very start, comes to a dramatic end!" Süleyman shouted, focusing on the top three, and mostly on the poetic injustice of Fatih and Selçuk swapping roles from the previous race weekend's penalty drama.

"I'm pretty sure Fatih is not amused in the least by that celebration," Zakir said, shaking his head as the camera showed Selçuk pumping his fist repeatedly throughout the cool-down lap, driving as slowly as possible, as if wanting to savor the moment of his first career win for as long as he could.

Selçuk turned to look at the grandstands, and when he saw his father, Aslan, clapping and cheering for him, he let out a guttural scream of pure happiness under his helmet. He finally saw his father smile at him the way he had smiled at Fatih. To Selçuk, it didn't matter how he won. What mattered is that he won. Nothing else.

"That is true," Süleyman said, his tone shifting to one of professional analysis. "This race has practically been robbed from him at the start, and despite a superb drive, he still couldn't mitigate the damage. But let's not take this win away from Selçuk. He is not the one who caused the punishment; he just benefited from a hurried decision by the race directors. I'm pretty sure they will have to explain themselves to Fatih's academy, who will undoubtedly be protesting this and requesting a rule change, at the very least, and perhaps the suspension of the race director for the next race weekends. As for Fatih, I don't want to be in his shoes for a moment, but it looks like I'm going to have to be during the post-race interview. Although the podium members are as we expected, we really couldn't have seen it happening in this manner. What a shame." He trailed off

before handing over to Zakir, leaving the commentary booth to rush to the interview area.

As Zakir summarized the race, the screen shifted to a live feed of the pitlane. It showed Fatih, sitting motionless in his kart, while others celebrated, left their karts, or began their weigh-in procedures. He was the only one still sitting there, his hands gripping the steering wheel, making it obvious to everyone that he was not happy in the least with the outcome.

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But unlike what people thought, his mind was not filled with anger or frustration. He was conversing with Apollo.

'Well, I did everything I could,' Fatih stated, an eerie calm settling over him. He realized this was the effect of [Invictus] at play, making him extremely level-headed no matter the situation. That didn't mean he was fine with what had happened; it just meant he knew there was nothing more he could have done that would have led to a different outcome.

After sitting in his kart for a full minute, he finally climbed out and walked to the weigh-in area. He cut the line, using his podium position privilege, and found Selçuk just stepping off the scale. Selçuk stiffened for a moment, but then the triumphant smile that had briefly paused resumed on his face, as if taunting Fatih for losing the race.

"Congrats on your win," Fatih said, his voice even, as he extended a fist. The gesture initially caused Selçuk to take a step back, thinking Fatih was about to punch him.

Reluctantly, Selçuk met Fatih's fist bump, his eyes vigilant. But whatever he expected, Fatih didn't do it. Fatih simply walked past him, tapped him on the shoulder, and went to have his own weight taken, leaving Selçuk looking after him for a moment, completely dazed.

All of this was shown on the main screen, and it immediately earned Fatih a round of applause from nearly all of the viewers. Zakir, back in the booth, spoke highly of Fatih's behavior and maturity, especially given his young age.

Chapter 42: Race Weekend | Sunday | Weekend Wrap Up

"I will keep trying my best until the end of the season," Jackson said, his voice quiet but firm. He shook hands with Süleyman and left the interview area, heading towards his academy's tent to wait for the podium ceremony. He was to receive the third-place award, but his expression was neutral; he looked neither happy with his position nor particularly bothered by missing his opportunity to get P2.

Fatih was immediately called to the front of the sponsors' board for his interview. The moment Süleyman saw him coming, a warm, professional smile spread across his face as he extended his hand for a handshake.

"Congratulations on salvaging P2 despite the penalty," he began, immediately getting to the most anticipated question. "How do you feel about it? Do you have anything to say regarding the penalty, or do you think it was deserved?"

'Not happy at all, as I'm pretty sure that I moved only after the lights went out,' Fatih thought. 'As for the punishment itself, I will be requesting the academy to appeal it and lodge a formal complaint with TOSFED. They should issue an injunction to the race director and either reverse the decision or demand an official apology.' That is what he wanted to say. But for a child to have such a clear, articulate, and legally-minded response would cause many to look at him strangely and would only make things more difficult. So, he said simply, "I'm not happy. And no, I didn't jump start."

Süleyman, recognizing that a five-year-old couldn't be expected to elaborate much further, nodded sympathetically and moved on to his next prepared question. "At the moment, you are still leading the championship with 45 points, followed by Selçuk with 41, and Jackson in third with 36 points. It's still a championship for any of you in the top three. Do you think you can continue to lead and go on to win the championship?"

"If things remain fair and I don't have any problems, I'm sure that I can win the championship," Fatih replied, his curated child persona momentarily slipping to reveal a flash of steel before he immediately returned to his innocent demeanor.

The answer momentarily rendered Süleyman speechless. He realized that Fatih had just sent a subtle but sharp jab at the race control officials and the race director. It was something he never would have expected from a child. Not wanting to draw further attention to it and potentially cause an issue for Fatih later, he quickly moved on. "How did you manage to keep your composure and even push to the point of nearly overcoming the penalty's advantage?"

"I just considered every lap to be a qualifying lap and tried to push more and more with each one," Fatih answered. "I'm happy that I managed to complete the race without making many mistakes."

Following that answer, and not wanting to highlight the race director's mistake any further, Süleyman asked a few more general questions before bidding him farewell and welcoming Selçuk, who was practically bouncing with excitement as he shook the commentator's hand.

"How do you feel to finally have the race win you have been chasing since last season?" Süleyman asked.

"YEAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!" Selçuk shouted, turning to wave excitedly at his parents, who were clapping and smiling at his antics. Seeing their joy made him even happier than the moment he had realized he'd won.

The questioning continued for a moment. Süleyman asked for his thoughts on the penalty decision and if he planned to reduce his aggressiveness now that he had a race win under his belt. Selçuk's answers were vague, his young mind not yet developed enough for nuanced responses, but they all hinted that he had no intention of toning down his aggressive driving style; if anything, he might even increase it.

Following the interviews, the drivers were ushered towards the podium. While Jackson and Fatih went through the motions, Selçuk enjoyed his victory to the absolute maximum. He jumped onto the podium when his name was called, and when he received his first-place trophy, he lifted it up and down constantly, celebrating as if he had just conquered the world.

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"I will try, but I don't think the academy is going to do much regarding this situation," Burak said as he walked with Rümeysa and Güldane, heading to the academy tents to collect Fatih after the ceremony. "Since the two drivers are from the same academy, the most they will push for will be a formal apology from the race director."

What he didn't say, but what both he and Rümeysa knew, was that the situation was incredibly complicated. The top three finishers of these first two rounds were intertwined in a complex web of relationships. Selçuk and Fatih were from the same academy. Jackson, although from a different academy, was having his chassis sponsored by Selçuk's father, Aslan, which connected him to the other two, as they were all driving Aslan's karts. And Aslan himself was currently trying to sign a major sponsorship deal with Fatih, with the final signature having been planned for after today's race.

Now, his own son and his soon-to-be-sponsored athlete were at the center of a controversial incident. This put Rümeysa in a very difficult position. Should she petition for the penalty to be lifted, proving her son's innocence but risking the sponsorship deal that would remove all her financial worries about sustaining his career? Or should she let the unfair result stand, securing the long-term sponsorship at the cost of a single race win? If she chose the latter, she needed to figure out how to explain it to her son.

Thankfully, she didn't have to make the decision immediately. Aslan had postponed the signing of the contract until the next day, citing the need to celebrate his son's first race win. But she decided to postpone her own decision-making for later that night. She saw her son running towards her, his arms wide, and she spread her own to welcome him.

"Was it fun driving?" she asked, putting him back down as they started walking towards the track's exit to return to the hotel.

"Yes, I enjoyed it," he said, taking both his mother's and grandmother's hands, jumping happily as they walked.

"Do you want me to complain to the academy to have them take back the decision?" she asked, wanting to gauge his perspective. Despite him being a child, which could lead to shortsighted reactions, she needed to know his feelings before deciding on a course of action.

"Not really," he said, his tone surprisingly nonchalant. "I can just win next time." He had already realized the deeper implications of the question.

To other kids, this category might seem like a matter of life and death. But for him, someone who had already lived a full twenty-five years in a past life, he knew there were far more important categories and championships ahead. Losing one race in the starting rounds of this championship was not a problem, at least not yet. The sponsorship was far more important than a single race win. Although he didn't win the race that was considered their final test, his driving had already proven that he **would** have won without the unfair decision. By not pursuing the matter, it would put Selçuk's father in an indebted position, which could be to their benefit in the long run.

"Okay," Rûmeysa said with a smile, a sense of relief washing over her as she finally came to a decision. "But make sure you beat them next time."

After arriving at the exit of the track and calling for a taxi, they bid farewell to Burak, who returned to the academy tent to do the final count of things before they started packing for the return journey to Istanbul.

Fatih and his family returned to the hotel, washed up, had dinner, and spent some quality time together before they went to sleep. The moment his head hit the pillow, Fatih immediately logged into the Simulation to finally collect his race weekend rewards.

[RACE WEEKEND DEBRIEF COMPLETE]

[SEASONAL MISSION: THE FIRST CROWN (WEEKEND 2)]

STATUS: COMPLETE

Milestone 1 (Participation): +10 SP

Milestone 2 (Pole Position): +10 SP

Milestone 3 (Fastest Lap): +5 SP

Milestone 4 (Race Finish - 20 pts): +20 SP

Milestone 5 (Driver of the Weekend): +5 SP

Additional Rewards (Per-Action):

* Overtake: none = 0 SP

* Defense: 3 successful defenses = +3 SP

Perfect Weekend Bonus: NOT ACHIEVED

["THE FIRST CROWN" SUBTOTAL: +53 SP]

[URGENT RECOVERY MISSION]

STATUS: FAILED

PUNISHMENT: NONE

[FINAL CALCULATION]

TOTAL SP GAINED: +53 SP

[Current System Points: 713 → 766 SP]

As he looked at the final tally of SP gained, a quiet sigh escaped him. The **53** points were a respectable amount for a single, dominant race weekend. But the massive **5X** multiplier from the previous round had spoiled him; a single, chaotic event had given him enough to purchase a major upgrade.

"Haaaah... looks like it's going to take the rest of the championship before I gain enough SP to upgrade again," he murmured to himself, the reality of the long grind ahead setting in. At this rate, accumulating the **2,600 SP** needed for his next target, **[Sponge Brain (Excellent)]**, would take nearly the entire remaining season of steady, near-perfect performances and even that might not be enough without urgent missions.

There was no shortcut for this. Only work.

He dismissed the system screen, the brief flicker of disappointment already fading, replaced by a familiar, quiet resolve. He materialized his Bambino kart on the familiar tarmac of La Conca and began his nightly practice, the four hours of focused effort ahead of him the only real answer to the problem.