

Formula 1: The GOAT

#Chapter 91: End of the Year Timetable - Read Formula 1: The GOAT Chapter 91: End of the Year Timetable

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Huff, Huff, Huff, Huff, Huff.

Fatih breathed calmly as he jogged back home, returning from a five-kilometer run. As he was just eight hundred meters from home, Apollo materialized around him, flying as he shouted, "Now, run full speed until you're home. Go!"

Without arguing, Fatih started pushing himself to the maximum despite feeling like his lungs were burning and his legs were on the verge of giving up. He knew it was all for his benefit, as the more he pushed his body, the faster the Sponge Body ability would take effect.

Instead of heading inside, he stopped in the garden of their house to cool down, jumping up and down. He then used this time to start other exercises under Apollo's direction, aiming to complete his daily missions with the highest effectiveness possible.

"Okay, that is enough for today. Go and rest in preparation for evening practice," Apollo said moments before the mission complete screen appeared in front of him, and the five SP he won were deposited into his account.

Fatih looked forward to tomorrow, Friday, which was his full rest day, where he wouldn't be doing anything related to motorsport, including writing articles, to allow him to wind down from his weekly workload.

"Go wash up and join us for breakfast," Rümeysa said when she heard the door open, knowing that it was Fatih back from his workout.

"Yes, Mom," Fatih shouted as he headed to his room to grab his bath essentials before taking a long and very thorough shower and joining her for breakfast.

"Afiyet Olsun (Bon appétit)," Fatih said as they started eating.

On the table, there were only three of them, as Burak, who lived with them, was at school, having already started last week.

"Don't leave. We have to talk about your schedule for this year," Rümeysa said when she saw Fatih collecting his plate and utensils to place them in the dishwasher once he was done eating.

"Okay," Fatih said, placing them in the dishwasher before returning and silently sitting at the dinner table, waiting for her to be done so they could start their conversation.

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PLAP!!

Rümeysa sat down after throwing the dossier she had collected from her room onto the table.

Picking it up and opening it, she paused, reading it for a moment before she started speaking. "This year, due to our late move, we are only going to be participating in three international events: two of them as normal entries under the FIA talented individual list, allowing us to circumvent the age requirements, and one of them as a wildcard entry."

Once she was done saying that, she paused for a moment before picking up a paper, sliding it to Fatih, and continuing, "Your debut race will be in late October in Italy at the 42nd Trofeo delle Industrie. As it is a normal entry for you, albeit only possible under the backing of TOSFED, you will be able to win the trophy if you win this race. It is a very prestigious and respected karting trophy in the world.

They suggested we start with it due to the effect it will have if you perform well, as it is a classic race that everyone in the sport respects, meaning the eyes of very important people in the karting world will be on it. As a result of its importance, expect a grid full of the best Italian national champions and top international drivers who will be there to win or test for the next season."

She then removed a second piece of paper, handing it to him before she continued, "The second race we will partake in is the CIK-FIA World Karting Championship (KF-Junior), which we will be entering in the second round as a wildcard entry because the first round has already happened. Because we are a wildcard entry, even if you win the race, you will not be crowned the world champion. The finisher with the most points across the two rounds will be crowned the champion, but the race win in itself is enough of a reward if you achieve it. But there is no pressure; just do your best."

She made sure not to put any pressure on Fatih, knowing that he was always doing his best no matter the session, the competition, or what was on the line. So anything added to that would be needless and might end up pushing Fatih to exceed the edge he was driving on and have worse results.

"This is going to once again be held in Italy, but at a different track named..." she dragged the word as she looked for the name of the track before she said, "La Conca International Circuit."

The moment she mentioned the name of the track, Fatih, who had placed the paper he was handed aside to read later, took the paper so fast he nearly tore it as he read the

name of the track, wanting to see it for himself. And there it was. "La Conca," he read audibly, with an excited smile on his face.

It was a track that he was sure no one in the world knew better than him, even those who practiced there daily. To say he was excited would be an understatement of both his lives. Despite one race he was going to be participating in not yet being mentioned, the second round was now his most looked-forward-to race of the year.

Rümeysa, who chalked his excitement up to him just being excited that he was finally going to be racing in a competitive competition, said, "As it is a World Karting Championship, I'm sure you know that it is going to be full of the best of the best drivers in the world in that category and is even considered to be the highest level of karting. Any good performance here is as good as certain to get you into the attention of motorsport giants, and there might even be Formula 1 driver academy scouts attending."

As she was speaking, Fatih continued reading the paper, which had the names of the strongest competition he was going to face, courtesy of TOSFED wanting him to be prepared. From it, he saw many future successful drivers' names, including the expected Lando Norris, Enaam Ahmed, Nikita Mazepin, Logan Sargeant, Robert Schwartzman, and a few more who would all go on to make a name for themselves in the higher ladders of motorsport.

This put a smile on his face, as it finally felt like his dream of reaching the pinnacle was becoming real with each passing day, as he was now on the verge of touching shoulders with those who would actually reach the pinnacle of motorsport, and not only that but also have a very high chance of winning due to the track this round was taking place at.

"As for the third round, we will also be heading to Italy, or rather, we will remain in Italy after the second round since these two races are a week apart from each other," she said as she handed him a third piece of paper.

"You will be entering the WSK Final Cup. It is the most competitive privateer karting series in the world, and the Final Cup is their grand finale. This one is going to take place at the 7 Laghi International Circuit. This one, like the first one, is a full entry and not a wildcard, so we are in for the trophy as well. Most of the drivers you will face in the world championship will be there.

I'm sure you have already seen that all the official competitions we are entering this year are very high-profile, and that is deliberate. They are setting it up so that you have the most high-profile debut ever to put you in front of as many high-profile eyes as possible in order to make things as easy as possible and even manage to bait some driver academies into reaching out to you. You don't have to win the race to reach that objective, but winning will be the best possible outcome. And since you will have the best of the equipment, second only to kart manufacturing teams who will be testing their

next-generation karts, your chances of winning are very good," she said as she looked at Fatih, gauging his reaction.

"I will do my best on the other two, but this one I'm sure I can win," Fatih said as he slid the paper with the second race he was going to participate in, the one taking place at La Conca, tapping on the name of the track with confidence.

"Hahahahaha," she chuckled before she said, "I thought you were going to feel nervous heading to a track you have never experienced, but you are still the same confident you," as she started ruffling his hair, which he quite enjoyed.

"I'm confident on that," he said as he read the system mission that appeared in front of him.

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[CHALLENGE MISSION: **EUROPEAN PROVING GROUND**]

Although famous online to those who watch your videos, you are considered just an entertainer by those who look at Europe as the measuring stick. Now that you have finally moved here, it is time you prove yourself against the doubters, that you are not just a sensation in Turkey but someone capable of contending with the best of the best and coming out on top in your first participation.

MISSIONOBJECTIVES:

Objective 1 [Trofeo delle Industrie]: Task: Podium Finish (Top 3)

Objective 2 [Raw Pace - CIK-FIA World Championship]: Task: Race Win

Objective 3 [Execution - WSK Final Cup]: Task: Podium Finish (Top 3)

REWARD FOR COMPLETING ALL OBJECTIVES:

New Ability Unlocked: [Setup Mastery (Good)] + 500 SP

Additional rewards will be provided if the delivered results exceed the objectives.

PUNISHMENT FOR FAILURE:

The cost to purchase new abilities from the System Shop will be permanently increased by **10%**.

***In case of failure due to circumstances beyond your control, the punishment will be re-evaluated.

[ACCEPT] / [DENY]

Chapter 92: To Italy

"If this is a reward for two podiums and a race win, what would the reward be if I won all of them?" Fatih asked himself as he bounced a tennis ball from the ground to the wall before it returned to him repeatedly while lying on his bed.

Beside him was the dossier that contained information about the races he was going to participate in this year, with additional information beyond the one-page summary his mother had handed him during their discussion.

TOSFED seemed to be putting in a very high effort to ensure that he didn't face any difficulties that might cause him to perform poorly on the track. But it was not out of their goodwill alone; it was also an opportunity for them to finally fully gauge his performance on the international scene, as that would decide the support they would be providing him for the next year.

It was a very calculated move, as it allowed them to both appear very supportive of Fatih while also spending only a three-race worth of money to know if their investment was a success or a dud. And although even if he didn't perform well, they would have to continue supporting him due to the contract they had signed under both their and Rûmeysa's insistence, as she had made sure it was tight following her first experience in motorsport, the level of informational and financial support was determined by the performance Fatih was going to deliver. So if he underperformed, they would be spending very little money until the end of the contract, but if he did well, then they would willingly fully support him, and both sides knew that.

"I don't know exactly, but it should be something that you will be impressed by, I'm sure," Apollo said as he floated above him in the form of a child's body.

"But let's not get ahead of ourselves and get up in our heads," Fatih said as he dragged his free left hand to pick up the dossier and removed some papers while his right was still catching the thrown ball, using sound and his Catlex ability alone. He then asked, "How much will these two tracks cost?"

"The usual. For Grade 6 circuits, it is 10 SP per," Apollo said as he opened the system's Circuit Shop and searched for the circuits for Fatih to decide whether to go ahead with the purchase or not.

He could navigate the system in Fatih's place, but the final purchasing decision remained with Fatih alone and couldn't be forced by anyone.

"In Turkey, I didn't really have to do that, but now it is time we fire on all cylinders and use this ability to our advantage," Fatih said as he went ahead with the purchase of both tracks.

Although it might look like just some advantageous ability, it was more of a cheat than it appeared. Within a race weekend, a driver who participated in all of the available practice time would have a maximum of one and a half hours on the track before qualifying started. Even if you included all of the sessions, it wouldn't exceed three and a half hours, and maybe double or triple that if they arrived a week earlier and rented the track. But Fatih could practice four hours every day on those tracks without having to spend any money, meaning depending on the time he started practicing on a specific circuit, by the time the race weekend started, he might have the most time a driver had ever spent on that track, meaning he would know it inside out like the back of his hand and what the fastest setup was weeks or days before even traveling there.

"This is going to be something when I reach single-seaters," Fatih said, knowing how advantageous having the simulation was going to be due to the testing restrictions that got stricter the higher up the ladder you went.

"Well, who am I to complain?" he said, chuckling, knowing that this was his special advantage, just like Stroll had his father's millions to support him until he reached Formula 1.

After purchasing them, he didn't immediately enter the simulation as he still had some things to do and planned to drive on them after he went to sleep.

With the new high-performance kart already registered, he couldn't help but look forward to it.

Time continued barreling forward like a brakeless train as Fatih spent all of his time on the two tracks, as they were the ones he didn't have any experience driving on, while spending only about twenty minutes a day on La Conca.

It wasn't long until the week of the first competition, the 42nd Trofeo delle Industrie, arrived. Having spent hours both inside the simulation and in continuous testing and practice drives under the support of RFM, he felt fully ready and excited as they headed to the airport a full four days before the first session in order to prevent any jet lag or other problems they might encounter that could delay them.

Accompanying them was his grandmother, Burak, and the cameraman who was documenting everything to be used in the future.

After a two-hour flight, they were picked up by an arranged car and spent an hour heading to Lonato before they arrived and checked into a hotel, resting for the day.

The next day, after refreshing themselves, they headed to the track to see it for themselves and understand the surroundings in order to plan where they were going to spend their time, where the food was, where the academy tents were going to be, and to their surprise, they were not the only ones visiting the track early.

Some were already on the track for setup and unofficial practice preparations, including Enaam and Lando, who were already on the track. Even Mick Schumacher, who was participating under his mother's maiden name, was on the track driving while they watched, as Fatih was only scheduled for tomorrow's unofficial practices. These were the advantages of having a team behind you, as those who raced with their own money and were limited in funding couldn't afford to do things like these, and Fatih was fully intent on benefiting from everything the system had for him.

After spending about an hour on the track, they returned to the hotel while Burak remained behind to communicate with the RFM team that was already there to get up to date with them and make sure that by tomorrow, every wheel on the gear was turning well between him and the team, since they will be working together for the next three races.

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"Although we usually test aggressive setups from the start to see what works and what doesn't, since it is your first time, we are going to start like we did in your tests with a neutral setup and only start moving it to the optimum setup after you are done with track familiarization," Steven said, having already gotten used to Fatih's keen sense for setup optimization in the multiple tests he had participated in, to the point that his suggestions were taken very seriously.

"Our engine tuners are still experimenting with jetting, ignition timing, clutch engagement points, and other fine-tuning experiments at this moment, so engine changes during the sessions might happen to see the results of these changes and go ahead with them or return to the previous setting before the official free practice starts and limitations take place," he continued the briefing as he went into more detail than usual since this would be Fatih's first international race experience, and he didn't want to risk him missing something just because he considered it to be well-known basic knowledge.

The briefing went on for about ten minutes before it was completed, and Fatih was finally allowed to head to the pit lane and get ready to enter the track, which was about to be opened in five minutes.

It didn't take him long to arrive there with Burak, finding his kart already waiting for him, fully ready, as other drivers from other teams and academies had already taken their positions, waiting for the track to open, requiring Fatih to walk all the way to the back of the pack where his kart was waiting for him since a kart with no driver was not allowed in the queue.

Getting ready didn't take more than a minute before he entered the queue, waiting for the green flag and the pit lane exit to be open.

As for Fatih himself, he was currently in full focus mode despite it being a free practice. After all, he was a believer in the saying, "Practice as if you are in a race, and race as if you are in practice," and to him, it didn't matter whether it was an official session or not. As long as he was in a kart on the track, he was going to give his all.

BWOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!!!!

A horn blared as the pit lane exit was finally opened, and one after another, drivers started entering the track, with Fatih following calmly before finally his tires set foot onto the track. It was the first time in the real world, but nothing felt new at all to him since the track he had purchased was a one-to-one match with its real-world counterpart.

It was finally a free practice session where he could drive fully before wanting the setup settings that he had come up with Apollo in practice to be translated into his now-neutral kart, having already experienced the pace it came with.

Chapter 93: Lack of Context

Once out of the pit lane, he silently followed the driver ahead. Instead of accelerating to maximum power like those in front of him, he drove just fast enough not to be left too far behind, but slow enough that a gap automatically opened as they navigated the track toward the start-finish line.

A few restless drivers overtook him on the way, but he paid them no attention. Those watching from the grandstands didn't consider what he was doing out of the norm, as everyone was focused on what was interesting to them.

However, that lasted only until the final three corners; once enough of a gap had opened, he instantly started pushing to maximum speed. He was nearing the start of what he had decided would be his push lap.

(Track map image here)

Going wide on the final corner to preserve more speed into the start-finish straight, he kept his steering super smooth, avoiding as much wobbling as possible on the current setup. He maintained the same smoothness as he took the first corner flat out before taking a sharper turn for turn two while still at full speed. He did his best to keep the kart stable over the bumps, which he knew the locations of as if they were on his own body.

Going wide for turn three, he rode the exit kerbs out of the corner without having lifted even once since the push lap started. As he entered the short straight toward turn four, he braked early, leading into the turn, using the brakes for the first time. Still, he avoided hitting the kerbs on the apex, electing to do so on the exit kerbs, stabilizing the kart once again as he pushed to the max on the long straight.

He arrived at the marshal post, where he braked nicely and early, hitting an early apex into the corner and making sure to have as little slide as possible out of it as he headed into the next double-apex corner. He missed the first apex of the corner while powering on hard and only hit the second apex while maintaining smoothness on the exit.

He got on the brakes early for the chicane, just missing the first kerb and nibbling the second one just a little as he used all of the exit kerbs on the short straight into the final triple hairpin corners. He got on the brakes early into the first hairpin, opening up the entry into the second and repeating the same into the third hairpin and the final corner, maximizing exit speed as he pushed full power all the way down the straight, finishing his first full push lap as he immediately started pushing for the second.

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1:04.421

The lap time flashed on Steve's laptop once Fatih passed the start-finish line and completed his first push lap.

"Wow," everyone in the tent who had watched the lap, focusing on Fatih, couldn't help but be amazed at the pace he managed to extract from a kart on a neutral setup. They were equally impressed with how he was driving on his second lap, even though they already knew he could do it from the test.

Unlike the test where they had only given him the track map, this time they gave him as many details as possible to reduce the track acclimation time and allow him to spend more time finding the best setup. The track was very grippy, requiring the driver to avoid sliding as much as possible, as doing so would lose them time. The fastest way around it was through very smooth steering to preserve grip and chassis balance, late apexing to maximize exit speed on short straights, and getting on the power early on the exits without sliding to gain additional time, all while keeping an eye on the Kerbs, since hitting some of them would upset the chassis.

The same information was provided to every driver before their first stint, but Fatih was the only one who had hit this lap time on his first try and in a neutral setup nonetheless. This meant there was at least a full one and a half seconds of lap time that could be gained through an optimal setup if they managed to find the sweet spot and the maximum edge that Fatih could drive while still having control.

"What was the fastest lap last season?" Steve asked as he parsed through Fatih's live telemetry, witnessing the smoothness in all aspects of his driving, from throttle and steering input to even his braking. Despite braking later than those currently on the track, he was managing to apply just enough braking to slow down optimally and gain time without locking up the tires, retaining as much speed as possible through the track as he averaged around 70 km/h.

"**1:03.507**," John answered as he went through the debrief notes that contained that information.

"So he is about **0.914** seconds from the fastest lap in this category. Looks like the record is going to be officially broken by more than one person," Steve said, realizing that with an optimal setup, that gap was going to be closed fast. He felt impressed, since three of their drivers, Lando, Enaam, and now Fatih, had the pace to break the record if track evolution was also taken into consideration.

Just as they finished speaking and marveling at his first lap, Fatih completed his second one and had reduced the gap to last year's fastest lap by another **0.15** seconds.

"This is going to attract attention," Steve said as he tapped his teeth together, wondering if it was a good or bad thing.

"For his race, it might be bad since it paints a target on his back. But for his European dream, there is nothing better than this type of attention. Plus, the more aggressive the competitors are against him, the better he can look if he outperforms them despite that," Burak, who was silent during the previous conversation due to being fully focused on Fatih's second lap, said.

"Can't deny that," John said, nodding, having already seen how Fatih drove against aggressive drivers during their constant tests and practices, to the point they considered him a scary driver to fight against.

"I agree. After all, scouts choose their targets of interest early, and a good performance later from a driver they weren't watching from the start might be considered a fluke," Steve said as he turned his head to the track in front of them, but not focusing on the karts, but on the main grandstand across from them where he could see a few people sitting and watching.

From this side, they were too small to distinguish faces, but he was sure there were some scouts and observers there, maybe not the main ones, but their interns or assistants were there watching for the abnormal and formerly unknown in order to have them included on the list of drivers to observe.

"But we also risk revealing our fastest setup before parc fermé rules lock setups if we allow him to continue pushing to the max after the setup change," Steve added after a moment of silence, trying to think of a way to balance the situation where Fatih got the attention he needed while also preserving their setup advantage.

"We don't have to worry about him not having enough practice time to fully push. Back in Turkey, he had less practice time than this, and he still had pace from the start. We can ask him to keep some lap time in hand, or we can sandbag him for the rest of the session," John said, acting in his authority as Fatih's coach in order to keep as much advantage as possible. "But we also need to inform him about it and let him decide."

However, they failed to consider one thing. They thought Fatih would attract attention from his driving, but they knew something the observers didn't: Fatih, unlike any other top driver who went out with a baseline configuration derived from their last experience on the track, was on a completely neutral setup. This resulted in him being slower than many of the best drivers, like Lando and Enaam, who had started with optimized configurations.

As a result of this lack of context, Fatih's superb drive was chalked up to being a good but average performance during this unofficial session. Maybe a more experienced scout would have noticed the difference, but those in attendance today didn't, resulting in Fatih's name not being included in the list of new talents to watch out for by the end of the first session.

However, even if Fatih knew he wasn't attracting attention, he wouldn't have felt bad or wanted to push to the maximum to attract their attention. He was someone who, if given the choice between boiling a frog slowly or dipping it in a volcano for an instant result, would choose the latter. That approach has a more memorable impact compared to the other, where extraordinary feats spread out over time might appear to be just slightly above ordinary. Besides, he knew that the main scouts would be on the track once the official sessions started.

Chapter 94: Smooth Setup

"Thanks," Fatih said, his voice hoarse as he grabbed the bottle Burak handed him the moment he rolled into the pit lane. Knowing the drill, Burak had already opened it for him, so Fatih immediately started chugging it, trying to replace the water his body had used to cool down, as he was now drenched in sweat.

"How is the track?" Burak asked when Fatih finally dropped the bottle from his mouth, having drunk nearly half of it.

"Very grippy," Fatih said while helping Burak carry the kart to its stand before they started pushing it back to the RFM tent to begin their setup work and additional optimizations.

Placing his helmet on the table, Fatih jumped onto a chair and collected a clean towel that had been prepared for him to dry himself.

"That was a good drive out there. Your pace is very good for a neutral setup," Steve said as he and John arrived at the table, taking a seat after placing a laptop on it to start the post-session debriefing. They sat opposite Fatih and Burak.

Since it was just the first practice session, there wasn't much to debrief, so they went through the basic information in about ten minutes before finally moving to the most important part: setup discussions.

"This is the basic setup that fits the track's characteristics, which we gathered from yesterday's sessions and our previous years' experience on this track," Steve said as he turned the laptop around, showing a file containing a setup recommendation. He added, as they started looking at the data, "As you already know, we encourage the sharing of data between our drivers, and this information is the result of the hard work of Lando and others. But keep in mind that each driver still retains a portion of the setup and driving tricks for themselves, so this is just a starting point for the optimal setup. It is very fast on its own and can put you at the top if you can exploit it fully, but if you manage to add characteristics that suit you, you can go even faster."

Once he said that, he stopped speaking, letting Fatih and Burak, who had already gone through the data, look at it. Burak was ready to explain things if Fatih didn't understand the reasoning or why something was done in a particular way.

'It really is a good setup,' Fatih thought as he went through the document, one that he wouldn't be against using on the track.

However, as he took the information and visualized the setup being implemented in a kart and driving it in his imagination –something he could do because of the more than five thousand hours he had spent in the simulation driving different karts on different tracks, paired with his Sponge Brain that was at a Genius level– it didn't take long for him to see the lap times this setup was leaving on the table.

It was obvious that each driver was going to have unique additional changes on top of this setup to fit them and allow them to retain a competitive edge against their team members despite sharing the data.

If everything was made available to the other drivers, there would be no need for some of them to participate in more than one unofficial session, since that would be all they needed to get used to the setup that other drivers had worked hard to come up with. They could enjoy the fruits of others' labor after doing basically nothing.

"So, do you want to go with it and test to see how it is and see if there are changes you want, or do you already have a setup in mind after your drive?" John asked.

Had it been Enaam or Lando, they would have suggested driving this setup first to get a feel for it and see if there were improvements they wanted. But they treated Fatih very differently after having experienced his deep understanding of the kart and the setup intuition he had shown across many tests and practices, to the point that they most of the time went with his suggestions as is and only rarely proposed additional changes.

Upon hearing the question, Fatih took a moment to consider the suggestion before he said, "First, let's try my setup idea and see how it works. If we manage to fine-tune it early, I will also try this setup as well," wanting to experience their setup suggestion in order to have a basic understanding of how Lando's and Enaam's karts were going to act on the track.

This would give him an edge if they were to go head-to-head, as he could use that knowledge to his advantage and force the other drivers to drive in a profile that was not suitable for their kart's setup, giving him an advantage.

"Sure, let's hear it," Steve said, picking up a notebook and a pen, ready to write down Fatih's setup suggestions.

"My previous setup was fighting the track, making the kart feel bound up and incapable of flowing. So let's start with removing the front torsion bar and widening the front track by putting one spacer on the outside of each stub axle."

"So you want to calm the front end down and help keep all four wheels on the ground," Steve said, seeing the intention behind that setup change, the complete opposite of the setup that Fatih had applied at Whilton Mill, as this track, unlike Whilton Mill, demanded a smooth setup instead of an aggressive and biting one.

"Yes," Fatih said, agreeing with his interpretation of the changes before he continued. "As for the rear, though at neutral it felt good, it could be better. On exit, I can feel the rear of the chassis flexing too much. When I get on the power, there's a slight delay before the kart launches. I'm losing drive. We need to lock down the rear end and turn it into a solid platform for acceleration."

"Stiffer rear, then. You want to add the rear torsion bar?" Steve asked after hearing Fatih deconstruct the problem caused by the rear's current setup.

"Yes, let's go with the stiff rear bar. And I want the widest possible rear track width, right to the 1400mm limit. We also need to switch to the hardest axle we have, the Type H. On a track with this much rubber and grip, I don't need the chassis to generate rotation; I need it to provide a stable, rigid base so I can be aggressive on the throttle."

A stiffer rear could be achieved through different means, so he went ahead and mentioned the exact things he wanted to be done to achieve that.

After mentioning a few minor additional changes, he finally finished giving the setup he wanted.

Steve took a moment to go through the suggested new setup and tried to imagine what it would do on the track. As he visualized it in his mind, he could see this setup making the kart feel like it was rolling into a corner with all four tires gripping tenaciously.

The setup would fully shine in the mid-corner, as it would be incredibly stable and planted, allowing Fatih to carry a shockingly high minimum speed and generate immense lateral G-forces, making him feel glued to the track and able to be incredibly precise with the throttle and steering.

On corner exits, like the tight hairpins, the combination of the wide rear track, stiff rear torsion bar, and hard axle would provide explosive traction. The moment he touched the throttle on exit, the kart would launch forward with minimal wheelspin, allowing him to be more aggressive and gain additional time.

It was an extremely good setup, as it would gain additional lap time by carrying momentum, allowing him to be smooth and maintain a high average speed across the entire lap. A less experienced driver might find the setup to be lazy on initial turn-in because it wasn't pointy, but for a driver with a good understanding, like Fatih, it would be obvious that the setup was trading a fraction of a second of initial rotation for multiple tenths that would be gained through higher mid-corner speed and better exit traction.

"So, in summary, the new setup you want for the next session is to remove the front torsion bar, widen the front track, widen the rear track to the maximum, install the stiff rear torsion bar, and switch to the hard rear axle," Steve read the summary of the things he had written in the notebook as he tried to hide the goosebumps he was feeling. It was unbelievable that this setup was something a ten-year-old kid had suggested after a single fifteen-minute session on a track he had driven for the first time. He then asked, "Is that everything, or is there more?"

"Yes, that's it," Fatih nodded before he started drinking the remaining water in the bottle, as he didn't feel satiated yet.

"Okay then, you get some rest, and I will go and inform the mechanics of the setup changes you want," Steve said as everyone other than Fatih rose from the table and left to talk with the mechanics.

"Starting with the next debriefing, we should add the mechanics to the table to reduce the need for repeating the setup changes he wants," Steve said as he contemplated the fastest way to explain it to them.

As telemetry engineers, both he and John were used to being the ones translating the young drivers' intuition and feel on the track into something the mechanics could work with, but with Fatih, there was no need for that, and they could save additional time if the mechanics joined them.

When they heard Steve say that, the three of them chuckled, realizing the absurdity of the situation they were in.

The setup changes took a whole hour to complete, resulting in Fatih missing the two unofficial practice sessions that were sanctioned by the track owners, not the competition organizers.

By the time the changes were translated into the kart, the fourth practice session was about to start, so they hurried Fatih to the kart after they made sure everything was as he wanted, with just additional ballast tanks that pushed him past the minimum weight

by ten kilos to hide the improvements from other teams and prevent them from mimicking it, he was finally sent to the track for his second session.

Chapter 95: Race Weekend | Friday | Arrival

"Shhhh," John took a deep breath as he checked the lap time of the final push lap Fatih had driven in his second session on the track.

1:04.202

Despite a ten-kilogram ballast that was slowing him down by more than a second, he still improved by more than two-tenths on his fastest lap with the neutral setup.

"Looks like we have the fastest setup possible on our hands," Steve said, waving at Fatih, who had arrived at their tent to rest and wait for the next session.

"Yeah, I think only a few fine-tunings are needed before it is good for the weekend," Fatih said as he sat in his chair, lazily enjoying the moment of rest.

"There is only one session remaining. Do you want to do the modifications now or go with the proposed setup and do the final modifications during the official sessions?" Steve asked as he joined him at the table.

"Let's go with the suggested setup," Fatih said without a moment of thought. He had already driven with the highest setup, but wanting a super-specific setup from the start was something he avoided. He usually gave the specific main setup he wanted and followed it by slowly increasing the minimum adjustments over a session.

"Okay," Steve said, opening his notebook as they started the session debrief, which was very short.

This was followed by the mechanics being informed about the setup changes, and they started working on them, having it ready before the day's final unofficial free practice session, allowing Fatih to go out and experience the setup.

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"Tomorrow, do you want to go to a park?" Rûmeysa asked Fatih as they had dinner at the hotel following his return from the track after the final session.

"Yes," Fatih said excitedly, as tomorrow was going to be a free day. The competition officials and the scrutinizing group would be doing final checks and preparations for the competition that would start on Friday and go all the way to Sunday, so the track was closed to anyone other than them.

"Good, then I will ask Burak and see if he is free as well," Rûmeysa said with a smile. Burak had not yet returned to the hotel, as he was still at the track, going through the data and final meetings before the official competition started.

Güldane just looked at her daughter and didn't say anything, smiling silently before continuing with her meal, knowing that saying anything would result in her slowing things down, and she didn't want that.

After they finished their meal and enjoyed time together in the hotel's lounge, they went to sleep to rest for the day, with Fatih entering the simulation to continue his practice as Apollo went through his planned lessons.

The following day was quite enjoyable for Fatih and the family, plus Burak and the cameraman who joined them on their journey to the park. They returned in the evening, and they avoided doing anything else, resting early in preparation for the start of the competition tomorrow.

Finally, Friday arrived. Knowing the importance of the day, they got up early and finished all of their preparations before heading to the track, arriving there at seven to start the sportive scrutineering process as fast as possible so that they could benefit from the non-timed session that was allowed before the official sessions were to start.

Fatih, with Burak's assistance and a worker from RFM, presented themselves, their kart, and their equipment for inspection. The officials checked the chassis number, engine seals, and Fatih's driver's license, which earned Fatih very weird looks from the officials who realized that he had a license above his age specification. Only after the FIA approved documentation was provided was that situation solved, and they were approved to go ahead as they had finally complied with the FIA technical and safety standards.

This allowed them to return to their tent, finally, to do their final preparations, and Fatih finally got the chance to meet the future Formula 1 driver.

"Lando, this is our new team member, Fatih," Steve said, welcoming Fatih to the tent and starting the introduction process before reversing it. "Fatih, this is Lando, our academy's ace and your competitor." Fatih gave a slight nod to Lando before turning to the young guy beside him as Steve said, "I'm sure you have already met Enaam in the test session, so there is no need for a reintroduction, and this is..." before he continued introducing the remaining drivers under the RFM team.

As he reached the table, Fatih extended his hand to Lando, who looked smaller than people his age actually were. Lando reciprocated the handshake as Fatih did the same to Enaam and the other drivers, before joining them at the table for a joint briefing session before the competition started.

They were all already in their race suits with their helmets on the table in front of them, showing that they were ready for the competition both mentally and physically.

"Okay, let's start fast before you have to head to the Official Drivers' Briefing in half an hour," Ricky Flynn said as he dropped a clipboard on the table, taking a seat at the short side of the table, signaling his position and the start of the briefing.

He had participated personally and taken the leadership role in this competition because he wanted to see how Fatih was going to perform with his own eyes and observe how he operated behind the scenes to see if he was the real deal he had shown to be in the test sessions, because there were drivers who were good in practice but the moment they were under the eyes of people, they started getting nervous and made blunders.

"We have completed the scrutineering process without any problem, and all our chassis numbers and engine seals are cleared. No surprises there, and frankly, that is the easy part," Steve said, starting the team briefing.

"I know you are tired from waking up early, but I want you focused," Ricky Flynn said, taking over from Steve when he saw a few of their drivers sitting and listening lazily.

"Go on," Riccky said when everyone focused back.

"This weekend's going to be tight. We've got 54 entries in KF-Junior, split into three groups. Not all of you will be in the same heats, so you are not going to be able to rely on teammates to clear space for you, and I don't want that to be something you were hoping for," Steve said as he flipped the dossier on the table, starting to go through the group allocations.

"Lando, you're in Group A. Enaam and Alex, Group B. Fatih and Max, Group C. You'll rotate through heats: A vs. B, B vs. C, C vs. A. That means you'll be racing each other at least once. So I want you to compete fairly and keep it clean. I'm sure you already know that these group allocations are the same ones that will decide which free practice session you will be participating in, so I'm skipping that."

"South Garda is dry right now, but forecasts say light rain tomorrow morning. That means qualifying could be on a damp track. We'll run a medium setup in free practice, not full wet, not full dry. I want feedback after every session. Don't just say 'it feels okay.' I want corner names, braking points, grip zones, which I'm sure you already have experience with, having already driven a few sessions on the track before today."

He went through additional important topics before he finished everything.

Rickky, who had been silently listening, looked at the drivers for a moment before speaking.

"I'm sure you all want to win, but doing so while driving dirty is something I do not condone. I would rather have a driver who shows consistency, and the same will be true for officials, sponsors, and recruiters who are watching. The reputation you form for yourselves today will determine the future of your racing career, the same way your talent does. No one wants a dirty driver, and even if you are good, with that attitude, you will need to be one of a kind for them to accept it. So drive hard but clean, understood?"

"Yes," the drivers all said in unison.

Upon receiving their response, his face softened a bit, happy that they were taking it seriously.

"You've all got talent. That's why you're here. But talent without discipline is just noise. So let's make this weekend count," he added as he checked his watch.

"Alright, grab water, stretch, and be at the drivers' briefing tent in 30. And Lando..... no heroics in free practice. Save it for qualifying."

The drivers nodded, with Lando giving a look of surprise that he was specifically called out by name, but he didn't argue about it since he had a tendency to do that. Other drivers reacted differently: some were jealous of the attention Lando received, others didn't really care about the singling out, and some were focused on looking forward to the session. The tension between them was real, but so was the excitement, because the weekend had officially begun.

They quickly got up from the table and started doing the things they deemed urgent before they swiftly headed to the drivers' briefing tent with five minutes on the clock, because missing it meant penalties or even exclusion from the event, so no one wanted to be late and miss the rest of the weekend because of it.

Chapter 96: Race Weekend | Friday | Free Practice

"Is this your first time in these kinds of meetings?" Enaam, who was sitting beside Fatih, asked, while looking at the back of the tent where Ricky Flynn and a few people from their and other teams were standing. The drivers had taken their seats, talking among themselves, waiting for the organizers to come and start the meeting.

"I have been in them, but they were small in size compared to this," Fatih said, following Enaam's eyes. But instead of focusing on the people at the back, he focused on the young drivers who looked to be the same height as him, despite knowing that he was the youngest of them all by at least two years.

To him, it was no different than a dream, as he now realized that he was seeing future drivers when they were at their youngest and with the least amount of hype. But he felt a bit sad, realizing that he was not going to see any of those in the upper categories during this meeting, as they were segregated depending on the categories they were in.

The team managers and mechanics were already conversing among themselves, as they knew each other from different competitions they had partaken in throughout the year, occasionally pointing a finger at some young drivers.

But the conversational atmosphere didn't last long, as two people, a man with a few folded large pieces of paper under his arm and a woman, entered the tent, standing in front of the large, clean whiteboard. Everyone in the room stopped talking and focused on them, at least the adults did, with a few kids still talking to themselves as if they didn't care.

"Can I have everyone's attention, please? Otherwise, this meeting will be useless if some of you are not going to focus on its contents," the man said in an Italian-accented English, but despite that, it carried an authoritative voice, causing everyone who hadn't stopped talking to do so, as some of the kids wondered who that person was.

With everyone now focusing on him, he spoke once again. "Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the 42nd Trofeo delle Industrie." He paused for a moment as everyone in the room clapped, with the adults starting it and the children following like parrots.

"My name is Stefano Bianchi, this competition's race director, and this here is Alessandra Conti, the stewardess."

Immediately after the introduction, he removed the folded chart from under his arm, pinning it on the whiteboard with magnets while saying, "I'm sure many of you already know what these are, but rules dictate that I repeat them so that none of you will argue that you didn't know these things," as the chart revealed different colored flags and a few other race-related images.

"Yellow means caution, as there is a problem ahead of you, and as a result, you should be vigilant and ready to avoid any problem. At the same time, no overtaking. Red flag means stop immediately, as there is something hazardous on the track or a race-stopping incident, so anyone who doesn't heed any other flag, especially this one, will be punished heavily." Using an extended stick, he moved from one flag to another on the chart. "Blue flag means you are being lapped, and you are to let the driver behind you through within three marshal posts. Failure to do that will result in penalties as well. A black flag means you are out. If you see it, it means you will have to return to the pit lanes and end the race immediately."

Using an extended stick, Mr. Bianchi tapped the next flag on the laminated chart, a white rectangle with a bold black cross.

"This," he said, "is the mechanical failure flag. If you see this waved at you, it means your kart is visibly damaged or leaking fluids. You must return to the pits immediately. Do not continue, as you're a danger to others."

He moved the stick again, this time to a diagonally striped yellow-and-red flag.

"This is the slippery surface flag. It means there's oil, water, or debris on the track. It will be shown at the marshal post nearest the hazard. You must reduce speed and avoid sudden maneuvers. If you ignore it and cause an incident, the stewards will not be lenient."

A few drivers exchanged glances. Fatih leaned forward slightly, his eyes locked on the chart.

Mr. Bianchi paused, then pointed to the final flag, a plain green one.

"A green flag means the track is clear. Racing resumes. It may follow a yellow or red flag situation. When you see green, you're free to push again, but remember, the race isn't won in one corner, so drive with that in mind."

He lowered the stick and looked around the tent.

"Flags are not suggestions. They are commands. If you fail to respect them, you don't just risk penalties; you risk your safety and the safety of everyone around you. I don't want an incident to occur just as a result of someone's ignorance of the flags."

A moment of silence followed. The hum of generators outside filled the air.

"Any questions?" he asked, scanning the room.

No one raised their hands, as it was practically basic knowledge for all racers, with some even feeling bored as they listened to him.

"Good. Now, Miss Conti, you can go ahead," he said, moving aside and leaving the stage to her.

"Thanks," she said, taking the center stage.

"When in parc fermé conditions, I expect none of you to touch your karts after qualifying unless you are authorized. Tire markings will be checked, and your transponder must be mounted correctly because if your kart fails to be timed due to a mis-mounting of the transponders, that will be on you, and we will not do anything about it," she said, immediately getting to the point, not wasting time with an introduction since the race director had already done that for her.

"During formation laps, keep it tight and don't deliberately open large gaps. During rolling starts, I don't want to see anyone weaving or brake-checking someone else. If you jump the start, we will know, and if you cause chaos, you will be penalized for the next heat, so keep all of those in mind during the start."

She continued on a few additional things before she said, "Finally, respect. I expect you to respect the officials, your competitors, and the sport. You are here to race and compete, not to argue, so if you have a protest, file it properly. I don't want to be informed of shouting in the paddock. Any questions?" she asked once she too was done.

"No? Good. And good luck with your races. Drive fast and drive clean," the race director said before looking at his watch and adding, "You'll be called for your first free practice in one hour, so you have half an hour of free track time to get used to the track before the official sessions start. Dismissed."

It took less than five minutes for the tent to empty as drivers and mechanics rushed back to their tents in order to have the karts ready as fast as possible to send them out for the final free-for-everyone session before the official time started and the timed and controlled free practices began. This time also acted as an opportunity for those who didn't have the financial means to come here days before the weekend and spend time getting to know the track in order to join the official free practice with all drivers, at least knowing the track to some level of familiarity.

Within ten minutes, the track was filled with karts, with very few drivers choosing not to join as it was getting very crowded.

But two of the five RFM drivers opted not to join the track, citing those reasons.

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"Looks more like a demolition derby than practice," Lando, who was watching from the pit lane, said as he watched the drivers who were experiencing the track for the first time go through turn one, fail, and get sent spinning or off the track.

"Yeah, for some of them, it's their first time on the track, and some are trying to prove something before the weekend starts," Fatih said with a half-smile on his face as he turned to look at Lando, who was watching the track standing beside him with his arms folded, squirming every time someone on the track slid or went out of bounds.

"That's the trap. You don't win anything on Friday. You just show off and risk bending your chassis," Lando said as a kart locked up and nearly collected two others as they both pulled back, imagining the sort of damage had it actually happened.

"Looks like someone is trying tomorrow's wet setup on a bone-dry track," Fatih said as he pointed at someone who had a soft axle and a twitchy rear while driving.

"You ever get nervous watching them? Like... wondering if you're doing enough?" Lando asked as he looked at Fatih, who seemed to be moving from one kart to another, observing them while remaining extremely calm.

"Always, but having nerves means you care. All you have to do is not let them drive the kart for you, or you will find yourself bottling a position at the start," Fatih said while holding himself back from laughing out loud when he realized what and who he was saying it to.

For Lando, who would show in his Formula 1 career that people's words to him affected his mentality, those words were things he needed to start taking seriously at this young age. Fatih wondered why such a thing wasn't done for Lando; was it because he was ahead of everyone in the later parts of his karting career that it was not a problem? But now that he had a close look, he planned to see if he could pinpoint the reason.

They watched the practice sessions while continuing their small talk before Lando returned to the tent with ten minutes on the clock before Group A's free practice started. He wanted to finish his preparations, and he was ready in his kart with two minutes on the clock, waiting for the pit lane exit to be opened so that he could enter the track and start his practice.