

# Giovanni Minardi: ‘Talent first’

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Sports management is crucial, especially when aiming for the top in motorsport. It’s about knowing how to allocate resources, maintaining project continuity, and achieving professional goals that, let’s be honest, go beyond just F1. We spoke with Giovanni Minardi, a motorsport talent scout and the owner of Minardi Management. (fm)



**Let’s start with current events: an Italian is making a grand return to F1 with a top team. How long have you known Kimi, and what do you think makes him special?**

*«I’ve known Kimi, or Andy as I call him, since he was eight years old, so for about ten years. I’ve watched him grow up in the motorsport world. The first time I saw him on track was during the Summer Camp at Sarno, organized by the Italian Federation in the summer of 2014. After just two*



*laps, I immediately realized I was witnessing a real talent. He had never seen the track before, didn't know the kart he was going to drive, and yet in just two laps, he set the track record. He was flying, but what surprised me the most was the ease with which he handled the kart, the perfect lines he took, the braking points—he looked like a seasoned driver, yet he wasn't even nine years old.*

*What I find special about Andy is his ability to drive anything he's given with such ease, and the most impressive part is that he's been like this since he was a child. Everything he does comes naturally to him. In my humble opinion, he is one of the few people in the world truly born to excel in this sport. I'm happy to have been there that day in Sarno to watch him drive and to have had the chance to work with him, bringing him to Mercedes and kick-starting his career, which will lead to him becoming the next Mercedes driver in Formula 1 in the 2025 season.»*

**Speaking of the Academy, can you tell us a bit about that world and help debunk some myths about it?**

*«It's a very complex environment that doesn't always reward the fastest driver or the one with the best skills. Unfortunately, politics, marketing, and even the country you come from play a significant role. Today, Academies often take on drivers too easily, looking at the big numbers and hoping that at least one will emerge as a World Champion. So far, only McLaren/Mercedes with Hamilton and Mercedes with Rosberg have succeeded, supporting them from childhood through to Formula One. Others have brought drivers in without achieving much, resulting in a few who stayed in F1 for a couple of years, but also many who were left disappointed and abandoned without any support. In my own small way, I try to help drivers reach the highest possible level based on their sporting value, not because they have a lot of money. Thanks to the network of contacts I've built over my 30-year career, I'm fortunate that when I recommend one of my drivers, they are often put under observation by the Academy.»*



**Tell us how your agency works: what does being a pilot manager mean today and why is it such a crucial role?**

*«Being a manager today means meticulously overseeing every aspect of a driver's career. Our goal is to pave the quickest and most effective path for a driver to turn professional. Each year, we evaluate the best category for each driver, select the optimal team based on their performance expectations and our budget, and sometimes bridge financial gaps through our network. Throughout the year, we ensure teams are performing correctly and intervene swiftly if issues arise. We also focus on the driver's overall growth, not just their driving skills. During the season, we work on enhancing our drivers' public image through strategic marketing, creating a strong presence so that everyone in motorsport knows who they are and what they do. By the time a driver is ready to be introduced to F1 Academies or manufacturers, especially in the case of closed-wheel racing, we are fully prepared.*

*Having a manager in motorsport today is essential. Without comprehensive knowledge of the sport and its key players, families can easily waste time and money. The complexity of this sport is akin to a chess game; knowing how to move the right pieces at the right time requires the experience of a seasoned manager like myself, who has been navigating this environment for nearly thirty years.»*



**How does one recognize talent? We know the term is often overused, but is there a way to see beyond the surface and understand when there is potential, even if it's not fully developed yet?**

*«This question is tough to answer because there are no set rules. It's about the feelings and emotions you experience when you watch a driver in action, which are hard to put into words. What strikes me the most when I see a driver for the first time, especially a young one, is the ease with which they do things. They immediately take the right lines, their braking points are perfect, and you can see how they interact with their mechanic or engineer. One thing that helps me is comparing the young driver to established drivers I've worked with in the past. This is something you can do when you've had the privilege of working with great champions and can see if they share similar characteristics, whether in driving style, personality, or other traits. I am confident that through my work, I can help drivers grow and become professionals.»*

**In this context, and without naming names, have you seen drivers with great potential who were 'lost' because of bad choices made too early?**





*«Unfortunately, I have seen many. I've seen drivers who were very talented but didn't have the financial means to race; I've seen others who had both potential and money but lacked the right mindset. In short, I've seen it all. To prevent this from happening, it's crucial to have a managerial figure like me alongside the driver and their family to help avoid mistakes and open the right doors. In recent years, we've seen more drivers with big budgets than with talent, but hopefully, this trend will change soon, and we'll return to having only talented drivers. Among my drivers, I am convinced there are some very talented individuals who have the potential to succeed as professional drivers and, why not, make it to F1»*



**Unlike other sports, which offer many athletes the opportunity to reach the highest level (think of football, a team sport with around 500 spots in top leagues like the Premier League or Serie A), F1 – as Sainz mentioned a few months ago – has only 20 places and infrequent turnover. Can we still talk about the prevailing dream of F1, or is it more accurate to speak of a path to professionalism in motorsport?**



*«Unfortunately, Sainz's words are true; the funnel is getting tighter and tighter. When I talk to drivers, I never focus on F1. Instead, I emphasize becoming professionals, which means earning money rather than spending it on racing. If we all do our jobs well – the driver, the team, the manager, and the family – and you make it to F1, then we've achieved the ultimate goal. I hope to have the opportunity to help many talents and guide them into the professional world.»*

### **How can one pursue a path to professionalism in motorsports, and what categories offer the most opportunities for those not solely focused on F1?**

*«The path to becoming a professional driver is now fairly well-defined. Those with the financial means or who gain entry into an academy typically start in karting, progress to various formula series, and then aim for F1. The journey usually involves competing in F4, then moving up to Formula Regional, Formula 3, Formula 2, and finally, if all goes well, reaching F1. For those without substantial financial backing, the goal is often to transition to closed-wheel racing as soon as possible. However, simply following this progression isn't enough. It's crucial to know the right time to move up a category, choose the right team, and make strategic decisions along the way. Apart from F1, several categories can lead to a professional driving career. **In single-seaters, there's IndyCar in America, Super Formula in Japan, and Formula E, which has gained prominence in recent years. In Europe, opportunities exist in the European Le Mans Series, the GT World Challenge, DTM, and WTCR. Japan offers the Super GT 200 and 400 series, while in America, there's IMSA. NASCAR, though predominantly American, is also an option, albeit challenging for international drivers. Additionally, Brazil has Stock Car racing, which is primarily for Brazilian and some South American drivers.***

*Fortunately, there are numerous championships outside of F1 that provide pathways to becoming a professional driver. Thanks to these opportunities, many talented drivers who couldn't make it to F1 have found success in closed-wheel racing, achieving excellent results.»*



### **How do you see the world of motorsports ten years from now?**

*«Not very well. Over the past 20 years, this beautiful sport has become purely a business, and it's being run as such. Costs have skyrocketed, making it a sport for the few. Take Formula One, for example, which should be the pinnacle of motorsport. If we look at the starting grid, we see that nearly half the drivers bring enormous budgets to race.*

*In the last three years, drivers who won F2 haven't managed to get into Formula One. However, next year, a bit of generational change will bring several drivers from the junior categories, though they are all part of academies and none have made it purely on their sporting merit.*

*For new drivers to have a better chance of entering F1, the FIA and Liberty Media should introduce new teams to increase the number of seats available. In other categories, the number of cars on the grid is much higher. If F1 could return to the days of the 80s and 90s, with pre-qualifying sessions featuring 36 cars, it would greatly benefit young drivers. As for my role, I hope to discover many more talented drivers and help them achieve their main dream, which is also ours.»*



*Minardi*  

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