



AKI HINTSA | OSKARI SAARI

W S O Y

THE CORE

BETTER LIFE,
BETTER PERFORMANCE

AKI HINTSA & OSKARI SAARI

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**BETTER LIFE,
BETTER PERFORMANCE**

WERNER SÖDERSTRÖM OSAKEYHTIÖ - HELSINKI

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ORIGINAL *AKI HINTSA - VOITTAMISEN ANATOMIA*

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KEIJO LEPPÄNEN'S BOOK *MIKA HÄKKINEN: MESTARIN PALUU*

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PREFACE

It was an hour and forty minutes before the beginning of the Formula One Grand Prix in São Paulo, Brazil, the last race of the 2013 season, when Aki Hintsä told me that this would be his last race in his then role as the McLaren F1 doctor. Ten seconds later I suggested that I write a book about him.

I'd known Aki for the ten years we'd both been on the F1 circuit and knew a lot of great stories about him. But I still had no idea what I was getting into. I thought I would be writing the story of an F1 insider and his life behind the scenes. The book did become that as well. The time I spent with Hintsä confirmed my impression of the gray eminence of the F1 paddock. Having witnessed Hintsä's daily conversations, I am convinced that his significance in the motorsport is much greater than he as a humble person will tell you. He talked to many of the top people in the F1 world, and from their tone of voice it is crystal clear just how much respect they accord his view on key questions, such as the choice of driver. But this is not just a Formula One book. What you hold in your hands is also not a tell-all memoir—although you will learn some new things about familiar names. Aki Hintsä carefully guards his clients' confidentiality.

The book's primary topic is the philosophy with which world-champion Formula One drivers have been trained un-

der Hintsas's watch. At the core of the book is, above all, Hintsas's well-being model, from which anyone can benefit.

Let me be frank. I am a sceptic when someone tries to sell me well-being. There is so much placebo rubbish on the market—miracle diets and pure humbug—that my irritation threshold gets crossed easily. Hintsas's model melted my scepticism for three reasons.

First, it is no fanatical defence of a narrow clique: it's all based on medical science. As a scientist Hintsas is also willing to admit his mistakes and change his views when new data come along. Nothing can ever be proven beyond a shadow of a doubt, and conflicting research data can be found on almost everything. Hintsas's experts, too, have to sift through all the data in search of the most reliable information. Their goal, in any case, is to keep testing and updating their views objectively.

Second, and for me more important, is that Hintsas never preaches. His model is not designed to make anyone perfect.

And third, I've seen how the model works in practice. My astonishingly open conversations with Sebastian Vettel and the other interviews I conducted for this book underscored just how important Hintsas's model is for his clients. Formula One, and later the business world, have been an ideal trial laboratory for him.

Hintsas is not the only physician talking about well-being. But I have never run into such a comprehensive and well-thought-out conception. In the words of Dr. Jesús Arroyo, one of Hintsas's collaborators, 'Everyone knows the methods by which well-being can be improved, but who will develop a motivation pill?' In Arroyo's mind, Hintsas's method may have solved that problem.

As I wrote the book, I began to understand why Arroyo had been saying these things. The more I learned, the more

convinced I became of Hintsä's approach. I was not completely convinced, however, until I tried it myself. I tweaked my life habits just slightly, here and there, beginning with my sleeping and eating habits.

The result was that during the writing of the book, I lost eight kilos and have never had more energy. I broke out of a long-standing cycle of sickness. For only the second time in about ten years, I spent six months totally healthy.

Over the past years I was also under considerable stress due to two personal crises. Some weeks they took turns keeping me awake at night; other weeks both came at me at once. Neither was anything I could change; nor, obviously, could Hintsä. But his philosophy helped me cope with the crises and put them in perspective.

Hintsä's understanding of well-being contains considerable scientific information, and no one book could ever cover his model exhaustively. This book is therefore only an introduction to Hintsä's thought—a kind of Well-being 101.

I have sought to tell the stories from Hintsä's life that best illustrate his philosophy. The book is roughly divided into three parts: Hintsä's years in Ethiopia tell the story of how his realisation came about; the middle part of the book depicts the contents of his well-being model; and the third part offers practical applications of his model through the stories of a few exemplary clients.

I would like to thank all of the people who helped me write this book. Antti Kontsas, Matti Kontsas, Heikki Huovinen, Hilkka Virtapohja, Hannu Luomajoki, Markku Partinen, Helene Patounas, Stuart Smith, Luke Bennett—without all of you the book never would have been finished. Heta Tuominen-Soini, Tuomas Grönman, Ilona Rauhala—thanks for the loan of your expertise. Mika Häkkinen, Kimi Räikkönen, Sebastian Vettel,

Tommi Pärämäkoski, Adrian Sutil, Chris Weber, Eric Tveter, Marko Ahtisaari—thanks for your courage and openness in sharing your stories. And thanks to Aki Hintsa for his trust.

Thanks also to my family for their patience, and to my dad for his useful comments. I haven't often seen editors thanked, but it's a necessity here. Every author should be lucky enough to work with Joel Kontro. He is a supreme professional whose calmness helped me sleep at night.

For reasons of confidentiality I can't even list everyone deserving of my gratitude, but you know who you are. Thanks!

Espoo, Finland, December 20, 2014.

Oskari Saari

DOWN FOR THE COUNT

Aki Hintsa didn't know which angered him more: the attempt to interfere with his work as a doctor or the fact that Martin Whitmarsh couldn't just say what he wanted to say.

It was September 21, 2013. The air in Singapore was warm, as it always is. The mercury was a hair under thirty degrees Celsius. The sun had set three hours before, one minute after the third free-practice period had ended. A slight breeze made the humidity bearable. But Hintsa was steaming, choking on his rage, and his head was humming.

Earlier that day in practice, the Finnish Lotus driver Kimi Räikkönen had banged his car on the curb violently enough to knock the wind out of him. The ride height in a Formula One car is so low that the driver's buttocks are never more than about five centimetres above the asphalt, so the situation wasn't in any way unusual. Drivers are constantly getting jolted, and at first Räikkönen thought nothing of it.

But after the practice period, the pain had become crippling—so bad that he couldn't breathe properly. The team doctors had already been in to examine Räikkönen. They hadn't dared recommend treatment but had said most likely that Räikkönen had no business participating in the qualifying laps that were to begin in two hours.

Finally a call was put out for Aki Hintsu, whom Räikkönen had known for ten years. Asking a McLaren doctor to treat a Lotus driver was a last resort. In the extremely competitive world of F1 motorsports, inviting a rival team's representative to help is quite unusual. Like his colleagues, Hintsu noted the seriousness of Räikkönen's condition.

'I've got to numb it,' Hintsu told him, 'but it's a tricky spot. I can't promise it'll help.'

Räikkönen knew that if Hintsu didn't anaesthetise his back, his weekend would be over, and consented to the treatment. The pain was incredible.

'Do whatever it takes.'

Hintsu anaesthetised Räikkönen's back and gave him pain-killers. There was nothing else he could do.

When the qualifying laps started, Hintsu stood in his usual place in the McLaren garage and watched with satisfaction as the black Lotus #7 curved out onto the track. Räikkönen placed fairly low in thirteenth, but at least he was in the race.

After the qualifying laps Hintsu saw from his phone that something was wrong. Someone was trying extra-hard to contact him. McLaren's Technical Director Sam Michael grabbed Hintsu by the sleeve.

'Aki, did you medicate Kimi today?'

'Yeah, he was ...'

'Did you do anything else?'

'I numbed his back.'

'Martin's pissed off. He's not happy you helped Kimi.'

Hintsu's tachometer flipped over into the red.

'Leave it, Sam. If Martin's got something to say to me, I'll talk to him directly,' Hintsu said. He was on his way out of the garage mid-sentence.

Team Principal Martin Whitmarsh was in the engineers' room.

'Martin, do you have a minute?'

'Not now, we've got a meeting.'

'Okay, then let's talk here!'

Twenty McLaren engineers stared at Hintsä in amazement. Whitmarsh stood up and took Hintsä into the next room. Whitmarsh was usually long-winded, but in this meeting he could hardly get a word in edgewise. Hintsä had a bone to pick.

'Martin, you cannot tell me who to treat and who not to! I'm a doctor. How can I refuse to help someone in tremendous pain. Tell me, Martin!'

'Kimi drives for our competitors!'

'If that's a problem for you, you'd better fire me this instant, because I will damn well do the same thing again. I'm a doctor, and it's my job to help people. It makes no difference what colour shirt they're wearing!'

Before Whitmarsh could reply Hintsä continued:

'Even if you and I were in different camps, or even enemies, and a situation like this came up, I'd treat you too.'

Whitmarsh, one of the most popular men in the McLaren pit, didn't know what to say. He had never seen Hintsä so determined. They didn't always see eye to eye, but they were friends who respected each other. Whitmarsh valued Hintsä's directness when he disagreed. Hintsä for his part saw Whitmarsh as one of the few people who could take it.

Whitmarsh put his hand on his team doctor's shoulder, looked him in the eye, and nodded. No words were needed. Their harmony and friendship survived, even though the next day when Räikkönen, with Hintsä's anaesthesia in him, drove from his thirteenth start grid to place third, four places ahead of McLaren's Jenson Button and five ahead of McLaren's Sergio Pérez. But the confrontation sealed Hintsä's decision to leave the F1 paddock. His work as a travelling physician with

the team would last only another two months—two Grands Prix longer than Kimi Räikkönen's with Lotus, cut short by a back operation. No one knew anything about that then. No one knew that Martin Whitmarsh would only be Team Principal at McLaren for another six Grands Prix.

In retrospect, Hintsala wondered whether Whitmarsh had been reading the writing on the wall. He had often thought his future as Team Principal was unsure.

It was clear even in Singapore that the prestigious British McLaren team was on its way to its first season since 1980 without a single placement in the top three. McLaren CEO Ron Dennis was not satisfied with McLaren Racing. Dennis had led the Racing Team for twenty-eight years himself, till 2009, when he had moved from the McLaren Mercedes Team Principal position to become CEO of the McLaren Group. Dennis had made McLaren the F1 success story it had been for decades. For all intents and purposes, the team *was* Ron Dennis. The fact that he had stepped out of the day-to-day management of the team changed nothing. The success of McLaren was in his blood, and its years of defeat had been hard to swallow. In his mind, Whitmarsh had made bad decisions.

For example, after the 2008 season Whitmarsh had come under tremendous pressure when he demanded that Heikki Kovalainen's contract be renewed after an underwhelming first year. He got his way, but the Finnish driver's second season on the team was miserable. This would have been a minor problem had the team been otherwise successful under Whitmarsh's watch, but despite its prestigious past and massive resources, the team had underperformed.

During Ron Dennis's twenty-eight years as Team Principal, McLaren had brought home twelve World Drivers' Championships and eight World Constructors' Championships. Of the

461 Grands Prix in that period, McLaren had won 138. During Whitmarsh's fairly short period as Team Principal, McLaren had not won a single world championship for either drivers or constructors. Only in the 2010 season had one of the McLaren drivers entered the final Grand Prix well-enough placed that he could have won the championship. McLaren's win rate under Whitmarsh was twenty-one percent; in Dennis's time it had been thirty.

Now Whitmarsh found himself in a situation where the young driver he had chosen, Sergio Pérez, was getting the boot and a contract was being offered to the promising young Danish driver Kevin Magnussen, Ron Dennis's choice. The media were talking about a crisis of confidence and saying Whitmarsh was down for the count—a count that in point of fact had started some time before. Dennis had decided to take up the reins himself again, and his first order of business was to change one of the team's two drivers.

It was hard to argue with Ron Dennis's Formula One skill and knowhow. Now he had decided that the team had a better chance with Magnussen than with Pérez. Hintsä agreed. When asked, he had willingly shared his views—after all, a significant part of his job was assessing the drivers' physical and mental readiness and motivation. Hintsä thought McLaren had two drivers who might race for World Championships but in the end weren't there to win one. Both were excellent drivers, but there were many other just-as-gifted athletes in the race whose hunger to win was greater. Hintsä had known Magnussen for three years. In 2010 Whitmarsh had promised the Danish driver a test day with McLaren—Hintsä guessed as a favour to Kevin's father, the team's former driver Jan Magnussen. Hintsä believed Whitmarsh didn't really want Magnussen on the team, though he politely supported the young driver in his

career and even tried to help him get a place on other teams. His caution was understandable. The young driver's success in the lower classes had been modest.

Part of Hintsä's job was to evaluate the chances the various young drivers available to McLaren had to win in Formula One. Hintsä didn't know outbraking from oversteering, but he had sensed in the Dane an unusual degree of determination and commitment. Hintsä found the young man surprisingly ready to race and an exceptionally mature athlete. His attitude was unusual as well. For most young drivers, just walking into McLaren's Woking headquarters near London would be enough to turn their knees to jelly. The Technology Centre's set-up is more reminiscent of the Pentagon or a space station than of a racing team's HQ. The futuristic architecture set on a fifty-hectare footprint surrounded by five artificial lakes contains the manufacturing sites for McLaren's street and racing vehicles, the workstations of thousands of employees, a 150-metre wind tunnel, and an F1 simulator. Most first-time visitors to Woking find that words stick in their throats.

But the Danish driver who walked into Hintsä's office was unfazed. He didn't even smile. He was nervous but not because of the size of the operation. Hintsä pressed Magnussen: was he absolutely sure F1 was the right place for him? And McLaren? Based on what? His results in the lower Formula series had not been particularly impressive.

Hintsä liked the young man's attitude and determination. Magnussen first offered a clear analysis of his lack of success to date and insisted categorically that his life goal was winning a Formula One World Championship for McLaren.

'If I'm not good enough to do that, I don't deserve to be in Formula One at all,' Magnussen said.

Hintsä recommended that Magnussen be accepted into McLaren's junior program, and they started working with him. Simon Reynolds, the trainer for McLaren's junior program, kept Hintsä in the loop on Magnussen's development. Changes were made in his nutrition, biomechanics, and physical training.

Through three years' collaboration, Magnussen rapidly approached F1 standards in both his physical and mental characteristics. At last Hintsä declared him as ready for the demands that Formula One places on a driver as is possible for a novice to be. When the Danish driver won the Formula Renault series championship, it was easy for Hintsä to recommend him to Dennis. Magnussen was given a contract and Pérez the boot.

It remains to be seen how right Hintsä was about Magnussen. Like Pérez, Magnussen as a newcomer found himself in the toughest possible spot. The car was no good, and after a brilliant opening Grand Prix, Magnussen—along with the rest of the team—was left outside the spotlights. When Fernando Alonso moved to McLaren, Magnussen was shifted to test driver, hoping to return to his racing driver spot in 2016.

But Hintsä's ability to spot an athlete's mental potential had made an impression on Dennis even earlier. The previous driver Hintsä had championed was Lewis Hamilton. Hamilton in his day also exuded that same determination as Magnussen—that desire to succeed despite all odds. Hintsä had known Hamilton was ready for Formula One ever since his 2006 GP2 season, which had ended in Hamilton winning the championship.

Heikki Kovalainen, who a year earlier in the last Grand Prix of the same GP2 series had lost the championship to Nico Rosberg, had debuted as an F1 racing driver at the same time as Hamilton. Kovalainen wasn't Hintsä's client, but the two men knew each other. Kovalainen was an extremely gifted driver,

and it was easy to predict a successful career for him—but according to Hintsä, Hamilton was ready and Kovalainen was not.

Hintsä revealed this view to me in a private conversation just before Hamilton's and Kovalainen's first F1 Grand Prix in Melbourne in 2007. Hintsä thought Kovalainen's body language and wandering gaze revealed uncertainty. He believed Kovalainen was not yet mentally ready to take Fernando Alonso's place at Renault. In Australia Hintsä was alone in this view, but of the two talented racing drivers who started at the same time, by 2014 one has won two championships, the other just a single Grand Prix.

Hintsä was among the first people Hamilton called after winning his second championship in Abu Dhabi in 2014. His message in the emotional phone call was clear: without Hintsä's help he would never have been a double champion.

Hamilton, too, was Dennis's choice, but Dennis set considerable stock in Hintsä's recommendation. There was a deep trust between the two men. It went back twelve years, to Kimi Räikkönen's first season with McLaren.

AKI

You don't leave this house till you've graduated from high school! Aki's father's words resound vividly in his head every time he recalls how he ended up in Ethiopia. And that tone of voice, which made it very clear that there was no room for negotiation.

In high school Hintsa was a promising ice hockey player who was invited to attend a hockey camp in Canada. A few other young players from the Fennia camp were also going to North America, such as Risto Siltanen, Heikki Mälkiä, and Ilkka Sinisalo. To Hintsa, who had been trying to get onto the junior national ice hockey team, the Canadian camp meant a step toward seeing his dream come true: professional ice hockey. His father crushed that dream with a single sentence.

To be sure, Ahti Hintsa had hoped to see his son become an athlete. He was a forestry engineer, an entrepreneur, and an Ostrobothnian with an uncompromising work ethic—but he had himself been a promising cross-country skier in his younger days, giving even such skiers as Veikko Hakulinen a run for his money. He did hope Aki would pick up where he'd left off. The father expected the son to win every weekend.

And so Aki skied. The junior cross-country skiing competitions in Soini have remained an unforgettable nightmare for him: with the taste of blood in his mouth and his gorge ris-

ing, he pushed himself to the limit, generally coming in fourth, third, or sometimes second. Except once.

Winning felt different. Even though this was skiing, which Aki hated, the feeling was a drug, and just as addictive. His father was different the whole rest of that day too. He didn't praise his son, but Aki could feel his deep contentment.

But it was very clear to Aki at this point in his life that team sports fit him better. He had gotten his first skates when he was five, and ice hockey, unlike skiing, felt natural to him from the start.

When Aki was ten his family moved from Soini to Ähtäri, where he made the official junior ice hockey team. At fifteen the young winger debuted on the men's team, and less than two years later, in 1975, he received his first contract offers from A Junior teams in the Finnish Championship league. It felt fantastic. But pursuing a career in ice hockey would have meant very soon moving away from his home in Ähtäri, where ice hockey was still played on natural ice. Artificial ice would mean year-round regular practice, no matter the weather. Staying in Ähtäri would mean stagnation.

The camp in Canada, moving away from home, and a contract with a Finnish Championship league organisation were the logical steps toward a professional career in the sport. But Aki could not defy his father. That was simply not an option in the Hintsa family. Ahti respected education and work, and he had decided that his son's preparation for success in life would not ride solely on a vague dream of playing ice hockey. And in mid-seventies Finland, that was exactly what the dream of playing pro ice hockey was: a vague castle in the air. At that point no one could imagine the glorious future that lay ahead for Finnish ice hockey. The Finnish Championship league had only just been founded, and Matti Hagman, the first Finn to

break into the National Hockey League, would not achieve his breakthrough for another year. In the end Ilkka Sinisalo would play nine seasons in the NHL, Risto Siltanen ten. They became the pioneering legends of Finnish ice hockey. Fortunately, there was no way for Aki to know that.

The other boys headed off to Canada, and Aki stayed in Ähtäri, playing on natural ice. The dream of playing pro ice hockey was dead, and the death of that dream swept away much else with it, including the young boy's self-image. Aki had been an ice hockey player. That had been his identity, his social context, the organising factor for his entire life. Where did he now belong?

Fast-forward two decades: Aki is in Ethiopia, in his dreams still playing on the Finnish Olympic ice hockey team as their star winger—and then missing an easy shot in the Olympic finals. That dream was the only thing in Shebe, Ethiopia, that reminded him of ice hockey. But in a way ice hockey was what took him to Ethiopia in the first place.

The dashing of his ice hockey dreams had been tough. His future had looked clear and bright, and now there was nothing there at all. No vista; not even a clue of what direction to head in. Aki had been furious with his father but also panicky. He had never even given a thought to what he would do if he couldn't play ice hockey. Sleep became erratic. His anxieties kept him awake. Aki knew that he would have to come up with something. He couldn't just hang around home bemoaning his fate. Ahti would not look favourably upon that approach to life.

As so often before, Aki sought solace from his maternal grandmother Lydia. She had always been approachable and close to Aki; he could talk to her about anything. She had been through a lot in her own life and didn't spook easily.

Lydia Uusitalo was a war widow, single mom to seven children—and yet had an exceptionally cheerful outlook on life.

Compared to her life Aki's problems were minuscule, but his grandmother did not belittle the young man's crisis. She believed that there was a solution to every problem. Her positive attitude comforted Aki. It held a strong appeal for someone struggling with the greatest crisis in his young life. His grandmother was a devout Christian, and in his mind Aki associated her positive and life-affirming being and attitude with her faith.

Up until this point Aki had never troubled much with religion. It was there, he was familiar with it, he went to the Ähtäri youth group, but it was mostly just a social thing. He had gone to youth evenings at the local Lutheran church and a summer camp organised by a local Pentecostal church, but only because all the other kids were going too. By contrast, his grandmother's faith was evident in everything she did. It was obvious to Aki that it was a force that, as she put it, had 'carried her through.' She wasn't a Christian out of habit; she lived her faith.

Hintsä decided to cast his lot to the Lord—though he didn't exactly know how that was done. Before, his relationship with God had been the carefree, distant acquaintance typical of young lives. Now the fat was in the fire, and Aki felt embarrassed. What did relying on God mean? How did you start believing in something whose existence you weren't even sure of? Was it even possible to 'start believing'? But he took encouragement from his grandmother's life and attitude. And he thought to himself that he had nothing to lose. He decided to set God a test.

'God,' he prayed, gropingly, 'if you exist, get me into med school. One way or another. Then I'll know.'

In return Hintsä promised to live and work in accordance with God's will. He thought of this as a risk-free bet: if God existed, he'd win; if there was no God, he'd lose nothing.

Up until that point Hintsä had been precisely the kind of student young athletes often are: not necessarily the most fer-

vently committed to academic pursuits. And so at the ‘penkkarit’ (the celebration that marked the last day of school for secondary school students), when Aki cockily told friends he was applying to med school, they laughed. True, Hintsä wasn’t relying entirely on higher powers to get him into med school: he was planning on studying hard for the entrance exam. But he was also practical enough to know that his chances of crossing the finish line on his own fuel were slim. At most he might make it as far as the university café.

After studying hard for a month and attending a prep course in Oulu, Hintsä went to the University of Turku to take the entrance exam for their med school. When he got the results in the mail, he couldn’t believe his eyes. He had made it—with room to spare. He considered the deal he’d made with God ratified. Religious faith didn’t shake his earth—Aki was always too rational for that—but it did change his world. University admission also brought about an event that had never happened before, nor ever would again: his father praised him.

‘Good job, son!’

Hintsä entered med school in Turku in 1977 and became a doctor in December 1983. To the stubborn Ostrobothnian, his friends’ scepticism had served as a useful goad and motivation for study. One ‘penkkari’ comment in particular had stuck in his memory.

‘You, in med school?’ one friend had blurted out before thinking.

That same friend, Kauko Kantola, later became not only rector of the Ähtäri secondary school but also Aki’s patient in the operating room with a leg problem. Serving as acting senior physician at the Ähtäri Regional Hospital, Aki had come to say hello to his old classmate, and jokingly asked whether he remembered that comment. Lying there with a spinal block,

"TO BE ABLE TO FOCUS AND GIVE YOUR MAXIMUM, IT IS IMPORTANT TO HAVE THE RIGHT PEOPLE AROUND YOU. AKI IS CERTAINLY ONE OF THESE PEOPLE. HE IS HONEST, CALM, LOYAL AND INDEPENDENT... ALL CHARACTERISTICS THAT DEFINE AN IDEAL WORKING RELATIONSHIP."

– SEBASTIAN VETTEL, A FOUR-TIME FORMULA ONE WORLD CHAMPION

The *Core* is a unique story from the top of the Formula 1 world, where Aki Hintsa, a Finnish F1 coach and a doctor, has for years guided drivers towards success, but more than anything, towards mental and physical well-being. Later, top managers and companies from all over the world have taken to Hintsa's model of holistic well-being, and now these groundbreaking methods are available to all of us. In this book, Hintsa gives practical guidelines on better performance and comprehensive well-being and tells his fascinating story from the African plains to the F1 paddocks and the highest level of business – a journey, which made him realise what is important in life.

DR. AKI HINTSA (born 1958) is a specialist in Orthopaedic and Trauma Surgery, who worked for eleven years as a coach and chief medical officer at the Formula 1 paddocks. His philosophy is based on the idea of preventive measures, in other words, preventing ailments before they even occur.

OSKARI SAARI (born 1975) is a producer and a non-fiction author, who has been an F1 commentator on Finnish TV since 2004.

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