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Mercedes F1 Junior, Andrea Kimi Antonelli: ADAC Formula 4 title is the first step towards Formula 1

- **Andrea Kimi Antonelli (Prema Racing) is the 2022 champion**
- **First champion from Italy**
- **16-year-old pays back the faith put in him by Toto Wolff, team principal of Mercedes F1**

Munich. Andrea Kimi Antonelli is the new ADAC Formula 4 champion. After his big success at the Nürburgring, the Italian in Prema Racing colours climbed out of the cockpit of his 180-hp Formula 4 car and raised his fists to the sky. He then leapt into the arms of his mechanics and engineers, as the celebrations knew no bounds at the Nürburgring. Victory in the penultimate race saw the 16-year-old crowned champion in the ADAC's junior series.

His success is no coincidence. After all, he laid the foundation for his maiden Formula 4 title at the season-opener at Spa-Francorchamps in Belgium: Antonelli secured his first two pole positions at the Formula 1 circuit and twice lifted the winner's trophy. He then made history at the second round of the season, at the Hockenheimring Baden-Württemberg, becoming the first driver since Norway's Dennis Hauger in 2019 to win all three races. If they didn't already know it, it was clear from this point that Antonelli's rivals would have their hands full with him. With nine wins and seven pole positions, the new champion has an impressive record in the 2022 season. Antonelli was virtually unbeatable against the clock, securing seven pole positions in a row at the start of the season. Only Taylor Barnard (18/GBR/PHM Racing) was able to put a stop to his successful run at the Nürburgring. Antonelli continued the unwritten law in ADAC Formula 4: the driver who wins the first race of the season goes on to be crowned champion. The only exception came in 2019, when Gianluca Petecof (BRA) won race one, only for Theo Pourchaire (FRA) to win the title. Antonelli is the first Italian champion in the history of ADAC Formula 4.

It is also no coincidence that the new champion was bitten by the motorsport bug. His father, Marco Antonelli, owns his own GT racing team. However, a key event in his still fledgling career occurred in April 2019: 12 years old at the time, Antonelli was called up to the Junior squad of the Mercedes-AMG Formula 1 team. "I was pretty surprised when the contacted me. You don't get a phone call like that every day, so I was thrilled," says Antonelli. Under the care of the Mercedes star, he found himself under increasing pressure, although the majority of it came from himself. The teenager was already hungry for success, ambitious, and ice cold on the racetrack. Before his career in Formula racing, Antonelli won the FIA European Karting Championship twice in a row, quickly paying back the trust put in him by Mercedes. As well as financial support, the programme also includes a coach. One man accompanies him to the racetrack at all times: Stephane Guerin. The Frenchman is like Antonelli's shadow and follows him wherever he goes. "He is a very strong support for me and it is nice to have him around. Stephane helps me enormously with my preparations before the race and the follow-up work afterwards," Antonelli explains.

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Always in a good mood and brimming with confidence, the curly-haired Italian from Casalecchio di Reno, a community on the outskirts of Bologna, is ultimately responsible when he gets behind the wheel of his car, but can build on the foundation provided by a strong and well-coordinated team. “I feel right at home in the new Formula 4 car, and particularly in the Prema team. I have an excellent relationship with the mechanics and engineers,” says Antonelli. That is also the reason why he describes them as “little pieces of the jigsaw”, which come together to make him “faster in the end.” Even at the pre-start before the actual starting formation, he is still joking and chatting casually with those responsible for his car. However, as soon as he dons his helmet and lowers the visor, he is extremely focussed and barely gives the opposition a chance.

After his successes, the new champion also occasionally takes a breather in the Italian sun. “As well as motorsport, I must also incorporate school and catch up on a lot of missed lessons. That is not always easy. Now and again I train for the races in the gym, but I also know when enough is enough. I also need a bit of time for myself and my family,” Antonelli explains. And so it is that he sometimes puts his feet up and relaxes, recharging his batteries and allowing him to be as well prepared as possible when he arrives at the racetrack. Strength is born in calmness.

He also receives strength and an extra dose of motivation from Toto Wolff. The 50-year-old Austrian is team principal of the Mercedes Formula 1 team and already has his eye on the ADAC Formula 4 champion. “I receive a message from Toto Wolff after every race weekend. He is very interested in my performances and regularly congratulates me on my success. It is great to be in touch with him,” says Antonelli of his relationship with Wolff.

His personal goal is Formula 1, and winning the ADAC Formula 4 title is the first step on that road. On the way, he takes inspiration from his idol, three-time world champion Ayrton Senna. Antonelli is full of admiration for the Brazilian, although he comes from a totally different generation. “Unfortunately, I never got to see him live. However, I was gripped by a fascination for Senna when I watched a report on him on television as a little boy. Since then, he has been a source of inspiration and I watch a lot of videos and onboard footage,” says Antonelli, expressing his admiration for Senna.

It looks to be written in the stars that the 2022 champion will one day make it into the pinnacle of motorsport. After all, his helmet and his red and white Prema car sport the Mercedes symbol as a link to the team and as a little personal lucky charm. In winning the ADAC Formula 4 title, Antonelli has now shown that he can handle the pressure and is ready for more challenges.



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