

8 September 2006

By: Ovidiu Panzariu, Sports Editor



## [Will We Miss Michael Schumacher?](#)

*No matter if he retires or not, the German already represents the main chapter in racing's history books*

The question on everyone's lips this weekend can only be one. Will Michael Schumacher quit Formula One or won't he? Even if you are a fan of the German ace or even if you cannot stand the guy, you still want to find out the answer to that question. As he promised the media, we will get our answer Sunday afternoon, around 7 or 8 PM. One of the strongest arguments for him not to leave Formula One was the idea that a champion always has to leave the world of sport as a champion. Everybody agrees that, once you've been a champion all your life, you can't leave the stage as a second. Well, I couldn't disagree more. 'Cause, you see, no matter if Michael Schumacher will decide to retire or not, he will always be remembered as one of the greatest champions that ever lived. And nothing could ever change that. If you're still having any doubts about it, ask yourself this question. **"How many great champions got out in fame?"** And I can give you at least a dozen names that wouldn't fit the profile: Muhammad Ali, Damon Hill, Michael Jordan, Pete Sampras, Boris Becker, Andre Agassi, Marco Pantani, Zinedine Zidane, Alberto Tomba, Reggie Miller, etc. On the other hand, there is only a couple that I can remember to have walked out while still on top of the world: Lance Armstrong, Jackie Stewart... and the rest I can't remember at the moment. More, we had the greatest example of all last weekend. Another great champion of tennis decided to call it a day. Andre Agassi did not walk out as a champion of the ATP race last Monday. He did retire, however, as the greatest champion of our hearts. Despite entering the tournament unseeded, nobody cared. His words said it all. *"The scoreboard said I lost today but the scoreboard doesn't say what I've found. I have found inspiration - you have willed me to succeed - and I have found generosity. I thank you and I will take you and the memory with me for the rest of my life"*, were Agassi's last words on the tennis court. Somehow, the situation resembles very much with Schumacher's. Not more than 2 days ago, Schumacher was admitting that the 15 years he spent in Formula One did not bring him only world titles and lots of money or success. More than that, it brought him good friends and an extraordinary group of people whom he worked with. What will happen if Schumacher won't win this Championship (and there's a big chance he might still win it)? Will it make him less of a champion? Will it wipe off the 7 world titles he has won, or the wonderful job he did rescuing Ferrari from mediocrity? Not a chance! Of course, there are a lot of racing fans who don't like Schumacher very much. And I agree. At some point, I felt the same way when he robbed Damon Hill of his 1995 World Title, pushing him outside the race. Or when he tried to do the same 2 years later, against Jacques Villeneuve. These are all just a small part of his long-lasting career. Everybody grows to hate Mr. Perfection. It happens all over the world. When Lance Armstrong first won Le Tour de France, everybody was ecstatic and praised the American for the greatest victory he managed after previously beating cancer. Still, when the wins kept coming and coming, he became a sort of "persona non grata" inside the Tour officials. Jean Marie LeBlanc praised the Lord when Armstrong decided to retire. Useless to remind everyone the fiasco Le Tour was the next year after that. Schumacher was quite the same. Everybody begins to hate someone who fails to fail. Roger Federer and Pete "Mr Perfect" Sampras are also such examples. But ask yourself this. **"Who will you hate after he retires?"** All the passion inside Formula One will be gone. Let's admit it, the reason why we watch the competition is because a big part of us wants Schumacher to be defeated. Once he's gone, who will we cheer for? Really now, think deep before you answer that. Do we really want Alonso to win the Championship, or Schumacher to lose it? We won't get to see how Formula One will look without Schumacher until he

decides to leave it. It might not happen this year. Maybe he has another surprise in store for us. What we do know is that no matter when, no matter how and no matter if he retires or not, Schumacher will enter the history books. Finishing runner-up this year won't change any of that...