



Media Information  
BMW Junior Team  
22<sup>nd</sup> December 2020

## **BMW Junior Team 2020: An extraordinary year with extraordinary performances.**

- **Interim report for BMW Junior Team 2020 after the first year of training.**
- **Dan Harper, Max Hesse and Neil Verhagen can look back on a successful debut season, despite the challenges thrown up by the pandemic.**
- **BMW Junior Team enjoys many highlights, both on and off the track.**

**Munich. With Christmas approaching rapidly, BMW Junior Team can look back on an eventful first year of training. Dan Harper (GBR), Max Hesse (GER) and Neil Verhagen (USA) have overcome the challenges thrown up by the pandemic, which could not have been foreseen at the start of the year, have grown together as a team, and have achieved great sporting success. What started with a training camp with Formula Medicine in January reached its high point with class victory in the BMW M4 GT4 at the Nürburgring 24 Hours (GER). BMW Junior Team and its mentor Jochen Neerpasch are now looking forward to stepping up to the BMW M6 GT3 next season.**

More than 40 years after the first generation in 1977, the iconic BMW Junior Team made its comeback in 2020. As it was back then, the goal this time was to bring three young drivers together to form a strong team, which would cause a stir out on the track. Back in the fold, as he was in 1977, is Jochen Neerpasch. The founder of the original BMW Junior Team has followed the development of Harper, Hesse and Verhagen very closely in recent months – despite the COVID-19 pandemic, which posed a major challenge for the programme organisers.

The fact that BMW Junior Team's first year was still a huge success is something that Neerpasch believes should not be taken for granted: "Firstly, a big compliment and thank you goes to everyone who was involved in organising the programme. Against the background of the pandemic, it was far from easy to implement the plan that we



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had developed for BMW Junior Team at the start of the year. It is only thanks to commitment and very good collaboration within the whole team that we still managed to pull it off.” Dirk Adorf also made a major contribution to this success. Like Neerpasch, he was always on hand to provide mentoring support and advice for the three Juniors.

From a sporting point of view, Neerpasch gave BMW Junior Team a very good report. “Despite the challenging conditions, BMW Junior Team performed very well and fully met all our expectations. It was important to see how excellently the team worked together and consistently improved their sporting performances. You could say that they passed their examination with the class victory at the Nürburgring 24 Hours.”

### **The highlight – class victory at the Nürburgring 24 Hours.**

BMW Junior Team passed its ‘exam’ with victory in the BMW M4 GT4 in the SP8T class at the endurance classic at the end of September – the highlight of the first year of training, which had started with a two-month fitness and mental training camp at Formula Medicine in Viareggio (ITA). That is where the foundations were laid for a successful season of racing. “At the start of the year, I did not know what would await me, as it was the first time I had moved away from home. However, we got on well from day one and were on the same wavelength as a team,” said Harper, summing up the time spent in Tuscany. The trio should actually have moved straight into a shared house at the Nürburgring immediately after the camp, but that was postponed to June due to the pandemic. “It was obviously a shame that we were not able to go racing straight after our fitness camp due to the pandemic,” said Harper. “However, we did a lot of sim racing during that time, which was great fun.”

Back in January, BMW Motorsport offered BMW Junior Team the opportunity to visit the 24-hour race at Daytona (USA) and to experience at first hand what it means to contest an endurance race with BMW. That was very good preparation for their first race outing, which came with the start of the season in the Nürburgring Endurance Series (NLS) at the end of June. BMW Junior Team adapted very quickly to the specific challenges posed to racing drivers by the ‘Green Hell’. In only their third race of the season, Harper and Verhagen took class victory in the BMW M240i Racing. Next was a first outing in the BMW M4 GT4, in which BMW Junior Team continued to learn quickly and ultimately finished 19<sup>th</sup> overall, first in their class, and as the best-placed non-GT3 car at the 24-hour race – all despite miserable weather conditions, which even caused the organisers to suspend racing during the night. “The weather





conditions at the 24-hour race were probably the craziest I have ever experienced,” said Harper. “The fact that we eventually won our class in commanding fashion is something my team-mates and I, and the entire team, are very proud of.”

### **A team – both on and off the track.**

Verhagen also looks back very positively on the season. “A big thank you goes to everyone who supported us so well this year and made it something very special. It really was fantastic. I am very happy that we achieved everything we wanted to achieve in our first year. When you consider how challenging the pandemic made this year, our programme actually went remarkably well.” As well as the sporting success, Hesse is also keen to emphasise the importance for his personal development. “The year was very intensive and interesting. Personally, I have learned an incredible amount and we have developed hugely as a team. Living together with Dan and Neil on a daily basis has really helped me develop, both as a racing driver and a person. I am very grateful for that.”

BMW Junior Team also placed great emphasis on the importance of not only racing together in the same car, but also developing a real team spirit and working as one unit. “I had very high expectations, especially when it comes to teamwork, but the Juniors actually exceeded them,” said Neerpasch. “They communicate very well with each other, and support one another superbly. That should not be taken for granted and, to be honest, we have been a little fortunate that it has worked out so well.”

As well as living together in one house, joint activities such as track days with BMW Esports team FNATIC and Marc Surer, a member of the very first BMW Junior Team, in vintage and modern-day race cars also contributed to the good team spirit. To give BMW Junior Team something to think about other than motor racing and training, the trio received a visit from TikTok and Instagram stars Sky&Tami.

### **Step up to the BMW M6 GT3 in year two.**

Harper, Hesse and Verhagen will spend New Year at home with their families. However, the next challenges are just around the corner. As soon as the pandemic allows it, the BMW Junior Team will return to Formula Medicine to prepare for the racing season. Once that starts, the Juniors will move back into their shared house at the Nürburgring. However, the plan is also for the trio to spend more time near the BMW Motorsport base in Munich (GER) in its second year of training.



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At the racetrack, BMW Junior Team is set to take the step up to the BMW M6 GT3. From the opening race of the NLS season, Harper, Hesse and Verhagen will go head to head with the best GT drivers on the Nordschleife in the top class. "I am really looking forward to racing against the 'big boys' in the same class," said Hesse. "In my opinion, the most important thing in our first year was to prepare as well as possible for what awaits us in 2021 with the switch to a GT3 car. I think we have done a really good job." Verhagen sees the situation similarly. "Hopefully we can have some success again in the BMW M6 GT3 next year. I can hardly wait to get going again."

When the time comes, Neerpasch will be there again, keeping a close eye on whether BMW Junior Team can continue its positive development. He believes they can now expect another aspect of the training – something that did not play such a major role in the first year – pressure to perform. However, "Based on what they have achieved this year, I am confident that they will manage the switch to the BMW M6 GT3 and pass their masters' examination at next year's 24-hour race."

#### **Media Contact.**

Daniela Tadday  
Media Relations Manager BMW Motorsport  
Tel.: +49 (0)151 – 601 24 545  
E-mail: [daniela.tadday@bmw.de](mailto:daniela.tadday@bmw.de)

Matthias Schepke  
Spokesperson BMW Motorsport  
Tel.: +49 (0)151 – 601 90 450  
E-mail: [matthias.schepke@bmw.de](mailto:matthias.schepke@bmw.de)

Benjamin Titz  
Head of BMW Group Design, Innovation & Motorsport Communications  
Tel.: +49 (0)179 – 743 80 88  
E-mail: [benjamin.titz@bmw.de](mailto:benjamin.titz@bmw.de)

#### **Media Website.**

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