

# IndyCar Media

## Conference

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# James Hinchcliffe

## Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'd now like to welcome our second-place finisher of tonight's Firestone 600 to the podium, driver of the No. 5 Arrow Schmidt Peterson Motorsports Honda, James Hinchcliffe. James, your best finish since you won at NOLA Motorsports Park last year, but I'm not sure that's a factor after the night you had.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: No, it's not, if I'm honest with you.

THE MODERATOR: Tell us about your night, please.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: My night was great until about eight minutes to go.

You know, we picked up right where we left off in June. The Arrow Electronic car was just an absolute rocketship. We got the lead the first half of this race back in June by really building a car to take care of tires because that's been always the name of the game here in Texas. And we did that. We did that better than anybody by a good chunk, too. I'm so proud of the guys. I'm so proud of the car they put together to roll off the truck still in totally different conditions -- I mean, we were here in June, we had 10 minutes of practice, which was only six minutes of practice, and having the best car I've ever had at Texas, maybe we were trying too hard at every other race.

But stops were great, strategy was great, I thought we were great in traffic. Like I said, we built the car for long runs, so that first caution, I was like, all right, that's unfortunate but it's the last stop, everything should be okay. We still have 30 something laps to go. And then as they kept coming and the laps counted down and down, I knew it was going to be harder and harder, and we held off the charges from Ed and from Tony.

But ultimately that call to come and get tires at the end there, that last stop, I think that was the difference for Graham, and it wasn't much. I gave him the bottom into 3. I had to make a decision because I thought he could get the run off of 2, and when I was going side by side -- that whole last run, the last five, six laps I was side by side with Tony and I was timing the line. I've seen so many races won here on the high line, coming to the line because you just have that momentum off of 4,



and I was going -- thinking back to my IRL Classic days and Sam Hornish Jr.'s tricks and all the rest of it, but man, Graham just pulled through 3 and 4 like no one had all night.

I mean, we made a run again on him at the end there and it got pretty close, but congrats to him, and like I said, big credit to the team. It's just tough having a car like that and leading that many laps but not the one that counted.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously you were out front most of the evening, incredible racing going on behind you. Tony was in here saying it kind of reminded him of the old days.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: 100 percent. Starting out a bit with tire degradation, but certainly at the end we put on a hell of a show for the fans, and that's what we're here for. It would have been a lot more boring if some car just won by half a straightaway.

But the racing seemed pretty good, and I can't thank Graham and Tony and Simon and all the guys up there enough. We put ourselves in some pretty precarious situations tonight and everybody came out okay. Nobody did anything stupid, and everybody played nice, very respectful. There was some racing, thought. I had a blast. That's the problem. I had an absolute blast. Had I not led every lap of the race, I would be much happier than I am.

But it was good old-fashioned mile-and-a-half racing. This is why I wish we had more mile-and-a-half tracks on the schedule. This is a lot of fun for us. People have got to pedal the car, it's not just wide-open racing the whole stint like it was in days past with the car.

Yeah, I'm kind of rambling. Sorry. Man, I really wanted a hat. I've been running this race now for like eight years without a cowboy hat.

### Q. You think you'd look good in a cowboy hat?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I'd look good with a winner's trophy, man. I don't care what you wear on your head.

**Q. There was some criticism among some of the drivers about the racing from Graham late in the race saying that maybe it wasn't as much as he**

### **wanted, they backed out?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: You know, it's tough. I really only got beside Graham on the last lap, so I can't really comment on it the same way. I do know he got into the back of me on the front straightaway a couple times, which is a pretty sketchy thing to get involved with. But I know what it's like. Sometimes you get a good run and there's nowhere to go and it's hard to hit the brakes at 220. Kind of tough for me to comment on that just because I'm going to sound like a bit of a jerk. I didn't really see him all night until the end.

### **Q. I don't know how much you saw of the back of your car, but it looked like the 4th of July back there. Is that something you could feel going around the corners? Did it kind of bother you? Did it upset you?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Let me tell you a little story about a guy named Allen McDonald. Allen McDonald is my race engineer, and you could take a bunch of blank white race cars with blank white helmets and drivers wearing blank white suits, put them out on a racetrack, and you can tell Allen McDonald's car because it's the one that's sparking the most. We call him Allen McDown-A-Flat because he always runs the car lower than anybody else. So after a year and a half driving Allen's car I've become pretty immune to bumps and shocks coming out from the floor of my race car.

But puts on a cool show. It actually is like our way to distract the drivers behind me, too, in night races.

### **Q. Going into Turn 3 when Graham dives to your inside, what were you planning to do between that point and the front stretch?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Well, like I said, I'd gone the last kind of four laps before that side by side with TK with him on the bottom and just kind of the big arc into 3 and then pulled tight mid corner, got a bit of draft off the side of his car and had the momentum coming off of 4 to just be pipping him at the line, and I was planning it out, I was kind of expecting it still to be TK, and all those last few laps we were ahead at the line. It was close, but we were a nose up, and that's what I was just kind of hoping to do.

So when we cleared Tony and it was just me and Graham coming down to the checkered, I thought, the momentum is on the outside. I feel like I've kind of seen it here 10 times before in races in years past, and I thought we were still going to be able to do it. But man, he rolled through the center of 3 and 4 with a whole lot of speed. He cleared me -- I hadn't been next to a car all night that cleared me that quickly. You know, he had the pace when he needed to. That was the time to make that move, and like I said, credit to him.

### **Q. Were you guys close at all to coming in for tires on the last three cautions?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Definitely. We considered it every time. It was a tough call because as the laps wind down you've got fewer laps to make up track position that you give up. Ultimately with TK and Graham taking it and with so few cars left on the lead lap and all the lap cars getting run through pit lane, you can sit there and play Monday morning quarterback all you want, but it's tough. Like I said, we built our car for long runs, so those short runs at the end kind of killed us. I mean, I'm sure there's an argument for being happy that we came in second because it could have been a lot worse having not the quickest car over one lap, and I'm the only guy not on new tires there.

### **Q. Before you got into the last lap, being on the old tires, at what point do you think you were probably the closest to losing the lead where you got the white flag?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Oh, I mean, a bunch of times. Basically since that first caution that brought Ed up, he was charging hard all night and we knew that was going to be a tough race, and then Helio was -- he came in for tires earlier, on one of the earlier stops, and then Graham and TK came in. So there was a lot of times.

Like I said, we were really strong on long runs, and earlier in the race Hunter-Reay kind of had our number for a while there and we kind of got back on long runs. I was kind of prepared after that first caution to maybe lose a spot or two and try and race our way back up as the laps wound down and the tires wore down, but I never got that opportunity; everybody kept running into each other.

### **Q. Earlier on in the race, I think it was lap 127, you retook the lead from Castroneves going into 1. How close did you get to him when you made that move?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, pretty close.

### **Q. I talked to him outside; he didn't know you were coming. His spotter said 5 back, and he thought he was referring to a lap car. He had no idea you were coming up on him.**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I think what he meant was the No. 5 is on your back. Yeah, it was close. I was kind of shocked that he did that so early in the race, but if he didn't know I was coming, that kind of explains it. But that's racing. That's why the guy up in the spotter's stand has got to be someone you trust and someone you've got good communication with because that could have ended really poorly for both of us.

**Q. You didn't pit toward the end there I don't think. I think the team set up but you didn't come in, but Tony came in around lap 236 under the yellow, yet he came back out like third behind Graham. I'm trying to figure out why he didn't lose a little more time.**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Well, it's my fault, because I lapped everybody up to fifth place before those cautions started flying, so when you've got that many new cars on the lead lap, that's how many positions you lose when you pit. So if you're pitting from third, there's only five cars on the lead lap, you only lose two spots. Because we got down to under 15 laps, on ovals with 15 laps to go, they run all the lap cars through pit lane and cycle them to the back of the field. Had that not been the case, he'd have come out mired in a bunch of traffic. Still in the top five and on the lead lap but with quite a few more cars to get through.

It's just the way the rule is written, and it's done to put on a good show for the fans, and I support the rule, but that's kind of the rule that bit us today. If I had just gone a bit slower and only lapped up to like 15th, it would have been a way harder call for him.