

IndyCar Media Conference

Tuesday August 30, 2016

James Hinchcliffe

DWTS Press Conference



ARNI SRIBHEN: Welcome, everyone, to today's IndyCar media teleconference. Earlier today, Verizon IndyCar Series driver James Hinchcliffe was announced as a cast member for season 23 of ABC's Dancing With the Stars. James is normally found behind the wheel of Schmidt Peterson Motorsports's No. 5 Arrow Electronics Honda, and he'll be paired in Dancing With the Stars with professional dancer Sharna Burgess when the show begins on September 12th. We're happy to be joined this afternoon by James, so welcome to the call.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Thank you so much for having me.

ARNI SRIBHEN: James, first, congratulations on today's announcement. I have to ask you, although you're pretty coordinated using your arms and legs behind the wheel of an IndyCar, do you consider yourself a dancer?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: (Laughing) That would be an extreme stretch if I'm honest with you. I consider myself dancing challenged to be honest, so this is definitely going to be a unique sort of experience for me, definitely outside my comfort zone, and Sharna definitely has her work cut out for her. But I've got the competitive spirit, and IndyCar drivers have a pretty good record on this show, so hopefully that counts for something.

ARNI SRIBHEN: He mentioned the other IndyCar drivers who have appeared on the show; it's only one. It was Helio Castroneves who appeared on the show in 2007 and again in 2012. He won in 2007. The question is have you heard from Helio yet, and if you have, what advice has he given you?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, no, I spoke to Helio at length before I committed to doing the show. There were a lot of questions that I had, and luckily having a friend and colleague who had been through it was a huge benefit to me. He definitely explained a really fun opportunity. He thoroughly enjoyed it, so much he went back for a second time. It was great to get to chat to him, and he warned me about the amount of work that it is, but said that it's going to be an awful lot of fun. He kind of helped me warm up to the idea.

ARNI SRIBHEN: You mentioned the amount of work you're going to have to do for the show, but the IndyCar season isn't over yet. There's two races remaining, including this weekend's event at Watkins Glen International. Does the amount of work that you have to do to prepare for September 12th affect your approach to Watkins Glen or even in a few weeks in Sonoma, provided that you're still in the competition when that race happens?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Right. So you know, for me, obviously I've got a day job, and that's first and foremost priority at the moment. The first two episodes are going to be the biggest challenge scheduling-wise, but once we clear Sonoma and clear episode 2, if I've made it that far and stay on the show, then we'll have a much freer schedule and be able to dedicate 100 percent of myself to learning and improving and being competitive.

But certainly up to that point, it's going to be a challenge with the races that we have coming up and the travel involved and all that.

Q. Do you know any of the other cast members? Are you looking forward to -- do you get to spend a lot of time with the other cast members. Are you looking forward to any of the celebrities, meeting any of them?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, really it seems like a pretty good mix. I don't know any of them personally yet, but definitely looking forward to getting to know some of them, and hopefully they're not awesome dancers.

Q. I was just wondering, do you think if you get on really well, will you be auditioning for Michael Flatley's job in Riverdance?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: No. Like I said before, I have a job, so this will be something to tide me over during the off-season if it goes well, and then I can get back to focusing on what I really do, which is driving race cars.

Q. On the serious side of it, it's important for you guys to consider doing cross-promotional shows on ABC or any other television network like Dancing With the Stars to keep that IndyCar profile up there and visible; isn't that the serious side of

doing shows like this?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: You know, definitely. There's a knock-on benefit of that. For me personally, it's a great opportunity, like I said, to get outside my comfort zone and do something you probably don't have the opportunity to do again. Like I've spoken about before, after everything last year, it's definitely given me a different approach to life and maybe given me a little bit more confidence to try things like this. But certainly getting one of our drivers out into some primetime, mainstream media and especially during the off-season, kind of keep IndyCar's name out there a little bit. Again, we're all assuming this is me making it past week one, so it's already a bit of a bold statement. But for sure, it's definitely got two sides to it.

Q. Am I wrong, or is this the second time you were approached by Dancing With the Stars to appear on the show, or is this the first time?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: No, this is the first time. They brought us out to a taping of last season's after the Long Beach race to kind of let me see it and get behind the scenes a little bit, meet some of the people involved and kind of see how it all went down, but that was the first time that we really talked about it.

Q. Just wondering with the last year that you had, it's been obviously amazing for you coming off of all those injuries. Do you feel like this was sort of fate, or is this something that just kind of you decided to do on a whim? How did you really decide to join this cast?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: You know, it wasn't an easy decision to be honest because, like I said, dancing is not something I would consider myself any type of expert at or even -- if there's something lower than amateur, it would be that.

But like I said, the experiences of last year have just kind of taught me a lot about life, and one of those lessons is to take opportunities, not shy away from things, don't be afraid. You've got to kind of live your life. This is one of those things that might not have ever come around again, and it is outside my comfort zone, so it was certainly not a decision I took lightly, but I think ultimately we made the right choice to be a part of it, and I'm looking forward to getting started.

Q. Looking ahead to this week, IndyCar hasn't been at Watkins Glen since 2010. What do you think you've learned that might make the difference this weekend in the first trip back in a couple of years?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Well, you know, we had the opportunity obviously to test there a few weeks ago, and with the repave the surface is very different. Obviously the car is completely different from the last time IndyCar ran there, so in lot of ways you're almost

going back to a brand new facility, or I should say going to a brand new facility. There's not a whole lot of relevant data. All the gear charts were off. Everything was off because of the repave and how much grip we had and how much faster this new car is anyway.

So there was definitely a lot learned in that test because it was so different from what the teams were used to. But it's going to be an interesting show. It's kind of a toss-up. It's a very, very high commitment racetrack. I think passing is going to be at a little bit of a premium, so it'll be a track position race, and qualifying will be monumentally important as is usually in the Verizon IndyCar Series, and we'll have to see where we shake out because the testing was a little bit scattered.

Q. What do you know about your dancing schedule I guess from this point forward? I assume you haven't done anything, any practicing yet. When does that practice begin?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Practice begins today, actually. Today will be the first rehearsal session with Sharna, and we'll do today and tomorrow, and then obviously I've got to take off to my day job, and we'll practice through the start of next week before the test in Sonoma and then over the weekend into the first show there. The real challenge will be show 2 because I really only have Tuesday and Wednesday before I've got to take off to Sonoma for Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and the next show is Monday. The second show will be more difficult than the first if we get through there. We might have to do a little extra work in the days leading up to show one to already start preparing for week two.

Q. Sharna is in town, and when is your first practice?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: It'll be this afternoon. It was actually -- I should have been there already, but there was a flight delay on her side, so she wasn't able to get in until a little bit later today. Once she lands, we'll head straight to the studio and get to work, and yeah, then we'll be in New York early next week and then out in LA after the Sonoma test, and then I'll be relocating myself to LA basically once the Sonoma race is done.

Q. My question is there is really no more oval racing left until the end of April 2017, and with that aside, surely you have a bit of confidence after the most recent race despite how it ended, but how does that confidence kind of carry forward to the final two races which are on permanent road courses?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Well, I think it brings confidence to the whole team in the sense that we walked into a very difficult situation in Texas, being that

we had 10 minutes of practice before heading into a race, and that really put a lot of emphasis on the engineers to produce a great setup right from the get-go, and the fact that as a team we nailed that considerably better than anybody else shows that the engineers are working well together and they have their ducks in a row when it comes to starting setups. That's such a key thing in the Verizon IndyCar Series. We get so little practice on a race weekend, rolling off the truck with a good car is huge.

So heading to the next two races, especially Watkins, a track that we don't have a lot of experience at, it's good confidence for the team and for the engineering office to know that they're doing the right thing and they're giving us good race cars right off the truck.

Q. Do you have any concern about Conor being on the loose at the Indy residence while you're in LA?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I have a tremendous concern. I've already set up a network of people that will be coming to check on him and the house in my absence.

Q. How do you stay on for all the extra commitments that you do? I mean, this is not the first external outside of IndyCar thing that you've done, but this is certainly something that will continue to help to grow you and continue to grow the sport on a profile. How do you keep it straight?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: You know, it's a combination of things. From a young age, I was counseled that this is the world, this is the motorsports world that we live in, and I've always just prepared myself for that, and so I've not shied away from extra commitments. I'm a very driven person on track and off, whether it's my racing or promoting the sport or outside business ventures I'm involved in. I like staying busy. I like staying active in that sense. This is a big part of our sport and is a huge help. Like we talked about with ET, this kind of thing, sure, it benefits me personally but it also benefits the sport, and I've always said from day one that anything that I can do outside of a race car to help grow the sport of IndyCar racing is something you can sign me up for because I've got such a passion for this sport. I plan on being around it for a long time as a driver, for a long time after that, as well, and I just love the fact that we've got the opportunity to do this kind of stuff and just try and help spread the word and show people that IndyCar racing is an incredible form of sport.

Q. Do you take anything away from Texas in relation to race setup for Watkins Glen? Obviously I know the circuits are completely different, but is there anything that you learnt from Texas that you can bring forward to the Glen?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Honestly, no, not directly. The whole point of our setup at Texas was to take care of

the tires and for long-run speed. Though our short-term pace and short-run pace was very good, that's not what our car was built for, so those short stints at the end with all the yellows is just what allowed everyone else to catch up. If it wasn't for that, in any longer run, we were the class of the field, and the team deserves a lot of credit for that. But it's the nature of the beast.

But no, unfortunately there's not a whole lot of lessons to be learned there that we can apply to Watkins.

Q. Will you bring anything from the test at Watkins to the race itself?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: The test?

Q. Sorry, the test from Watkins a couple of weeks ago.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, yeah, of course. That was our first real chance to get dialed in on that racetrack with this car, and like I said, it was quite a bit different than what the teams all remembered from 2010, so that was incredibly valuable, and I know that a lot of guys learned a lot of information about what they needed to show back up with this weekend.

ARNI SRIBHEN: We will thank James for his time this afternoon and wrap up today's call.