

IndyCar Media Conference

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Scott Dixon

Helio Castroneves

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joined now by Helio Castroneves driving the No. 3 Hitachi Team Penske Chevrolet for Team Penske, finished second fastest in today's overall practice sessions. Helio, you have a best finish of fourth here at the track but three poles, which should serve you well in qualifying tomorrow. How much of that experience are you going to be able to take into tomorrow knowing that the track is reacting so differently than it did when we were here last?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: First of all, Hitachi and my Verizon runs like the speed of Verizon LTE advanced, the nation's largest fastest 4G LTE network. Make sure you got that one.

It looks pretty good, pretty smooth, and the experience for me, I don't know, we have so much speed in the past qualifying here, and unfortunately some issues in the race. Obviously you want to go out there and put the best what you can have. Looks like Scott and his team seemed to do a very good job, but we steady but slowly were able to keep getting there.

I have to say that it's amazing. I'm not sure what he feels, but amazing how G-force we're pulling in the Carousel. I literally feel my face going like this. You know, it's like an amazing experience, and what a lot of fun this place is. It's unbelievable. I wish you guys were standing, like I said -- actually as Dario said, standing in Turn 5, which is the Carousel, because you guys are going to see how fast the Verizon IndyCar Series goes in that corner. The car looks good, the Hitachi car. We are very, very slowly but steady working in the car, and lot of details. I could not believe how many details. Since this track is so much smoother compared to what it used to be in the past, there was so much details not only in the setup, the driving, and the grip. Every time the Firestone tires, you put new tires, the track changed. I mean, we started turning lap 80 -- 84s and then 83s, now only this guy did 82. But it just goes to show that -- I mean, I believe tomorrow is going to be on the lows 82, if not 81s, as well.

THE MODERATOR: I know you've been in the car for

most of the day, but earlier today IndyCar announced that Hitachi was coming on as the presenting sponsor of this race in particular. Talk about your relationship with Hitachi and what they bring to the series as the presenting sponsor of this race.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Absolutely. Hitachi is not only a company that people think put the name on the TV, which actually is not even that. They have about 1,070 companies combined and generate revenue over \$120 billion, and I'll tell you what, I was able to go last year in Japan and their facilities, and I was so amazed. They can actually build a city without any other company around, so their infrastructure that they have is just amazing.

To have them in partner not only with Team Penske but now with Watkins Glen and the track and some of the other tracks, you can see they start slowly but surely, it's just great. I'm honored to be representing them in the Verizon IndyCar Series, and hopefully we can put the name into victory circle.

THE MODERATOR: Joined also now by Scott Dixon, who was fastest in today's practice sessions, driving the No. 9 Target Chip Ganassi Racing Chevrolet for Chip Ganassi Racing. Scott, you are the winningest IndyCar driver here at Watkins Glen. Scott, your lap time today, your fastest lap 1:22.8740, over five seconds faster than the track record here, and even though it's not official yet until qualifying tomorrow, but what is the main difference? Is it just the repave, and what were you able to learn from today's practice sessions?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think as Helio touched on, it's a lot different to when we came here. There was a lot more second- and third-gear corners. Now it's extremely fast, especially through some of those, 10, 11, the Bus Stop, the Carousel, even the approach to the Boot. It's just really fast.

So you know, the times have dropped almost six seconds. I think we'll see it well over six seconds by the time we get to the red tires and qualifying. I think weather conditions are playing a big part, too. When we did the tire test here with different compounds and things like that, we were in the fours, but the temperature was a lot warmer.

So yeah, it's definitely fast. It's a lot of hard work. The loading is through the roof. There's no real time that you get to rest. It's really hard to talk to the engineers, especially where we're pitted this weekend, when you get in because the loadings and the timeline is right before pit entry. It's a lot of fun.

Love being back here at the Glen. I was super excited when they announced this race, and I know with the Verizon IndyCar Series and everybody involved, we can definitely make this a fantastic race for the future, and hopefully we can build on it.

THE MODERATOR: Three wins here, and I believe they were consecutive from '05 to '07. What do you remember from that stretch of races where you were just completely dominating here at this track?

SCOTT DIXON: Unfortunately I remember the fourth one the most, which should have been another easy win, and I spun under yellow. That was quite painful. But yeah, it's been a race, I think -- and all of those were in very different cars. We had Toyota engines, Hondas, I think G-force, and then maybe even one year might have been a Dallara. Might have been wrong on that. The conditions here, too, throughout the years have been very tricky. I know we had some races that were raining or on slicks, and started in the wet and went to slicks, too, so it's been a fun track and one that, as I said, I love coming here. It's one of the great old-school American tracks that we're very lucky to come back to.

Q. How was the car today? How did it perform? And secondly, how physically demanding is the circuit for yourself?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think the car rolled off really strong. We had a pretty good margin in the first practice. The same in the second. The second session, the last run, we only ran two sets of tires, and the last set of tires we had traffic on every lap. I'm hoping that there's still some good time in the car.

But yeah, we went through the motions of different mechanical setups that we needed to try and tick off as we've tested here a couple times now.

All in all, I think all the Ganassi cars have been very quick. I know Tony had a bit of a rough run on one of those new tire runs there, so I think he's going to be up there. He already is in fourth, but he'll be right by me, and same with Max and Charlie. The team has done a great job coming here, and hopefully we can use that to our advantage.

Yeah, it's physical. There's no doubt about that. But I think it's typical race time, the loads aren't as much,

and you get of get into more of a rhythm. You've got to try and make the tires last. Maybe there could be a bit of fuel saving going on; we're going to have to wait and see. But qualifying is going to be extremely tough.

Q. Helio, in the '70s, Watkins Glen was the traditional home for the U.S. F1 Grand Prix, and your team, Roger took part several times with Mark Donohue. Did he ever show you how dramatic and difficult was qualifying during that day in Formula 1? Did you see some historic things when Roger took part here in the '70s with his team?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I'm not understanding the question. Footage? No, he did not. But when I was here a couple of months ago at the museum, I don't know the name of the museum -- in Corning, that's right, it was really cool to see some of the images from the past. Roger did mention to me about not only Watkins Glen but also in Elkhart Lake, that the way it used to be, there was basically not much walls around. There was actually hills and mountains, and it was incredible.

When he told me those type of stories and I see the image of the footage, the pictures, it was pretty incredible. And this morning, or this afternoon, talking to Bob and Dario, as well, and Bob talking about 1974, his first time running over here, what is amazing for us, I cannot speak on his behalf, but for sure I believe it's the same, that Watkins Glen is kind of like the DNA of open wheel, and for us coming back here, it just shows that we belong to a place like this. Such a nice place. Very difficult, very challenging, but a lot of fun, as well. I'm glad that we're here, and again, I just hope the Hitachi car will be tomorrow fast, as well, and in victory circle on Sunday.

Q. Let's talk curbs and the Bus Stop. I always thought there were 25 different ways to try and go through that section, but it seems to me the fast way is --

HELIO CASTRONEVES: What way he's doing. That's what -- is it different?

Q. Yes, a little bit different. He doesn't use as much curb as some of the other folks do.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I'm glad I knew that.

Q. And were you just kind of blowing some laps and coasting during that a few times? If you're not on a hot one, do you just take that fairly easy?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Well, depends on if you're coming out of the pits, and depends what's happening. There must be traffic in front, you just take it easy just so you can create a little gap. Where he's talking about the tires, sometimes you want to get a very -- you don't want to be too far behind, but you don't want to be too

close, or whatever it is, you just want to make sure it doesn't upset your car. That's probably what you'll be seeing.

Q. Scott, can you talk about, you do seem to get through there cleaner than most other folks, and what's the margin for error there?

SCOTT DIXON: I didn't know I was doing that. Now you gave my secret away. Yeah, I don't know. It's how we've been running. I don't know if more cars have obviously been taking curbing and stuff like that. For me it doesn't seem like it helps me. I think I take it quite a bit on the exit, but on the entry for sure. So yeah, everybody is different, and it depends on the car, right. If you're trying to manipulate, you can't go in as deep if the car is quite neutral to start with, blah blah blah, so it depends, I think, on the car that you've got.

Q. Are there a few spots to make up time?

SCOTT DIXON: I find these days the high-speed corners are less of an improvement. For me most of the time gained is in braking and low-speed corners.

Q. Given the high-speed nature of the course now and the fact that everything has gone up a gear, what do you see are the best opportunities for passing around here, because there's very small brake zones and you're immediately stepping back on the gas.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: That's a very good question. It's such a high-speed corner that we're going. We're always able to -- I think up the hill coming out of Turn 1, 2, 3, the car in front might be in huge trouble because he's going to be breaking the air, and whoever is behind is going to get more draft, just like at an oval, and probably the Bus Stop is going to be a potential, especially on the restart or start of the race, it's going to be a lot of three wides there. So I feel that's going to be the main opportunity to overtake, but you never know. Because it's so much fast, somebody might make a mistake, and that could be a potential for passing, as well.

SCOTT DIXON: Totally agree. I think when you've even got a small amount of less drag going up the hill, it equates to a great deal once you got to the top. I think that's definitely going to be a pretty good chance there, and it's a pretty slim margin, I think, to make mistakes in Turn 1, and then also in 7. There's some places that you can really mess it up.

You know, if you lose momentum here, man, it takes a lot to get it back.

Q. With the repave and the downforce, does this even feel like the same track anymore?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: What do you mean?

Q. The cars are going five seconds faster. Does it feel like the way it used to?

SCOTT DIXON: You know, the corners go the same direction. You know, I think -- I miss a little bit of the character that it had when it had the patches in 8 and 9 and even in 7, and the grip was down. But I think that's definitely going to evolve over the next two, three, four, five years. You know, right now I think we're kind of at the peak of it. But yeah, I really like it and enjoy it now because it's so fast, it's smooth, but I do like tracks with a lot of character, too, like this place used to have. But I think we'll get that back here soon.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I think the bigger difference is timing because when you were talking about five seconds, downshift and upshift, becoming in power, acceleration, the time that you had already was a little bit more, and now it's just like off the brake and step on the gas, so it's absolutely -- that was the biggest difference.

But in terms of lines and things like that, you're still doing pretty much the same.

Q. This is for both of you: Being that it's a 60-lap race on Sunday, if you're out of breath just doing some laps and coming in the pits, how are you guys going to do this if there are not a lot of cautions?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Good question, but I don't think the rhythm is going to be quite as hard like we're doing right now. Right now we're pushing the limits to see how fast the car can do it. But when Scott mentioned a little bit before, it might be there was a strategy saving tires and things like that, and the track is going to change, got to make some adjustments on the car, so it's not so like over here, because I don't know how -- it would be extremely difficult to be like that, plus you have a heavy fuel, which is going to be -- I think the biggest factor is going to be like turning. We don't have power steering, and that's going to be very difficult. That's why probably we're not going to do much faster than that. But it's going to be a challenge for sure.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, similar. I think as you get into a rhythm, it changes. The grip levels aren't as high for the first four or five laps, but the peak of the tire is pretty big, but if you tried to maintain that pace you'd be in pretty big trouble coming up on lap 10 maybe.

Q. When Helio was talking about the G-force, what's it going to be like tomorrow when the grip is going to be even more?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: It's going to be like that movie

3D, your face coming off. Did you feel that or not, your cheek going this way?

SCOTT DIXON: No.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Really?

SCOTT DIXON: I had some drool coming out. That was about it.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I don't know, that will be very interesting. I think tomorrow, as we were talking about, the reds are going to be the overall grip, and it would be -- or sometimes it's just getting used to. I think those two-hour practices were really good just before tomorrow about 45 minutes of practice or half an hour, so it was actually really good to have that one. But I don't know. Hopefully we'll be as good as today.

Q. Will you use the reds in practice tomorrow?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: No, you save normally for the qualifying.

SCOTT DIXON: I think the reds are incremental. We're not going to see a five-second gain. It's going to be maybe a second or something. So the loads will go up a little bit, but it's not for a sustained length. Yeah, I don't know. It'll be interesting because I think some people may have run the reds at different tests here just because they brought different tires. You know, it is tough not being able to run during any of the practice times, especially for the rookies. Their first time typically for any track on a red tire is Q1. It's definitely an eye opener when you get that amount of grip strapped on. I know there's talks in the future to maybe have more red sets for practice on Friday, which I think would be a good addition.

Q. This question is for Helio because Paul Tracy was talking on the broadcast that you did 21 laps on one set of tires, and I think your fastest speed was a 23.4, as they say, it's 83.4, and your last lap was say 83.7. So that would imply that the black tires are very consistent and don't go on, but being that the track is like billiard table smooth, wouldn't the red tires last quite a while?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Wow, I guess she is observing very well. That's good. You're right, I feel that Firestone brought very good tires. You're able to be consistent. But it's not -- we're doing a lot of stops. It's not kind of like it's three laps, stop, three laps, stop, then cool down the tires and go again. So the tire kind of like -- it doesn't destroy as quick as if you're going straight from a 15-lap run. That for sure will be effective on the race.

But definitely for us, it shows that our car is very, very

consistent. I was very happy with the stability of the car, especially on the older situation. You can see there was still a lot of speed, and that's our goal.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, thank you very much. Good luck this weekend.