

IndyCar Media

Conference

Saturday September 3, 2016

Scott Dixon

Will Power

Sebastien Bourdais

Helio Castroneves

Tony Kanaan

Max Chilton

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are joined now by Max Chilton, who will be starting sixth in tomorrow's IndyCar Grand Prix at the Glen presented by Hitachi, driving the No. 8 Gallagher Chip Ganassi Racing Chevrolet. This is your first start here in an IndyCar. How has the success of Chip Ganassi Racing contributed to this great performance that you've been having this weekend?

MAX CHILTON: Yeah, the Gallagher's Chip Ganassi crew have given me a solid car. They haven't been here in recent years, but they've got plenty of experience here, and it makes everything easier. I already felt more at home coming to this track just because it's such a fantastic track. It matches or has a lot of similarities to my favorite circuit, Spa-Francorchamps in Belgium, so it's just fast, flowing, undulating very picturesque track, and I think everything together with Gallagher giving me a good car, it just came together.

It wasn't easy. It was definitely -- I was surprised how close it was for such a big track, so there's still a lot that could have gone wrong. Also we didn't really know whether the red or the black was going to be quicker, and actually there wasn't much in it anyway. Yeah, we got it all together, and it was nice to get a solid qualifying result together.

THE MODERATOR: You're running an interesting paint scheme on your helmet this weekend. A few of us have heard about your inspiration behind that, but give us some information on why you chose to run that scheme this particular track.



MAX CHILTON: So it was actually a friend of mine that suggested it. He races Classic Formula 1 cars, and he said, you know, you're going to the Glen; I said, yeah. He said, you know it was 40 years ago that James Hunt won his world title, and they raced at the Glen that year, and that year he stuck it on pole, won the race and got fastest lap, and it doesn't get much more dominant than that, so I thought he deserved some credit for that.

So I like my one-off schemes. I like to try and keep my helmet the same because I don't like the ones when you can't recognize the driver, but when it's this obviously different, I think you can get away with it, and it seems to have gone down a treat with the older race fans. Yeah, very happy with it.

Q. How was the performance of the car today?

MAX CHILTON: It was great. I actually felt more comfortable in the start of FPT yesterday than I did today, but it's a weird track here. It took so many laps for the tires to come in. Out of the pits you think they're in, but you're three seconds off the pace, and you just think, where on earth is this time going to come from. But it just takes a lot longer for the tires to actually fully get to their peak temperature where you just have to keep pushing and pushing, and I found there was more performance in just doing as many laps as you could, trying to perfect what you were doing than actually trying to find the temp here with setup. I think our strategy of going straight out on green all three quality sessions and just running to the flag, it paid off in the end.

It's a challenging circuit, but I was happy, and I think actually our tire deg is one of the best. It seems to be better than my teammates', so hopefully tomorrow if we get a clean start, it should be a good one.

Q. Do you take any kind of inspiration from your experience in Formula 1 here?

MAX CHILTON: Obviously I haven't raced here in Formula 1. I know this place is not going to be overly easy without DRS or Push-to-Pass -- well, you've got a bit of Push-to-Pass, but I think everyone is going to be on a limb, and it's not going to be particularly easy to overtake, even though there is quite a long section between Turn 1 and the Bus Stop. So I think you've just got to make sure you get a clean first lap.

Strategy will play a part in it, but I don't think it's going to be a hugely sort of changing race. I think you've just got to make sure you hold your position at the start and then keep digging. It's going to be a very physical race.

Q. Max, at what point did you decide that blacks were the best way to go, and was the issue caused by the Cooper Tires leaving an incompatible rubber on the track?

MAX CHILTON: You know, it was a difficult call actually because we knew -- Scott tested here three, four months ago during a tire test. He didn't know what was red or black. He thinks he knew what tire was what, and from what he said, we didn't know that that -- there didn't seem to be a huge difference between the two tires.

So ideally over history, history tells you red is going to be the better tire to race on, so you didn't want to do too many laps on the red, but you didn't want to take the gamble off of going black in Q1 and getting knocked out, so we went reds like most people did in Q1 to see what the tire did. And then we thought, oh, do we be clever and go black now and then do lesser laps on our reds so it doesn't hurt our reds as much in Q3, but Chip, the team, Chip Ganassi, he's got so much experience, he always says to us do the simple things right, and the simple thing right is try and qualify as far up the grid as you can.

I think we made the right call again. I think the reds just had a slight edge, which got us into the Fast Six, and then we'll start with the blacks. But actually I went quicker on the blacks, and I didn't have my -- I did so many laps in Q3 and Q2 that I didn't have any maximum power left, so I was actually on reduced power on that Q3.

I think actually the blacks you could argue were the better tire.

Q. Max, I suppose you were running here in qualifying trim. Do you retrim the car for the race tomorrow?

MAX CHILTON: It's arguable. Ideally not because I don't think it's going to be particularly easy to overtake here, and if you put a bit more downforce on to help your tires, you're just going to get passed on the one overtaking place. So we won't be adjusting it much. My tire deg seems to be very good compared to my teammates', so hopefully we'll just get a clean start tomorrow and keep digging.

Q. Max, how nice is it to actually make the Fast Six after Road America, a kind of similar flowy road

course? I think you said you got held up during there, so how much of a relief is this?

MAX CHILTON: Yeah, it definitely makes a difference. This circuit just stood out to me, and Road America is more what I'm used to, the faster flowing, especially here the lovely smooth surface. I've been brought up with nice tracks, so it's a bit of a shock to the system when you come to bumpy surfaces. It was nice to drive here with a smoother circuit. Yeah, circuits do suit certain drivers, and this suits me like Elkhart Lake. The fast flowing corners I just prefer.

It paid off today, as well, like it did in Road America. But the Road America race went awfully badly, so hopefully we can change that tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Joined by Helio Castroneves and Will Power and Sebastian Bourdais. Helio, you've just qualified really well here in the No. 3 Hitachi Chevrolet and in the past, as well. What is the key for you to qualify well here at Watkins Glen?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Well, good car, good team. Obviously everyone in our team share a lot of information we're able to collect and able to put it together. It was great with this situation about the red tires and the black tires. It's always interesting, and, well, at the least we're able to do good lap times on the reds, and sounds like the blacks were the way to go. Sometimes when you were -- just got to take a chance, and our group decided to go with the reds, and that's the best we could do.

THE MODERATOR: Will Power, driving the No. 12 Verizon Team Penske Chevrolet. Will, you are our most recent race winner here at Watkins Glen. You also have a pole to your name here at the Glen. Good start to your weekend so far. How important is that to you just even confidence-wise as you continue your plight to try to catch Simon in points?

WILL POWER: Yeah, it's very important to start up front, definitely, considering the championship situation. I felt pretty comfortable around here. Really enjoy the track. Obviously I was really grateful to get in the Fast Six there and have a shot at it. You know, unfortunately on my final lap, starting it, my engine just died in the last corner there. Definitely cost us some time, but starting on the front row is definitely better than where we were.

THE MODERATOR: And Sebastien Bourdais joining us, also starting third in tomorrow's race, driving the No. 11 Team HydroxyCut KVSH Racing Chevrolet. Surprisingly, this is your first start here in an IndyCar at Watkins Glen. How has the weekend been going so far, and what are your impressions of the track?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Yeah, I had the opportunity to do three sports car races, but we never came here in Champ Cars and you guys were not coming anymore when I came back in IndyCar in '11, so never drove those here. But the test was a lot of fun, and it's definitely one of these super high commitment racetracks. Really enjoying it. The team did a really good job, and we found something that works for me, and it's awful close, obviously.

I thought that 82.7 was going to be somewhere close enough for it, but it turned out not to, and I made a mistake on the third fast lap, which was supposed to be the end of our qualifying, but I went pretty slow to let by the guys I had to let by just to make sure I wasn't going to impede anyone, and in doing so we thought we saved enough fuel another lap, which I did, and I was somewhere a tenth and a half, two tenths up, so just on par with Will and Scott.

You know, might not have been enough, but we'll never know because we ran out of gas coming up the last corner, and that was it. It was a bit disappointing, but in the meantime it's my bad. I made a mistake, and we went for a lap that we were never counting on. It is what it is, but it's fun to be in the press conference in the Fast Six and starting at the front of the pack for a change.

We still can't make the reds work, but we'll see about that tomorrow. Firestone has done a great job with the black tires, but for sure for us it just seems to be a real struggle to get a setup that works with both rubbers, and we'll see what we can do tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Also joined by Tony Kanaan, driving the No. 10 NTT DATA Chevrolet. Tony, three Chip Ganassi Racing cars in the Firestone Fast Six today. What's clicking with the team? It's a team that you've had success with and Scott has had success with here at the track. What's working out so well?

TONY KANAAN: I think we're having a great season. You know, we've been working together really well. It's my third year there, and I think we finally got to the point that we can exchange a lot more information. When I got to the team, I really had to adapt in some of the things for the way that they set up the car. Scott drives quite a bit different than I do, and I've been migrating towards what he is doing.

Great effort by the team for sure. Three cars in the Fast Six, with the way that this series is competitive, it's not an easy task. We definitely split the strategy a little bit on the Fast Six. We went on reds and we saw the two cars on the team going on blacks. I think it didn't pay off as well as we wanted, but we're there, top 5.

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: You didn't look at me?

TONY KANAAN: Of course I did. You beat me on the blacks. Let's split it. We decided to split the strategy. Scott was on blacks. Yeah, I saw you, trust me.

Q. Sebastien, you just said earlier you were racing here already in Champ Car. How much different is the track from the Champ Car point of view and then compared to IndyCar?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: No, I said we never raced here in Champ Car.

Q. But you raced here sports cars?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Yeah, sports cars.

Q. Is it a little advantage for you?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Yeah, it doesn't hurt to know the layout, of course, but the grip level that this place has got now, it's unbelievable. It really feels, like especially in qualifying when you're pushing everything you've got, is that you're doing almost a lap with a gun to your head. It's that close. You have so little margin, and the minimum speed is 90 miles an hour around the lap. That's it. There's no slow corners and that, and I'm sure in qualifying it was even higher than that.

It's gotten to the point where our cars have kind of outgrown the place a bit, but it's still a thrill, and it puts on a great show for the fans. You just really have to get your stuff together because there's not going to be a small crash. If you make one, it's going to be -- you're going to pay the bill for sure.

But it's what we get paid to do. It's no different than ovals or anything else. Just have a ball and get it right.

Q. Will, you talked a bit about it out there; for a 3.37 mile track and only 11 cars out there at a time for the first three groups, why so many interference penalties, and what could be done to improve that?

WILL POWER: Yeah, just need to extend the qualifying time because everyone comes in and does their two laps, and they all go out at the same time. If you had a bit more time, you could pick and choose where to put your driver out on the track. You know, it's not the drivers' fault, it's the amount of time we have, and the teams sending them out have no choice. I think just a little bit more time in the qualifying session, and you could pick better gaps and there would be less penalties.

Q. Is it hard to get out of the way?

WILL POWER: You know, generally if you see a car starting to disturb your air, so everyone wants a good gap, so it's going to be a pretty big gap, and that's the problem, so it makes it tough for sure.

Q. TK, how have you -- what do you attribute to your kind of turnaround this season, the fact that you're in third in the championship at the moment?

TONY KANAAN: I'm having another kid, so I've got to buy more diapers, man. People keep trying to retire me. I'd better show something, otherwise I'm going to go home and be, what do you call it, a home stay dad or something?

Q. A stay-at-home dad?

TONY KANAAN: Yeah. (Laughing.) I don't think it would be good for the kids, man, trust me.

No, I think we flipped this year. I mean, last year -- the consistency has been the key, and I've been around for a long time, and I was talking to Helio, and we always compare each other forever, we race together, and consistency kept him in the game the past five years in the championship. We just really got in a row and got some good results. Last year I thought we had actually a pretty good season, but the double-points race is what really hurts you, and crashing in there last year was right away finishing 23rd, it hurt me quite a bit, and I never recovered from that until another year.

I would say it's just that we're clicking more. Like I said previously, I think me and Scott are working better than ever together, and I finally figured out a little bit how to adjust his drive style to mine, and we are sharing things. We still know a couple things that something is going to work for him and is not going to work for me. I think it's a matter of working together and the momentum. We're there. I'm pretty pleased with our season.

Q. How was the performance of the car today?

TONY KANAAN: It was good. The car was good. I think overall over the weekend we were at least two or three tenths behind Scott every session and trying to catch up. I kind of knew going to qualifying it was going to be tough, and then when we split the strategy between the reds and the blacks, I knew it was going to be even tougher. I would say I'm happy with the car. I think we're pretty good on blacks. But we'll see. The race is going to be -- it's going to be a tough one, very physical, and it's hard to pass here, so we'll see.

Q. I just wanted to get straight who set their fastest lap on blacks and why reds turned out not to be maybe the tire to have. And then when did someone discover that? Was it earlier on in qualifying?

WILL POWER: Bourdais is the one that was the pioneer. Sebastien set a really fast time, so it was kind of obvious then.

Q. On blacks?

WILL POWER: On blacks, yes.

Q. Will, did you go on blacks, too?

WILL POWER: I went on blacks in the Fast Six, yes. So did Dixon.

Q. And didn't use reds at all?

WILL POWER: I didn't use reds at all, no, of the final round, no.

Q. What was the issue why blacks just weren't right, the setup?

WILL POWER: Yeah, some setup, but just like a better tire. The reds are -- yeah, the reds just didn't work out. I can't put my finger on why.

Q. Was it too much grip?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: The problem is we set our cars up on black. That's all we can use all weekend, and it's like that every weekend. The problem is when you're margin on tires, you're putting the tire through such a duty cycle over here that if you overshoot the tire, then all of a sudden the car is not -- it's stranded and it's a mess. For us we went out on reds in Q1, and the car was a disaster, and we just reverted because clearly we were not going to fix it in qualifying. Just given enough time, it's a softer tire, it's probably a quicker tire, but with the black setup on, you don't have much time to figure it out.

Q. Do you normally at most tracks not change the setup because it would be too risky?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Well, you just can't. When you're in qualifying, you basically do a hot stop in qualifying during the sequence. You do two, three laps, then pit stop, change tires, go again, so you can't make adjustments to the car. It takes a bit more than that. You need to take a bit of time, look at data, see what's really happening and all that stuff, and that's not just the way it works. Usually it's not that clear-cut. Here it seems like if the top three is on blacks in the Fast Six, there's probably a good reason for it.

Q. Scott, can you talk about the choice of tires and how that made you get pole today?

SCOTT DIXON: I think these two covered it pretty well. We actually after the first session in Q1, we only did really the out lap, and we already mentioned that I didn't like them, so then really from that point we just tried them in Q2 and barely scraped through. We had some other issues on that run in Q2, which made it difficult, but I felt like I had a better balance and a car that I could control better on the blacks.

In some areas I think the red had pretty good grip, but for me it wasn't -- it didn't suit me.

little bit more and gone on to win at this place.

I think the first few laps, like anywhere, it's going to be pretty interesting, but I think the first big long straight here is the tough one going into the Bus Stop.

Q. Dix, 5.6063 seconds under Briscoe's pole, first of all, happy to take that back from the Aussie, but do you feel that? What are you feeling physically after demolishing the lap record?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I was expecting it to be over six seconds, so I think all of us were a little shocked with -- the track was really fast this morning in the cooler conditions, and then we automatically thought you'd pick up eight tenths to a second on the reds, which didn't play through for some reason, which I think we'll work out later. Obviously the black that we're running here is a new tire I think for Firestone, and the red is from another track, so the separation is going to be interesting to see how the tire deg is. But yeah, it's just so fast. I don't know what the average speed is, but it's got to be just below 150 miles an hour, which is almost race pace at like Milwaukee or something. So it's pretty crazy to be averaging those speeds. But the G-loads, especially in Turn 10, 11, Turn 5, I haven't seen that for quite some time on any road course.

Q. Did you test here earlier, and if so, is your setup today similar or identical to the test setup?

SCOTT DIXON: It's kind of evolved from when we first tested here. There was a couple of different tests. There was a tire test, and that was a really short day. It started at like 3:00 to 5:00 or something like that, and I think we even had some rain, so we really only did an hour of running, and then the second test here where a majority of the teams came, we had another big rainfall which ended the day. So we kind of evolved the car through other tracks that we'd been running maybe from that point and things that we had learnt, and then we just tried to clarify a few things that were maybe not -- we maybe weren't so certain on. It's a lot of our baseline stuff is from maybe Road America or Mid-Ohio or something like that. I think that's why the team does run well on this kind of circuit is because they have a good baseline for it.

Q. When you look at the Fast Six, it's a lot of experienced guys and then Max broke through for his Fast Six. What has his feedback been this weekend, and how impressed are you with how he's gone on?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, it's good to see Max doing well. I think it's definitely an eye-opener, I think, coming to the Verizon IndyCar Series, and especially if you're a rookie. You don't get much additional time. You don't really get many additional tests. It's an extremely steep learning curve, and I think road courses like here at the

Q. Tony, you just said passing, overtaking is quite hard here. Traffic tomorrow in the race could be an important issue, can be a problem; what do you think?

TONY KANAAN: Traffic is always a problem if people don't play nice, yes, for sure. I'm not sure with such a long track if somebody is going to have a problem if we're even going to be able to get traffic. I'm not sure. It could be, but once you catch a back marker, you're going to get the flag, and they might going to have to let you go. But yeah, if you're close enough and you're fighting for position, it could be a factor for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Joined now by our pole winner Scott Dixon, driving the No. 9 Target Chip Ganassi Racing Chevrolet. Scott Dixon set a new track record here at Watkins Glen International of 1:22.5259 seconds in the Firestone Fast Six session. Scott, this is your -- you have three wins here at Watkins Glen, but surprisingly this is your first pole. What went so well in qualifying?

SCOTT DIXON: I think the Target team just did a fantastic job. The car, I think even in the first session we had a good gap on the rest of the field, and they've definitely honed in and got a lot closer I think over the sessions, especially Will. But I think when you roll off, especially on some of these short weekends that we have, I was hoping there was going to be a lot less practice time than what we had here this weekend because everybody started to close the gap.

But yeah, we had a good couple of tests here in adjusting the car, but it's also a track that I really enjoy. I think it suits my style. But the Ganassi group as a whole have always been known for doing really well on road courses, the likes of Road America and Mid-Ohio. Good combination, and I don't know, fun to be back here, really fun.

Q. Given the high speeds and the grip level and everything, just how utterly critical is that first start going to be?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, it's going to be interesting, just because I think tire choice is going to be quite interesting tomorrow, too, which we'll have to wait until after the morning practice to see where that goes. The reds I think were a little -- were definitely not what everybody was expecting, so that's going to be an interesting choice to see how that plays out strategy-wise. But yeah, I think the -- obviously the first corner with the steep uphill climb here, you know, when you can get a little less drag and when you're in the slipstream there is going to give you a ton of acceleration, and in the past I think that's really helped the races we've been in where we've trimmed out a

Glen, he's probably more used to as opposed to a bumpy street course or low-grip tracks that these cars are pretty tricky at. For me it's been great to see him have a consistent weekend, a weekend that you can now see he's getting confident in the car. Haven't got to chat to him too much. I think all four cars have been pretty similar on setup actually, so it's been a nice weekend for a lot of us to run in the same direction and hopefully keep moving in that way.

Q. From your perspective with the high downforce and the short braking zones, so you see a lot of pace tomorrow? Do you see a lot of tire wear? What do you think the race is going to be? Is it going to be professional?

SCOTT DIXON: I don't think it's -- it's an IndyCar race; I don't think it's ever really going to be professional. You're going to have people -- I think the fuel windows look a bit -- a little tougher than I thought they would have been to get the mileage, so that's going to open up some strategy difference right there. The red tire is -- we've never run it before, we haven't been here for five years or six years. It's a very big unknown, and that could really also add to how the race plays out.

But I think the trick here -- not the trick, but just how you have that long bit straight with that steep uphill, even this morning I came out of the pits and almost passed Pagenaud when he was already on a quick lap just for the straight drag that you lose and the length of it that you're able to pass.

Degradation is going to be one I think we've seen quite a bit of graining and the occasional blisters and things like that on the blacks, and the reds we really don't know yet. Yeah, the I guess the easiest thing is just to say it's a lot of unknowns, and I think you'll see a pretty good mixup.

Q. Normally you put on the reds, everything is quicker. For the most part it's an issue of wear. But because we've got to run what is generally going to be a full stint tomorrow on them and there's such an unknown, nobody feels comfortable with them, how much time and effort will you as a team spend tonight looking at what you learned in qualifying and how much time and effort during the morning warmup will be spent on reds?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think typically you try to save the reds as much as possible so nobody runs them in the warmup. It's quite similar to Detroit; the other downside to Detroit is that it's a double-header so you have to at least run two sets of those tires, so nobody can really ever run them and see what they do, either. But generally everybody starts on them and tried to get rid of them as much as possible. That may be what

happens tomorrow, as well.

It was quite strange; I thought the grip was there, but the platform for me, and I'm quite obsessive over the platform of the car and the way it rolls, so that was a hard part for me. I think our time would have been pretty close to what we set had I had a clean lap in Q2 on a new set of reds, but yeah, the longevity as we all know is typical that the reds don't last as long as the blacks. That's one solid thing we can take from it, but we'll just have to try and figure out how we can maybe make them live a little bit longer, so I think tomorrow morning you'll see quite a few people running on at least one set of reds.

Q. Bearing in mind you're going to be starting alongside someone that's kind of pretty deep into the championship hunt and therefore might be less inclined to take risks, especially considering he's a couple of rows ahead of Pagenaud, does that give you somewhat of an advantage in terms of being able to hold him back and take more risks because he's going to be keeping the hell out of your way?

SCOTT DIXON: I'll definitely remind Will before the race that he's got a lot more to lose than I have. You know, I think you can see that Will has evolved a lot I think as a driver, especially this championship, and it was funny, we chatted at Road America about the runaway championship that Simon was having, and I was like, you wait, man, it's going to flip. One of us will be in the Chase again to try and hunt him down, and obviously Will has had a spectacular latter part to the season. But yeah, no, I'll definitely remind him that he's got a lot more to lose.

THE MODERATOR: Scott, congratulations. Good luck tomorrow.