

IndyCar Media Days

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Helio Castroneves

Media Day Presser



Q. You're starting your 20th IndyCar season.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Wow, 20. The doctor, yesterday I went to medical, and the doctor said I have the health of a 19-year-old kid. That's what she said. I said, I just feel like --

Q. That's what she said?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: It was a doctor. It was a she. It was a doctor. Come on, really?

Q. Would you kind of recap your 2016 season and then transition into this year, what you're looking forward to.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, happy new year, everyone. It's great to be back. Again, as Mark said, about 20 -- wow, it's a lifetime achievement. When I was a kid, that's what I wanted to do. I wanted to drive race cars, and obviously I'm still living my dream, and I want to keep going as far as I can, as competitive as I can. With Team Penske, it's going to be my 18th season. It's interesting that over the years I've only been outside of the top 5 only twice, which shows that we are very competitive.

Unfortunately that top 5 did not give me the championship, and I've got to figure out what to do. But we've got to keep knocking on the door, like I always did, but the main one is the Indy 500. We're coming back strong for this year. We're really focused for the 500. We want to have -- the team is going to have five cars, which at the same time it's good and bad because the good thing we can develop the car faster, find information faster. The bad thing is it's obviously going to have four more competitors on that.

But I feel that, as you heard, I'm young as ever. Age is just a number, and I can't wait to go back. I can't wait to start the season again, and it sounds like it won't change much with the aero package. It might be a little bit faster, but again, seems -- just looks like it's going to be a continuation from 2016, which is great for us.

Q. Over the years you've had different teammates come in, and I think from my point of view, you keep stepping up your game and improving every year like a Will Power came along and was winning poles. It just seems like just a little fire under you to watch whatever he was doing or at least try, and I just think you've really improved the longer

you've been driving. Now you've got Newgarden coming in, you had Simon come in, and so what are you going to have to do now?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Well, keep up -- it's just a computer. It's update the skills, and it'll be great for Newgarden, a new addition on the team. Last year he did dominate at the Iowa race, and we want to find out why, and that's one of the things. At least I see it this way: I want to try and see what's the quality that Joseph has that I can improve my ability to put on the racetrack, as well.

There is no question he's a race winner, and Roger has an amazing eye for talent, and he is a rising star for sure.

And talking about him now, for sure having the certainty, as well, I think it'll be a great fit for the whole entire team, which is going to help everyone, including myself. I have the mentality to look what is the good thing that I can make myself better, and hopefully Joseph has that, too.

Q. You look at Ganassi's switch to Honda, and obviously you guys are still with Chevy. Do you think that builds a certain degree of competitiveness?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: No question. It's definitely -- it's going to create that kind of scenario that -- it happens in the past. The good news is they were with Chevy for a few years, but with the caliber of the Ganassi team, for sure it won't take long for them to figure it out. But we want to think that at least it's something that they're going to have to work double the time to catch up.

But again, it's a team that has been obviously very competitive the past -- all the years, and with the caliber of drivers, as well, I feel that they're going to be competitive for sure. But that doesn't scare -- that's actually -- when you have a competitor team, it makes us to go to the next level, and that's what we're looking for.

Q. To have a one-off driver come in, obviously Juan can do it as much as anybody with his experience here, but there's got to be a little bit of a definite for somebody who hasn't been in the car for all the races like you guys. How do they overcome that so

quickly?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Well, I believe he's going to be making one race before the 500, maybe a possibility. I'm not sure if that's the case. But if not, the only -- one of the guys that I know that can sit down in a car and go fast without any practice is Juan Pablo. I have no doubt of that. He for sure, for us, it's going to be just an extension. I don't think it's going to be a -- we've got to take people from our side just to fulfill a fifth car there, so the way the logistics work, Team Penske knows the best. We have like Kyle Moyer, which is a phenomenal guy, actually used to deal with five cars in the past when he was working with Andretti. So that won't be any issue related to the program of Team Penske.

Q. What's it going to take to put a complete season together and capture your first title?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: That's a good question. It's been, as I said, 20 years, and we're doing everything we can, and we always end up close. For sure, win. You've got to make it happen. Last few years we have not been in victory circle, and that hurts for sure, to be at least in contention. So we've got to figure out a way to win, and from there on, just hopefully carry on the momentum for points.

We have consistency, which is probably the most difficult thing is to keep that consistency. We've just got to find the weakness spot areas, and for sure the main thing is winning a race, and with that, we carry on the rest of the season.

Q. Helio, last year Team Penske won 10 races out of 16. Now you have Newgarden joining you, and that only leaves three other drivers outside of Team Penske that won anything. What do you think the other teams will have to do to beat you guys? Are you going to be as strong as you were last year?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, absolutely. As you said, we have the top four in the championship. Basically we -- I don't think you can do better than that. And that's our goal. It's to complete the top four in the same team, and we are looking for the same result that we have this year, except different numbers. Hopefully that No. 3 will be in the No. 1 spot.

Q. Helio, the championship is the only thing really on your résumé that's missing. You can arguably run the Indy 500 a few more years even after being competitive for a full season. The clock is ticking. You've got another year or two to really do it, don't you?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, I know.

Q. Are you starting to feel like I've got to do it this year, I've got to do it next year?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Look, yes. Personal, I know that the clock is ticking. I don't have to prove anything to anybody else, but I want to achieve my goals, and my goal is to win a championship. We've just got to put all the pieces together. Last year we had a very good season, and unfortunately we had pole position, we were fast, we were leading races. Roger always says, you lose more than win races, and I agree. There's so many races that we should have won and probably would have put us in the title for the championship. But the interesting thing is we always have phenomenal teammates that end up getting in the right spot in the right situation.

I won't thinking about the clock ticking, I am thinking about opportunity, and that's probably one of the -- of my motivation to come back every year and keep -- when I put the helmet on, give it my best, and that's what I'm going to do again.

Q. And you've got the body of a 19 year old, so you've got who knows how many years?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: We've got to prove the fact at night, that's what she said. Ba-boom, we've got to make that happen now. It was said in a very innocent way.

Q. We're going to the 101st running of the 500. What can we expect? Will it be a letdown, or is it still always the 500, a special race?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Good question. The good thing about last year, I do feel we got a -- the new millennial. We got the new young people watching the Indy 500. It was a great promotion that everybody did. It's a new generation, and I feel now 40 years from now that the guys -- the first time -- I heard a lot of people it was the first time they watched the Indy 500. Those people are the ones that are going to continue to watch it. It's a continuation of that new people probably for this year and the following year. So looking forward to another great race which is -- this is never going to end. It's always going to be the most great spectacle in racing, and looking for the fourth one.

Q. How tough a challenge is it to get people that watch the 500 to start watching the other events?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: The challenge is, from the series, to keep it motivating. We have the right product. We have the right drivers. It's more exciting than actually any other race you see out there, to be honest. So it's just -- we've just got to get the word out there. Today you have so many ways that obviously Verizon is a big partner in it, and that's what we've got to continue to focus. I feel that that's the direction we should be focused on.

Q. We're going back to Gateway for the first time in

a few years. You've had a lot of success there. What do you expect the racing to be like, and what do you like about that track?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I'm super excited to be honest. First, because 1999, Hogan Racing, that's the team I raced for, it was based down there. So I have kind of like a sentimental way from St. Louis. That also was one of the races in Champ Car that I finished behind Michael Andretti, which was one of the -- I couldn't believe it. When I was racing, I remember, man, this is Michael right in front of me, and I remember racing. Which is amazing, 20 years now, we're going back. My memory is going back. I know I won there, and there was one fact very interesting that I don't think a lot of people know. My win there in 2003, when we are on the grid, I had a glitch in my dashboard, so I raced the entire race without revs information or lap times or fuel consumption information. So it was kind of like difficult, especially on the restarts, because sometimes you're guided by the lights to shift gears. But that didn't stop us to win the race.

I really like the place because the place has been very good to me, and I can't wait to go back there. I know it's a different evolution, of course. We used to downshift and different speeds, probably going to go much faster in the corner when we go back. But it's a place that still -- it's a great way for us to go to a new oval, and I feel the people from St. Louis, especially now that they don't have the football there, I think they're going to find a way for us to becoming the new sport over there, so I'm looking forward to going back.