

IndyCar Media Conference

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Scott Dixon

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're joined now by fittingly the defending winner of the Phoenix Grand Prix here at Phoenix Raceway, Scott Dixon, who just completed the first practice session of the IndyCar Open Test. Scott, you've been out on track, obviously a racetrack that you know well that you've had success on. What are your thoughts on the first session?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, well for one, it's good to be back in an IndyCar. It's been a little while, so it's nice to be out running and obviously back here in Phoenix, fond memories from last year. It's always good to be back at a track that you won at.

For us, big changes in the off-season, and the first -- well, it's the second time in the Honda power car, so first time on a short oval, which as we know is maybe not the best package to have, but all in all, it ran fairly smoothly. We didn't do new tires. It looked like a bunch of people did new tires at the end and did a couple of different aero adjustments to try and get an idea on some of the data that we've been looking at through the off-season.

But yeah, as for right now, the engine feels really good, and lap times I thought for what we were doing were actually fairly decent. It's always hard to tell in preseason testing, especially with manufacturers, how tuned up they are, and we'll just have to see how it plays out once we come back here for the race. But for us and our testing program today, the session went fairly well.

THE MODERATOR: What is going through that transition like when you're switching manufacturers over an off-season and these first initial tests? What are the challenges of the driver to adjust to those changes?

SCOTT DIXON: You know, typically they're the same as far as when you do make these changes. I think it's definitely a polar opposite or polar difference between how manufacturers -- these two manufacturers at least run their program. You know, for me it's a lot of familiar faces. As a team we've achieved a lot with HPD and Honda, so it's nice to be back working with a lot of those people, and as I said, they run the program vastly different. So I think the program in itself actually

fits our team a little bit better, but you know, we'll have to see. Obviously performance is what you really look for. I think this year is probably the hardest time to do that transition just for the sheer fact that we almost have no off-season testing with four days now in a stagnant year of development, ourselves and AJ Foyt are probably the only two teams that are on a very steep learning curve trying to figure out what the other side has had for two years.

There's a lot to learn, a lot to take in. It's exciting, it's a new challenge, and definitely happy to be behind the No. 9, and we'll see what we can get this season.

Q. Going back to your victory here last year, you led the last 155 laps. Post-race, most of the drivers talked about hard to pass, too much downforce, and you were pretty confident in your statement saying that for the first year you thought things went pretty well but that IndyCar would be better here the second time around in terms of the entertainment value of the race with the aero kit freeze and so forth. Do you still remain confident of the showbiz value of the race?

SCOTT DIXON: I think it'll be better. It's always a fine line and something that's very tough to achieve and takes multiple attempts, I think, at doing it. Right now is a very tough time, too, because this is a non-development year and everything has stayed stagnant, it's very hard for Honda to change any of the parameters because this is -- basically nothing is meant to change.

I expect larger changes for next year when we go to a single aero kit configuration, and because next year IndyCar will have the power over the whole car. Right now it's very tough because the parameters that they use, it's very difficult to make an equal change for both.

There has been some smaller changes. Obviously I think Firestone brought a different tire here, too. Right now for me it actually felt like the track grip was up over last year, so that's kind of interesting. Not sure why we're kind of getting that read yet. But to be honest, right now I couldn't tell you either way. We're doing what we can as the drivers to make the show better, and we'll have to wait and see whether it turns out that way.

Q. Could you tell me, do you feel the drivers in the IndyCar organization realize the importance of improving the showbiz value of the race in terms of trying to build the audience in this market of a second year of what may only be a three-year window to succeed?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, it's paramount, and there has been some heavy discussions, and not just for here but for a lot of different places. But there's a lot of pieces to the puzzle. It's never that easy just to make one change. In that moment you're going to annoy or anger somebody.

I think IndyCar in the off-season have done an amazing job of going to these tracks, testing configurations. It might not be -- the changes as quick as we would like to see, but there's also got to be a methodical change period for both. I find next year it's going to be a lot easier to make these changes. It's just right now in a stagnant year, it's kind of tough. But still, in the off-season they've made some pretty good tests and adjustments and are working in the right direction. We'll just have to see how it works out.

Q. How temporary is the all-white driver suit?

SCOTT DIXON: You don't like it?

Q. I'm just saying how temporary is it until you start having some signage on it?

SCOTT DIXON: That's above my pay grade, man.

Q. And other than I think a couple of years ago when you had a white Target driving suit I believe in Indy or somewhere like that, it's always been red. When is the last time that you've had a non-red driver suit other than the aforementioned time?

SCOTT DIXON: Well, if you count paint schemes and stuff there's been plenty of different colors and white ones. Not this plain, but it'll change before the season starts.

Q. Scott, I guess it would be logical to expect that you guys with the changes would be better in the second half of the season with some experience and work and what have you. Are you confident you can come out of the gate pretty quick and do well in these first few races?

SCOTT DIXON: That's the goal. You know, whether it plays out that way, we'll have to wait and see. But there's -- when you're racing a competitor, you have a pretty good understanding of your analysis of where they stand, with where they struggle, where you're better, et cetera, et cetera. So going into this we kind of knew the areas that we were probably going to be on the back foot some and better at others.

I think the off-season for us, to be honest, has been a

really good reset with the manufacturer. I think last year as a team we made a lot of mistakes, a lot of small mistakes that we didn't get the small things right first, which gave us ultimately the worst championship that we've had in probably about 12 years. We had great speed throughout the year, but finishing sixth in the championship is not something that we take too lightly.

You know, as I said, it's really hard to gauge. There's areas that we think we're going to be fast and good, but there's areas that as a team we needed to work on, and too, with the manufacturer changing configuration, we might not be at best, as well.

Q. How do you like the fact that there's the same four drivers year to year, whereas -- does that help to have that bit of continuity, at least, when there's been one or two changes off and on in recent years?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, it's always nice to have the same lineup, you know, and I think with TK, it's been good to work with him for the last two seasons and going into a third. That kind of longevity between him and myself at least, I think you start to get some good patterns of if the 9 car does one thing, the 10 should do this, et cetera, et cetera, which is something that we had a really good sort of platform with Dario when he was in the 10 car. And then with Max's second year, expect to see some big improvements, and I think he's starting to get the flow of it. He was a little unsure of the street courses in IndyCar for a while, but it's definitely taking a liking to those now, and Charlie definitely was strong throughout last year, too. Yeah, I guess the short answer is it's nice to have the same lineup.

Q. The track will have the same layout next year's race, but for the IndyCar race in 2019 everything is going to change, the start-finish line, over there coming out of Turn 2. How much is that really going to change the style of restarts at this track?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, it'll be quite interesting, just because of trying to -- obviously with the restart zone and stuff is going to be, it could be pretty tough. But it could also open it up a little bit instead of all barreling down into Turn 1. I don't know. The short answer to that is I'm not really sure how it's going to change our racing, whether it will at all. But yeah, I think it's definitely exciting to see Phoenix International putting in all the money and going through the transition, updating the facility. Definitely everybody is excited about that.

Q. Did you think the track needed an upgrade?

SCOTT DIXON: No, I think it wasn't -- depends on some of the other places, too, you know. But no, I think

this facility -- obviously much hasn't changed since I first came here in maybe 2000 or something, or '97 maybe, '98. It's good to see it going through an update.

Q. You talked earlier about the changes to the cars being made to make this a little bit racier. How much are track conditions going to play into that? I know we've gone to some races where if the weather had been different the race would have been completely different. How much does that play in here versus other tracks?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think here, typically the conditions are pretty similar. We're going to see a pretty big swing, obviously, from today to tomorrow with the ambient, at least the temperature, which will be interesting. But I think from when -- from now to when we come back, I don't think there's going to be a big shift. I think on some of the superspeedways you see more of a shift in how the race plays out just because you're in such low downforce levels that swing of a few degrees ambient makes a big difference to overall grip and degradation, too, throughout the race.

Here, you know, you're pretty high on downforce, so it's a much smaller shift.