

IndyCar Media

Conference

Saturday March 11, 2017

Will Power

Scott Dixon

Takuma Sato

Josef Newgarden

Tony Kanaan

James Hinchcliffe

Fast Six Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with our Firestone Fast Six post-qualifying press conference, joined by Scott Dixon, Takuma Sato and Josef Newgarden. Scott, another second place qualifying finish, but I know that your team is working really hard to get you to that top step tomorrow. What are your thoughts on qualifying and your initial impressions going into the race tomorrow?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, honestly, I think the team and Honda did the job. I just did not. I made a pretty big mistake on my first lap, which definitely disappointed, and we had a pretty smooth weekend. The car was super fast and came up short, but it's qualifying. Hopefully tomorrow I can redeem myself and we can snap up an extra spot, but good round for the weekend, especially for the whole team. It's good to see all of us working all together, good speed, and I think the reset in the off-season has been really good for all of us.

Kudos to Honda. They've made some good gains, and it's been really enjoyable working with them.

THE MODERATOR: Joined also by Takuma Sato, who will be starting fifth in tomorrow's race. The pole winner here in 2014. Takuma, you must be glad to be starting off to such a great start with your new team.

TAKUMA SATO: Thank you. Yes, I'm extremely pleased about today's result, having had a very difficult first day yesterday. The team did fantastic job, pulled everything all together, and I really have to appreciate all my teammates. Obviously they all helped me out to get things put together, obviously extremely strong, hard work, and then obviously the boys did a great job to put everything together on the 26 car. Everything really worked well. Up until today's practice, I was still a little bit nervous and didn't get confident in the car. It's



such a short time, and having a little tragedy yesterday. But in qualifying a different type of feeling. I got out first on the red tire, and I was extremely happy in the car. Like Dixon said, it's really a great job from Honda over the course of the winter. I know it's a frozen package. We can do very little things, but I think engine development as well as how you try and use the car and the package, I think today is a result that we are really coming back in strong.

THE MODERATOR: A career best start for Josef Newgarden here on the streets of St. Pete. Previous best was 10th, will be starting fourth in tomorrow's race. I don't know if you know this, but the driver that has qualified fourth the past four years has won the race here in St. Petersburg.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I've been told.

THE MODERATOR: Are you taking it to Vegas?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't know. Hopefully the odds favor us this weekend again. But I have been told numerous times that this car has been victorious twice in the last two years here. So no pressure, right? Hopefully go get it done. But I think we have a good start. Fourth place, like you said, it's the best that I've started around St. Pete here, so I think our guys did a great job.

I feel like I didn't maximize that final Fast Six as much as I could have, but I also don't think I would have gotten Will. I think Will put a really good lap together. He did an awesome job. We've had good cars. I think our race cars off the truck have actually been pretty good, and we haven't had to do much. We've been able to stay inside of our window for the most part this weekend.

I'm excited. You know, the next thing for us now and certainly for me is to learn the race car, how it's going to perform over a tire stint. We haven't done much of that, at least I haven't, with the team here at Team Penske, so I'm excited to figure out that portion. As you said, they've had luck with this car in the past, so hopefully it's going to be a strong race car, and I think we can do a good job with the Verizon 2 car this weekend, and hopefully we can seal it up for tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: And the 2008 pole winner Tony Kanaan also joining us. It seems like you and your teammates have been quite strong throughout practice

and also as evident in qualifying today. What do you attribute to that success with Chip Ganassi Racing teams?

TONY KANAAN: Well, I think when I walked in, Scott was saying how well we were working together, and I think the engineers did a great job over the winter when we switched to Hondas, and we spent a lot of time concentrating on the areas that we thought they weren't good last year. We had a come-to-Jesus meeting at the end of the year with Chip, and that was probably not the nicest meeting I've been, so they put a lot of pressure on us and on the engineers, and I just think we came better prepared.

Great to see we could put all four cars in the top 10, and we're really close. I think the four of us, with the Honda aero kit, it kind of like melted in with the team, and we're just working really well together right now.

THE MODERATOR: James Hinchcliffe, also a career-best start for you on the streets of St. Pete, your best previous was fourth. Also the winner in 2013. What do you remember from that win and how it felt to start off the season with such success and carry that into what was one of your best seasons to date?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, obviously starting off the season strong is huge. Momentum in this sport and any sport really is a key to success, and winning the first one and getting off to that strong start always makes you feel good and keeps the team in the right state of mind, and it was the first one in my career, so obviously a pretty emotional day and one that I remember very clearly, and with our best starting spot here, obviously the competition up front is incredible. Verizon IndyCar Series never fails to disappoint in that sense, and congrats to Will and everybody at Honda to really step up their game, and happy to be starting inside of row 2, and kind of see how it plays out tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Joined now by our pole winner Will Power. This is Will Power's 45th career pole, which moves him to fifth all time on the all-time leader list. His seventh pole here at St. Petersburg, and that is seven of the top eight. With those numbers in mind, what does it take to qualify on top so many times here on the street of St. Petersburg?

WILL POWER: Yeah, it takes obviously a very good team and kind of getting through that first round there, taking the risk on just doing one lap was good for me, definitely had a bit more meat on the tires in the last round there. So yeah, and I mean, worked on the car, too. Made a bit of a wrong setup change there for the last round and kind of just made it and went back and did something else. So yeah, very happy to be on pole. It's really tight competition.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and open it up for

questions.

Q. James and Takuma, the last couple of years here, Honda's attitude was basically on the street courses and road courses, we don't really have much of a chance because the Chevys just have us beat. Now it looks like it is a great spread between you and the Chevys. Can you just talk about how that dynamic has really changed this season?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Well, I don't think our attitude was ever that the other guys have us beat. We were always pushing and always trying to improve. Certainly if you look at the results, it was leaning in their favor for a while, but Honda is not one to lay down and just take a beating, so yeah, I think you've seen a lot of that. No doubt having Chip Ganassi Racing join the stable helps elevate everybody. You've got four great drivers and a tremendously successful and resourceful team to kind of help push everybody forward. So coming here and seeing the way that it's spread out, I'm not going to lie, I think everybody is a little surprised that it's been this strong for us, but again, it's just a credit to a tremendous group of people, not only at HPD but at all the teams pushing to try and make everyone better.

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, I mean, racing is always tight, so I don't know which part made us so strong. Maybe it's a little competition this year, supposedly not a huge difference, but obviously the material change made us have a different balance, and like James said, it's just the consistency of the development of how you understand the cars and aeros. For me it's coming to the new house, so everything is pretty new.

Also I know the package, but the way they approach is different, so I had tons to learn, and I'm pretty pleased to be up in the top six.

Q. Along those same lines, this question is for James and also Takuma. You're both long-time Honda drivers, and with Ganassi coming in working hard over the winter with their engineers, has anything that has come through Honda that maybe the Ganassi team found that has helped elevate your efforts at your teams?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I don't think Honda would tell us if that's where it came from. They'd probably just say, we figured this one out. No, I think in general whenever you add good teams and good drivers to the stable, it's going to elevate everybody. Chip and his organization are known for pushing people pretty hard, and whether that helped get Honda moving a little faster or working a little harder, who knows, but like I said, the attitude last year was certainly one of motivation, if anything else. 14-2 is not the way we wanted the win tally to go up at the end of the season, and we're very, very motivated to try and change that in 2017.

Huge credit to those guys for everything they have brought to the table. They've obviously worked so

successfully with Honda in the past, so it wasn't a complete get-to-know-you sort of situation. It was a welcome-home sort of thing, and I think we're all sort of bearing the fruit from that now.

TAKUMA SATO: On top of that, I think if you remember the last year, we had to go through with the 2015 spec engine at the beginning of 2016, so we are a little down in power, but as you've seen, a big jump at the Indy 500, and then since then obviously it's a very small step, but I think it's a continuation of the working that has put us here, I believe.

Q. Josef, how nice is it to just be on the eve of actually, I'm going to make my first start for Team Penske as opposed to having to talk about moving to Team Penske?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's been a long five months or whatever it's been in the off-season. I think if you -- I don't know what anyone else would say, but certainly for me, when you change teams, you don't really want an off-season. You'd like to get going pretty quickly. We've had a lot of time to talk about everything under the moon, so I'm excited that we're finally here. We're now through our first qualifying session, and we'll get through our first race tomorrow. It's been exciting. I mean, I've had a great time. It's been a blast working with Will and the other guys, and everyone on Team Penske. We have a great, great unit, great group. Will talked about it a little bit. It takes a great team, and I can see why they've been such a strong team. They've got great chemistry, and it's really a privilege to be able to work with everyone on the team, the engineers, the drivers. I'm excited, man. Let's get through round 1 and then let's get rolling through the rest of this calendar year.

Q. Will, when you whitewalled it in session 2, how big a whack was that, and were you concerned that it was going to maybe screw the car up for the Fast Six?

WILL POWER: No, it was -- you know, the shock fin sticks out actually further than the wheel, so it wasn't I didn't think any problem. Just making sure the lap before I didn't get that exit. That's what ruined my lap, so I had to do a third lap, so I just stayed in it and kind of brushed the wall. It just got the tires, didn't get the rims.

Q. Was there enough time to get a feel for how much the new surface was degrading the red tires? And was that key to your actually having that amount of life left in the reds?

WILL POWER: Oh, yeah. I mean, it was -- the first session, I kind of realized on the out lap, like oh, the tires are actually in a lot quicker than the day before. You know, I thought, I can probably do this on the first lap, and I went for it, and then I just pitted. It was a total guess. I just pitted after one lap because I thought, yeah, it felt like that was pretty hooked up, and it was good enough. We banked that one-lap set then, and

that definitely makes it easier in the Fast Six.

Q. Josef, did this meet your expectations going into qualifying, or were you expecting to get in the top six? Or were you thinking maybe eighth, tenth would be good but Fast Six would be even better?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: You know, I think for us, yeah, we felt it was feasible. I mean, I think we've -- I think us on Team Penske, we felt very good about our race cars. Will and me are pretty happy and the other guys were happy, too. We thought it was definitely possible for the Fast Six. I think the pole was maybe more questionable this time around. You know, we weren't sure that we'd have enough for a pole. But Will did an awesome job. I mean, I know what race car he's got underneath him, and he maximized the most of it. I definitely think Fast Six was our target, and if we could have gotten the pole with one of our guys, then that would have been icing on the cake, and Will got that done for us. We feel pretty good about that portion, now we've just got to make sure we have good race cars for tomorrow.

Q. Qualifying is over. There's been a lot of talk about brakes this weekend. 110 laps tomorrow. Are you guys confident that those brakes are going to hold up for 110 laps?

TONY KANAAN: I think it was a concern in the beginning of the weekend, and I think we addressed that with INDYCAR. But no, I think it's -- everybody is aware of it. I personally don't think it will be a bigger problem -- I think we thought it was going to be a bigger problem than it is for now. And race pace, I think if you look at the race last year, it became a fuel mileage race because of the degradation of the tires, so depending on how the race goes, you can have a pretty easy --

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: It's going to rain anyway, but it's going to be fun.

Q. James, you mentioned that you kind of were surprised how quickly -- you said you weren't sure how fast it would take with Honda, but tell me why you think it is happening so quickly and why you're seeing the results so early.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Well, part of it is last year we were coming in with, as Takuma mentioned, the older spec engine. We had a big upgrade around Indianapolis, which as we saw worked pretty well, and furthermore, coming into the start of '16, all the Honda teams were dealing with a brand new aero kit. We were doing a second consecutive year of starting from scratch essentially where the other manufacturer wasn't going through that.

So now that we've got a year of development under it, it was natural that we were going to gain more. In a frozen rules scenario it was natural we were going to gain more, I think, than the other guys. I think that's a large part of it. It's a little bit more than I thought it was

going to be, but then you also take into account that the other guys lost four really good cars and Honda gained those. That's part of the balance, as well. Either way, it's just been a collaborative effort by all the Honda teams and everybody at HPD, so it's great to see that it's paying off.