

IndyCar Media Conference

Saturday April 22, 2017

Helio Castroneves
James Hinchcliffe
Scott Dixon
Ryan Hunter-Reay
Will Power
Simon Pagenaud

Press Conference

MODERATOR: James you have been in the Fast Six at each race this season. What do you attribute that success to?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Obviously, it's super competitive in the Verizon IndyCar Series at the moment. Track position and good starting position is obviously a very important part of it. We focused a lot of our efforts and energy in the offseason to it. We were decent. We had a decent strike rate last season. Certainly, getting the No. 5 car consistently in the Fast Six is great and it's put us in position to lead laps so far this season and obviously take a victory last week in Long Beach. Proud of the Arrow Electronics guys, and everybody at Schmidt Peterson Motorsports to consistently be giving us a car good enough to be competing with the best of the best.

THE MODERATOR: Joining you on row three will be Ryan Hunter-Reay in the No. 28 DHL Honda for Andretti Autosport. Ryan has two wins here and one pole position.

Ryan, it seemed like an extremely competitive Firestone Fast Six this afternoon. Take us through your qualifying run, and ultimately a good starting position for you tomorrow.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, it's a great turnaround from last year. Last year we qualified 18th here. So it's nice to have that turn around.

Yeah, it was so competitive. Just pushing every bit; that you couldn't make a mistake by a couple feet, and even then you didn't know if you were going to make one. You could see me, I was pushing all weekend. I had an off this morning and I had an off yesterday, and nearly had two more there just because I was trying to get every bit out of it. Unfortunately, I have a bit of a



deficit at Penske at the moment, so hopefully the cooler weather tomorrow will bring us to that. A good start to the 28 DHL Honda team. Hopefully we can get a third victory here. That's the goal.

THE MODERATOR: What is it about this track that challenges drivers so much? Question to both of you.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: You can never do a perfect lap around here. It's always changing. It's very susceptible to track changes. It's just always surprising you. Right when you think you've figured out the right line, it will surprise you. So very difficult to get it right. Very difficult to be consistent. And if you try and take a little bit too much away from it, if you try and just get a little bit too aggressive, it will bite you.

THE MODERATOR: Joined also by Helio Castroneves who will start second in tomorrow's Indy Grand Prix of Alabama. Driving the No. 3 AAA Insurance Team Penske Chevrolet, won the inaugural race in 2010 and also has two poles.

I know it's probably not the spot you wanted but a front row start for you here at Alabama. Take us through your qualifying run.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: You came first, you're last, is that what they say? (Laughter) is that what they say? Somebody says that. I tell you what, no, it's a great team effort, especially AAA Chevy. Guys did a phenomenal job during qualifying, because we keep like chasing the car, which was phenomenal, and towards the end.

But my teammate, Will Power, he definitely has something about this place, about many places, but this is one of them, too. But he did a great job putting a lap towards to the end. In Long Beach, it was like a precision lap, and this lap was like going out-and-out crazy; I was like one eye closed and hopefully stick, and it did.

But now we're looking for tomorrow. Hopefully the weather, it's going to be a little bit cooler, and I think everybody's car is going to be fast. But, well, we are starting the front row, as you said, so it's a good place to be and now we've just got to look forward and hopefully beat my teammate.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open up for questions.

Q. Helio, I didn't know you were a fan of Talladega Nights.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Just watching a lot of movies.

Q. How much, you know, adapting to changing weather conditions, how do you do that?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Oh, man, this morning, my car was awesome this morning. I guess everybody was pretty good, too. But then, first thing when the sunshine came out, the track temperature rise, it becoming very slippery. So you've just got to adapt. Look a little bit of what you know in the past, and go with your gut feeling. At least that's what I did, since in the end there, we couldn't share much information with our teammates and we just throw a little bit of the dice and it paid off.

Q. This would be for the entire panel up here. With the weather, a lot of support races today, a lot of different rubber on the track. Still talking about the possibility of rain tonight. Are you hoping for rain? Are you looking forward to a green track tomorrow?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Rain overnight wouldn't be bad. Just to kind of wash the track. We go out there for qualifying and there's so much Indy Lights rubber, like marbles everywhere and there's chunks of rubber all over the racetrack. A little bit of a cleaning probably wouldn't be a terrible thing. I don't think anybody really wants rain during the race tomorrow.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Wouldn't be bad to wash you off, either.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Well, that's true. I haven't showered in four, five days now. Becky is at home, so I'm just saving water. It's for the environment, bro.

Tomorrow is going to be one of those days where I think we're all really thankful we get a warmup because the track is going to be -- a 20-degree difference -- I thought an eight-degree difference here in qualifying was massive. So a 20-degree difference is going to change everybody's cars quite a bit, and having an opportunity to go out there and get a feel for it, I think is going to be huge for all of us.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: For me, it's just one thing. Obviously, it's the same for everybody. The engineers in the series, the technology today is so incredible; that they are able to calculate those difference. And that's why this series is so competitive. I mean, every time it change, the track change, so there is nothing predictable.

In terms of tomorrow what will happen, pretty much the same. I think a dry track would not only be great for racing but for the fans, as well.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I did shower this morning, by the way. That was a joke.

Q. Ryan, yesterday Marco was in here and sounded upbeat that he was going to be able to turn his pass on Friday but unable to do it Saturday, problems around -- but same thing happened to him today. Did that surprise you that he didn't advance out of the first segment?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: It's tough. Like these guys say, it's so competitive, right. If you miss it in one corner, I'm telling you, one corner on your fast lap, the rear brakes free a little bit, that's it.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: And it compounds here, too, right. At other tracks, you might lose a-tenth-and-a-corner-kind-of-thing and you deal with the rest of the lap. If you lose a tenth and 16, you're losing a tenth in 17; you're already another half-tenth in one, which is a tenth in two -- like the momentum in this place is incredible, and screwing up one corner just carries for three like more. It's super annoying.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I know our whole team went really loose this afternoon. That hurt him --

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: You were loose this morning.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: You could see I was loose. I've been exploring every boundary of the track and inspecting the landscaping. It's beautiful around here, by the way. They did a good job of it.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Mr. Barber pays a lot of money to make this place look good. And you just go driving all over it all willy-nilly. You win one championship and think you can just tear up racetrack.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I've actually touched very little grass. There hasn't not been a whole lot of grass. There's been a little bit of kitty litter in there --

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Every inch of payment.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: You have the best shirt on in this place -- (laughter).

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: That's a matter of opinion. Helio and I could agree with you but then we would all be wrong.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: He's too young.

THE MODERATOR: Any final questions before these drivers before we welcome up Simon Pagenaud? Thank you very much.

We'll continue with our Firestone Fast Six press conference joined by our third-place starter for tomorrow's Indy Grand Prix of Alabama, Simon Pagenaud driving the No. 1 Menard's Team Penske Chevrolet. Simon is the defending race winner here at Barber Motorsports Park and also has one pole to his

name.

Simon, it seems like your team really has this event on lock and a great start for you tomorrow. Take us through your qualifying run and your thoughts on tomorrow's race.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, it's phenomenal for the team. They did a fantastic job preparing these cars. This is a really good track for us in general. We have a really good grip and an understanding of the aero package, as well.

Personally, it was a good session. A little hectic the beginning of pit lane because I couldn't really go on my out lap to get the tires up to speed, had a lot of people backing up, so it was very difficult to transfer with only one lap on the tires. So unfortunately, we wore out the tires Q1, Q2, and then I pushed a little too hard in the Fast Six. But I guess that's what it's all about. It's racing. We were very aggressive. We were very aggressive with the setup and I think we went a tick too far.

Overall, congratulation to Will. That was great qualifying and phenomenal for the race team, one, two, three. Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: We welcome in our pole sitter, Will Power driving the No. 12 Verizon Team Penske Chevrolet, a two-time winner here at Barber Motorsports Park and also his fourth pole at the track.

Will, it seems like you just qualify extremely well here at this track. What is it about your driving style and your experience here that allows to you do that?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I mean, first, it's having a very good team and car. Definitely working well this weekend. Kind of focusing very well and making sure I'm looking at the right things. Felt like I had a much better car on used tires. I think that's kind of where we've been going wrong. Yeah, just very good result.

THE MODERATOR: Also joined by Scott Dixon, driver of the No. 9 NTT DATA Honda for Chip Ganassi Racing. Scott, also, in addition to James Hinchcliffe, has been in all Firestone Fast Six groups so far in the 2017 season.

Scott, it seems like your qualifying runs at least have gotten off to a really good start this season. What's going on at Chip began as any racing that's allowing you to do that?

SCOTT DIXON: I don't know, I think it's a number of things. The car's been really strong from the start of the season. This weekend, we struggled with just keeping up with the car. It's been tough in the conditions out here. But I think that was kind of the best we could hope for in qualifying.

Pretty happy with that. The Penskes have been strong all weekend, and I think we're in a good starting position. I think our car seems to hold on to the tires quite well. And this morning, the car was much better in the cooler conditions, so hopefully tomorrow with the ambient conditions getting a lot cooler, that can maybe play our way a little bit. As always, it's a tough race here strategy-wise and pace here at Barber, but hopefully we can move forward a few positions.

Q. You've won at a lot of places but you haven't won here and you've got six podiums. What do you need on Sunday to make that happen?

SCOTT DIXON: Well, it would be nice if these guys just pulled over at the start. That would definitely help things.

I don't know, you know, none of these tracks owe you anything. It's just trying to piece it together. I think we've had a couple of really good shots in the past here to win, and you know, we've made a couple mistakes and it just hasn't played out.

So this year, I personally don't feel as strong in the car around here for pace but I think the car consistency-wise it quite good. So maybe that will help throughout. But you know, strategy and especially in the first couple races, have been pretty tough.

So we'll see what happens tomorrow. I think it's a pretty straightforward race as far as two- or three-stop, and three-stop is probably going to be the most popular. There's never one thing why we haven't won here. It's always a lot of things.

Q. In the Indy Lights race, we didn't see a whole lot of passing and it was hard to pass for the drivers. Is it going to be the same for IndyCar? Is it going to be a strategy with when you pit and how fast you get out of the pits in term of making passes, or can you pass, do you feel?

WILL POWER: Yeah, it's interesting here. I mean, it's actually been some good passing here because the tires degrade, especially the Reds. So maybe being cool tomorrow will make had a harder, and you know, yeah, it's going to be strategy, as well, when to pit, try not to get caught out by yellows, that type of thing. I just wish IndyCar would open up the pits on yellow. It seems ridiculous that we don't. It is ridiculous.

THE MODERATOR: Anyone else on passing?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think we'll see what the tire degradation is tomorrow. The weather, if it's colder, won't have opportunity. But if it's hot enough, we'll have tire degradation and then we'll have passing. We've seen some passes in the past. So you know, there is some restarts. Should be exciting, two in turn five. It usually is, so we'll see.

Q. If it's cold tomorrow with increased grip, how will that affect passing?

SCOTT DIXON: Just what these guys said, if you have less degradation it makes it tougher, there's less separation between each car. I think Firestone actually brought a more durable Red tire here this year. So as you can see in qualifying, there wasn't that much difference between the Red and Black, which may not help that, as well. I think if you look at the races here in the past, this has been one of our best road course racetracks as far as passing and racing.

So I don't see any reason why that's going to be too much different tomorrow. But, you know, it also -- a lot of it relies on how strategy pays out; if you get a caution early and it flips the field, then it gets pretty exciting.

Q. Talking about passing, with the push-to-pass, why does it allow that you can use it as a defense? Why is it that the driver in front can use it as a defense mechanism? Why isn't it like an F1 where the guy who has DRS following can use it but the guy in front can't.

SCOTT DIXON: I've been trying to tell INDYCAR that that would be a good idea. It actually would. It would create a lot of passing at tracks like if this the guy in front could not --

SIMON PAGENAUD: Have you guys been talking? You guys had dinner together last night, right?

SCOTT DIXON: Leading with all these questions.

Yeah, I think it would be a good idea. I think they should try it, I really do, at tracks like this, they should. Maybe not Road America because it's such a big, long straight where you can use a lot of it up, but I think -- I really think it would create some great racing.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I'll give you a real driver's discussion here: I disagree. And he does, too. No, I don't like it. I think it's artificial racing if you were to disallow the guy in front of you to defend. He's just as much allowed to defend his position as the guy behind is allowed to attack him, in my opinion. So I'm totally against it.

Also, I would like to see the push-to-pass come back on restarts, because I think it makes the restarts very lame and boring. But again, you're never going to have 50 percent -- 50/50. Everybody is going to have different opinions.

Q. Will, you mentioned opening pits on yellow. Is that something the drivers and owners have approached IndyCar about?

WILL POWER: Yeah, actually they did open the pits a few years ago. I think it was like 2012, 2013, or whenever bow bar field was there, used to open the pits. I understand that it's dangerous opening the pits

because everyone races back to the pits, but nowadays, you could easily put a speed limit on the car. So if it goes yellow, everyone goes down to a speed and once all the pit stop sequence happens, everyone just packs up and it's a normal restart. That would be quite simple.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, thank you very much. Appreciate your time.