

IndyCar Media Conference

Friday April 28, 2017

Helio Castroneves

Will Power

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with our Verizon IndyCar Series post qualifying press conference. Joined now by one of our front row starters, Will Power, who will be starting second in tomorrow's Desert Diamond West Valley Grand Prix out here at Phoenix Raceway.

Will, an improvement over last year. Broke Helio (Castroneves') track record for a second, then he got you in the end. Tell us about your run, if the conditions kind of calmed down a little bit from practice.

WILL POWER: Yeah, conditions were definitely better. It was just a little tough going second in line because of all the dust that had blown on the track. So, I was very unsure on the first lap.

The car felt really good, honestly. You know, Helio actually ran a little less downforce than me, so it was trimmed more. Yes, he was very fast.

I figured that he was going to knock me off, maybe Josef. But, yeah, good run. Good starting position. Tough track to pass.

You know, you got to get your position in the pits, I guess qualify well. See what I can do tomorrow to switch that around. Castroneves can be second, I'll be first. That would be nice.

THE MODERATOR: It seems like it's been a very rough start to the season for you results-wise. Everything that could go wrong, Murphy's law, right? What does that do to your mindset going into the next race and the next race, moving on in the season?

WILL POWER: I mean, at Barber, I did everything possible. It was one of my best races ever, best weekends. I got focused, got the car right. Qualifying, was really fast in the race. Got past back markers quickly. Couldn't ask for anything better. Then got a flat tire. That was unbelievable.

That was the race to get us right back in the game. I just can't believe it. Yeah, I guess you have runs like this. Nothing you can do. You just know that it will switch. It just does. You're doing the right thing, you're qualifying the front each week, eventually you're going to get a result.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Will.

Q. You're starting on the front row alongside Helio on the outside. I've had someone tell me that Indianapolis is actually better to start on the outside. I don't know if that relates to this track being a short oval. Does that give you any advantage?

WILL POWER: No, not on Helio. It's such a tight corner. It's way better to be on the inside here. Yeah, Indy, it's not bad to be on the outside. That's true. It's much more open. Yeah, tough here. No one ever runs the outside. But maybe on the first lap it will be okay.

Q. Could you speak to the physicality of this racetrack, how you think the race is going to go tomorrow night.

WILL POWER: Yeah. I think it's much cooler conditions this year, so physically it should be better. But it's more downforce, more grip. It's just so tough in traffic. You know, we keep trying - well, I do - to tell the series we need less downforce, give us road course horsepower, you know, speedway wings. Let us leave dark marks on the exit of corners. Here your corner speed is about the same as your bloody street speed.

I believe they should give us a formula similar to that, like give us a heap of horsepower, which we have potential for on the road course horsepower, and then take a bunch of grip away. That would be really cool.

Q. You tested here earlier. Did you notice anything concerning setup of the car, aero package for the race?

WILL POWER: Yeah, we did. You mean the open test here earlier in the year?

Q. The test in the daytime, not in the evening.

WILL POWER: The testing this afternoon?

Q. No, earlier.

WILL POWER: Yeah, no, we did. We learnt some stuff. It's always changing. But, you know, we got to run in traffic. It's so hard because you can't get a train of cars long enough that there will be in the race. The conditions are always a little bit different. But I feel like we got a good scope of adjustment in our car.

Q. I know the old Will Power would have maybe had a harder time with this start. I'm reading the book, seen you grow from putting negative results

behind you and still be able to be positive and move forward. How well have you been able to do that?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I haven't even -- like Barber was really disappointing, I have to say. Like, I just think about it on the drive home. Oh, man. You know, usually when you put a weekend like that together, you put everything right, usually you win the race.

But yeah, I mean, I got over it pretty quickly. But it's disappointing, it is, because it's such a competitive field, you don't get many chances at winning races.

But, yeah, just focusing forward. You know, I mean, when you've been around racing long enough, you know you're going to have bad runs, you're going to have really good runs. I mean, you do. It just happens like that. Things can't go your way all the time, and they can't go badly for you all the time. It's just percentages. It's math (laughter).

Q. Your location at the end of pit lane, is that a big advantage here? Is it harder to turn in because you're on a curve? Are you just more grateful to have a clean exit?

WILL POWER: Definitely grateful to have a clean exit. That made a big difference last year. So I'm hoping this year we have a yellow flag stop about, you know, 50 to go, 60-ish to go, right when everyone has one more stop to do. I'm about P2, 3-ish, hang on for the rest, win the race.

Q. How easy or hard is it to save fuel on an oval? Is it easier here because you can back everyone up because it's so hard to pass?

WILL POWER: It's definitely easier here to save fuel because you catch the back of the train, then you're just sitting there. No one can pass anyone. Generally, you know, someone will try, then they'll wash out, then they'll lose a position. It's really, really difficult. Yeah, I think track position race.

Q. You got to watch Helio celebrate with his little hat. How frustrating is that, especially being your teammate on top of that?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I just dislike him (laughter).

No, I wasn't even noticing. He's got (indiscernible) and everything.

THE MODERATOR: A hat and a crown, too.

WILL POWER: C'mon.

You know, this year it's been pole for me, pole for Helio, pole for me, pole for Helio. Let me work this out. Indy road course for me, damn it, pole for Helio. I wanted the 500 pole. But then maybe it works out in the race, so...

Helio and I are going at it because we're really close in

poles. I think I'm 46 and he's now 49. He's, like, really trying to cement that position, but I'm going to take it from him.

Q. You mentioned the desire for more power, less downforce on a track like this. What is your thought on the downforce part? You take that away, add power, you have cars in the corner idling, not able to pick up the throttle. Is there a balance you think IndyCar should look at?

WILL POWER: If you take grip away, the cars will be what in the corner?

Q. If you're adding a lot of horsepower, taking a lot of downforce, cornering is going to suffer. Is there a balance IndyCar should consider?

WILL POWER: There's good balance actually. What we ran, like, from 2012 to '14, like at Milwaukee, you're like going down two gears in the corner. It wasn't really a full lift, but it was a lift. You know, I won the race in '14 because I had better traction off the corner. So that was a pretty good level.

You could hardly tell a difference from the year after, like, in speed, watching, but we had a lot more downforce and no one passed anyone. So definitely it needs to come with the tire, as well. Softer tire, more forgiving, slide more. Even something that just degrades a bit. At tracks like this... I mean, Iowa last year I thought was a great race. Felt they had it dead on, you know.

Q. You mentioned it's going to be difficult to pass. Is there room in there that it might surprise you to a degree, somebody is going to find a line or try something a little different that works?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I think, yes, could -- if we could just open up a lane, like the outside of three, four, a couple cars start running the outside corner, that would really help. It's just the fact that a groove doesn't come in. No one wants to get up there, yeah.

It could be good passing. I don't know. I'm just going off last year, and a little bit of practice. It's felt kind of difficult. But it may be good. May be quite good.

Q. Will, is the tire that Firestone brought any different than last year? Somewhere I heard someone say that the tire is not degrading over the course of the stint because the track is fairly smooth. If it did degrade, that would help, I would think, enhance passing.

WILL POWER: Yeah, you're right. If it degraded more, it would help passing. But they brought a more durable right front tire. I think they fixed the front tire, had a couple issues last year.

The tire does degrade a little bit, but not like Iowa. It really degrades, creates some good racing. I think it could be a really good race. I expect it to be a really good race. I mean, it's a little harder than other tracks

to get a run.

Q. Beyond you and Helio on the front row, it's JR and Josef on row two. You had the opportunity to race Josef in a different circumstance. How would you rate their race craft? How different is it them up there, knowing you're racing them?

WILL POWER: Yeah, Josef is a very good racer. JR, have to watch your bumper pods with him. Beyond that, he's all good. I think maybe now he's learnt not to knock off pods.

Yeah, good guys right there.

THE MODERATOR: Will, thank you very much. Good luck tomorrow.

WILL POWER: Cheers. Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue our Verizon IndyCar Series post qualifying press conference. Joined now by the pole winner for the race tomorrow evening, Helio Castroneves. This is Helio's second pole this season. Also a repeat pole winner here at Phoenix Raceway. He now has 49 career poles, which ties Bobby Unser for third on the all-time pole list.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Nice. That's what I'm talking about.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations. Take us through your run and the conditions on track. We know it's been breezy today. It's been dirty today.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: It's been tough. Then they call us old. That's what I tell you. Experience is a big part of this. Today was really, really good.

First, I want to thank again everyone for yesterday, the celebration of myself and Tony 20 years. We had a nice time in Phoenix. Thank you again for everybody that show up.

The conditions were really difficult today because it changed from last year. Last year, we qualified in the afternoon, practiced at night. Now it was completely different. But the gust winds were horrendous.

We just decided to work obviously most on the race setup, make sure that the car would feel good. Big things that happened here in pre-season, probably it paid off today because we didn't have to go through a lot of change.

But again, in qualifying, yeah, my engineer did a phenomenal job. We calculated something in the car. It turned out to be a good one.

THE MODERATOR: With your younger new teammate this year, I know you've been talking a lot about how it even challenges you more. As you said earlier, we

celebrated your 20th season in IndyCar last night. How rewarding is it to know you're still seeing these results despite the fact that we're celebrating milestones like that?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: It's always great. Josef is an amazing talent. Huge congrats to him last race, he did a phenomenal job. It was a shame for Will, he was looking like he was going to take another win, as well.

To be honest, it's not about the age, but it's about having a great group of guys. Today we have a phenomenal group of talented drivers. I'm just honored to be part of this group. Day in, day out, they push me. I learn from them. That's probably why we keep up there.

So now we have a great chance tomorrow. Hopefully we don't have the same problem that we had in Long Beach. I already talked to the Chevy guys. Make sure we have a smooth start at least. But we're looking forward. Can't wait for tomorrow. Car is really, really good. Obviously qualifying is one thing, race is another, but I'm really confident for tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Helio.

Q. You mentioned that the conditions in practice were terrible. Will said the same. Could you learn anything for qualifying, the car behavior, in hot conditions is different than cooler conditions?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: We had a little taste of it. We didn't go full of it because we knew the conditions would change so much from the morning or late -- afternoon to the evening. We just had a taste a little bit how is going to go.

The toughest part, people don't realize, even though we going at night, it changed a lot. I remember. We probably had a change especially in track temps were probably 20 degrees to 25 degrees different. That change completely the racecar.

That's why big props for my engineers and everyone to put everything together in a right way. It was perfect.

Q. I think last year you led from the pole, then sort of had a problem going into turn one, a tire issue of some kind. I don't know if you ever figured out what happened there. Can you avoid having that happen again this year?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: If I'm not mistaking, I think Firestone came up and probably saw there was something wrong with that tire. With Juan Pablo was a punch. It wasn't the setup of the car. My other two teammates, which was Will and Simon, ended up finishing the race second and third.

We feel that Firestone did a good job. In fact, they change a little bit of the construction of the tires for this weekend. We feel that we haven't had any problems

since then. I'm looking forward for tomorrow not having any issues.

Can't count with anything outside of our control. But we thinking positive here that it's going to be good.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations. Good luck tomorrow.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Thank you. Thank you, guys.