

IndyCar Media Conference

Tuesday May 16, 2017

Will Power Helio Castroneves Gabby Chaves

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: It's time for our normal 6:00 or so press conference, and I was watching the timing and scoring monitor, Gabby, when you jumped up there to the third position, maybe even got up to second position, but it was obviously a good lap. There were a lot of cars running together out there. Tell us about your experience on the day and how you feel about your car.

GABBY CHAVES: Really good. I mean, yesterday we did, I think, three laps on track and then three more out and in, and that wasn't good. Obviously our guys were disappointed that we didn't really do any laps.

Today had to kind of bounce back from that and right away work on the car and improve it and show some speed. That's the direction you want to be heading in.

We're happy. Obviously we've still got plenty of work ahead of us, and I think if we just keep doing what we're doing, we should be able to be in a good spot for the race.

THE MODERATOR: You've done awfully well here in your career here in Indianapolis. Is it a track that you feel particularly comfortable?

GABBY CHAVES: Yeah, it's a track that from my very first outing here, very first time was in an Indy Lights car in 2013, I kind of just took to it. I just enjoy racing here. I enjoy driving here. This is just a faster car and a more enjoyable car, and when you get 30 or so of us out there, it gets a little crazy. But at the end of the day, I'm having a blast out there. Obviously the better your car is, the more fun you have when you pass people, so hopefully that's what we'll do.

Q. Gabby, this month you're working with Larry Curry, who's had more than 30 years here at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. How much has his expertise helped you this month so far?

GABBY CHAVES: Well, I think Larry has really been more of a guidance for the team rather than me so much. As you may know, we're also working with Al Unser, Jr., who's kind of taken more of that role to work with me and give me his experience, his learning, and everything that he's learned here, try to give as much



as he can of that to me so I can expedite my learning curve, go out there and get right to it.

But Larry has been really just instrumental in getting together a brand-new team, two brand-new cars. Obviously he's been the one who's got the guys involved since I believe the second week of January was when the cars were bought. They came in probably right before February, and ever since then, he's the one who's kind of taken the lead on who's going to be my engineer, who's going to be my mechanics, and who's all going to be involved in the team.

And I think really he's put a kickass team for me, so I'm very happy with that.

Q. Gabby, can you give some more details how this team came together?

GABBY CHAVES: Yeah, I believe our first conversation took place in late December right before Christmas. Harding Group had been a longtime sponsor of the speedway, or partner, as well as had participated as a car sponsor before, and I think them as a whole wanted to take that next step, which was car ownership. That very first lunch meeting we had was kind of to talk about our objectives and see if what we both had in mind kind of felt -- would work together, and obviously for me it's important that I can have a group of people around me that I can grow with, being only my second, third year in the series.

And I think that's what their goals were, as well. He told me, I don't want to come here and just do it once, I want to come here and be in it for the rest of my life and do it successfully, and we're looking at a young driver that we can build around.

So I think our objectives kind of just meshed together, and we just made it work.

Q. According to the information, your car has a cooperation with Dreyer & Reinbold. Are your cars similar setup or identical setup?

GABBY CHAVES: I don't believe so. I think while we do have a partnership, we utilize their work space in their dry rambled shop in Carmel, we are able to just go on about our own tasks and the way we set up the car, in the way we go out on track, and then at the end of the day, we also are able to share a little bit of information to see how we can progress together. It is a good thing to have, especially for a new team coming in, but it

would be unfair to say that that's why we were quick today. I think we were quick today because the guys in Harding Racing did a hell of a job getting the car together and putting on a fantastic race car.

THE MODERATOR: We're also joined by the two gentlemen at the top, Will Power, who was at the top of the queue in practice and already logged some time here. Not only were you at the top but I noticed that your no-tow speed was also pretty good. Tell us about your car.

WILL POWER: Yeah, it was pretty good all day, actually. I have to say that it's made some improvements overnight. Yeah, the no-tow speed is better for sure, and yeah, I feel comfortable in traffic.

You know, it's a long week. Got to keep working at it. Things change. The car goes in and out of being good and bad and this and that. You've got to try not to get lost and just keep it simple.

THE MODERATOR: Helio, happy birthday.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Thank you, that's very nice.

THE MODERATOR: Will was in here talking about the number of victories that he's close there with you. He was talking about that.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: He passed me, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: What about that? Are you prepared to get even here?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Absolutely, we're preparing -- I was trying to get a little bit ahead in the Grand Prix, but he did a phenomenal job there. But again, it's all about -- now it's the 500. You're not thinking about the numbers of how many victories you have in your career, it's more about the big one. This is the big one, and we are working as a team trying to get the best out of it.

We understand that yesterday the top 10 there was only two Chevs, and today in the top 10 there was only three were Hondas, so you can see those boys are playing some games here, so interesting.

But it's okay. It's all good. We keep focusing on our work. We're working together with Chevy and everybody else so that we can keep up the good pace and moving forward.

Q. Will, can you talk a little bit about the heat we've had this week, the wind we've had today, and how that's contributed to top speeds and lap speeds being a little bit down from what maybe fans thought would be coming?

WILL POWER: Yeah, that's true. It's definitely made the track greasy. But it all has to do with whether

people want to practice qualifying. That's when you start to see some bigger speeds, and we don't get the boost until Friday that we're running qualifying and probably not practice qualifying until Thursday. So these first three days -- which being hot, yeah, it will make it slower. But we're not in the configuration that's going to put up a big speed anyway.

Q. Helio, the last couple years here we've come in asking if we were seeing everything that Chevy had to offer leading up to qualifying. We're hearing the opposite, is Honda showing everything they have? Any thoughts of that?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Not right now, and understanding -- it sounds like they have issues in the past. We can only speculate. I can only speculate that they don't want to keep blowing up the engines now. They've got to wait until Saturday so that they can finish the qualifying and then put the race engine in, otherwise they're going to have to do something like that.

Right now it's the name of the game. We've just got to focus on our work. We can't just -- we can only speculate, but out there we're just trying to run. As Will mentioned about downforce and qualifying setup and race setup, we're just trying to make sure that we feel as comfortable as possible, which whatever happens on race day, we'll prepare as much as we can.

Q. Will and Helio, I know a 500 win would be big for both of you guys, but how big would it be for Roger? I got a chance to talk to Josef recently, and he said that Roger still pursues No. 17 like he pursued No. 1.

WILL POWER: That's true. Roger definitely just puts everything into this race. Yep, as a team, I think we did a lot of homework in the off-season for this race, and we tested here twice, so you know, we're getting the most out of our package. I know Chevy is working really hard, and obviously you can see that our speeds are pretty good right now.

But Honda has obviously turned their engines down quite a bit for -- because they're having a few failures.

But yeah, Roger, he would love to get No. 17, and I would absolutely love to do it for him.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I'll tell you what, obviously Roger is my strategy, for him to leave his day job, which is a pretty busy schedule, I took him over here on Tuesday. Actually he's staying here all week, which shows the commitment that he has and it shows what he wants. It's another win, and it's not just because his team has a lot that he's going to settle down. He's going to continue collecting victories, and we want to continue hopefully getting him that kind of result.

Q. Gabby, all that time you spent in the two-seater driving people around, did that just make you miss

this car that much more, or did it actually just kind of keep you in the feel of things a little bit?

GABBY CHAVES: I don't know, I think it freaked me out a little bit because I was used to going relatively slow, and then you get back into this car and you go out there for your first laps, and you just -- you always forget a little bit how quick this place really is at those speeds. And it did take me probably a full outing to really feel comfortable.

But I always say, any time you can get behind the wheel of a race car, it's a good day. Even if you're learning only very few little things, you can always try to push yourself and try out some new things to learn.

Q. Helio, with that paint scheme you've got, do you feel golden this month?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Gold status, my man. Yes. Make sure that you guys get your FRN cards. You can get an app, as well, FRN app, and getting that, basically you can get about 10 cents of a discount on a gallon. It's big time. Plus whatever you correct, they have restaurants, they have groceries, they have all sort of things. FRN app or FRN.com. You can actually find it out.

And as soon as you apply, you get a gold status.

WILL POWER: You can get the app on your Verizon phone.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: There we go, don't forgets that. You're right. My bad. With all this theme, hopefully we can get the gold moment at victory circle, but right now it's a little bit away, but we're preparing for that and we're looking for it.

Q. The weather forecast for tomorrow is pretty good. It should be a lot like today. But for Thursday on through the rest of the weekend, it's very unsettled and uncertain. Would you alter your program, your practice program for the rest of the week based on the schedule, based on the weather forecast?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Well, in our side, it will be a little more windy tomorrow compared to today, but constant wind is no problem. Well, the only thing that we alternate is about the planning, when to use the tires and not use the tires and things like that, and so far we feel that Thursday and Friday is still pretty darned good, and Saturday is the one that might be iffy. But Saturday is already the day of qualifying.

So right now we are -- as a team we are looking very, very strong into those directions, and it feels like we are good until Saturday.

Q. Gabby, I have a question about who your engineer is, and for someone who hasn't been in the car for a while, I'm assuming that this is a new relationship, and it seems that you have a lot of

confidence already just going out initially.

GABBY CHAVES: Yeah, I'm working with Matt Curry as my race engineer, and yes, it is a new relationship. But we've been seeing each other for months now, almost every day.

You know, it's not like meeting someone new your first day on track. You already know the person. You already know a little bit of their thought process, and when you communicate with them, they understand you, and it's -- it's a little bit faster transition when you have to go out on track and get to work pretty much the first time on a car.

So far, so good. Obviously have all the confidence in the world in the car that they're giving me, and I think we're starting to show a little bit of the potential that we can bring.

Q. It seems last season, last year here, that the Hondas seemed to be a little more powerful than the Chevys, that seemed to be the consensus, and yet the top three today, all three of you are Chevy drivers. Past Friday, are you going to get more boost, increase that they would give for qualifying, and also, driving the Chevys, do you notice a different from last year, because I would think over the winter Chevy made some gains.

WILL POWER: Yeah, they've been working hard. I think, yeah, everyone gets a boost on Friday and Saturday. You know, the gains are very small when you're talking -- back a few couple years ago, the gains were bigger, and now it's just so small you don't feel anything, you just see it on the speeds. They're working hard, obviously.

Today the Hondas are turned down quite a bit. We can see that. But I feel like our alone speed is actually pretty good compared to what they were running yesterday.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, you saw what they did yesterday, 226, and today Marco was 221, so for sure, five miles an hour, it's not the setup.

But as I said, we can't keep talking about them, we can only focus on our way, and Chevy, as Will touched on the subject, is working really hard. We are maybe with 1.4 boost, it might be different, I don't know. At this point, even us don't know, but we know that everybody is working together so that we can -- don't see as much of the difference or last year which they were strong. If it is, we're just got to go around and make sure we have a better car.

Q. What's the situation in terms of this kind 60 mile-an-hour gusts. Do you have to pile on a lot more downforce to combat that, and would that be an explanation as to why the speeds are slightly slower than we expected?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: The speed is slightly slower

from when, from yesterday?

Q. Yeah.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Well, Will did the same lap time, correct, from yesterday?

WILL POWER: I think so.

GABBY CHAVES: I went 20 miles an hour faster.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: But I think we know why. I think you're getting a little bit more comfortable.

I went faster just because we are changing a little bit on the cars, but I don't think that the wind had anything to do with it. As I said, I think if you would be the Honda -- with the power that they have, you would probably have about, again, the same people up there, as well, today.

Q. Was the wind consistently in one direction or was it blowing different ways throughout the day, and which way was it making the handling most tricky?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: There were some moments, but the way that -- it wasn't as gusts as we had in the past. It was at least a constant wind that was about five to ten miles an hour. We had the year before 20, when we tested here about 30 miles an hour, and those make a huge difference. But at the moment it's still pretty constant and we are able to keep practicing in a safe pace.

Q. Helio, you won this race as a rookie in 2001 in a different car than what you had been driving throughout your career. Although the differences aren't nearly as dramatic as the Formula 1 car to this type of car, what do you think are the biggest things that are jumping out for a newcomer such as Fernando Alonso?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: You mean the cars you're talking about, from what I used to be -- yeah, back then, obviously the biggest thing was the horsepower when I jumped in from 900 horsepower to back then probably 600. It was definitely vibrating more on this car, the IRL car, than actually the Champ Car. It was less finesse. Everything here was a little more rougher, which is okay, but in the end, it was not a problem to adapt. We did have our race in Phoenix -- if you remember, a lot of people complained that we didn't finish the race, but that was actually great to do that because it gave us a great parameter for this race.

And he is probably learning very well. I ran around him today, and he does have great teammates, as well, so he can learn from it. I don't see he's going to have any issue at all.

And today you have simulators, you have so many more data technology that can help you to adapt quicker, and that's definitely helping him out.

Q. (About his transition from a Champ Car to an Indy car as a rookie.)

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, I mean, back then I was coming from a very sophisticated car, and to go to a very different car, primitive. I appreciate the help in English. But it's true, it was very difficult. But once you were up to speed, the tires were very similar, and that probably for me was not a big difference.

Q. How is having Juan as a fifth car this month been different? Have you guys been able to adjust your programs? Has he brought some more fun or liveliness for the month?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I mean, he's -- yeah, Montoya, he definitely stirs things up in the team.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: He is Montoya, come on.

WILL POWER: Yeah, you don't have to say any more. But it's another car. It's more information. He's got a lot of experience. He's won here a couple times. You know, it's just better having more people. Look, it's a very experienced team when you look at it with all the drivers, so Juan definitely brings a lot to the table.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, thank you very much for coming in. Appreciate it.