

IndyCar Media Conference

Sunday May 21, 2017

Scott Dixon

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Scott, first of all, congratulations on your third pole at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. You had two guys vying for it at the end and we heard your comments that Ed was the guy to beat, and we asked Ed if that surprised him, and he said, yep, it sure did. Did it surprise you?

SCOTT DIXON: Absolutely. I thought maybe the dash had broken on the steering wheel and brought up a fake number, but yeah, I don't know, we seriously don't think we expected to see the speed that we did. The whole pre-lineup for qualifying was debating with Chris Simmons, my engineer, on, man, we trimmed too much, we trimmed too much, and I was basically talking myself out of it and seeing if he could maybe put some for downforce in the car, and he was like, man, don't worry, it's going to be fine, it's going to be fine. When I saw that first number, I was like, wow, this is impressive, so obviously a huge thanks to Honda, too. They've been pushing extremely hard, I think, with the engine. They're definitely pushing it to the limit.

Big day for us. Obviously this is the pole. Got to give a shout out to Sebastien Bourdais, too, saw him this morning, and he's doing well. He's a teammate with me in the Ford GT program, and we've spent a lot of time together over the years, and he's a hell of a driver. To be honest, I think he would have been the one that snatched the pole today. So just got to wish him well. I know he's going to be on the mend quickly and hopefully he can be in a car here very soon. Today we managed to get it done, and we're starting in the right place. The hard part now is to keep it there.

Q. It's been a while since the pole winner has won the race here, but you did it in 2008; do you feel that that's the recipe for your second Indy 500 victory?

SCOTT DIXON: It's definitely the goal. The last time we were on the pole in '15 we had a really fast car. I think we led over half the race and ultimately we overheated the car on the last stint and had to wind up taking a top 5. But you know, this is one thing. Indianapolis is always about two big hills throughout the weeks, and you've got the pole first, the fact that the pole preparation of the race car, and then into the race. This is the first step of it, but now our focus is obviously quickly transferred to tomorrow. We've got another four hours of track time and trying to make the No. 9 car as fast as possible.

Today was fantastic to get the pole, but emphasis is on the 500. You know, it's cool obviously getting the pole with NTT DATA and the No. 9 car, and hopefully in the next few days here, we'll be announcing the Camping World car, so looking forward to that, as well.

Q. Scott, the last time you were on pole here in 2015 was kind of abnormal circumstances the way that qualifying was done. Does this feel like kind of a more normal process even though yesterday was still a little weird?

SCOTT DIXON: It's been a little weird in the fact that both days we haven't run in the practice, so the first time for myself and my teammates has been just getting in the car qualifying, and it's kind of daunting. I've never done it before. You have all these crazy things that run through your mind, especially when you watch a lot of the other competitors either touch the wall or have a really bad runs. You think you're maybe heading in the wrong direction and the computer isn't telling you the right settings for the ambient conditions and things like that. Today was probably -- the last two days have probably been the most nerve-racking for me. I don't know whether it's because I'm getting older and emotion is becoming more stronger, but it's definitely a tough -- this year I think more so, too, is that the first lap is if you get the first lap right and you're like, okay, this is not so bad, but lap 2, 3 and 4, the fall-off with the tires has been quite dramatic, and that has been the hard thing. If you have a rough first or second lap, you know that lap 3 and 4 are really going to be tough, and yesterday that was the case for us.

Yeah, it's a little bit of a different weekend, I think, for us just with how we ran, but I think it was really exciting for the fans and everybody that -- I could hear them cheering and standing up and seeing that when you're getting ready to go out and some big speeds were going up. Obviously a huge thanks to the fans for coming out today, too.

Q. Tell me about the work you and Chris Simmons have done and the entire team have done switching to Honda during the off-season. I think when we spoke at Phoenix in the preseason test, I don't think we were predicting you were going to be on pole here. How does it feel?

SCOTT DIXON: I think we kind of felt that this would be one of the first strong tracks for Honda with the aero kit especially. I think Honda and HPD and the integration that we've had with them I think has been pretty seamless. Everything is very adjustable, and they

push to the limit, as we've seen throughout the year, and it's a fun environment to be involved with. You know, whether we thought we would be on the pole, yeah, you know, we shoot for those goals. You know, that's what we're here to do. I think we would have really liked a couple of wins already, too, in the season, but that just didn't play out.

But I think everybody in some ways with the team, it was really good to have a change of scenery and a different look at how we need to do things across the board, and we made a lot of mistakes last year, and it was nice for everybody to sort of refocus and actually have kind of that new toy to focus on, too, and make the most of it.

Everybody on the engineering staff, all the girls and boys at Chip Ganassi Racing at the shop and the people that are on the road have just done a tremendous job this year to really get the most out of what we have and try and -- it's been a two-year sort of catch-up that we've had to do. The other teams have had the same manufacturer for that time. It's been a good transition and a fairly quick one.

Q. Last time we saw speed like this year, I don't think you'd even come over to the States yet. What does an average qualifying speed of 232 miles an hour feel like from inside the car?

SCOTT DIXON: It feels fast. Any speed positive 215 or 220 around this place feels really fast, but I think you just block it all out. You're constantly just trying to feel how the car is, see where you can place it, see if you can improve the next lap. It's been so intense this weekend just trying to hold on to the car for the four laps. I think that's where all the focus has been.

But I think for the Verizon IndyCar Series, it's cool to see these speeds gradually creeping up. It's good to see we've made a big improvement. I think I did a 227 average last year, so it's a nice little jump.

Q. You're talking about those high speeds. We just heard from Ed, and he was saying that he thinks you guys can and should start going faster in the future. Do you agree?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, you know, I think it's -- you know, obviously we've been there before, I think, with where we are today, obviously we could be over those speeds quite easily. But you know, there's also the safety aspect of it, too, and to be honest, I think for most people, you can't even really tell the difference, whether it's 220 or 236.

You know, it's one of those things, it's a number, and I think for the fans and even for the drivers, if you start getting to those numbers then maybe you can break Arie's average, that would be really cool. I could see that happening in the next few years.

Q. Here in the media room they showed your in-car

camera, seemed like you were fighting the steering wheel. Did you have as much handling as you wanted given the speeds you were going?

SCOTT DIXON: Well, no. It's going to be tough. You trim out here to the max, man, and if you want to get rewards here, you have to go for it. You know, Chris was probably a little on the more go for it side than I was, but it was good to have that encouragement, and that's why he's in the position that he is and why he's been so successful through his career, too, so it's a great combination.

But the first lap is probably the easiest, and then it's pretty much downhill from that time on.

You know, we had to fight it. You're trying little tricks to help the car throughout the run. You're trying to change the balance throughout the run, as well, to see if you can help it for the next lap and just see where the balance is going. But you're working, man.

Q. And then you mentioned some of the issues that other teams had today in Turn 2. Was that an issue for you today? What was your general approach going into that area of the track?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, you're thinking about it a lot. I think I maybe should have been sitting in my bus and watching Days of Our Lives as opposed to watching all the drama going on out on the track because you get so amped up, and TK and I were sitting across from each other in the engineering room, and everybody knows how animated that guy is, so he was freaking me out, and it was just a bad deal to start with.

You know that's going to be a tricky part. We always knew that with the ambient conditions and how the wind direction was. Especially yesterday I think after we saw Seb's crash, that definitely makes everybody -- it's kind of there. But as soon as you strap in the car you're just trying to do the best that you can and dial the car in as much as possible.

Q. Will you explain what your two daughters think? Do they understand what you've done? How do you explain it to them?

SCOTT DIXON: I think so. What happened today? Now they're getting shy.

No, obviously having kids has been a huge part of our lives. It changes your life in many special ways, but I think to build on these memories -- we're very fortunate in the Verizon IndyCar Series, it's a very family-oriented business, and especially the competitiveness that we have, we have a lot of great friends here and the girls have a lot of good friends here, too. It's a fun environment to be involved in and hang out.

Q. A couple of drivers on their runs nearly kissed the wall with the rear. There were a lot of guys hanging it out out there, but your car looked pretty stable at that speed. How stable was it?

SCOTT DIXON: There's a trick in doing that, man. No, it wasn't -- I think the balance was good. I think we had a little too much understeer on the car which definitely smoothed some things out, but yeah, you know, Turn 2 was definitely tricky today, and I think it was more in how you got the initial timing to turn. On my second lap I turned a little too late and had to lift, and later on I just kind of managed that speed by lifting a little bit to get the front to turn into Turn 2 and then go straight back out on the pedal to get it down the back straight. But if the car was good, then your day is a lot easier, and obviously today Chris and everybody at Chip Ganassi Racing gave me a fantastic car that we could get the most out of it.

Q. I think within the next days before the race, you have to go with some other drivers on a journey around America, to a couple of cities to promote this race. How stressful is that, and how can you handle that?

SCOTT DIXON: You know, it's not too bad. I think the hardest part of the week leading up to the 500 is you're basically trying to predict things. Everybody asks you how do you think you're going to do, how is the race going to go. It's so hard to talk about the race continuously before you've even done it. You know, you have to be positive, but there's always some doubts in your mind, especially after Monday. We'll see how Monday goes tomorrow, another four hours in the car, which should be some very good prep.

But you know, I'm looking forward to a couple of days off. Obviously I've got media on Tuesday and heading to Toronto, so I love going to that town, and definitely excited about that. But yeah, it's a tough week. It's probably the hardest week because you're not really in the car much and you're talking about what may happen. I think once you get to race day, you're glad that you're finally there and you're in the green room and ready to go.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations to the girls and the old man in the middle.