

# IndyCar Media Conference

Monday May 22, 2017

## Simon Pagenaud James Davison Max Chilton

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Simon Pagenaud and James Davison are here. The defending series champion, No. 1 on the car, which is really cool. Then, James, I suspect that wasn't in your planner, suddenly you find yourself tooling around the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. I heard you chatting, saying you tried some things early that didn't seem to work, a little bit tricky out there. Why don't you tell us about it.

JAMES DAVISON: Yeah, sure. Well, it was my plan to be in the race this year. Aware there was a limited supply of engines and chassis. Someone's got to miss out. A lot of us didn't see the Alonso thing coming. That took an engine away from even Stefano or I.

I knew there was a possibility someone could get hurt, right? You never wish for that. So you're around the paddock in case something does happen, and you're there.

Surely enough, it happened. I couldn't kind of believe it. I mean, especially with Dale Coyne's team that I've driven for the last time I did the 500.

So, yeah, yesterday I didn't know what to think. It was such mixed emotions, to be able to get the opportunity to drive in the race, but such unfortunate circumstances.

So, yeah, thoughts are obviously with Sebastien and Claire. The series needs him back.

For today, look, straight up, we're running a road course backup car. We knew we weren't going to be particularly quick, but we just needed to try to get the car to handle well, with a lot of cars in front of us obviously. We're starting 33rd.

So, yeah, we tried a number of things as the day went on. I would say it wasn't the right direction. But, you know, we're smarter from it now. So, yeah, we'll just try and go another step forward with the car on Carb Day.

Yeah, we're all aware of what our situation is here. It's obviously very compromised. We've just got to do the best we can with it and keep the car in one piece. There's no excuses for doing anything negligent.



Yeah, just sticking with the program and just having to be patient.

THE MODERATOR: That's what a professional driver does.

Simon, I was down on the grid yesterday. I made the joke that at least two-thirds of the people we interview are going to say, It's unfortunately not the speed we were looking for, but I think our car had good balance, we're going to have a good car come race day, it's a 500-mile race and you can win from anywhere.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Pretty much that boring (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: But it's true. Today, I mean, is it still a search for more speed? Was it a search for more balance? Do you think there's something missing? Where were you at with today?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, no, it's a great comment actually. I always complain that we always say the same thing.

But, you know, unfortunately, no, we didn't have the speed in qualify. We haven't had the speed last week at all to compete. It was unfortunate and a bit of a mystery. Yesterday, I said the mysteries of Indianapolis sometimes. It's what makes this place legendary, I guess.

We made a lot of changes last night, mostly on obviously bodywork, because it's a different package than qualifying, and also a new engine to go for the race. It's a weapon, that engine, to put in there. They put a new engine that's really strong. Chevy did a tremendous job with calibration.

I felt like my racecar was very good last week, and we showed it today I think in the heat. It actually gets really good in traffic. It can run with people.

Yeah, I think it's going to be an exciting race. There's definitely a big competition between Honda and Chevy. Honda's done a very strong job, bringing a strong engine and aero. But we have what we need, I think, to have a strong race.

Again, it's 500 miles so a lot can happen.

THE MODERATOR: Max Chilton has joined us. I

made a comment to some journalists who came up that you're about mid pack, fifth row. This guy has been solid, it seems to me, all month long. You ran really well, consistently. This was a last chance to get out there. How about your day, how did it go?

MAX CHILTON: First of all, thank you and hello. It flew by. It wasn't a normal six-hour session. It was a reduced session. So I was in the car for most of it, apart from visiting the little boy's room for 10 minutes.

Then just cracked on and tried to get as many laps in as possible. The more laps you do around here, the more you learn. I don't think anyone out there is overly happy with their car in race traffic. You keep trying to learn, trying to get it better.

I started to stop fighting that, find ways to drive around it. In clear air, I seem to be pretty competitive. In dirty air, I started to learn how to time the moves.

Great to have Ganassi at the top again. It was great to see Scott get that yesterday. He fully deserved that. Yeah, it was nice to get to learn this track more in proper group running. We do a bit of group running on the week to build up, but it doesn't last very long till people peel off. Today everybody was getting on with it and learning what they had for the 500.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. James, can you talk about not being in IndyCar for a year, cracking off 220 miles an hour straight out of the box. You're out there in your road course trim car, any work you can do between now and Carb Day to massage it a little bit more towards speedway so you can do more than 223?**

JAMES DAVISON: It's actually been two years. I missed the 100th last year.

To be honest, you do this race once, you know what to expect. The cars are always going to be set up with a lot of downforce. The sticker Firestone tire's just phenomenal. You go out of the pits, you nearly want to go flat first time into turn three, having not been in the car for two years. It was no issue, yeah, being flat by lap two or three this morning, or early this afternoon.

Yeah, in regard to what we can do with the state of our road course package, to be honest, I'll actually asked that question when we took a break in the middle of practice today. Yeah, I didn't really get an answer, to be honest. The engineers were just focusing on what we can do to get the handling in the window.

I'm sure there's something we can do. But it can't be too, too big. As we know, a lot of these teams spend, especially my team, they spend months massaging the gearbox, uprights, getting the friction reduction done, the body fit right, in addition to the engineering.

Yeah, obviously Sebastien's crash, you know, that all went out the window. You've seen it in the past when I think Ed Carpenter wrecked in early morning qualifying probably two years ago. He gets out of the car, you can see he's more upset about the state of his racecar that can potentially win the race, because he knows their best foot's, yeah, behind them.

Yeah, just one of those things. We're just going to have to do the best with what we've got.

**Q. Max, this time last year you had only driven one oval race. Your engineer was similarly new. Now that you've had a year of continuity, what do you know about this place that you didn't know this time last year?**

MAX CHILTON: It's difficult. I still feel like I'm a rookie. I'm still learning a lot. Every time I get on track, I'm learning. I think it's the case with anything. Tony and Scott, they've been in this 15, or 20 years for Tony. They're still learning.

Tony always says he comes back here and every year he treats it like he's never been here before because it's always so different. I get what he means, 'cause it is different every time. You never come back here with the same setup and it works. Sometimes day-to-day the same setup doesn't work.

I'm just learning the feedback. It's all very small movements. You're moving the wheel a tiny amount, lifting the pedal a tiny amount, learning all the cues. Sometimes you feel like it's moving, but it's not really.

It's just getting comfortable with the situation. Today was a good day for that. Thankful for Ganassi having a strong car here. Hopefully we can get it all right in the 500. It's a long race. That's one thing I definitely do know.

Having Dario as my mentor, he's told me a number of times -- he obviously, I think, started at the back one year and won the race. I think he started at the front and had problems, went to the back sort of halfway through the race, still came through to the front. It's not over till the fat lady sings.

**Q. Max and Simon, I know there's no such thing being comfortable going around this track at over 220 miles an hour. Did it feel any less being on edge knowing you weren't on your qualifying setup, that you were more on your race setup, not quite as trimmed out?**

MAX CHILTON: For me I actually feel like in traffic it's more daunting than it was yesterday. Yesterday my first two laps were competitive to be in the top five or six. I didn't know what speed I was doing. I looked down on the end of the second lap start line, it said 231.4. I thought, Wow, we're cracking on here. It didn't feel overly fast, it just felt right, until it went wrong at turn two. I had to back out.

Today, balancing out behind another car, it actually feels a little bit quicker. I was quite surprised to hear James say he came out of the pits after two years and wanted to go flat into turn three. I definitely wouldn't want to do that. Everyone is different. Everyone does things in a different way.

**Q. James, when you say your team doesn't have all the parts you'd like to have for this race, do you have a superspeedway front and rear wing? Is it the side pods? What part are you missing?**

JAMES DAVISON: I mean, obviously we have an oval car. It's just what makes these cars quick here, obviously you got to have handling, then you got to have straight line speed. The body fit and the work that the teams do to reduce friction in the gearbox and uprights, all the rotating parts on the car, it's a huge process that a lot of these teams put in.

Clearly you saw how quick Sebastien was in qualifying or this last week. Teams have primary cars. Yeah, it's been a tough run for the team, obviously, at Phoenix and here. They've lost two cars. So all that was left was a road course gearbox and uprights and all that kind of stuff.

The body fit, I mean, we had brand-new Dallara side pods on the car with no body fit done. We're kind of pulling a bit of a parachute. Obviously we can only try to make the car handle as well as we can. What terminal velocity we're going to have is what we're stuck with.

Yeah, it's the way it is. We're all aware what the situation is.

**Q. Simon, can you talk a little bit about the weather. The wind obviously was a big factor yesterday. Just generally speaking, how do you anticipate it? How does it work? It changes from day-to-day. Just in the wind factor, how much time do you have to react? How much anticipation of where the breeze is do you work on?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, it's a really good question. It's something you adjust to every corner. Every lap you have to watch the flags, especially the orange flag up top on the pagoda. I guess I don't know where it is. I know where it is from the track.

I believe it's 25 miles an hour socket, so if it's straight, that means you have a 25-mile-an-hour gust. I check every lap, every corner, where it's going, so I can adjust.

But I'm one of the drivers who adjusts every corner. Some don't. Like Max said, it depends very much on your feel, what you like. I personally adjust every corner, whether it's the anti-roll bars or the weight jacker, just to have the car where I want it to be, and no surprise. That's the biggest thing.

It's very difficult in qualifying, because you're already very much on the edge of grip. You enter the corner sitting on the right rear, the car is sliding. Any movement from the steering wheel is going to point you either the right way or the wrong way. Any gust of wind is going to have a big effect on the balance of the car.

So it's quite tricky, especially when you're so low on downforce to go for the pole, example, it's a constant adjustment every corner, every lap. Those four laps in qualifying feels like forever.

So, yeah, it's an interesting challenge. In the race, you're more into the car in front of you, depending what the guy is running, how much air you're losing, and where the wind is pointing, towards your nose or not.

But again, you can set your car up with the wind change. Like Max said, again, you learn these tricks every year. You learn more every year.

**Q. Max, you said there was an issue yesterday going into turn two. Could you elaborate on that. There's been so many issues with turn two this year.**

MAX CHILTON: So this track is made -- it's meant to be the same either end, the same banking. I think every driver would admit every corner feels very different. I had a shunt there last year at turn two. Doesn't mean I don't like that corner. To me, I'd say that is the hardest corner on that track. Three and four usually feel pretty easy. Turn one, it's daunting because it's just the first one.

Turn two, there's something about it. It's usually sort of into the wind, as well. If there's a strong wind, it grabs the front, sends the rear out. Yesterday I was flat for two laps, 231.4, 231.1. I went in there, turn one was fine. Two turn, the literally turned the wheel, and the thing just took off. I had just done the throttle. Tiny change in wind made me completely have to come off the throttle. I think I just missed the wall by an inch. I thought I touched it. Got away with it.

Tiny things make the difference. Some days the wind is sort of behind you there. It goes in nice, but you lose the rear on the exit. It's just tiny little differences.

To me, turn two is the hardest corner, especially on your own in clean air and to follow. Sometimes it depends on the way your car is set up.

**Q. Simon, you've only been with Penske a couple years. I'd like to know the reaction of Roger, except for Will, all you guys starting in the back of the pack.**

SIMON PAGENAUD: It's my third year with Penske.

I don't think Roger's happy if he's not winning. I think that's the whole mentality of Penske, Team Penske.

You know, I think this team is working countless hours. We have people at the shop right now, understanding how this practice just went, trying to be better next one.

It's incredible. It's a factory. It's always booming. So we're not here to be second, third or fourth. The goal is to win races. That's why Roger brought five cars this month, it's because his love of Indy is huge.

You know, the qualifying effort is not satisfying. But it is what it is at the end of the day. You know there's competition here. It's very strong. There are very good teams, very good manufacturers. It's the beauty of it. Some days you dominate, some days you don't. It's your job to understand why and get better. I think that's the lesson that everybody learns every time we go to the racetrack.

It's a very humbling job in many ways.

**Q. Simon, it's been a weird year because you've had five top fives, leading the points, first oval win. Somehow compared to last year, where you had the ridiculous start, does it feel like there's less pressure now, like you're flying under the radar? What is your state of mind in relation to how your season has gone versus what this race would do for you?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: It's interesting. We've had everything go right last year at the beginning of the year, a bit of luck. Everything went right. It's different this year. We've had everything go wrong (laughter).

But despite that, we're not leading the championship since Scott has got the pole, but we're still there, still second, I guess. It's still a very good effort. I think a lot of guys would like to be in my position.

You can complain as much as you want, but at the end of the day it's about working together as a team. It's the same people, same driver, same engineer, same strategy, same mechanics. It's just sometimes it smiles, sometimes it doesn't. I'm sure it will smile back. When it does, hopefully the others will be very worried.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, from a group of people who never plan on going out flat out in one, two, three or four, thank you very much for coming in.