

# IndyCar Media Conference

Sunday May 28, 2017

## Takuma Sato

## Paul Harcus

## Michael Andretti

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Paul Harcus, strategist, is alongside two gentlemen joining him after a great day. Takuma Sato, who wins the 101st running of the Indianapolis 500, and Michael Andretti, who goes back-to-back, three out of four, at Indianapolis, which certainly makes for a great day, in what was a nail-biter of a race.

We watched all week, a couple of weeks, and it was clear you were very strong, Takuma. Not only that, but we learned five years ago, and in qualifying, that you're not afraid when it comes to an opportunity to win the race. You are going to give it every inch you've got. This year you got it done. Tell us about your emotions.

TAKUMA SATO: First of all, I'd like to say big thank you to the Michael Andretti and whole team, Andretti Autosport. Without their support, obviously I cannot be here today. The entire month with my teammates working extremely seamlessly well through the practice day, fantastic qualify, very strong start. At one stage I lost momentum, goes down to like P10 place. I just get down in my job, believe in the car, in the (indiscernible) pit stops.

Like you said, when I comes, I have to give 100% commitment. I knew I could do it. But just, you know, waiting the moment. The last few laps, they were the moment.

I know Helio is always come on charge. But he's just such a gentleman with such a fair player. I believe him. We go side-by-side turn one. It was job done.

The last two laps, the car worked beautifully. I just cannot thank enough everyone who supported.

THE MODERATOR: I watched the restarts. I've seen three- or four-wide. Going into one, I have one eye closed, I can hardly stand to watch the thing. Tell us about the strategy of getting this guy to the milk.

PAUL HARCUS: I think the biggest thing there is we had good cars which were prepared. We have such a great team chemistry, all the cars were good. We were all fast, which you could see right through the start there.

We were trying to stay there. Middle point the race there, we had a pit issue, dropped us back. Takuma did a good job of keeping his head, just sort of working one-by-one. When he went into one, I just sort of close my eyes half the time. I'm afraid. I keep thinking, Are we going to make it? Great driving. I think he did a great job today of keeping his head about him and racing up the front.

THE MODERATOR: The guy who writes the check was agreeing about going into one. At some point, the prize we're talking about is the Indianapolis 500. Your druthers, you want a guy that's willing to go out there and go for it and grab that brass ring.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Hell yeah. We had the right guy doing it, for sure. He drove a superb race. I watched him very closely. There's many times where he was in a difficult situation, and he would get out of the situation. He showed a lot of patience. But then when he had to go, he went.

There was one move where he passed two cars on the outside in one, which was a very important move, because that gave him the track position of the top two guys in front of him. That was one of the moves of the race, in my opinion. When I saw that, I'm like, Whoa, I think we're going to win this thing. He didn't let us down. He drove very, very well.

I'm just so proud of everyone on this team. The difficult part of having multiple cars is not everybody is going to be happy. There's some other cars that were very, very strong today that we had that ran into bad luck. I feel really bad for them. But that's why we have six bullets in the gun.

He came through for us. Taku did an awesome job. I'm so happy for him. Really happy for Honda. They worked really hard to get us here. I know how big this news is going to be tomorrow when they wake up in Japan. It's going to be huge. I'm really happy for them, that we were able to give them a win with our Japanese driver here.

TAKUMA SATO: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. Michael, you're beginning to catch up with Roger Penske now. I know that was a big goal of**

**yours. Back in October or November when you signed him, I remember saying, Now he has a team that can properly give him the right tools. You always said it's easier to take a fast guy and slow him down than take a slow guy and make him go faster. What have you seen with the development of Takuma?**

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: He's brought a lot to our team. He's got a lot of experience, very technical. On top of it, he's a great guy. He's a great part of the team. He's done everything I thought he was going to do.

I knew he was going to be fast here. He definitely didn't let us down. He didn't let us down in qualifying, and he definitely didn't let us down in the race. I'm very proud of that. So happy to have him on our team.

**Q. Takuma, when we used to go to Motegi, you were treated like a rockstar by the fans. How will this be received in your home country?**

TAKUMA SATO: This will be mega big. I cannot imagine how it's going to be. Obviously, Motegi time, in Japan, it was a very good race, I thought. The fans very appreciate. For me is a personally home race, is always something special.

But nowadays, a lot of Japanese, the fans following IndyCar Series, particularly for the Indy 500. I know they flying over from Japan today. Many, many people came. So I'm very really proud of what we achieved, and team gave a super good opportunity. We showed finally a great result today, so I'm very, very pleased about it.

**Q. Takuma, Helio was in here. He said when you made that final pass, you had a Honda, he had a Chevy, Chevy struggled all week, he said he didn't think he had enough horsepower. When you did make that pass, knowing you had a Honda, did you think he wasn't going to be able to challenge?**

TAKUMA SATO: Honda as a package, they did a great job. Already showing some great performance from last year, but this year kept on going.

I know Penske is particularly strong in traffic. They were coming out of the gearbox. Once I get tow, once I leading, I'm sure they could pass as well, which was the case today.

Like Michael said, 10 laps to go I overtook them from outside. That really gave me a good position. I know Helio is coming, coming, coming. I speed up. He tried to attempt.

But I just got to believe myself, believe what the car capable is. Indeed, you know, come off beautifully. So I'm very appreciate for that.

**Q. Takuma, a follow-up on the Japan thing. Like a lot of people, we've been to the races in Japan. We've seen your sponsor commitments. How soon**

**do you have to get back over there? I assume they want you there quickly.**

TAKUMA SATO: I mean, talking about sponsor, I mean, today, Ruoff Home Mortgage, Panasonic, Honda, Firestone, everyone was a great support.

I always think it's Japan suffering obviously since 2011, big earthquake. I know all over the world, many people suffering from that kind of stuff. But still 250,000 living in temporary house, certainly this one is give some energy. With the Japan program still getting stronger, any sponsorship is welcome to helping childrens and the family over there.

I keep on doing what we doing. The racing is the one part that I just passionately wanted to do it. All the sponsors supporting on that program. I cannot thank enough to them, too.

**Q. When do you think you'll go back?**

TAKUMA SATO: I don't know (laughter). I mean, at the Long Beach 2013, I went back to Japan and did a press conference. There was close to 300 media on the Honda first floor. The fans really, it was crazy good, in a positive way. So this one is even bigger. This is, like, the best win in my life in this moment.

I just cannot still believe it.

**Q. Did you make any adjustments to the car all day? Didn't seem you were in much of a panic mode at all.**

PAUL HARCUS: The car was good all day. Garrett did a great job there. We were confident on Carb Day, with the car, we adjusted there. Taku wasn't happy with the car, we went back on it. Today was very minor. One click a wing, a little bit on tire pressures. Really the car was underneath him all day, it was very good.

**Q. Getting back to numbers, as an active owner now you've surpassed Chip Ganassi. I was wondering how much you pay attention, plans for the future. Ziggy, how many championships have you got here?**

PAUL HARCUS: Michael has given me a few of them, so we're good (laughter).

I was with Al Jr. when he won. I think this is number three or four for me. I've been blessed to have good teams, good drivers that make my job easy.

Today was special just because this is one for the little guys.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: I was going to say, I feel tall up here today. A pretty good feeling (laughter).

**Q. Being second in the big three, now you're in the big two.**

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: That's awesome. You know,

somebody said that to me when we were down in Victory Lane. I'm like, Whoa, that's a big deal. Obviously I couldn't ever win it as a driver. I think I said this a few years ago, Maybe I was meant to win it a ton of times as an owner. Maybe when I'm 80 years old, hopefully I'll have more wins than Roger. That's our goal.

**Q. Takuma, 2004 you scored your Formula One podium here. Now you have the biggest win of your career. Talk about what that place means to you.**

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, it's a fantastic place for me. Got on the podium first time in Formula One 2004. Back on podium again. This was the highest podium.

Well, I don't know. It must be something in it here that I do love. Indy Grand Prix always enjoying here. Unfortunately we didn't have a super competitive race on two weeks ago, but I knew Indy 500 is something team prepare for for long time. Looking at the history and, like, we talk about with Michael, but just winning all the time here. Not all the time, but just so competitive all the time.

It's just fantastic feeling. I love this place, not just because the winning, but the fans so appreciate. I respect them. They give me a great speed and great confidence. Going to turn one, it's always great to see, so colorful, so full of people. This is the place, mega place. It's just fantastic feeling.

**Q. Takuma, a week or so ago, the entire Andretti team was brought in here. Everybody wanted to talk to the new driver from Spain. You sat down there and were virtually ignored. How has the world changed in one week or so?**

TAKUMA SATO: Talking to me?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Yes (laughter).

TAKUMA SATO: Sorry, sorry.

Fernando did obviously an incredible job. I mean, he was leading the race in his first attempt at the 500. I was watching, probably five, six, or ten places back. My teammates was leading, doing a group run almost. It was fantastic.

I mean, Fernando, tremendous commitment to come here, skipping Monaco Grand Prix. Show his smile all the time. He looks really he loved, enjoyed it. He just drove so professionally. He's obviously one of the best guy.

But Indy 500 is a race, you never know until very last lap. I was so pleasure to work with him. He's my old friend from Formula One. It's so great to work together. And Michael put everything together, six drivers, I think we were happy team.

**Q. Takuma, as I recall, you didn't learn to drive until your late teens, early 20s. Now that you have this biggest win, how much longer do you think you'll be driving?**

TAKUMA SATO: Well, right. So I didn't have opportunity when I was kid. I always loved, you know, the cars and motor racing. But I start racing when I was 20. So I know it's very late. But I just kept never give up. I always challenge it. That's why maybe I failed so many times, too. But, you know, made a mistake, learn it, then try to get faster or better than all the drivers.

Then it comes along, got scholarship from Suzuka and Honda. That virtually launch me into professional racing driver. Did a couple years in the British Formula 3, and won the championship in Formula One, and now here. Now I have a proper equipment, a great environment. Michael prepared a super team. So I'm so proud to drive one of Michael's driver. Today we showed the strength.

Age is something for the athlete. Age 40 is something you have to consider how you going to perform well. I think we proved Helio still up there, me up there, T.K. up there. We train really hard to maintain. Always just heart and the mental, the mental strength. You can keep on going. Someday it will have to retire, but I will have a more competitive race I want to now.

**Q. Takuma, having come so close here in 2012, do you feel more redeemed or satisfied? Michael, do you feel it being a little bittersweet seeing you had two other good bullets in the gun that could have contended for the win.**

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, it's such a privilege to win here. So whether it was the first attempt or eighth attempt or you had a drama in the past, it doesn't really matter. You winning today. It's just superb. Just coming onto the top, nothing else.

But, yes, I do feel after 2012 I really need to correct something I left over. Today I was so happy that I made it and won in a good move. I have to thank to the Michael for that.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Yeah, that's what I said earlier. When you have so many cars, not everybody's going to be happy. I got to tell you, I wasn't very happy there when we started losing all those bullets. We had really strong cars, but they just seemed like everyone started to have problems, including Takuma when he fell down, you know, because of the pit stop. I went, What the heck?

It was so weird because it was almost like that last year. We had two dominant cars, they both take each other out. At that point our best car was 20th. It was sort of a very similar thing. I'm like, What is going on here?

But I also knew because of that experience not to give up, you know, that we still had some really strong cars. Then you just started watching Takuma start picking 'em off. I was like, Whoa, we might have a shot here because he had a really car strong all day.

Yeah, I feel really bad for Ryan, I feel really bad for Fernando. Fernando drove a really good race for his first time here. I feel really bad for Alex, as well, because he had a bad pit stop. He was a strong car, as well. Unfortunately, I don't know what happened. I think Marco lost that winglet. It seemed like all the other cars just had a lot of bad luck, including Jack, who got caught up in that debris.

Like I said before, that's why we had six bullets in the gun, right? Luckily one came through.

**Q. Takuma, when you heard your spotter told you that Castroneves was behind you, how nervous did you get?**

TAKUMA SATO: Always nervous wherever he is. I know Helio know how to win here, too. But, you know, I was happy that it was only constant race on him, not five packs. We already have a good cushion between others.

Helio is the guy, he can go for really hard, with respect. I can trust him, as well. On track or off, we got on really well. Having battle with him is always good. Given the circumstance, we had such a strong package, like Michael said.

When it was new tire situation, so after the pit stop, everybody got fresh tire, the car not necessarily the fastest, I would say, because everybody could go flat out in traffic. That time I was really struggle.

But after 20 laps, our degradation must be one of the best. Garrett, my engineer, worked so specifically working for the consistent car, which I agree with. Yeah, so we didn't have a super, super fast down the straight, but I think we had such a consistent car. Give me confidence. Give me when you need it, you can really commit it. That's how we win today.

**Q. Michael, specifically the engine trouble. We know Honda has had reliability problems. When those two went down, how much concern was there for you for the guys you still had left that their engines would hold out?**

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: You're obviously concerned. But we sort of knew you're going with the odds. When you do have six cars, you're probably -- if there is a problem, we're going to have a few of them go down. That's what happened.

But, you know, I don't blame Honda at all. I think, if anything, I blame all of us pushing Honda so hard. They had come to us and said, We can give you a little less reliable engine, but it will have more power.

We all, of course, said, Let's go for the power.

When we did that, obviously you know there's going to be some sad faces. That's what happened.

**Q. For those of us who covered the 1991 Indy 500, our jaws dropped when you went to the outside of Rick Mears in turn one, then he came back with the same move. We'd never seen that before. Today's race seems like we were seeing that on practically every lap. How do you describe the nature of today's race, just how vastly different it is from when you drove here?**

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: It was really crazy because when I was here, they had the apron. The track was much wider. It was a bit easier. Here they were doing it, I mean, they were running four-wide into turn three. It was nuts. They were basically pulling it off. It was just amazing.

Then when he went into turn one, three abreast, I'm like, Oh, no. It was like, Whoa, what an awesome move.

That's what you have to do because everybody is so close, the competition is so close. You got to take risks. It's a risk/reward situation.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Because I think, you know, it's not just about this race, I think it's about all year. I don't like that there's certain tracks where one kit has an advantage over another. I just don't think that's good for our sport. I think everybody should be on equal ground. I think it will be much better for the fans that you have the Hondas and the Chevys on equal ground going at it at each racetrack. It's not that way right now. That's why I'm for it.

**Q. Last year you mentioned the story began in 1987, your parents got the ticket, you went to Suzuka, saw the race. Would you put into words this transition and this whole journey, what does it mean to become one of the greatest Japanese drivers, and what was the biggest sacrifice.**

TAKUMA SATO: I feel so lucky because I think everybody support me. I know when I was 10, a friend of my dad, the father, took me to Suzuka back in 1987, when I was 10. Very first time I went to the track. First time to see any racing car. That was Formula One. It was a gorgeous day for me. It just got me.

Since then, I was just crazy about motor racing. I just loved the car. Since then, as I said, I didn't have environment, anyone to give me a chance until 19 and 20 years old. When I ask my parents, Give me a chance, because the school had age restriction, you had to be under 20 years old. When I saw it, I was 19. Following year, the first chance to go there, if I'm not good enough, by all means, fair enough, I quit. But I

just cannot stand without challenge it. I couldn't quit.

I was in university doing bicycle racing quite seriously. I was ready to quit everything. I just wanted focus the racing. Eventually the Suzuka Racing got me the scholarship. That's how we started. So I have to appreciate everyone involved supporting today. Is only because their support. It's not me. I was really lucky.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much for coming in.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Thank you, everybody.

TAKUMA SATO: Thank you.