

IndyCar Media Conference

Friday June 2, 2017

Esteban Gutierrez

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are pleased to be joined by the driver of the No. 18 Dale Coyne Racing Honda now sponsored by Unison, driven by Esteban Gutierrez. First of all, congratulations and welcome to the series. You had some practice time out earlier this morning. Your initial thoughts on the car and also the track here at Detroit?

ESTEBAN GUTIERREZ: Thank you, and yeah, thank you. It's a big pleasure to be here in IndyCar with this family. I've been following you guys from a very long time. I'm from Mexico, so we are close by some Mexican races, as well, that you've had, so it represents something very special. We have some Mexican drivers going to here, so yeah, it's a big honor to represent Mexico now in IndyCar, and regarding the track, it's probably one of the trickiest tracks in the calendar, so it's been quite enjoyable to get there in the IndyCar for the first time, getting to know the car.

Obviously my first goal right now is to feel comfortable, to learn. I have a great team behind me supporting me, giving me all the available information for me to get up to speed as quick as possible, right, because we know that coming from a Formula 1 experience, from Formula E, takes a bit of time to get used to a different car, especially coming into a weekend where there is quite few practice and track time.

THE MODERATOR: You've mentioned being from Mexico, and obviously there are no other drivers from Mexico racing full-time in the series. What does it mean to you to be representing your country here in the Verizon IndyCar Series? It has a deep history of Mexican drivers in it.

ESTEBAN GUTIERREZ: Yes, it has a deep history from Adrian Fernández to Michel Jourdain to Mario Domínguez. Many drivers have been here. I'm particularly very good friends with Adrian. He's a really nice guy, and throughout my career he's been always supporting me. Specifically, as well, Sebastien Bourdais, I was following from my CARTing days. At those times he was basically dominating Champ Car at that time, and yeah, it's very special to come here to be in his seat, and obviously he's a really good reference. He's a fantastic driver.

I spoke to him this morning, and he gave me a few tips here and there of how to approach the weekend, and yeah, I'm working very well with his engineers, which

I'm sure is a great team. That gives me a lot of confidence and enjoyable, as well, because to come here with a good team, you start already on a good side.

THE MODERATOR: We know that you currently have other racing commitments in the future, but about your opportunity specifically for Detroit has been announced at this point, what has the adjustment period been like for you? I'm sure you just arrived maybe yesterday to the track and adjusting to new teams, new teammates, new engineers?

ESTEBAN GUTIERREZ: Yes, I mean, everything came very quickly. But I really -- from the first time I received the call from Dale, I said I didn't think it twice. I really wanted to take this chance, and I feel very grateful with it, to have this opportunity.

So far I'm enjoying it a lot, and yeah, I think it's important to think on Detroit right now. Hopefully I can do the rest of the season. This is what I want. So yeah, hopefully we can get things organized so that everything goes forward.

Q. After working with Haas F1 and all the engineering staff that they had last year and your other experiences with F1, now you're going to Dale Coyne Racing, which is a bit of a smaller operation; what's that like? Is this more of a racer's mentality more so than a technical mentality?

ESTEBAN GUTIERREZ: Yes, it's pure, pure racing. It's really special to come here. You have the car with no power steering. You have the car pretty much open to adjust anything you want. So the seat back and the communication with the engineers becomes even more important. In Formula 1 it's a lot about fine tuning during the weekend. Obviously you can develop a lot in the medium- to long-term. But in a difference to an IndyCar, you have basically everything open, from the gears, from downforce levels, mechanical changes, differential changes, so many tools, ride height, caster, so many tools you can work with, which is pretty interesting.

At the same time, it's a lot more information to cope with, but it's really good. I mean, it makes everything much more simple to have not a really big team. On the other hand, to have some technical support is important, so I think at the moment, Dale Coyne is a great place to start. It's a really good team, and I'm

grateful to be there with them.

Q. Have you had a chance yet to talk to any fans? Formula 1 drivers don't seem to be able to mix with the fans around the track; here it's a lot more open and a lot more fan friendly. Have you had a chance yet to say hello?

ESTEBAN GUTIERREZ: Yes, I had the chance, and I love it. I love to share with the fans because most of those fans, they are so passionate about racing that sometimes you learn from them, you know, from history. And it's nice to speak to them, to understand what is their perspective.

You get something that in Formula 1 or in other places I've been -- don't get me wrong, Formula 1 is an amazing category. My days there, I really enjoyed it. It's very different. It's a different characteristic. But the openness that IndyCar has with the fans makes it quite special.

Q. Speaking of the difference in cars, you don't have to worry about curves or DRS; in what ways do you feel like more in control as a driver? I know you've only had 45 minutes, but how do you feel as a driver now being that it's more on you?

ESTEBAN GUTIERREZ: Yes, it's true, and that makes it even more interesting because it's more natural. The cars are pretty much equal between the teams, and that gives you the opportunity to show or let's say to do more as a driver and to influence more on that side.

Also the level of communication with the engineers to fine tune the car, suiting the driver -- the driving style. Also -- I mean, yeah, in general, yeah, I'm very happy, and the fact that you have no power steering makes it also very different. You have so much feedback from the car. The feeling really is much harder, but it's much better because you get the feedback that you have from the tires, from the car, from the movements, the vibrations, and this helps you a lot to understand the car better. Not many buttons to think about.

Q. You've raced a number of your current contemporaries, Alexander Rossi, Josef Newgarden in past series and beat them. Have you talked to them much or have there been any other drivers that have reached out to you and said welcome, and what's been their welcoming of you to the series?

ESTEBAN GUTIERREZ: Yes, I've spoken to a few of them, not everybody because I came very quickly. We just arrived here two days ago. But yes, I mean, it seems that it's very nice to come back to America from 2007 when I was racing Formula BMW here. I know very well tracks like Road America, which is one of my favorite tracks in the world, and I'm very keen to hopefully have the chance to race there again with an IndyCar in the following races.

But yeah, regarding the drivers I competed with, it's

going to come natural. I mean, obviously being here, spending more time here, I will be able to speak with them. It's been a long time, so many years in between, so I'm sure we can share a lot of experiences.

Q. The last two years the Indy 500 has been won by drivers with considerable Formula 1 experience. Next May, where would you rather be, Monaco or Indianapolis?

ESTEBAN GUTIERREZ: That's a really good question. I would love to try Indy 500. I watched the race, and it's a real racing race. It's pure driving, pure racing. It requires so many factors around. I mean, I think what Fernando experienced, I know Fernando very well, so I could see a smile on his face all the time, so I could realize that it's something I have to try. Yeah.

Q. This is really trial by fire because as I understand it the first time you were really in the car was this morning for 45 minutes. As I watched Helio, the in-car camera and watched all of the movement of his steering wheel, all of the bumps, and you're supposed to have Penske shocks, which are supposed to be superior, it seemed like a really rough go. How do you adapt to that?

ESTEBAN GUTIERREZ: Well, first of all, here is the approach. My approach this weekend is to learn. I'm here -- obviously considering that I have not driven the car yet before this weekend, now that I drove in practice one, I feel much better than what I expected. I mean, obviously I was a little bit intrigued about what was going to be the feeling, but actually I'm enjoying it a lot, and I think that's the most important. So I'll take it step by step very progressively, no mistakes, just enjoying the experience, and the speed will come naturally. It may take a few races, may take a few sessions, I don't know, but as long as it comes natural and I'm enjoying it, I'm sure the speed will be there.

Q. You've raced on street circuits before, obviously, but this street circuit here is quite different from a lot of those in that it's very, very bumpy. Aside from getting used to the car, how much of a shock is our version of a street circuit?

ESTEBAN GUTIERREZ: Well, it's a little bit bumpier than the video footage I had from the previous year. I was pleased to get on track and to say, okay, it's not as bad as I saw on the videos.

But definitely it's something new for me. I mean, to have this amount of bumps, you know, the changes of the surface, you have concrete, you have asphalt, you have -- everything is changing so the tires are reacting differently, so obviously it's another factor on top of learning the car is also to learn the differences between the surfaces.

So yeah, I mean, it's all about being comfortable, and at the moment, thankfully I'm quite comfortable with the car, and I'm confident, so it will come step by step.

Q. Slightly off topic: I think you're from Monterrey?

ESTEBAN GUTIERREZ: Yes, that's correct.

Q. A couple people in the room have been to the IndyCar race in Monterrey.

ESTEBAN GUTIERREZ: Did you like it?

Q. Yes. How is the track, and any chance we go back to Monterrey?

ESTEBAN GUTIERREZ: Why not? Would be fantastic, and it's my hometown and I would love to have a race there, so for sure it would be something to have -- it would be very special to go back there. Yeah. And I'm sure it can be possible in the future.

Q. Being that you're in the car now with Dale Coyne Racing, I don't know what has been discussed, but there would be a good chance that you might do an oval race, and what are your thoughts on that? Have you ever had any experience racing on an oval?

ESTEBAN GUTIERREZ: No, I never have, and hopefully if I have the chance that I can at least do a test day before that, so that will be important for me to get a feeling. It's completely new to me, but I'm very keen to learn and to go there and try out. I mean, I'm a racer. I like challenges, so that's what I'm looking forward to.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much. Welcome to the series, and good luck this weekend.