

IndyCar Media Conference

Friday June 9, 2017

Charlie Kimball

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're going to continue with our post-qualifying press conference. We're now joined by the pole sitter for tomorrow night's RainGuard Water Sealer 600, Charlie Kimball, driver of the No. 83 Tresiba Honda for Chip Ganassi Racing. This is his first career pole in his 109th start. Just talk about getting that monkey off your back and winning that first pole.

CHARLIE KIMBALL: Yeah, it's pretty fantastic. It feels really, really good actually. The car was pretty good straight out of the trailer for practice, and I think a lot of credit has to go to everyone here at Texas Motor Speedway with the repave, the addition of some drainage, and the reprofiling of 1 and 2 over the winter. I got up this morning and saw it raining and thought, oh, man, this looks a lot like last year, but it was incredible, as soon as the rain stopped the track dryers went to work and it did not take very long to dry. That's a lot of credit to those guys.

But really it comes down to credit for my team. Everybody at Novo Nordisk, Chip Ganassi Racing worked really hard looking at all the information that Scott gathered from the test in April. We knew the 9 car was going to be quick. His experience, he's always really, really good, especially on these superspeedways. He has such a great feel for it. When he put that speed up, we knew we were going to have to do better than that, and we figured that was going to be the benchmark, or at least I did in my head, and then I did that first lap and the balance wasn't quite right. We just -- I'd been a little conservative on my tools in the cockpit because I didn't want it to step out, and so I knew it wasn't good enough, and I knew I had to make some changes for the second lap, made some adjustments, and was able to shorten up the track distance, get some good speed, and I think I owe my Honda engineer Eddie a drink tonight, or two, because he gave it all she was going to get, that's for sure.

Q. Charlie, I know you've had -- I think May really has just got to be the most frustrating thing for you, having two blown engines and then you go to Detroit and an engine blows in front of you and you have to steer away from that. How good does it feel to get on the other end of some luck?

CHARLIE KIMBALL: Yeah, if we haven't had bad luck this year, we've had no luck, so it's nice to get some good luck, and honestly, hard work -- the guys, I owe them such gratitude because they've been behind me.

They've had my back all year long through the good, the bad, the ugly. We haven't really had much great yet this year except for today, so it was nice to pay them back with this pole. They work so hard, especially this race being the end of a string of so many races back-to-back, the fact that we've shown our resilience as well as we have is -- by getting this pole is an indication of how great a team I have working with me. Everybody at Chip Ganassi Racing has been solid, and like you say, May was hard. It still hurts. It still keeps me up at night, so it's nice -- hopefully I'll sleep a little better tonight having a pole under my belt.

Q. Charlie, a lot of drivers out there are afraid it's going to be a one-groove track, so starting on pole has got to be equally important for you; how do you think tomorrow night is going to play out?

CHARLIE KIMBALL: I think we will have to see. I'm not exactly sure because I think in Turn 3 and 4 it races like a superspeedway, but in 1 and 2 it almost races like a short oval. At the short ovals -- okay, a short oval where you're doing 220 miles an hour. But on the short ovals track position is key, and having the best track position out there and having some teammates around me, as well, Scott and Tony have incredible experience on these ovals, on superspeedways here at Texas; I think they've both won here. So it's nice to have those guys around me, and three Chip Ganassi Racing cars in the top four gives me a lot of confidence that we've got good cars. Qualifying trim isn't always the same as race trim, so we've got a little bit of work to do in the half hour tonight. But the car was pretty good in race trim in the hour practice earlier this afternoon.

It could be a one-groove racetrack, but you never know. I mean, we haven't run at night. We haven't run more than 20 or 30, 40 laps at a time. It'll be interesting to see how the track evolves and develops because it is new, especially 1 and 2. It's new asphalt everywhere, but the reprofiling definitely changes how you race through those two corners.

Q. Charlie, along that line about the track that they reconfigured, they took out four degrees I understand in Turns 1 and 2, and I think it might have been Tony that said it used to be difficult to go into Turn 1, especially if you want to try and pass someone. It sounds to me like they've brought the track lower, as well, they've brought it more to the infield side. How does that change your driving style compared to the prior -- before

they paved the track and took the bumps out?

CHARLIE KIMBALL: It was something that Scott actually mentioned after he tested in April. He talked about how early and how different the visual cues were going into Turn 1 because of the fact that I think they left the top or the outside edge and then by reducing banking just made it wider. They've added a lane or two lanes at the bottom. And it means that you turn in a lot earlier, and it's almost a double apex corner. It's very different in sensation than what I'd gotten used to around here.

So it took a little while this morning. I mean, the first outing I wasn't anywhere close to being flat, and then by the end I was really comfortable as we were taking a bunch of downforce out. It does take a little while to get used to it, and I think it may change how you race because of where you're turning in and how long you turn through Turn 1 and 2, and with the changes that Firestone has brought, it's different than the test in April.

We're still learning on that, and we're still learning how the tires are going to degrade or not degrade or last or not last for a whole fuel stint. But yeah, it's a very different sight picture.

Q. Charlie, if you're turning in sharper and you're holding it longer, why aren't the fronts going off? Why aren't the tires degrading?

CHARLIE KIMBALL: I think it comes down to the package that Firestone brought. Part of that is they knew what they had, but also with the new asphalt it's not as abrasive as the older asphalt, I believe, at least we're not seeing that. It's generating higher loads for sure. I mean, we're faster. We're a lot faster. Any time you see a number 220 and above on your dash, it gets your attention. It's like doing a lap at 230 or north of 230 at Indy; you get out of the car and definitely feel a little stronger than you did when you got in the car, that's for sure.

Q. 109th start, but you've had some decent runs at other places. Did you think this was a long time coming and can you remember one that kind of got away?

CHARLIE KIMBALL: Absolutely. 109 starts and getting my first pole, that's not a stat -- I mean, that's less than 1 percent, and that's not something that I'm going to remember. But having gotten that first one, now it's about getting the second one.

Here, coming into this weekend, I knew we were going to have a good car. I watched Scott run really well at that test in April, and everything he was saying, there was a lot of confidence in the package we had. So even with the differences coming back, the different tire and different stagger, that sort of thing, I knew the engineers would be right on top of it, and I just had to go out and get the most out of it, and I think it showed because I had to make some adjustments for the

balance of the car, and I had the confidence to do that and take a fairly big swing at the car for that second lap because I think the first lap wasn't fast enough to beat Scott, but the second lap was.

I mean, it was, what, 4 hundredths of a mile an hour average over three miles; that's pretty close, and I think that's an indication of how all four Chip Ganassi Racing cars are built and set up.

Q. Looking back, can you remember a pole you thought you had coming in?

CHARLIE KIMBALL: There were a couple of times, have been a couple of races. Mid-Ohio we were close. I thought we were pretty good at St. Pete this year, but in Q2 we had a tire go flat. We had a valve stem failure early on in Q2 and that threw us out of sync so we didn't get into the Firestone Fast Six, so there are a few like that we got close. I think at Pocono a couple of years ago we took a big bite at it and we were gunning for pole, we were going for it. I ended up crashing, so I remember that one vividly. There have been a few, but it feels really good to get it done here at Texas.