

# IndyCar Media Conference

Friday June 23, 2017

## Robert Wickens

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good morning, everybody. Thank you for joining us today. We are pleased to be joined by Robert Wickens, who will be driving today for Schmidt Peterson Motorsports in the No. 7 car, as Mikhail Aleshin works to get back racing here in the Verizon IndyCar Series.

Robert, first of all, it's not going to be your first time in an Indy car. You have some experience in this vehicle, swapping rides with your friend James Hinchcliffe earlier this season. Talk about that experience for us.

ROBERT WICKENS: Yeah, first off, I'm excited to be here. I mean, it's definitely a last-minute trip, yeah. I found out basically yesterday at 2 p.m. that this is going to happen, got on a flight last night, got to the hotel about 10:00 last night, sleep, here as soon as the gates opened. It's been a bit of a ride.

Like you said, James and I did a car swap back in February in Sebring. A lot of fun. Got a couple of hours in an IndyCar. I know just how exciting the car is to drive.

I haven't been to Road America since 2007 when I raced here in Atlantics. Going to be a steep learning curve, but a fun day.

THE MODERATOR: What are some of the things that especially either translate or don't translate from your vehicle in the DTM series about an IndyCar that you experienced when you did the swap?

ROBERT WICKENS: It's funny, when we did the swap, I hadn't driven a racecar for quite a while, it was actually like the Christmas break, all that stuff, limited testing in DTM. When I got more or less in the race car, it's the same thing. You go as fast as possible, you brake. I thought there was actually a lot of similarities.

Then the week after the car swap, I was in Italy testing. When I got back into the DTM car, oh, man, they're really different.

The biggest thing is the weight of the DTM car is quite a bit higher, a little bit less downforce, but not that much. I would say the power-to-weight ratio in IndyCar is a lot better. The high-speed corners are a lot quicker in IndyCar, more Gs, physical. In DTM cars the main physical fatigue is just heat from being enclosed in a closed cockpit car without a lot of airflow.

In IndyCar, you actually have to use your muscles a bit. We have power steering, there isn't power steering on Indy cars. Apart from that, it's more or less the same thing. From what I've gathered setting up the cars, it's a lot of the same really because the DTM car is a formula car with a body on it more or less.

THE MODERATOR: The ride swap was really just kind of a fun thing between friends, right? Did you ever actually ever imagine it would lead to something as serious as participating in a Verizon IndyCar Series practice session?

ROBERT WICKENS: Definitely not. James and I, we've been teammates since -- well, we met in like 2001 when we were both teammates together in karting back in Toronto. We were always joking around, Wouldn't it be cool if we make it pro? He always wanted to go to IndyCar, I always wanted to go to Formula One. We already knew at a young age we wanted to go different ways.

We got pretty close. Like, I was reserve driver for Formula One for a bit, tested a bit. But the whole time, our whole childhood, we were saying, Once we make it pro, we should always do a car swap. He always wanted to try a Formula One car. I wanted to try an IndyCar car. We were able to do it. Sure, it wasn't a Formula One car. But the DTM car is a great car to drive. He got to drive the pinnacle of a touring car, which not many people get the chance to.

But, yeah, the fact that I'm here today, definitely didn't expect that.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Robert.

**Q. The drive here in IndyCar, is it maybe just for yourself a plan to move into Formula One or do you see IndyCar in your future or you want to stay with DTM?**

ROBERT WICKENS: To be honest, Formula One is not on my radar whatsoever. I'm 28 years old. I have no ambition to start a Formula One career now. I'm very happy where I am with Mercedes and DTM. Obviously, this was just a spur-of-the-moment thing. James and I, we're very close. Also Schmidt Peterson Motorsports, we've stayed in some contact since the car swap because they're great people, we got along very well. We kind of just chatted as friends through texting and stuff.

Hinch actually asked me if I was in Canada, because I wasn't supposed to be home this weekend. I was supposed to be in Europe. But my plans changed last minute. I was like, Yeah, I'm actually in Toronto. I was going to have a relaxing weekend at home before I go back to Germany for my next DTM race.

At the moment, DTM is my priority. That's all I want to do. You never know what the future holds, but I can confidently say that Formula One is not on the radar for me.

**Q. You're going to be practicing today against a lot of people you competed against. What is your memory of racing those guys?**

ROBERT WICKENS: Yeah, it's pretty cool. I mean, (Alexander) Rossi and I, we go pretty far back because we always kartered in the same championship, but never really in the same category. I always knew his name coming up.

Then we raced the first time against each other in I believe it was GP3 in 2010. Then we also did the Formula Renault 3.5, where him and I both finished in the top three in the championship that year.

It's going to be cool. I actually haven't seen any of my friends yet, apart from Hinch, because it's been a super busy day. Then there's like Conor Daly, raced against him. I raced against Josef Newgarden, Esteban Gutierrez. There's a lot of great drivers. It's really cool to see a lot of good people have been able to make it in professional careers.

**Q. DTM is your priority, you're happy with that. Was it difficult to convince (Mercedes motorsports boss) Toto Wolff to allow you to do this?**

ROBERT WICKENS: Luckily, I didn't have to speak to him. I had to call Ulrich Fritz, who is the CEO of HWA, who is my first call. He's more than happy for me just to get more seat time. He understood the situation. Yeah, he believes that drivers driving different cars will make you better when you come back to your day job. More than happy with it. He did have to call Toto.

I was more nervous about the timeframe of everything. This was all happening extremely last minute. I know Toto is at the European Grand Prix this weekend. I wasn't sure if he would be traveling or not. We kind of needed a quick answer, yes or no, if I could do it or not.

Surprisingly five minutes later, he called me back and said, 'Pack your helmet and have fun.' So it luckily wasn't that hard to convince him.

**Q. Will he be monitoring your progress from Azerbaijan?**

ROBERT WICKENS: I don't know, to be honest. Maybe, I mean. I feel like he's going to be pretty busy running a Formula One team. I'm sure he's going to be

checking the motorsport feeds on Twitter or online to see how I get on. You never know.

**Q. This is a short-term thing. Are you keeping your hopes tempered (indiscernible)?**

ROBERT WICKENS: It will definitely be bittersweet if I can't run the race. I'm excited to do an IndyCar race. Being a North American kid, it's something I've always watched. My idol growing up was Greg Moore. He obviously passed away. I watched CART, Champ Car, IndyCar, I watched them my whole life. It would be kind of cool to tick that box to say I ran one.

Mikhail and I were teammates in Europe for three years when we were on Red Bull together. So I also have a very good relationship with him. I feel for the situation he's going through as an international driver. It's not easy sometimes with immigration and making your way through.

Obviously, yeah. I'm going to be blunt. Yes, I will be disappointed if I don't do the race. But at the moment I'm just going day by day. Yesterday I was on my way to a relaxing weekend, now I'm in Road America, so...

We'll just have to wait and see.

**Q. Going off of that, what is your approach with the team, just getting the car set up and everything? What is your mindset as an individual? What is the team's mindset with a different driver in the car than they're used to?**

ROBERT WICKENS: First thing was getting me fitted in the car. When we did the car swap back in February, we just used kind of a seat that was floating around in the shop. I think it's actually Pagenaud's seat when he was at Schmidt. Luckily I fit in that one. That one was put back into the car. Yeah, so I'm in the car. Am I 100% comfortable? Not really. Given the short timeframe, it's pretty good.

I think what the team aims to get out of today is just simple data. I'm sure there's going to be test items. I'm hoping I can contribute to setup, my general feeling with the car. Hopefully if Mikhail shows up for tomorrow, he'll have a car that is better off than if it just didn't run today.

THE MODERATOR: Robert, thank you very much. We appreciate your time. Have fun this weekend.

ROBERT WICKENS: Thank you, guys.