

IndyCar Media Conference

Saturday July 8, 2017

Will Power

J.R. Hildebrand

Post-Qualifying Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with our Verizon IndyCar Series post qualifying press conference. Joined now by Ed Carpenter Racing's JR Hildebrand, who will be starting second in tomorrow's Iowa Corn 300. It's been an interesting past couple of hours. It started not spectacularly, I imagine, and then you end up with a second-place car for tomorrow's race. Take us through your morning, that whirlwind of emotions, and probably a little bit of uncertainty.

JR HILDEBRAND: Yeah, I mean, I think we felt really good in the practice session, and then we were going to do our qualifying simulation at the end of practice, so we're just working through race stuff. Felt pretty good with the car, and then went to do our qual sim, and there was a couple little things that we felt like we clearly could have done a little bit differently to have a different outcome there, but car felt great for the first lap and a half, and then going through 1 and 2, just ran over that bump there and the car bottomed out and I lost it, and that was all she wrote, sort of.

Had an unfortunate trip to the medical center and gave the guys a little extra work, but I think for me this year, Texas, running at Texas this year and having the guys fix the car in the middle of the race with no setup pad, and nothing else gives me more confidence than I'll ever need that they can definitely give me something to be confident in going back out without testing it again.

I felt good that we were going to be able to make a couple of changes to reconcile the issue that we had this morning and that everything would be what we intended for it to be when we went back out there, and you know, the conditions are definitely tough. A lot of guys -- I think a lot of guys struggling, more than they thought they would. I think we were kind of on the limit there in terms of where we were at, in terms of downforce and grip.

But was able to obviously put together a couple of good laps and have a little moment in the same spot, but kept it together, and obviously just super happy for the team to be sitting on the front row after all that. You know, good rebound for everybody for sure.

THE MODERATOR: It is JR's career best start at Iowa Speedway. This is your third start at Iowa Speedway. Your previous best start was fourth. Knowing that and



knowing that you have an improved spot to start tomorrow's race, how important is it to qualify up front here at Iowa Speedway?

JR HILDEBRAND: You know, I think it's always important to qualify up front. I think it's -- I guess I would say I think because this place races quite well, both lanes come in throughout the race, and it's certainly a place that you can pass guys, you know, qualifying on the front row versus say qualifying on the third or fourth rows I don't think is quite as significant of an issue as it would be as a place like Phoenix where it's much tougher to pass.

But I think for us, it's just more about getting everything going, getting everything back together, getting back out there, knowing now that we can go into the afternoon session really focused on tomorrow's race rather than continuing to feel like we're kind of recovering from this morning and looking forward to that. Yeah, anywhere you can be in more clean air is certainly better, and we'll look forward to that at the start of the race tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: We'll welcome in our pole winner Will Power with Team Penske, his second pole here at Iowa Speedway and his fourth in 2017. That brings him to career pole No. 48, and it is also the third pole in a row at Iowa Speedway. Will, I know you spoke earlier about feeling fairly confident or at least knowing that you would have a shot at going last in the qualifying order this afternoon, but after you saw some of the times that some other drivers put up, did you keep that confidence as you headed out to the track?

WILL POWER: No, I was a little worried when I saw my teammates' data and the gear trace; they were turning more right than left. But when Helio went, who had a similar car to me, I thought, the track's coming in, and it seemed like people got more and more consistent, so I thought -- I actually didn't even know what speeds JR was on, but I did my absolute best.

Yeah, very happy to start up front. Obviously around short track racing, pole is more important obviously for the next race and good position than it is track position here. You've got to be very good in traffic, so we've got our eye on that and focusing pretty hard on that.

Q. JR, is it hard to be disappointed with starting second?

JR HILDEBRAND: Yeah, I mean, I think based on the

day that we've had, I think that that context certainly makes it a little bit more of a positive thing than else, but we certainly came in here expecting that we could put the car in the front row, so I'm just sort of in a way relieved that we were able to kind of recover from this morning and do that. You know, otherwise you obviously want to be able to capitalize on opportunities to get poles when they present themselves. Today certainly would have been one of those for us, but I think in the big scheme of things, we'll certainly take a front-row spot, and just at this point, as Will sort of alluded to, it really ends up being about how the car is over the duration of a stint at this place. You know, it's nice to start up front, but we'll definitely be putting some work in this afternoon.

Q. Given the fact that tomorrow will be the same temperature, can you share any secrets about what you will do with the heat for 300 laps?

WILL POWER: It will be tough. It's a very high G track. It will be physically tough, and also tire degradation wise, make the tires degrade faster. Yeah, not that much harder than last year. I think last year was fine. It's always nice around this place when you get a yellow, you can take a breath, because you're pretty much turning the whole time. But yeah, it's the same for everyone.

Q. JR, I get that you guys are wired differently, but how do you go into that turn again, have a moment, and keep your foot on the gas?

JR HILDEBRAND: I mean, you know, I think I was pretty convincing to myself that I was just going to -- I mean, regardless of this morning, that the team was going to give me something that was better by at least a little bit in that same spot, and it was better by a little bit in that spot. You know, I mean, I think that it's one of those things in this series, I certainly am a believer that the teams would rather see us go out in situations like that and have faith and trust that they've given you something a little bit better and that you can stick it and have something go wrong again than have you kind of pussy footing it through there just because you're worried about it. So I felt like after the job that the team did to get it back together and all that kind of stuff that I at least owed them a shot to get through there flat out, and fortunately it stuck and hung on.

You know, it is, I think, probably a little bit of a different mentality, but that's part of what makes this sport exciting and I think kind of interesting is that these places in particular, all the oval tracks that we go to, qualifying is just like mega-high commitment. So sometimes that's just what it takes.

Q. Will, how much did the track change from the lap you laid down in practice to your pole laps there?

WILL POWER: Yeah, pretty similar, actually. You had 20 cars go before me laying new rubbers. Yeah, the balance was pretty nice for me, so yeah, obviously at

the beginning of that qualifying session it looked pretty bad, people were really struggling, but then as the rubber went down, it got better.

Q. Were you able to, I guess, feel real confident when you finally did go out that it was going to be similar?

WILL POWER: No, I wasn't. I wasn't. I saw Helio's run, so I didn't change my car. But I was very wary of people having big loose moments, so I was ready for it.

Q. Will, how much has it surprised you that Team Penske has won the poles at Iowa Speedway but hasn't won a race?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I guess that is surprising how many years we've been here and some of the drivers that we've had in the team. We've got the Iowa king in the team now, so they're in trouble.

JR HILDEBRAND: Glad he's stuck back there a little ways, that's for sure.

WILL POWER: Yeah, I don't think he'll be there for long.

Q. Three out of the top four drivers in last year's race are starting outside the top 10. Does that give either of you a boost of confidence heading into tomorrow?

JR HILDEBRAND: I mean, I think it probably just makes you feel like you're going to have some guys digging on your heels pretty quickly more than anything. And I think that just comes down to you watch last year's race and you see how it progresses through the event, and this is definitely one of those events that it's about how the car is and what you're capable of doing with it over the long haul. You know, today's session was obviously a sort of tricky one and threw some curveballs at guys particularly that were early in the order, but like we both, I think, said, it's really nice to start up front, but I think I certainly expect to be challenged if we start struggling at some point during the race.

Q. Did you have to go to a backup car?

JR HILDEBRAND: No. It was like just rear wing basically and a new steering wheel.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, thank you very much. Good luck tomorrow.