

IndyCar Media Conference

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J.R. Hildebrand

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll welcome in our second-place finisher, JR Hildebrand of Ed Carpenter Racing. This matches JR's best career finish in the Verizon IndyCar Series, also finishing second in the 2011 Indianapolis 500. Also started second in today's race. JR, it seems like you were switching in between several different positions within the top 5 but ultimately made your way back to a podium finish. Take us through that decision near the end of the race to pit a bit earlier than the rest of your competitors to try to make your way back up.

JR HILDEBRAND: Yeah, I think we had a really good car out there today, but sort of to Ryan's point, I think just because of the heat, to have a car that was good enough by enough that once you got later in a stint that you could get by guys, it was just really tough. You know, we opted to -- we thought that we were better than the cars in front of us or the majority of the cars in front of us running fourth or fifth or something and elected to pit early, get on fresh tires, rip off a bunch of laps and try to kind of cycle out with better track position and see how that worked out for us.

You know, it was a great call by the guys in the pits. I think they could kind of see how the race was unfolding. There weren't a lot of yellows. That would have cost us a lot in that race if a yellow had come out after we had pitted, but it was definitely the right call to try to challenge for the win, and was able to hold off everybody but one.

From that perspective, it was definitely hairy there for the last kind of eight or ten laps. We were just on more used tires than the rest of the guys around us. Lap traffic was super difficult to get around. I ended up getting stuck behind a couple of guys for like 30 laps at the end. But all in all, just really happy for the team and to get the Fuzzy's Vodka Machine up here on the podium again.

Q. Your teammate Ed was struggling; did you have a chance to talk to him?

JR HILDEBRAND: I spoke with him really briefly because he was running pretty well at the beginning. I think we were closer together sort of in pace earlier in the race it seemed like. And it sounded like they had some sort of mechanical issue that happened sort of partway through the event that really took the handling away. I didn't really get any more detail than that, but the cars weren't significantly different, so there must

have been a kind of variable issue that came into play there.

Q. Compare your race here to Phoenix where you finished third; how difficult was it to -- everyone complains about traffic here.

JR HILDEBRAND: You know, I think they're a little bit different. Here it became more -- for me what was screwing me up with the traffic personally was that I was catching up to a lot of guys that were really unpredictable in terms of where they were putting their cars. In 3 and 4 in particular, both lanes were still kind of there, and so you'd be catching up to a guy and he's running lap cars, be catching up to him and they're running in the high lane, so you're thinking, okay, I'm going to run low so I can get up close and have clean air going through the corner and work my way around him or whatever, and then you'd catch up to him, and that lap they'll run the bottom, and it was just kind of -- I guess that for me when it's not for position is really frustrating to deal with because it's just like -- that's not stuff that I do to leaders if I'm getting caught in a race.

But that's just the challenge here one way or the other. If you're racing guys for position, that's what's going on, and everybody knows that's what's going to be going on.

I think there's a little bit of -- it's more difficult to know where the guy in front of you is going to run here, and that's kind of what makes that tricky. You know, so I think at Phoenix, I guess at Phoenix you know more ahead of time that you're going to have to set a guy up a bunch of laps in advance and make that happen, whereas around here it's a little bit more of a guessing game of like, where do I put my car so that I can keep the momentum going relative to the cars in front of me.

I think the heat had a lot to do with -- I guess I would say particularly towards the end of the race there was no low line through 1 and 2, and there wasn't much of a high line through 3 and 4. Those lines were significantly slower than the alternatives. So that made it more of a one-lane track once the tires started to go off, and that was making it difficult for sure. I think if it hadn't been quite as hot, you wouldn't have had quite the degradation, and you could have been a little bit more open to the line.

Q. You mentioned the short pitting, and Ryan talked about his straight-line speed and Helio still kind of ran away from him. Were you in a similar

position, and was short pitting the best chance to beat them?

JR HILDEBRAND: Yeah, I didn't think we had a speed problem, it was more just it became about track position basically at the end. You know, by the end of the race, Ryan mentioned that you had kind of like 10 laps to go hard wherever you wanted on the track. But even if you could keep doing that for another five laps -- I started to just run wherever I thought I was hurting the tires the least because I knew that that was going to be something I was going to have to be paying attention to 30 laps later when there was five or eight to go.

From that perspective, I think we probably had Helio's pace. I got jammed up in traffic, which is when he got by. For a period of time there even with a lapped car between us, we were basically holding station.

I think if I could have kept him behind me for longer and I'd have been in front and we were just kind of battling it out, he would have had a heck of a time getting by me as I was in more clean air. But that's just kind of how it goes.

Yeah, I felt like we definitely had a car that could have won today, just kind of based on outright pace. So I think we can feel good about that heading to certainly St. Louis and some of the other ovals.

Q. I know race drivers certainly aren't fans of other race drivers, but considering all that Helio has kind of been through the last three years --

JR HILDEBRAND: Are you sure you want to ask me that question?

Q. Do you have any feelings at all about what he did today?

JR HILDEBRAND: No. Yeah, I mean, he's been doing this for a super long time and he's racing for Roger Penske, like they should go out and be competitive every weekend, and we're here to beat them and take down the Dark Empire. Yeah, I like -- if somebody has got to win and it's not going to be us in a competitive race like this, it certainly doesn't bother me that it's Helio. You know, I mean, he's a champion of our sport, for our sport. I guess he's not actually a champion. He's not an official champion. We'll say he's an emotional champion of the sport. He always -- no BS, though; he does do a great job. He's always so excited. He's so passionate about it. You love to see that from guys, particularly guys like him, and him and TK, they're turning back the clock and giving us all a run for our money every weekend. Obviously congrats to those guys. But we'd much rather be beating them.

Q. It's great to see Ed Carpenter Racing doing so well and actually challenging and being the lead ahead of the Penske drivers. You're a much smaller team; can you talk a little bit about how you utilize or the team utilizes their resources to be able to be

in a David versus Goliath situation?

JR HILDEBRAND: Yeah, I think for us, we obviously come into certain tracks in particular, ones like this, with a historical track record of being competitive at these places, and I think once we -- at every event that we go to, your events are made and lost just in what you do over the course of practice sessions at the event. Rolling out of the truck on the right track has a lot to do -- that helps a lot. But being in form to win races comes from making the right decisions during the race weekend because an event weekend like this, the conditions are totally different than when we tested here a couple weeks ago because it's 15 or 20 degrees warmer or whatever. So you have to be able to react in the right way to see success in situations like this.

I think for us, you know, between Ed and I, we're always looking for the same thing and are pretty -- I think generally pretty strongly opinionated about what exactly it is that we're looking for, and so that has allowed us when we come to these places, we do roll off the truck well because we've got good historical track record, and we know that the setups are kind of like in the general operating window of something that can be really fast. And then as we go through the weekend, as we go through practice sessions, we get that even more kind of refined.

I think it just comes from the mindset within the team and the ability of the engineers to sort of translate what we're looking for and asking for correctly or whatever, most effectively for what we're trying to get out of the cars. Fortunately for us, more often than not, it seems like we've been looking for the right things because when we come to these places year after year, we're pretty competitive. We've got a little bit of work to do to make that the case sort of across the board over the duration of the season, but certainly at events like this, we don't -- we feel like we're coming in on an even playing field with those guys.

THE MODERATOR: JR, congratulations. We'll see you in Toronto.