

IndyCar Media Conference

Saturday July 15, 2017

Simon Pagenaud
Graham Rahal
Helio Castroneves
Will Power
Scott Dixon
James Hinchcliffe
Fast Six Press Conference



did a good job of resealing from Turn 6 to Turn 8. I think next on the project list is probably Turn 1 or the approach to Turn 1. It's very bumpy this year. Especially when you just start into the braking zone there's a really big -- almost needs to get ground. Hopefully it doesn't cause any issues tomorrow for the race.

But I think these tracks do have a lot of character, and it makes it very difficult to get the lap together, which technically makes it -- to get the car to do the right things and be consistent is also very tough.

I love the challenges of all the street courses. Toronto I think is one of the best layouts that we go to and the city and the fans are -- it's a lot of fun to come here. Enjoy being in Toronto.

Q. How big a liability will your pit location be in the race?

SCOTT DIXON: It's tough here anyway with the new configuration of pit lane. Luckily we have an easy out which helps a little bit with not having to turn so sharply out of our pit. Getting it in is really difficult just because of the way the curve is. Trying to turn back with the lock on an IndyCar, it doesn't have much turning radius. But pit lane is always one of those things. Sometimes you can have extremely close calls and even lead to crashes, but hopefully IndyCar did the right job, I think, with pulling the pit speed limiter down to 40 miles an hour, and it definitely makes it a lot safer for everybody else, and fingers crossed we don't have an issue.

Q. From a scoring standpoint, is it going to be a hindrance being all the way in the back?

SCOTT DIXON: No. It will just be the crossovers that you have with cars coming and going. The only person that normally get an advantage on pit lane is the pole sitter, just being closer to the pit exit.

Q. A lot is being made of this track and how difficult it is, but when you watch guys like Esteban and J.R. hit the wall, does that make it that much more mentally difficult knowing it's one thing for it to be difficult but then to watch other drivers suffer ill fates?

SCOTT DIXON: I didn't see what happened to Esteban. I saw where J.R. ended up, and Turn 8 has always been tricky. But I don't think it's an issue.

I think Turn 1 is kind of really the only area that needs

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with our Verizon IndyCar Series Firestone Fast Six press conference. Joined by Scott Dixon, who will be starting fifth in tomorrow's Honda Indy Toronto. Scott has two poles and two wins here at the Honda Indy Toronto. Those wins came when he swept the two double-header races in 2013. Scott, starting fifth tomorrow, a great starting position for you as you look to move forward in tomorrow's race. Take us through your qualifying run and what you expect from tomorrow afternoon's race.

SCOTT DIXON: It's just really been a rough weekend for us as far as speed. Well, even just to drive the car has been a handful and really hard to keep control of it. I think this morning we were P17 so we made some good strides to make it to the Firestone Fast Six and ultimately fifth. I think we had enough time maybe to jump fourth there, but hit the wall really hard in Turn 6 there my second lap there, which had some good speed in it, and then I think I bent the suspension after that.

All in all, good recovery. I've got a lot of work to get done to make the car a little bit better for tomorrow in the race, and the competition is definitely very strong right now. We'll see what tomorrow brings. Hopefully we can get a little bit lucky. Led most of the race last year until we got hosed on a yellow there and went to the back. Maybe we can have our way tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: We talk about how this track is extremely challenging in that there's so many different types of surfaces, each corner is so different. How do you feel it is to navigate around the track, and what do you have to do to prepare yourself mentally for all those different types of surfaces?

SCOTT DIXON: It's tough. I think the hard part is every year it changes, whether it's the winter, or they

cleaning up. It's almost a bit of a jump there now as opposed to being a braking zone. But every year it changes. It's a street course, and I think that's the challenging part about it. I think it's interesting for the drivers. It's a lot of fun, and it's damn difficult, as it should be. It's nothing new. I think it's going to be different next year, as well. So you've got to keep it on the track and out of the walls.

Q. With the bumps going into Turn 1, we're watching noses flying, do you have trouble keeping your feet on the pedals getting into that braking zone?

SCOTT DIXON: The pedals are pretty big in these things, and it's a confined area. So yeah, that's not too much of an issue. I think it's definitely a bit harsh on some of the equipment, attaching things and things like that. You know, I think we've had lasers broken and other things on the car, but it is what it is.

Q. Ed Jones has a broken left foot. You need a lot of pedal pressure there I presume. That can't be very comfortable.

SCOTT DIXON: Pretty similar to Detroit, man, to be honest. Yeah, I kind of went through that with Detroit and a couple other races earlier on in the year, and it's not enjoyable, that's for sure.

Q. You've been through that, so how impressed -- I presume you're okay, 100 percent now?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, pretty much almost, which is good. It's one of those things, you either sit the race out or you bear down and try and get through it.

Q. I saw Sebastien Bourdais earlier today and he walked into the Honda tent for lunch and he couldn't get his cane to hang on the table correctly so he just threw it down and kicked it underneath the table. He looks like he could be ready to go if it was a few years back when all you had to do was say, I'm ready to go. Are you glad that drivers are being forced to sit out?

SCOTT DIXON: Talking to Sebastien, I think he's making the right decision. I think Dale would probably like him in a car right now, but I think he's the one that's kind of calling the shots.

I think it's a tough situation. I think he could probably drive, but if he has another crash, you're making things a lot worse. It's not just the driving factor, it's if he has another accident.

THE MODERATOR: We'll welcome in our next four drivers, starting with Helio Castroneves, who will be starting third in tomorrow's Honda Indy Toronto. Take us through your qualifying run and what led to this third-place starting position.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, it was pretty good. The Hitachi Chevy was running really, really good, and obviously my teammates, we're all working together,

pushing each other, and in my group the car was running really smooth, picking up a little bit of understeer with the blacks, so I was trying to make some adjustments.

That's the fun part about it, you start making some adjustments and try to rush into it, but it worked pretty well, and we saved the best for last. But definitely Simon put up a phenomenal lap out there. I mean, I wish I would have started with a brand new one instead of stopping and coming back in, so it would have given us a little bit more of a possibility to keep pushing every lap.

THE MODERATOR: Also joined by Graham Rahal, who will be starting second in tomorrow's race. A new best start for Graham Rahal here on the streets of Toronto. His previous best start was third. Take us through your qualifying run, and it seems like you ended up in a very favorable position for tomorrow's race.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, it was just a great effort by our team just to make the right adjustments. Obviously it was a close one there to sneak through to Q3. We felt all along like we had the pace to be there, it was just a matter of putting it together. I didn't do a great job in Q2, just barely slipped in. But just trying to keep up with these guys all weekend, and Penske is doing a tremendous job, as usual, and so we've had to push pretty hard. But definitely proud of the lap that we put in there, and like I said, I think our guys are working hard to put a good race car on the track tomorrow, and hopefully we'll go out there and push these guys for everything they've got.

THE MODERATOR: Our reigning winner Will Power sitting to Graham's right will be starting fourth in tomorrow's Honda Indy Toronto. We've been seeing you a lot in these press conferences. What's been going right for you this weekend, and ultimately take us through your qualifying run.

WILL POWER: Yeah, obviously the cars are really good. My qualifying on the blacks was really fast, definitely car felt good, a bit on the reds. Didn't get a good read on that -- when it went red there. I only had one lap and it had a lot of push, and I thought, well, maybe the fronts weren't in and then didn't have time to make a change for the Fast Six.

Yeah, just big imbalance, and got as much as I could out of it, as it was, so starting 4 is pretty good around here. Try to keep out of the mess.

THE MODERATOR: Joined also by James Hinchcliffe starting sixth in tomorrow's Honda Indy Toronto, which matches his best start on the streets of Toronto, also a sixth best finish of third last year. How great is it to start off with such great momentum heading into your hometown race?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, I mean, obviously last year getting in the Fast Six was pretty good for us, best start that we've had here, and to match that, this weekend is pretty good. We've been struggling a little bit to be honest. We've been kind of on the back foot, and really needed to find something for qualifying, and the qualifying was weird with Esteban's accident, just kind of sneaking us into Q2 because we were on a lap when that happened, and then the one-lap shootout in Q2 is always exciting, sticker reds for one lap. You're just trying to save your life and give it everything you've got, and we got in, which was great. Coming into qualifying with the Penske brigade doing what they've been doing in practice, we all kind of thought we were fighting over fifth and sixth. Huge credit to Graham and Scott; to have three Hondas in the top six is great.

Yeah, we turned this into a podium last year, so fingers crossed we've got strong race cars and things go our way in the race and stay away from the big mess that Will was talking about, and go from there.

Q. James, you alluded to it almost slipping into the second round and once again slipping into the final round. Was there ever any doubt that you were not going to get into the preceding round's qualifying?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Well, yeah, we kind of made a bit of a tactical error in Q1 starting on scrub blacks rather than sticker blacks. So the difference in grip between a heat-cycled set of used blacks and a sticker set of reds is massive, and when you only have one or two laps of good tire to get that lap time on the reds, having to make that much bigger a jump than had I started on stickers, that put us behind a little bit. And we were on a lap I think that maybe would have got us in just by the skin of our teeth when Esteban had his accident. I didn't realize that he was ahead of us at the time, so I thought we were out, but luckily we got in, and Q2, we earned that one, a one-lap shootout to just kind of lay it all on the line there and put together our best lap of the weekend. That one felt good for sure.

Knew it was going to be a struggle to get much higher than sixth just based on what we've seen out of these guys in practice. But definitely proud of the guys.

Q. Graham, after your run, after the Fast Six was over, in your own words you said you were "geeked." What is it about this run and about the prospect of picking up where you left off at Detroit?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, look, more than anything, as James said, I really didn't know -- I think a lot of us felt that it was looking like a Penske one through four, so where do we shake out after that. And when Josef didn't make it, I knew that we'd have a pretty good shot of, I guess, being fourth.

But no, the reason I was so excited is just because I feel like I really got all of it out of the thing and then

some maybe, and as James said, in Q2, he did that, and that's rewarding.

You know, sometimes it doesn't matter where you end up. If you know that you did your best and got the most out of it, then that feeling for sure is more rewarding than being -- I don't know, for me than many other laps that I've done or times that I've been on pole before. It was just a good lap, and I'm proud of our little team for the effort that everybody keeps putting in. We've been -- shame the season didn't start off well because the last handful of races we've been right there. Hopefully we can keep it going.

Q. Graham, you were very successful winning both races at Detroit, and this track is a little different; it's very bumpy, and I guess it's pretty slick. In terms of tire choice, I get the feeling the Penske drivers didn't particularly like the red tires, they didn't seem to practice with them very much. They get one set on Friday they can give back. But do you think that even though Firestone developed this tire that's supposed to have more grip that it's just not working here?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, for me it's been pretty good. My car on blacks is definitely pretty active. I would say it's very consistent. In fact, what I ran in Q2 when I ran the one-minute-point-two or whatever, those were like 17-lap blacks. For me it's been consistent, but the reds have been better and the times that I've used them and particularly in the high speed -- not necessarily the high speed, the flowing sections, 9 through 11 is like massively better for me on reds than blacks.

You know, I think what we've seen over time is they kind of fit -- it depends on what fits your car. In Detroit we were able to make used reds last a stint no problem, and a lot of guys struggled. Tomorrow I think it's going to be -- weather comes, then that changes completely. But we just have to see what we get here. But we're going to -- we'll probably run a set of reds in the morning and just run them long just to see. But I think Helio got a full session or quite a long run on the reds last night and stuff. Again, we'll just have to see how it plays out there tomorrow.

But my sense is for me, reds are what I favor, but we'll see.

Q. James, you used to come up here and be the fan favorite but leave here very disappointed. What has been the key in turning that around and now you're a legitimate contender out here?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Oh, man. I think it's just the consistency and the situation that we've had over at SPM. Having the same team, same crew, same engineer allows you to kind of build on it, and certainly street circuits have been a strength of ours this season especially. Like you said, coming off the best start and best finish last year, we kind of wanted to build on that, and we didn't necessarily roll off the truck that way, but

we've got ourselves in a position to be at the sharp end. I think it's just hard work. It's experience, and a lot of times we've been quick here, we've just had like the worst luck ever.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Plus you won the -- for me, in my eyes, you won Dancing With the Stars, that's why the fans are really behind you.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: That's really sweet of you. That helps. Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with our qualifying press conference with our pole winner Simon Pagenaud, who's set a new track record in the new track configuration of 58.9124 seconds. His first pole in 2017 and also here on the streets of Toronto and his 10th career pole. You've been atop the speed charts for most of yesterday and also today; did you have a feeling that you had a pretty good shot at pole heading into this afternoon's qualifying session?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I feel like the DXC car was pretty competitive all weekend, so I felt really comfortable. It's really the first weekend of the year that I've been able to do exactly what I want with the car, and it's a lot of fun when that happens. And also, just like Graham was saying, it feels so rewarding when you feel like you extract the best out of yourself and feel one with the car. It was definitely some really fast laps there in the Fast Six, and I really put everything down on the line.

Very satisfying, but my race car has been phenomenal this weekend, so I hope we can transform that into a win tomorrow. It would be perfect timing in the championship.

Q. You've seen your teammates Helio and Will go back and forth on several different pole wins throughout the season. Does it matter to you to finally get a pole in 2017 and join that rank, or are you more focused on race results?

SIMON PAGENAUD: For me it's race results. That's really what pays. But every race car driver has an ego, and I think qualifying is all about ego. We all want to be the fastest man. Like I said, I think from the moment we start in go-karts, when you manage to do that special lap, it's the best feeling in the world, and I think that's what we all hear, is to us, it's the grand when you get to do the pole and put that perfect lap together. That's what we seek for. That's what I seek for the morning when I wake up, and when it happens, when I manage to put it all together on a given time, it's very enjoyable. It's the best reward in the world.

THE MODERATOR: The Verizon IndyCar Series races on many different types of tracks. When you get to a street course here like Toronto, do you feel like in terms of the other street courses we visit throughout the season, how important is it to qualify well here in

Toronto specifically?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, to me it's the most important place to qualify well, so that's why this pole position is very important to the race results. It's going to count toward it. But if everything happens normally, that's the problem here. Like I said earlier in the press conference, Toronto always has a twist for you on the strategy. But it's always better to be up front for sure. So that's mission accomplished on the pole position, but we have one more thing to do, and that's the race. The whole weekend is tackling practice 1 a certain way to be well set up for practice 2, and practice 3 is all about qualifying. When you check everything that you want to check to that point, that's satisfying.

Q. I know you just mentioned that it's about the race results at the end of the day, but judging by your entrance here, there's got to be a certain level of excitement winning pole here in Toronto.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, yeah, that's big excitement. I love this city. I've been racing here since 2006, and this is really a fun track to me. I've just never had the success that I thought I could get for unknown reasons, so again, being able to put a perfect lap together in Toronto is very unusual because it's a very tough track. So I feel very satisfied that way. But there's a huge competition within the team. Obviously Helio has been on a tear this year, and I needed some poles to catch up on that competition. Last year I was the one that won that competition, but it's a fun -- we're just having fun with that. That's why the entrance was a bit flamboyant.

Q. You mentioned the term perfect lap though, and multiple perfect laps when you think about it, you beat Will and then you beat that time again. How do you get that consistency on Sunday in the variants of weather and temperature and all that jazz?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think it's a different story. I think I've done my job into qualifying. Now we've got to forget about pace over one lap, right. We've been thinking one lap pace. I've got to extract the best out of the tires, the car. I've got to be as close as possible to the wall. I'll tell you, I took all the risk necessary in Turn 11, for example, to get a little tense here and there.

If I do that in the race, I won't finish the race. So it's a different approach. I've got to set up my car a little differently for the race, maybe a little less aggressive with the rear end of the car to actually keep my tires underneath me and be stronger the whole stint. And like you said, we don't know what the forecast is going to be. That's the one thing you can't control, so we're all going to have to adapt to that. But it's the same for everybody.

Q. Last year at Detroit if I remember correctly, you started the race and went over 20 laps on red tires,

and I think you were the only driver to successfully do a full fuel stint and make those tires last, and I don't think your speed really dropped off. This year here at Toronto, the track is different, it's a street course, it's a lot slicker, I guess, in places, but Firestone said that they brought a tire that had a lot more grip. How do you feel about the red tires in terms of longevity and all that?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, it's tough for me to answer. I had some issues yesterday in practice, too, so I didn't manage to do a long stint on the red tires. I don't know the degradation. I know because of my driving style I feel like my front tires are going to go away quicker than the rear, and I'm going to do everything that I can tonight to make sure that we can keep our tires underneath us, but we also need a fast car on the black tires. So it may be more a case of limiting the number of laps on reds and switching to blacks afterwards. I think the blacks are going to be faster on the long run. But if the conditions are difficult, you're going to want to use the reds just because if it's spotting in places, you're going to be more comfortable on reds. There's a lot that goes into it in the trailer that not many people get to see, but there's going to be a lot of conversation tonight to try to see what we can do and make sure that the car is going to be consistent.

Q. This is a race that in the past has had a lot of cautions. How does that affect the way you guys plan for a race, especially seeing as we could get some weather tomorrow that could throw even more cautions in the wind?

SIMON PAGENAUD: It's tough. That's a constant discussion. You know, the problem is statistically that yellow comes out at the end of the first stint right in the wrong spot. What do you do? You try to pit before that statistical lap that seems to be around 14 or 13. But the problem is if it doesn't go yellow, then you really shoot yourself in the foot. You kind of have to react to the situation on track, and that's Kyle Moyer and Ben Bretzman, my strategist Kyle to decide with me in the discussion during the race to what to do.

Also they're always looking at the competition, where they're at on track and what are they doing. We're obviously looking at Dixon very closely, and that's the main competition for us. So that's what we're going to be looking at. But tomorrow we need to go out there and win the race. That's the bottom line.

Q. What does it say about this event that the only two tracks that have been held on the schedule longer are the Indianapolis 500 and the Long Beach Grand Prix?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, I think it's definitely a classic here. When you talk about Toronto, everybody knows the Indy Toronto. It's a beautiful event. The crowd was amazing on Friday. It's still amazing today. I think obviously the sport is growing, and it's growing back. I think it's phenomenal to see that. The track is improving every year. But when you look at the

pictures, you still see the exact same background as it used to have, and I think that's what makes this track, this place very historical. I love coming here. It's a great track, great event, great food. It's cool, yeah. Got some good places.

THE MODERATOR: Simon, congratulations. Thank you very much.