

IndyCar Media Conference

Saturday July 29, 2017

Will Power

Josef Newgarden

Takuma Sato

Graham Rahal

Helio Castroneves

Scott Dixon

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Scott Dixon. Scott has two pole positions and also five wins.

Scott, another good qualifying position for you here. Tell us how your session went.

SCOTT DIXON: Not the best day for us. I think we've been chasing the same issue all weekend and even the half day test we did here last year, with the car being extremely loose on entry, a lot of understeer.

Fundamentally we haven't really changed it. Kind of been back and forth from each end. We tried a pretty big change in the Fast Six there. We really had nothing to lose. That was really bad.

Hopefully we can get back tonight, sort of figure out what we need to do, try to make it a bit better. It's good to see a few Hondas up there in the Fast Six. Congrats to Will on another pole. Tomorrow will be definitely a tough race.

THE MODERATOR: How do you address that personally as a driver at a track that you have so much success at, yet something not quite going the way you want it to?

SCOTT DIXON: Every year changes, whether it's the tire or the weather. For us, we've had a big change in the off-season with manufacturers. I think some of those things, when you have a track that the team is good at, and I prefer as well, you maybe get stuck in your ways a little bit, too.

We came back with a very similar setup to what we had last year, whereas a lot of the other tracks we've had to kind of reconfigure a lot because of the different aero kits.



I think we need to maybe apply a little bit more of that, as well. In the cool conditions this morning, I thought the car was fairly decent on the new tire. We had some traffic, which I think we gave up a lot. As the heat came into the track, the ambient was still pretty cool today, we just went (indiscernible) the car was as good as we had in the past.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Seems like going through the keyhole, everybody was going wider than normal. Did you use that line? If so, it's probably a line you haven't used here before.

SCOTT DIXON: You're talking turn two?

Q. Yes.

SCOTT DIXON: I found that spot a few times. It wasn't intentionally. For me, trying to hug the corner has been a lot better. But especially with the wind today and the wind direction, you get a lot of push from the wind direction going into that corner. Especially over the crest, it's very hard, at least for us and our setup, very hard to keep the rear underneath myself. When you lose the rear, you start sliding through the corner. A lot of people creating that outside line, at least it would seem so.

Q. You said you had a similar configuration as last year. Do you make any significant changes for tomorrow's race?

SCOTT DIXON: I think we have a direction that we kind of need to go with. I felt like we tried everything we probably should have done. Hopefully there's not too many more of those left. Hopefully start heading in the right direction.

We'll change a large or something fundamental to how the car works through the corner. Entry right now, there's a big separation.

Q. With the times so close, how do you know what you're missing? You're not missing that much from the other guys.

SCOTT DIXON: Well, there's a lot of data. But, to be honest, it's really driver's feel. What I feel to how my car is performing in different spots can be totally different than my other teammates.

Not very often drivers have the same kind of car. That's purely by feel. Obviously there's big sections that you can make better on a team across the board.

You have places like that. To get the perfect car that you want, I don't think I've ever had one, but there's always areas that you feel like you can improve on a lot.

Q. One of yours best tracks, but you only have a three-point cushion.

SCOTT DIXON: It is what it is. I think you try to get as many points as you can during the season. We haven't done a very good job of that with many tracks. I think we wish we had little more of a points (indiscernible). Not really thinking about points right now. We're in a good spot. The only time that leading the championship really counts is at the end of the year. We'll see how we get through these next four races and see how Sonoma plays out.

THE MODERATOR: Scott, thank you very much.

We'll welcome in Josef Newgarden, starting second in tomorrow's Honda Indy 200 at Mid-Ohio. Ties his best start here at Mid-Ohio.

Josef, take us through your qualifying run and thoughts for tomorrow.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Pretty good day for the most part. We're in the front row with Team Penske. It was a good team day ultimately for us in the 2 car. We had an opportunity to essentially get the pole. We came close, didn't materialize. That's always tough, especially when you get pickled by your teammate, it's always difficult.

We've had a great car all weekend. Not really been off much at all. Still happy with our starting spot. I think that's going to be really good. We're getting closer, definitely getting closer on the qualifying stuff. Hopefully we can finally get one of those poles at some point this year. That would be great for us. Now we have to look forward to the race, make the most of that tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: You're only 23 points behind Scott in the championship run right now. When you see him qualifying a little bit further back than you normally expect him to, is that going through your mind?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Not particularly. I think I'm not thinking about what the gap is to Dixon. I think I'm more thinking about how can we have a consistent day. Ultimately that's going to be the most important thing, is having a clean day with no incidences. Not necessarily points, but making sure we have a top five, hopefully a podium. If you're really lucky, then you get a win. That's all you have to work on. Generally the points take care of themselves as the year goes on. So that's my focus right now.

THE MODERATOR: Takuma Sato is starting third, also his best start here at Mid-Ohio.

Takuma, seems like a lot of things came together for you here in the qualifying session. What, in your opinion, went right?

TAKUMA SATO: It's very good. The team work extremely well with the four cars, very competitive sessions (indiscernible) all the practice. We got to get things together for qualify. Extremely happy with the performance of the car. I think the team has reached a good setup. Just tweaked a little bit. I think a P3 is very happy place for us. I think it's good position for the race for sure tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Graham Rahal starting fourth tomorrow, also ties his best career start here.

Graham, you said yesterday that even though you were fastest in P1, you felt you might be lacking something from performance on the cars. Do you feel like you found that in qualifying?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I think we got better. We struggled with the same basic issues on a lot of road and street courses this year.

It looks like we found a couple (indiscernible) improved it. Overall I'm really proud of our team. The guys, all year, everybody has been cranking, working hard. This is a big weekend, an important weekend for us. Obviously the championship is on our mind, but as well this being at home.

A good qualifying session for us. It was a shame that in Q3 I frankly just messed up. I didn't have Power's speed, but I kind of threw it away early in the lap, and that was that.

You know, disappointed. At the same time we showed we got the pace. Hopefully tomorrow we can work from fourth.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Graham, how good of a sign is this that you're disappointed to be fourth?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, it's a great sign. But obviously we put the fastest lap of all of qualifying together. We just didn't do it at the right time. That's frustrating. I think any of these guys know that. When you feel like you're in that sort of spot, it's good.

But like I said, I mean, on what ended up being my best lap, I lost four and a half 10ths just in the last corner, last corner meaning turn 12 early in the lap. That set the tone for the rest of the lap. It's hard to claw back that much.

You know, overall, though, it's good to be disappointed. But I feel like we got a great car, a great chance, a great crew for tomorrow. Put our heads down and

work hard. I mean, anything can happen.

Q. You had a moment there on your last lap. How fast of a flyer would that have been? What happened?

GRAHAM RAHAL: It would have been quicker simply because I wouldn't have lost -- knowing why I lost 4/10ths in turn 12 before, I don't think I would have lost 4/10ths there. I think there's a little bit of deg. It's hard to say would it have been ultimately fast enough. It wouldn't have been fast enough for pole, might not have been fast enough to get Josef.

Again, it was a good, tough, competitive session. Everybody's pushing hard out there, pushing these things to the limit. This track is very unforgiving. You miss the line by a few inches, you're sliding around like you can't believe.

Yeah, I'm just lucky honestly we didn't cause a red because that was as sideways as I have been in a long, long, long time. Hopefully it doesn't happen again.

Q. Takuma, starting third puts you in a great place to win. What would a win here mean not just for you but for the team as a whole?

TAKUMA SATO: Obviously we love to win as much as everyone does. Third place means a lot of opportunity. It's not necessarily to win the race. But I think certainly aiming for the winning.

But I think if we can get a podium finish tomorrow, that would be super result for the team. We do the best we can. We have to.

Obviously this place is a tricky place, a lot of fuel saving if it's a whole green race. If it's caught up in the yellows, that was the case in the last few races for us, but hopefully we are in position to winning these guys, so that would be good.

Q. Josef, you had a fantastic run the last couple of weeks, Toronto, the Penske Games. What will it take to keep this momentum up to get higher up in the points?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think I got DQed on the Penske Games. Guys might know about this. A huge controversy on Twitter right now if you haven't looked it up.

To capitalize on tomorrow, I don't know 100% what it's going to take. If I did, I would just tell the team right now, This is what we got to do to win the race.

If we have just I think a good start, that goes a long way. Got to get through the first corner, which is turn four, cleanly. If we can do that, get going, I feel good that we're going to have the pace and we're going to have the strategy to get it done.

Not foreseeing any incidences that could happen. Just got to have a good start and we'll work on it from there.

Q. Graham, are you optimistic you'll find improvements for tomorrow's race?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I think once you're at this stage, it's hard to want to throw too much at it because you kind of know what you have, you just try to massage it a little bit. I actually feel like our race pace, like Josef just said, our race pace will be good.

For me, when you take it down, guys aren't going to be doing low fours tomorrow. When you take it down a notch, it changes the balance, the characteristics quite a lot. We should be okay, so...

We'll see. Go back, meet with the engineers, talk to them, figure it out, determine what we're going to do going forward. But I don't think you'll see any huge changes out of us.

Q. Takuma, road and street course-wise, up and down for you. Something you can build on?

TAKUMA SATO: I hope so. Generally speaking, I should be happy with road course. 2010 first year, (indiscernible) pretty much everywhere else. Street course I had to figure it out, and oval course first season. Since then up and down. This year I had neck injury at the road America. That was a little difficult race for me.

The last race we had at the road courses, you probably have to go back to Barber. We had a relatively competitive race. I'm looking forward to tomorrow. We have another solid race. I think we have a very good foundation right now.

Like Graham said, just massage the things and go back to the engineer and try to tweak a lot, get a feed out of that. Hopefully tomorrow is the payoff. I'm looking forward to having a strong race tomorrow.

Q. Graham, starts here have been pretty wild on occasion. How much does starting on the backstretch almost beg you to take a shot? How much do you have to fight that impulse?

GRAHAM RAHAL: You know, it's important for us. We're going to have to take a little shot. Obviously as Takuma said, we need to get through clean. At the same time I got to beat those guys over there in the championship.

For me, we got to go win this thing. It's as simple as that. We're going to try the best that we can. Hopefully the two of us can get through clean and go racing, all of us can, and we'll go from there.

Yeah, I mean, it's inviting. Makes the restarts inviting. It's a tricky thing there. But we already saw some action earlier today with that. So hopefully tomorrow will be nice and clean, and we'll go racing.

Like I said, I mean, for us, the only way we're going to catch them, obviously the last race is double points, but the only way we're going to catch Dix and these two over here, same for Will, we got to win races. I mean, that's what it comes down to, so... Hopefully we'll go out there tomorrow and have a strong one.

Q. Josef, feel like I'm putting you on the spot here, but between Helio and Will, they've got 99 poles, he's in his 20th year in competition, he's like in his 14th. Does it marvel you how good both of them are at collecting poles?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Let me tell you what, I walk into the engineering room every day and see these guys. I'm just in awe of what I get to stand next to. No, I am. You have no idea how much fun we have. We work together very well in the engineering room. But they're very, very good.

Will, the way it comes down to it is, you got to get it just right, know exactly how many laps you want to run in qualifying, you have to nail the lap, you only get one run. That's what these guys are great at, they have done it for years, but they're the best at it. They have not gotten worse. If anything, they just get better. I feel like Helio gets better every year. There's a lot to learn, absolutely. There's a lot that I've observed this year.

I'd like to get on top of them at some point. I'd like to be P1. Until that time comes, I'm going to keep observing and trying to figure out what they do and how they do it so well.

GRAHAM RAHAL: They're both sneaky. Honestly, Helio will look like he's messing around. What's he doing? Then he'll come into qualifying and, boom, P1, he'll get the pole. You're like, What the heck was that?

They're very, very sneaky sometimes. They're slowly working, going about their business, nothing to look at here. Then they sneak up on you and they just take it right out from underneath you.

Look, they're both very strong. They both have their own strengths and know how to get it done. I don't know how to choose between them. They're both very good.

THE MODERATOR: Josef, Takuma and Graham, we'll let you go. Thank you.

We'll welcome in Helio Castroneves, two poles here, also two wins.

Helio, to Josef's point, you have the 11th fastest time in the combined practice sessions today, yet able to make it into the Firestone Fast Six, able to pull out a really good starting position for tomorrow. Do you feel like you found some speed in qualifying that perhaps you

didn't know you had in practice?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, no. Learned a lot yesterday with red tires. Able to put it together. Even though we didn't put it together not by our own, in the Fast Six, before we start, the engine, very mysterious stall. We calculated about three laps would be perfect. But because of those 15 seconds that we stay in the pits, basically cost us a third lap on the second set of tires, so we didn't have enough time to complete that.

Even though we're in a good lap, good in the first run of the tires, those drivers are sometimes playing with fire because they're really slowing down. A lot of guys I don't think knew that I already went ahead of the game. Even if you going to ride on the gearbox with someone, just about I would say five, six car lengths, this car so depends on downforce. I caught in area on four, five, six, which is a fast area. We lost a bunch of lap time.

Regardless of that, thought Chevy was really strong. Congrats to Will. Great job. Like I said, every time we jump into practice and qualifying, you know, one of us is going to end up being the top. Will did a great job again. We'll just keep digging.

THE MODERATOR: Pole winner for tomorrow's race, Will Power. Third pole here. His 49th career pole overall, tying him with Bobby Unser for fourth on the all-time poles list. His fifth pole this season, his sixth consecutive year starting on the front row here at Mid-Ohio. The fifth all Penske front row in the 2017 Verizon IndyCar Series season.

Will, a similar question to you. You had the 10th fastest time in combined practice throughout all three practice sessions. Do you feel like you found something in qualifying that you didn't know you had or didn't possibly want to show you had?

WILL POWER: In practice, it's really difficult to get a clean lap. Kind of unsure going into qualifying after today's practice. We didn't get any good laps to understand the car. Yeah, it always changes when you get to qualifying. (Indiscernible) got to make the most of it. That's what I always do. Seems to work. It's what I did this time. The car had a really good balance on used tires at the end.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Will and Helio.

Q. Will, did the track improve in the grip level after a couple races today?

WILL POWER: Yeah, it's very similar to practice. It does get better through the whole session. You can almost reset after each round of qualifying. But, yeah, it's just a track that takes rubber and for some reason loses it all within a 30-minute period.

So, yeah. You get to qualifying, you go where you go.

Q. Will, what comes over you in qualifying? What is it that you summon? Your career poles list kind of speaks for itself. Can you explain the drive you find.

WILL POWER: It's just a matter of getting it all together and understanding what you've learned over that weekend and putting it all together during the qualifying, especially when it counts, the Fast Six, not use too much energy all weekend. When you got to use it, use it.

That's what I do. Don't ever try to put it all out there in practice, then when I get to qualifying, especially the Fast Six, you got to really compete.

Q. Six front rows, what do you like about this place? Why does it really suit you?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I don't know. I haven't really won here. It's something that I would really like to do. Definitely qualified well here. (Indiscernible) run well here. It's a very technical track, loose, fast, a lot of commitment. Typical old-school IndyCar road course.

Q. Did either of you notice when you went out to qualify there was a lot more wind than the morning sessions? Did that affect you at all?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: It was pretty much the same as practice. The only thing that changed was the temperature. It was about 30 degrees hotter, the track was 30 degrees hotter than this morning, which means, again, you lose quite a lot of downforce.

That's the typical thing that happens in our series, our cars, because we're so much dependent on the aerodynamic. Five degrees makes a difference. Imagine when you're talking about 30.

So that's probably why some people said it changed so much. Just got to keep on top of the track.

But as Will said, this track is really difficult, really, really difficult, up and down degradation, grip level change in one area. So it's really fun when you get it right.

Q. Will, I'm going to ask you about the car parked over here in the other garage, the 28 car. What have you gotten to learn about it so far?

WILL POWER: Yeah, it looks awesome. I'd say IndyCar did a fantastic job of making it a really mean, bad-ass looking car. It looks like '90 cars. Makes the wheels look bigger again.

I think what's good about is it moves the weight distribution forward so you can (indiscernible). With all the weight back there, it's difficult, drive the car loose.

All in all, really nice. Can't wait to drive it. I think it's really, really nice.

Q. When do you think you'll get your first chance to get in it for real?

WILL POWER: I don't know. I'm not sure. Montoya has it all right now. Yeah, I don't know. Have to wait a while.

Q. (No microphone.)

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yes, I didn't see the car, to be honest. I'm like, What am I going to say here? I saw some pictures. Yeah, they did a good job.

Q. Have you had a chance to get feedback from Juan?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, I spoke with him. He was actually in my time stand first day, first practice. I talked to him about it. He said the car is really stable in the oval. Really enjoyed it. Normally when we add (indiscernible), the car does some movements in the corner. He said that's gone. They didn't allow it to go less downforce, and sounds like you can really start taking off now in the car to go fast. So the car seems to be, because Will just mentioned about the weight distribution, seems to be driving much better.

But Juan was very positive. You know Juan Pablo, he doesn't (indiscernible) filter to talk about it, so it means he really liked it. So that's good.

Q. Were you contacted by IndyCar or Dallara concerning your opinion on the car?

WILL POWER: (Indiscernible) a lot of drivers on what it needs. What was really obvious when we went to the body kit, it created a lot of turbulence. (Indiscernible) stuff on the bottom. Should be a lot better racing now. Should be a lot easier on the road and street courses.

I think at the superspeedways, they didn't need a car that has to follow any closer. No one leads a lap at Indy (indiscernible). Yeah, Indy has been great racing. This will be even better.

Q. Helio, any thoughts about starting on the inside going into turn one next to your championship rival, Scott Dixon?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Well, we just going to try to make it through, make sure that -- right now, there is know who is who. It's about five or ten guys battling for the championship. There's a lot of points in the game. We're just going to try to make sure to be smart enough to make the first corner and keep going forward.

But right now I have no concern.

Q. You have Dixon three points ahead of you, then all four of you guys, you're tied in points with Rahal. Do you feel strength by numbers is going to help you out?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I don't know. I mean, as a team, yes. But individually, a lot of competition in the team. Very good problem to have.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: We're battling for the

championship ourselves. You can use a little bit your teammates in case something's not going well. You can still take advantage of that and collect a bit more points.

But that's the name of the game. As Will mentioned, it's a very good problem for our team to have. We're going to obviously try to finish 1-2-3-4 in the championship.