

IndyCar Media Conference

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Sebastien Bourdais

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, and welcome to our first media availability for the Bommarito Automotive Group 500 presented by Valvoline. We'd like to welcome Dale Coyne Racing driver Sebastien Bourdais. Sebastien, it will be 14 weeks tomorrow since you had the crash at Indianapolis, and we know immediately you set out a goal of coming back to race again by Sonoma, which is several weeks away. You're back a few weeks earlier. Are you even a little surprised at how quickly the comeback has come about?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: If you're referring to making a call on Wednesday night, yeah, that was kind of late that we could do that. But no, it's just really good to come back, and really looking forward to it. We never really know exactly the timing of things. We knew six weeks for weight-bearing, providing the that X-rays looked good, and eight for walking. We did eight and a half for weight-bearing and transitioned really quickly into walking, got out of the office and started walking. I was feeling good enough at that stage, and the doctor in Tempe was pretty happy with what he saw, and then Terry and Dr. Scheid didn't exactly agree with it, so there was a little setback and the cane popped back and things like that, but I'd say overall as soon as we did X-rays and the bone looked pretty strong, I knew things were looking good. And then we went out west for the trip that was planned a long time ago with the family, and that went very well, and when I came back, drove the coach back from Vegas to Indy and went to see Dr. Scheid again, and we did the final -- what had the potential to be the final check but not necessarily on the 15th of August. He really obviously was pleased with the X-rays and everything looked really strong.

At that point it was a green light, and let's go racing. I couldn't be any happier about that. Yeah, just looking forward to putting this story behind and just getting back to work.

THE MODERATOR: You also tested at Mid-Ohio the day after the race there. That went well. How do you feel going into this weekend? Obviously you have to feel a little bit rusty, especially on an oval, but how are you preparing for this weekend?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Yeah, it's obviously a bit of a difficult one because we knew going into this one that it was not going to be the easiest of weekends for our

package. But Honda has worked really hard, and so we'll see exactly where we're at. But I think it's very much of a Phoenix scenario as far as where we stand with field position. We'll see how things go, but I mean, we'll just try and do the best we can, and for me to get back in the saddle, like I said -- like you said, Mid-Ohio test went really well, and there was really no bad feel of any sort, so just did an install lap and everybody was staring at me, so how does it feel, and it felt good. So we just proceeded, and then pretty much had the test day, and that went very well. We were very competitive, and the car felt good and we made progress and got some answers on a couple of things that we had questions on, and so everybody was pretty happy. Yeah, when I got the green light to go race, then it was like, all right, let's make it happen.

Initially it didn't feel like it was going to be possible to come back at that time, but I wanted to come back for Watkins and Sonoma, and yeah, just managed to push that one week early.

Q. I know you've tested on this track twice, last fall and the end of May. You were not one of the drivers obviously who tested here since the repave. What do you think of this facility, and what demands does it pose?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Yeah, I think it's a great layout, and obviously now with the new pavement, it looks like a first-class facility, so it's awesome. You know, hats off to the organization. I think a lot of people had doubts about the organization being able to pull it together and repave so fast and be ready for a race like that. You know, just really appreciate all the efforts, and I heard that there's a really good predictions for the crowd and everything. If we could sell out the place, that would be awesome. Hopefully that happens and everybody has a great weekend and we put on a good show. As for us, there's no pure target. Nothing has really ever changed. Just do the best you can and see where you end up.

Q. The time you were away, Esteban Gutierrez was replacing you. Going back now to your car, did you have to reset it to your setup which it was before, or did Esteban keep you informed what he did with the car in the meantime when you were not driving?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: No, Esteban didn't have to do that. Obviously I stayed very much in touch with the team. I came to Toronto and then I came to obviously the race in Mid-Ohio. Yeah, of course every driver

likes the car a certain way and you have to give up certain things for Esteban, which he liked, and that was part of the interesting thing at Mid-Ohio, to just see after a test and a full race weekend where it ended up with the setup, and we tried a couple of different things, and as normal, you'd say there were things that I liked and things that I didn't. But the team obviously kept its head down, and it's always very difficult when you have two rookies in a team, and they did very well. You know, it was just for me, trying to stay in touch with what was happening and understand why and how they got to where they were and then make whatever adjustment we wanted to do at that point.

Now it's kind of hit the reset button and kind of go off of what we know from Phoenix because that's the closest obviously you're going to get to -- with the grip, the pavement quality, the fact that there are no bumps and everything and the setup of the track. Pretty excited to come back and try the new surface.

Q. You either said this the morning of the Indy 500 or when I spoke with you at Toronto, but you said that your impact record was one that was probably not ever going to be broken --

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: That's not what I said. I said I encouraged everybody not to try and beat it.

Q. Are you surprised that it got beat last Saturday by Ryan?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: No, it didn't. G's are only one factor. We've seen higher G-forces than 130. We've seen them in the 150s, and not before the SAFER walls. But the velocity of impact is something different altogether, and sometimes the very peak of G's is not always recorded completely accurately. It depends on the frequency you record and the angle of attack and everything. But yeah, I strongly advise anybody to try and not get to 27 or higher than that.

Q. And also to see what this day means for Craig Hampson and Dale Coyne, in a lot of ways, this is a day that they've been waiting for just as much as you.

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Yeah, I mean, obviously Dale, myself, Craig, Olivier and all the existing team at Dale Coyne Racing, Todd and Darren and everybody, these people put a lot of hard work into putting this program together for me and for the best interest of the team. You know, when that big setup happened at Indy, it was very unfortunate first of all because we obviously had an extremely quick car. Secondly, because it was probably by far my best shot at winning the 500, and you never know when that opportunity presents itself again.

So that was a big setback, and also because we are looking still -- although we had two bad weekends prior to that event, we were still looking for a decent championship, and after leading it, not quite sure how that happened. Still was pretty good feeling about that.

Just it was really unfortunate that it halted the season, and yeah, obviously we're not in the hunt in the championship in any kind of way, but it's just great to be back in the car, and I really -- obviously we're going to be talking about it. You guys are going to be talking about it for a little while.

Obviously and hopefully by the time we start 2018 you're done with it, and we can just look forward and put this behind because it was very unfortunate. It was a big accident, and it's not something you want to be reminded of all the time and when it's going to be back to normal, and things are obviously clear, and it's going to be a much easier environment.

I'm not blaming anyone for obviously talking about what happened and the comeback and everything. It's obviously normal. But I've obviously seen what happened with James and stuff like that, and I'm sure when I'll come back to the speedway next year, it'll come back again. But I want to put this behind me. It's a crash, unfortunately ended up at the hospital and having to get fixed and everything, but it's part of the life of a race car driver. Sometimes things happen and things go bad.

In all the bad ways, it still was pretty miraculous that I got out the way I did. We'll just take it step one at a time and move on from there.

Q. With that in mind, how important was it for you to come back to get these three races in and gearing up and building toward next season?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Yeah, that's really the whole thing for me, to get back in the saddle, obviously prove to everybody that nothing has changed, that I'm still the same guy, plus a little bit of hardware, but that's another thing. And at the end of the day, just get back in the groove and, yeah, just go racing. I don't think -- I don't expect anything to be different other than maybe I'll be a bit more conservative on balance and setup in qualifying, but that's just a little safety net that maybe I used to have and that for 500 I kind of took away, and that didn't seem to be the right and smart thing to do. So we'll hit the reset for that, but yeah, it's just important that obviously I get back in the groove, rebuild the end of the season towards next year and feel like we are completely ready to go racing and give it a shot for whatever we can achieve next year.

Q. Sebastien, you've talked about how important it is to come back before the season ends, but next year going forward there's going to be a universal car, so can you talk about whether you can carry anything forward to next season or if it'll be brand new? Is it more just working with the team as a group? Was that what is important to get back before the season ends now?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Yeah, I'd say that and the perception. I mean, the perception of everybody around racing. I think you always have to prove

yourself or re-prove yourself in racing. There's no doubt about that. Because those questions are going to be in people's mind and everything, I just wanted to make sure that that's taken care of and we just can go back to work and just not worry about it. And obviously then get back in the groove with the team, put the process back in place, and we don't know. Nobody knows really what is going to be felt about it next year or not, and there will be necessary adjustments for sure.

But we're still going to be learning every time we go out and do things. Just coming here, obviously it's a new track. If you show up next year and you've never raced there, you're at a disadvantage. So yeah, every little bit of experience helps.

Q. What have you done to accelerate your rehab? Are you coming back, what, two months too soon here or just two months early?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: No, not two months early, just a couple of weeks really. It was always the deadline of four months for no restrictions, was always the target -- not the target but the doc's opinion to go back full running and no restrictions. So yeah, I think at that point, really, like I said, it was weight-bearing at six weeks. That was the first step. And then we gained a couple of weeks when that happened.

You know, bones, there's nothing you can do. You just have to let it heal. I worked hard at rehab to make sure that I wasn't losing muscle mass and strength and all of that, but when you don't have weight-bearing you can't do very much, so from six weeks onward it turned into much more intensive workouts and it turned into really real workouts instead of rehab. So that was good, and it was good for the spirit, as well.

And then I think when you start regaining weight-bearing, as well, you motivate and encourage bone growth, as well, and the bone reacted really well, because from six and a half to August 15th, the bone has like doubled in size almost. It was pretty strong. So for sure things accelerated from there. But I can't say I really had so much to do with it. You have the bone part and then you can only deal with the muscle part.

Q. Sebastien, obviously your injuries are fully healed and recovered, but the mentality, how did you get this accident out of your brain? Was there a special treatment psychologically in order to forget it?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: No, there's no forgetting it, and I think it would be a mistake to forget it. I think it's a good reminder that obviously you should not disregard the signs that the car is giving you sometimes, and I did. Like I said, I got caught up in the moment, and I paid for it. So probably don't want to do that again.

But you know, I guess you grow into it at every stage of your career, and that's why those two guys over there, they are really good in the business because they have a lot of experience.

I'm never going to catch up to them, but I'm trailing behind so far, so hopefully by the time I hit 40, I'll have wisdom again.