

IndyCar Media Conference

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Ed Jones

Dale Coyne

Fred McConnell

Jay Frye

Press Conference



First of all, thanks to everyone for coming out. It's been a great year for us. It's an honor to receive this award. There's so many great drivers in the past that have won it as rookies, have moved on to be champions, won a lot of races. Yeah, I'm hoping I can be part of that.

I got to thank Dale, Dale Coyne Racing, for the opportunity I've had this year, working alongside a great team of engineers which has allowed me to progress quickly, have some of the great results we've had. Yeah, it's been a fantastic year.

As we said, coming through the Mazda Road to Indy was key to my success this year. Before 2015, I only raced in Europe. Learning all the American circuits was really important for me. To do that in Indy Lights was really helpful. Learning ovals, a part of that was the Indy 500. If I hadn't done Indy Lights, it wouldn't have been able to gain that experience, wouldn't have been able to do that. It's key for young, up-and-coming drivers like myself to go through that, make it in IndyCar.

THE MODERATOR: Dale, obviously the third-place finish at the Indy 500 will be the signature moment of the season for your team and for Ed. Talk about the maturity that Ed displayed all through this season, but especially when Sebastien went down and you really leaned on Ed to deliver for the team.

DALE COYNE: I think it's been a whole progression the whole year. We've run a lot of rookies over the years. We run rookies in tests that have never made it to a race, we ran rookies that made it to races.

When you take a rookie to his first test, you usually know right away what you're going to get. That's been pretty straightforward everywhere we go. We ran a rookie once named Paul Tracy. First day in his test he was three seconds faster than Danny Sullivan. A little hard on the car, but three seconds faster. He turned out to be that way, incredibly fast, but took him a while to calm down, not tear cars up, gearboxes.

Ed was that way. The biggest surprise with Ed was his race craft. When we got to the tracks, he's never crashed this year, he's had a couple little spins but never crashed. So that's very welcomed on our team because we crashed plenty with the other car.

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, everyone, to this very important press availability, trophy availability. We have four distinguished gentlemen here today. We start with Jay Frye, the IndyCar president of competition and operations. From Sunoco, Fred McConnell, the director of fuels marketing. On the far end is Dale Coyne, famed racecar driver and team owner of Dale Coyne Racing. Our special guest is Ed Jones, who has had a terrific season.

I'll let Jay have a little conversation.

JAY FRYE: I'm honored to be here. If you look at last year's Indy Lights champion, now this year's IndyCar Rookie of the Year, the whole program is working really well. We're excited to be a part of it.

One of the things we talk a lot about: youth. Next year I think we have nine drivers confirmed, almost half the field, that are still in their 20s. We have a lot of young talent. Ed is one of the leaders of that, and we're real proud of him.

THE MODERATOR: Fred, I believe you have a trophy there to hand out.

FRED McCONNELL: I do. Thank you.

This is always an exciting award for us to give. Sunoco has a long history of supporting young drivers. It's very important from our perspective as fans of the sport and partners to be able to support young drivers, give them a platform, an opportunity to succeed, then to be able to recognize that success.

Winning the Sunoco Rookie of the Year award is always a precursor for a great career. Ed, I'm so proud, at Sunoco we're very proud to have you now as a part of that Sunoco heritage. Just very proud of the great season that you had. Very happy to be able to present you with this Sunoco Rookie of the Year award.

ED JONES: Thank you very much.

There was a performance criteria that we had and some stuff that we negotiated long and hard with Honda. He nailed those every race. I mean, it's like they weren't sure what he was going to be. We weren't either. He was a very pleasant surprise.

Obviously Indy, third place there. Did you get Rookie of the Year at Indy or no? Didn't get that, okay (laughter). But he deserved it. Finished third with a very important piece of aero equipment off of his car, that I think he would have had a chance to win that race. He's done a tremendous job.

I think he's got a great deal of respect from everybody in the pit that we talk to. A lot of teams have talked to him about his future. But I think he's been very, very good this year. Very, very pleasant surprise. That shows for his maturity. He's young. 22?

ED JONES: Yeah.

DALE COYNE: That's just a puppy. But he's done a good job, very, very good.

THE MODERATOR: Other IndyCar rookies of the Year that are currently racing, Sebastien Bourdais, Marco Andretti, Will Power, Ryan Hunter-Reay, James Hinchcliffe, Simon Pagenaud, Alexander Rossi. It is perhaps foretelling of the kind of success that can be had.

Didn't you say, Dale, the first scratch on the car was Detroit?

DALE COYNE: I don't think he scratched the car.

ED JONES: I didn't crash.

DALE COYNE: I don't remember that. He actually did hit the wall at Pocono. The smallest amount of damage I've ever seen anybody do hitting a wall at Pocono. Done a very good job all year long, every track.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. It's impressive to see you winning the Rookie of the Year, but more impressive, you're representing a country which has absolutely no history in motor racing, Dubai. When you return now from America to Dubai, you expect that you will get some prizes, awards in your home country?

ED JONES: No. Obviously I'd like that very much. But, you know, I was born in Dubai. I grew up there. As you said, motorsport over there is still very small. There's no other drivers which have really been up into the highest level of motorsport, like IndyCar. Yeah, it's great to be representing even that region.

Yeah, hopefully I can help them take more interest in motorsport. It's grown a lot since even when I started.

So I'm hoping I can be a pioneer for that, I can encourage more guys to see what I've done and start to come over to America and try and do the same thing.

Q. Ed, what is the one best piece of advice that Dale has given you this year?

ED JONES: It's hard to say. There's a lot of advice that Dale's given me. But, you know, he's always been very supportive of learning everything step by step, learning from Seb. Every time I get to every weekend, even every session, I remember early on it was try to learn as much as you can, take it step by step, there's no need to overdo it early on.

I seen myself as well as one of the guys, rookies, younger guys that would come in and they try to be right at the front the beginning. In a series that's so competitive like this, it doesn't really happen that often. It's extreme difficult to do it. Sometimes doing that, you can actually take steps backwards because you kind of lose where you're at. It's always better to sort of take it step by step, yeah, get there that way.

THE MODERATOR: We're also joined by Ed's father Russell. His mother Elaine apparently is touring the area.

ED JONES: She's wine tasting with Gail (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: You had this award wrapped up, so she could take a breath.

Q. Without having another full-time rookie to compare yourself with, where did you want to finish in the points? Was it a top 10, top 15? What was a realistic expectation for what you thought you could do?

ED JONES: It's always difficult not having another full-time rookie to compare to. Then again, I've looked at the rookies over the last few years. I've seen it's extremely tough. I feel pretty happy with how it's gone in comparison to other guys recently.

I wanted to finish top 10 in the points. Halfway through the season, we were on track to doing that. We had a good opportunity to do it. The last few races, things have maybe not gone to plan.

But I feel like as a driver, I got stronger. Early on in the season, I had some really great results. I was driving well, but also a lot of things fell my way. I was pretty lucky in that sense. Now I think we've gone better, me as a driver, also binding with the team. We got stronger, but things just haven't gone our way. It's been frustrating.

I think if we can have a good race this weekend, we can get ourselves back up there, maybe just outside the top 10, but if we can do that, it will be a great job.

THE MODERATOR: Dale mentioned all the rookies he's had. This is only the second driver to finish with the Rookie of the Year award, the other being Alex Lloyd in 2010.

Q. Ed, is this your first race at Sonoma?

ED JONES: Yes, it is. I tested here a few times in Indy Lights, but I've never raced here.

Q. As a rookie, how do you adapt to a track, learn as quickly as you can to get up to speed?

ED JONES: Yeah, it does vary a lot on the different types of tracks. Say with the ovals as well. There's some tracks you go to, and instantly it's not too difficult to learn. As I said, doing Indy Lights last year has helped me massively with a lot of the tracks we've gone through.

Probably the weekend where I felt was the hardest maybe was Detroit, which was the first race without Seb, and the first race which was a new track for me. That was quite difficult. Street circuit. I find the American circuits in general are a lot harder to learn quickly in the sense that there's a lot less room for error. Whereas in Europe, when I was learning tracks, you go out, you could go over the top, and you had miles of runoff to make a mistake, you'd still be all right. Here, you have to build it up a bit more. You make a mistake, it's much more costly.

Yeah, it's been difficult. It's been tracks like Texas, one of the ovals, where going there looked pretty daunting, but I got on there and immediately it was like my favorite, one of my favorite places to be.

Yeah, it just depends on the circuit. Also if you get to the track with a good car straightaway, it makes things a lot easier, as well. Fortunately we've had that at most places, so yeah.

Q. Are you enjoying racing here at Sonoma?

ED JONES: Yeah, I really like the track. It's very challenging. In the mornings, it's usually a bit nicer. With the cooler temps, you can do the high-speed stuff, the car is going to be faster through there. It's amazing how quick you can go.

Yeah, the temperature change is such a big difference here. Makes it very difficult for the driver and the engineers as well. If we can have a good weekend, I think it's a very, yeah -- a place where it's very rewarding to get it right because it's so difficult to do it.

Q. Dale and Ed, how have you stayed resilient in what has been a very up-and-down year for Dale Coyne Racing overall?

ED JONES: It's been very tough. But the whole team together, everyone within the team works very well together from the beginning of the year. A big shame to lose Seb after quite a few races. Everyone got on well with it. I remember after the accident, actually

Dale got everyone together. We pushed forward.

I think there's been a lot of times that on Dale's team, there's things that have happened, gone up and down. As we've seen, they've always come back stronger. Feel that was just another case of that.

Another reason why, if it's possible, I would love to stay with the team. I feel like it's a really great place to be. Everyone has a great working relationship. We can strive to be even better next year.

DALE COYNE: Yeah, I mean, there's been huge ups and downs this year. We went into Indy, could have been leading the championship coming out of Indy. Again, led it through the first three races with Seb. He was certainly the leader of the team. There was a big benefit for Ed to be able to coattail on that, learn from him. A lot of crashes in May and June. We went on from that.

But he's been a trooper. He works well. Got Seb back earlier than we thought. That was good for the team. They just work well together. The group of people we have, the entire team we put together for this year is the best we've ever had. Raises our stock as a team.

We'll look at this not as what's going on now, we're looking at the next year. When we started this, we looked into next year. We knew there would be new spec aero kits. That's a level playing field for everybody, where we have an advantage, we don't any more. Chevy had an advantage, they don't any more. Next year is what we've been focused on from the beginning.

I think for Seb to win the first race, for this guy to be doing as good as he was doing, was a surprise for all of us. We really look forward to next year.

Q. When Sebastien went down, at what point was it harder for you?

ED JONES: Yeah, mainly for me, Seb has so much experience in these cars, with the setup. He would go out on the first run, he would know straightaway whether the car is in the right place, whether it's going to be right or it's wrong.

For me, I didn't have that experience yet. I'm still learning a lot. So I wasn't always sure if it was just me or if it was a lot with the car. Yeah, that was the main thing. Seb is really good with setting up the car. Having his feedback to work off from was really helpful.

If I ever wasn't sure about something, I could use him to back something up. Not having him there, yeah, made it harder. Sometimes I was guessing a bit more. So, yeah, that was the toughest part.

On the other hand, it was a big shame to lose him there, but for my rookie season it was almost -- I think I

feel like it's a rookie season where I've experienced a lot of different things within the team, a lot of different scenarios. It's only going to make me better and give me a stronger opportunity next year.

THE MODERATOR: Dale, you said a lot of people have asked about his future. He'd like to stay with the team. Can we broker a deal today?

DALE COYNE: Just about. We're very, very close. I would love to have Ed back next year, so...

We're working on that now. We need to get after next year's plan, so we need to know who our drivers are as quick as we can.

Q. Dale, when did Ed catch your attention? When he was doing Indy Lights or over in Europe?

DALE COYNE: It was Indy Lights. We went to his last race at Laguna Seca when he won the championship. We kept an eye on him. We keep an eye on all Indy Lights guys as well. It's close, we can see them, watch them race, see how aggressive they are.

He was always smooth in the car. I didn't know how good he was going to be, because he was smooth. He doesn't look like Paul Tracy in a car, but he drives better than Paul Tracy, at least in the beginning, at least Paul's first year. He was a pleasant -- it was the biggest surprise we've ever had.

He looked very smooth and consistent in the car. He was in these cars. These cars need that. They're big, heavy, powerful. You need to be smooth in these cars.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much, gentlemen. Congratulations, Ed. You were very deserving regardless of how many guys were in the field. This was a strong drive, third at Indy supports that.