

IndyCar Media Conference

Friday March 9, 2018

Jack Harvey Robert Wickens

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are pleased to be joined by two members of Schmidt Peterson Motorsports. Unfortunately James Hinchcliffe was pulled away very last minute for a competition obligation. We'll keep you posted on his availability throughout the weekend.

We are joined by Jack Harvey and Robert Wickens.

Robby, I know in all of the media availabilities you've been having throughout your announcement, you've been saying, I'm just waiting for this moment to get to St. Pete, to finally get my chance in IndyCar.

Now that it's here, how are your thoughts heading into St. Petersburg this weekend?

ROBERT WICKENS: Not a whole lot has changed. Actually my first time even in the city of St. Pete. It's a nice town, nice weather, good views.

But, no, the big thing, like I've been saying all along, now we're only an hour and a bit away from the first official session of the season.

I feel prepared. I feel relaxed. I feel excited to just get into it, yeah, get stuck in, as you would.

THE MODERATOR: We are also joined by Jack Harvey.

I know you've had a few opportunities in IndyCar so far, obviously some time up in the Mazda Road to Indy ladder system as well. Looking forward to this weekend in particular, kind of the start of something new for you. Your thoughts heading into the weekend, as well?

JACK HARVEY: I've been lucky. I've been here a few times in Indy Lights. First time I came here was my first race in North America. It was also my first podium. Followed up in '15 with two more podiums. St. Pete has traditionally been kind to me, at least in the past bit it has anyway.

I think the new thing about this year coming with Michael Shank Racing in partnership with Schmidt Peterson Motorsports, we're still a new team. The expectations for the year I think are going to be somewhat modest but I think achievable and realistic.



I think, as Robby said, it's nice to be at the first race. We've done not that much, but an intensive testing program to get us here. Seems like everything has gone well. We've progressed every day, which is really the main thing for us.

We're going to run a selected schedule. Really it's just trying to do the best we can with what we've got. Honestly at the end of the year trying to give everybody a headache as to how do we get in the car full-time. First part of that puzzle is having a good weekend here.

THE MODERATOR: (No microphone.)

JACK HARVEY: I guess James would have been the perfect person to ask this question to. I drove the body kit. I haven't got completely comfortable with it, become normal to me. So going from the old car to the new car for me, it was a little bit of a change.

Didn't have that much experience in it, so it was kind of easy to just jump in the new car, take the new car on the chin, kind of see exactly what its characteristics were.

I think that's probably a little bit of an advantage in some ways. Obviously I take the experience and have to adapt a little bit.

But, yeah, James is probably the best person to answer that because he has the experience of several variations in IndyCars.

ROBERT WICKENS: I think in terms of this weekend, it's going to be interesting. On ovals, when we did the open test in Phoenix, the last hour was kind of an unofficial pack session: everyone put fuel in, go drive around with other people to see how the car reacted in traffic.

But in testing, private testing, stuff like that, whatever it's called, in Sebring and Sonoma, stuff like that, you're so busy working on your car setup, you don't really go find another car to get really close behind. You might catch someone on cold tires that eventually moves out of your way. We haven't raced really on a road course yet with this kit. I think it's going to be unmarked territory for everybody.

What we've learned on the ovals, the car really, like,

sucks up in the draft a lot better than the old one. That's an indication there's probably going to be a decent amount of passing into turn one. If you get a good run, I feel like it's even better with this new kit.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Personal expectations of what this season looks like for each one of you?

ROBERT WICKENS: I think for me, just constantly improving is kind of all I want to really do. The best-case scenario for me would be to walk away from this weekend with a top 10 in any form, whether it be 10th or obviously better.

But one little goal I made for myself in my rookie season is just try to complete as many laps as possible. From what I learned from my off-season studies of YouTube and everything else in IndyCar, you have to be there at the end of the race. These races are so long, there's kind of inconvenient yellow flags that you can't control. As long as you can put yourself in a decent spot in the last stint, I think that's all you can really ask for in your rookie season.

Hopefully we can start getting consistent top 10s, then you get the odd top five, consistent top fives, the odd podium. I think it can work forward that way.

As long as I can look back on the season and be happy with what I've done, hopefully not make too many stupid mistakes, I think that would be a success.

Q. Why is 2018 such a good year to come in as a rookie driver?

ROBERT WICKENS: To be honest, I think every scenario is different. Me speaking from my experience, 2018 was a good year because of two reasons. One, my previous job with Mercedes and DCM, they were stopping, like, in their championship at the end of 2018, so I kind of had to look for a new job anyway. I had some connections with Schmidt Peterson Motorsports from driving in Road America. Then with the new 2018 aero kit coming in, as a rookie, it's just one less disadvantage that you have. Everyone has to learn this aero kit together.

As a rookie, you have to learn the Firestone tires, the tracks, you have to learn how a race weekend works. If this was 2017, you have to learn the car that everybody else has been driving for a while.

Now it's more or less a brand-new aero kit configuration for everyone. That eliminated one disadvantage that a rookie had. That was why it was appealing.

The championship is on the rise. It's exciting, it's sexy. The new car looks great. I think the added attention just proves that.

Q. (No microphone.)

ROBERT WICKENS: To be honest, for a while there I kind of never thought I was going to get back in an open-wheel car. To be fully honest, I didn't really mind that idea. I was really happy where I was with Mercedes and DCM. Then circumstances changed and now I'm doing my childhood dream.

As a kid, I grew up watching IndyCar on TV. My hero growing up was Greg Moore. Then obviously I followed The PLAYERS team very closely. When I raced here last in North America in 2007, I raced with Forsythe. I had that Canadian history. I lived a tiny bit of my childhood dream.

Now to be back in North America is amazing. Driving an open-wheel car for the first time in almost seven years took a bit to get used to. Driving in a closed cockpit for so long, I forgot, like, what the wind really sounded like when you're going 200 something miles an hour. That took some getting used to, my head buffeting all over the place. The fresh air was nice. Apart from that, it took a lot of getting used to.

Q. (Question regarding the new car and getting the right setup.)

JACK HARVEY: Probably trial and error, I guess. Every driver has a particular feeling they're getting from their feet, their hands and their backside to then try and translate that to the team.

Really what you're looking at are changes that can make you feel comfortable, then changes that can make you fast. Sometimes a comfortable change, you feel better, but your lap time stays the same. I think that's honestly just working relationship between driver and engineer, engineer to driver, on-track performance, what's changing really.

I think we're both lucky that James has a good handle on last year's car this, year's car. Although there's a lot of new differences and new changes in the SPM engineering office this year, there's still a foundation of people who were there from last year, bouncing ideas off each other, three cars to test.

I know I come to the party a little bit late in testing, but already feel like we're contributing something. I think that's what's nice about this program. We went to Sebring first time with three cars and you can kind of delegate setup changes, then you come back together at the end of the day to see what was good, see what everybody else liked, what did I like, what did we dislike. All of those things kind of create a new direction or path to follow, experimenting.

Well, hopefully we'll have a good weekend and hopefully our testing has gone well and we see some results this weekend.

ROBERT WICKENS: What he said.

No, I mean, he did cover a lot of it. The big thing, like, I think what a lot of people don't understand is, like, 80 to 90 percent of the work is done before the race even gets there. It's all the work we've done in testing, it's all the simulation stuff that the engineers are running continuously every day 9 to 5, Monday to Friday, to find the optimum setup. Then you run it in practice and hope it correlates well and you have a well-balanced car.

But what makes or breaks your race weekend in any championship I've ever driven is doing your first practice with a well-balanced car. To do that you have to do everything in line, everything working properly before you even arrive.

I think time will tell how we did. Because it's such a new car, I think everyone is a little unknown to how well their simulation actually correlates into a real-life setup on the car. So far, through what we've learned in Sebring and Sonoma, we're not far off what our computers are telling us.

I think, yeah, to have a good weekend in any championship, I think Penske has been such a dominant force in IndyCar because they seem to just have four cars working on all cylinders right from the first lap of practice. Then from there, as a driver, you want to drive the same car every time because then you can fine-tune yourself. Instead of chasing how the car feels, you're just working on yourself as a driver.

I think that can really make or break the weekend.

Q. (No microphone.)

ROBERT WICKENS: James is pretty terrible. He's a terrible human being (laughter).

James and I, I'm sure a lot of you guys know now, we go pretty far back. We met when I was 12. He would have been 14, turning 15. We met as teammates in karting. He came into the karting team I was a part of. We kind of hit it off right there. Then we started a friendship, started hanging out. Now he's one of my best friends, one of my longest-lasting friends that I have.

It's crazy that we're sitting here today in St. Pete as teammates, as professional racecar drivers in IndyCar. For so long as kids, we dreamed of both making it professional. We both did, but in different routes. Now that we're back here, it just goes to show for any kid, you can't really predict the future. You kind of had your ideal plan. By no means did I have an ideal career path to make my way into IndyCar at 28 years old.

But I'm here. I'm happy. Like I said earlier, I'm living a childhood dream. It's pretty cool.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.