

IndyCar Media

Conference

Saturday March 10, 2018

Robert Wickens

Takuma Sato

Will Power

Jordan King

Matheus Leist

Ryan Hunter-Reay

Fast Six Press Conference



to see how it is here during the race.

THE MODERATOR: Takuma Sato joining us, starting fifth in tomorrow's race, driving the No. 30 Mi-jack Panasonic Honda for Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing. We spoke to you just a little bit earlier, but take us through your qualifying session and did things go according to plan? Obviously a great starting position for you tomorrow.

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, I think it was a spectacular qualifying in terms of the fans, and I thought, too, it was really tricky conditions. I think it's tricky enough to drive these cars, but having had it drizzling, especially towards the end of qualifying, it was challenging. But I think my thought was that the team did a tremendous job in the preparation for this race. We had a quite last practice session that never really got through clearly -- how can I say? Planned it, but I think the qualifying we showed good speed, and in the end to make it into the Firestone Fast Six was a little bonus, so I'm really pleased.

THE MODERATOR: Ryan Hunter-Reay starting sixth in tomorrow's race, driving the No. 28 DHL Honda for Andretti Autosport. You mentioned earlier that you were unsure if you were going to be able to find the gaps in qualifying to make sure that you were able to get the best run possible. Do you feel like you were able to get that, and did it meet your expectations?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, that unfortunately was not our issue today. Seems like a controversial topic, though. There was a lot of penalties being thrown around from what I could tell. But we just got a little bit too aggressive with the car today. There at the end, I think it was just down to the drivers figuring out, and I was quick around the rest of the track, but I just didn't get it together in Turn 1 and 2, and that's down to me.

Every time I passed start finish, they kept telling me P1, P1, P1, and then it fell from there the last two laps. But good job for these guys, and obviously to Wickens. He certainly sorted out Turn 1 and 2 out there. It was like running on ice. Somehow those runway strips were sitting so low in the car. You can't really place your car and try to get around them because they're so wide you have to get over them, and you can't see them until you're on them. It was definitely tricky out there. I'm surprised we didn't end up with any cars in the wall. Fun session, though. That'll definitely keep you on your toes.

THE MODERATOR: Joined now by Will Power, driving the No. 12 Verizon Team Penske Chevrolet, who will be starting second in tomorrow's Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg. Will, oh, so close to your eight of the last nine poles here at St. Petersburg but still starting up front on the front row for tomorrow's race. Will that help you in terms of leading throughout the race and not having to make your way up through the field but also just from what you're expecting of the race, is that up-front starting position going to be key?

WILL POWER: Yeah, there's no question. Starting up at the front is definitely better as far as getting through the first corner and that sort of thing. Obviously pole is the best position you can be in. But yeah, I mean, it will be interesting we don't know how these cars race. I know they follow well, but I don't think they draft that well. But yeah, very close.

Had a big mis-shift during my lap where I just got stuck in gear for quite a while, and then when I saw how tight it was, it was like, yeah, probably lost a tenth or so there. But yeah, fantastic job by Wickens, first time out, to get pole.

THE MODERATOR: We've been through several practice sessions, but this is the first qualifying session where we've had the 2018 car. I know we keep talking about it, but I think everyone is just so fascinated with how it's going to be working in qualifying sessions and different types of tracks. Your impressions of its first qualifying session?

WILL POWER: Yeah, it was -- the balance kind of surprised me a little bit for the first qualifying session. Obviously conditions are very tough there. But the car itself is a lot of fun to drive. You've really got to drive it and hang it out there to be quick. Definitely more spectacular for the fans, and it will be very interesting

type of race.

Q. Will, did you pretty much feel you had the pole, and was it a big shock once Wickens' number came up, because before that he had run like a 1.6?

WILL POWER: No, I was so slow at the beginning. I was wondering if it would even be -- I'd just be sixth. But as the track dried, I got better. I thought I was pretty good on the last lap, apart from I had a very like stayed in the lunar a long time because I had a really big mis-shift, which cost me quite a bit, but the rest of the lap was really good. And yeah, it was -- I mean, the track was basically dry everywhere except for Turn 1 at the end, so I kind of expected a lot of people to be up there. It's a very, very tight field. I was actually happy to be on the front row.

Q. I was wondering from all three of you what we should make of three rookies making the Fast Six in their IndyCar debuts.

WILL POWER: Yeah, just shows kind of the parity, I guess, within the series, now that everyone has got the same body kit. You don't really see anyone struggling. They're all good guys. They're all guys capable of winning races. Yeah, pretty impressive, though, all those guys up in front there, first time out. I think there's three, right? Three of them in the Fast Six is very impressive.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, I agree. These guys have been quick in testing, though, so it's not totally shocking they did a good job overall. It's funny because there's so much talent in the series, you just miss -- you have a slight misstep and everybody is there to pick up on it. But good job for those guys for sure, trying conditions and a new car on the track, it's impressive.

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, basically I agree, too. Nothing else but just shows the talent and obviously progression, equalize conditions, and tricky conditions, shall we say. It was a matter of these three rookies, really, really well done.

Q. Taking the last question to the next step, do you expect the usual suspects, the veteran guys who have done a lot of laps here, will you percolate to the front as you get into the race on Sunday, or are those young guys going to be able to stay up there barring anything strained?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: In this field I wouldn't be surprised if anyone runs up front really. That's the beautiful thing about the Verizon IndyCar Series. Actually anyone can win the race, and I have no expectations on that side of it. I don't expect to go to the front because I'm a veteran. It's going to be a very difficult race. It's going to be a very different race than what we're used to. I think we're going to be slipping and sliding around, constantly changing circumstances, and traffic is going to be very difficult. You know, even out-braking a guy is going to be a lot different than in years past. It's going to be a different

Q. For the three veterans, I'm hearing that the cars slide around a lot, and I would think that would create a certain amount of tire wear. Do you think the tires are going to last through a full fuel stint?

WILL POWER: Yeah, that's a good question. It feels like the rears would go off, actually, quite a bit. But yeah, I think we'll know more in warm-up tomorrow, although it'll be very cool, which really looks after tires. But yeah, I think there will be definitely more deg, it's just a question of how much because the cars have less downforce.

Q. Since you're the veterans, you've been here before. Let's pretend it's going to be dry tomorrow. Give me a number for cautions.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: It's so funny, you go into strategy meetings talking about how many yellows there are going to be. You look at historical figures, and you look at it, and there's no cautions the previous two years, and then there will end up being 15. So I couldn't predict it at all. Any time we've tried to do that, we've come up short. I couldn't even start to tell you. I mean, we could all surprise you tomorrow and run clean.

WILL POWER: Yeah, I think the last couple years of racing you couldn't even get close, so there wasn't any late moves. But I have a feeling with this car that tires will go off more and some cars will move forward and some will move back. Maybe there will be more yellows. Hard to say.

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, same.

Q. Do you think that one of the reasons why some of the rookies might be having some better luck is that they don't have to unlearn what they had with the old aero kit where they had so much downforce and then when you take all that off you have to get used to having less downforce on the car?

WILL POWER: I think it's easier to get in the window with this car, to be honest. So yeah, I mean, none of the setups really cross over. Maybe a little bit. Yeah, it just seems easier -- it's harder to drive, but it's easier to drive it because you're a little bit more nimble and you can get away with a slide without losing a bunch of time. Yeah, it's just the fact that everyone has got the same stuff makes it very competitive.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I think all the veterans had to dial it back a little bit from what they've been used to getting away with in brake zones on these tracks. You can go to Sebring and test all you want and be similar to there, but once you get to a temporary street circuit like this, for the past three years, knowing what we've been able to get away with in the brake zones, the rolling minimum speeds and stuff like that, it's definitely a different track and a different approach.

THE MODERATOR: We'll welcome in our two new additions to today's post-qualifying press conference. Joined by Jordan King, driving the No. 20 Ed Carpenter Racing Fuzzy's Vodka Chevrolet for the team. Jordan did set a new track record for the streets of St. Petersburg. That time is 1.0476 seconds. Jordan starting fourth in tomorrow's Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg. Setting a track record, starting fourth in the race, did you expect to adjust so quickly to the series and the car?

JORDAN KING: If you asked me that question two months ago, probably not, and more because I didn't know anything about the car other than speaking to engineers and other -- Alex Rossi, Conor Daly, people I knew.

So yeah, two months ago, no, I had no expectations, but then slowly after driving the car, I started to realize that actually it's not too dissimilar to what I've driven before, and I feel comfortable in the car. It's not like it's something where I need to learn everything again. Yes, there's a few driving techniques that are different, but we've got a driver coach that's helped with that, and the engineers have really helped with some more details of learning. But also the other thing that's helped is they've trusted me, as well. They've let me kind of be myself and go forward with it.

THE MODERATOR: Also joined by Matheus Leist, starting third in tomorrow's Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg, driving the No. 4 ABC Supply AJ Foyt Racing Chevrolet. I was listening to your post-qualifying interview, and I think you used the words it's a dream come true. Not a lot of drivers qualify third and say it's a dream come true, but I know it has to be really exciting for you to get into the Verizon IndyCar Series and have such a great result for your first qualifying session.

MATHEUS LEIST: Yeah, definitely. I was racing in England two years ago and then last year came to race in Indy Lights and had quite a great season. The cars is completely different than anything that I had driven before, and then this year I made the step to the IndyCars. Yeah, I think I was expecting to be like top 10 but definitely not top 5, top 6, and the team just did an amazing job, and very happy for the performance throughout the whole weekend already, and looking forward to the race. It's going to be my first race in IndyCar, first time doing pit stops, first time saving fuel and all this stuff, so a lot of things to learn yet, but hopefully we're going to have a great time tomorrow.

Q. Matt, you're the youngest driver in the series; you just mentioned all the firsts you're going to go through tomorrow. How do you go out there today? What's in your mindset? You've never done this before. And I guess for both of you, do you just go and attack it?

MATHEUS LEIST: Yeah, I think so. I've been doing

some preparation with the team, with Tony, so he has been helping me a lot like throughout the past three, four months, and I think I'm feeling ready for tomorrow. I've done a lot of sim stuff, as well, so for sure it's going to be tough, but you need to improve a little bit in the race trim, but yeah, hopefully it's going to be all right, and I'm excited. I just can't imagine how it's going to be tomorrow. You know, it's tough. I was expecting a top 10 today and then qualified third, so I don't have any thoughts about tomorrow, so we still need to work on it and see how it goes.

JORDAN KING: Yeah, for me, I'm trying not to have any expectations, and so far that has worked. Then again, I'm sitting here. But it's more that I've trusted my ability, so in my view, if I continue just to do that and actually trust what I've been told, trust what I can do, the rest of it will take care of itself.

Q. Jordan, you set the track record today and you made the Fast Six and you're trying not to have any expectations. After a day like today, how do you stop from having any expectations?

JORDAN KING: That's a tough question. Coming into qualifying, it was one of those, yes, I knew we were quick enough to get through, but still, I had to perform, and it being my first time, I was obviously putting more pressure on myself than anybody else. But then I just had to keep reminding myself that if I just do what I know I can, the rest of it will be fine, and that was the case even after the last Fast Six. When I got out of the car and looked at the time screen I was a bit annoyed, but we went higher up because it was so close, and I knew there was still lap time there.

Yeah, it's more just kind of taking a deep breath in and going, right, no, just don't get ahead of yourself and just keep doing lap by lap sort of thing.

Q. What do you make of the fact that three of the top four qualifiers are rookies?

JORDAN KING: Everyone keeps asking the question. You asked the previous three whether being a rookie is actually an advantage, and I think, yes, it is, but it also isn't. You see in numerous walks of life that being experienced counts for a lot more than being inexperienced, but I think the thing you've got to remember about us is, yes, we're rookies in IndyCar, so we don't have to relearn things, but we've also been racing for 12 years for myself --

MATHEUS LEIST: Yeah, 11 years.

JORDAN KING: So we have got a lot of experience in driving cars, new tires, changing conditions and that sort of thing. So we still have to learn the new car, but there's still a lot of experience in the past. So I think that also negates some of the factors that -- you look at a lot of the young drivers coming through, they are actually very experienced and well-rounded, and I know Matheus won the British F3 championship and so

did I, so it must be maybe a British F3 --

MATHEUS LEIST: Jordan was my coach one time when I was racing FIA. It was fun.

JORDAN KING: And now he's beating me.

MATHEUS LEIST: Yeah, but I think coming up from Indy Lights, it's a good step. I can't say it's easier than coming down, but it's all right for me, and all these guys have a lot of experience, so they kind of know how to adapt themselves very well.

Q. Matt, when we were out at Phoenix for the test, you may remember this, you brushed the wall four times I believe it was and just kept going out there and kept hammering at it. When you left the racetrack that night could you have pictured this happening here?

MATHEUS LEIST: Yeah, of course. I think what happened in Phoenix is that last year I won two ovals out of three in Indy Lights, and usually the high line worked quite a lot in Indy Lights, but with the IndyCar the tires are completely different, and the high side gets pretty dirty. So all the times that I tried in Phoenix, it didn't work. At least I learned some stuff from there.

Yeah, Phoenix was a good test. I think we were like top 10 pretty much every time I hit the track, so I was having confidence for here, also, whenever we tested in Sonoma, and Sebring was great testing. So yeah, I was confident coming over here to St. Pete now.

Q. Matt, you replace the very popular American driver in Conor Daly. Do you feel like that puts any extra pressure on you to perform? And you're also in the American team with AJ.

MATHEUS LEIST: No, I don't think so. I think now we have a Brazilian team in AJ Foyt, so it's not all Americans, with Tony, as well, so not much to say, I think. The guys of ABC and AJ Foyt, they want to see guys winning races and being up in the front, so that's what we are trying to do.

Q. What do you think of all the veteran names that are in this series, a lot of really great names, big drivers that have accomplished a lot. Did you think in the very first race that a rookie would go out and win the pole today, and if so, when you look at Robert's résumé, is it even kind of fair to consider him a rookie?

JORDAN KING: I think it comes back to my point. We've all been racing a long time, and I think Robert has achieved a lot more than your average person in motorsport, and he's a very talented driver, so there's no coincidence that he's come in and done a good job. Maybe his previous experiences in other cars helped him in the trickier conditions, so yeah, he has done a very good job. That said, all the big names, as well, they have done good jobs. Obviously it's 50/50 up here today, but they've all -- they'll all be good

throughout the season, and it won't be a case that they will be caught asleep.

Q. Some of the veteran drivers have commented about this new universal car that they have tried to make changes, and they didn't get the results that they expected. In other words, whatever changes they made to the car, it didn't go the way they intended. Coming in as rookies, have you had any difficulty setting up this car? It would appear that you've gotten very good results and that you're comfortable in the car, and maybe it suits your driving style, so I'm just wondering if when you've had changes that you and your engineers have gone through if you really get the results you're looking for.

MATHEUS LEIST: Yeah, so I think it's a pretty nice car to drive, actually. It's pretty fast. I had a half a day in the old car, and it was quite a big step from the Indy Lights, but this car now, it's okay steps, not that much. For me it's just like I felt better in all the turns from the Indy Lights. The car brakes very well. The power -- we have quite a lot of power, and with the new tires quite a lot of grip, as well. For me, it's a pretty nice car to drive, and I don't have any complaints.

And also, the technique from the Indy Lights to the IndyCar is pretty much the same with these aero kits now, but it was not the same with the old one, so it kind of helped me a little bit.

JORDAN KING: And I think from my point of view, I've just been honest with the feedback to the engineers. I don't have any pre conceptions on how the car should handle, but the engineers are also new to this car, as well. So I think it's as much of a challenge for them as it is for the drivers. If they can't give you a fast car, you can't drive it fast, so there's always another side to the argument. And our guys back at base, they have worked really hard to understand the new car, but we've also got new brakes, as well, so there's five or six different things that they've had to get their head around and work out what's right. Now, we've done a good job this weekend, but that's not to say the next weekend there will be different challenges on a different circuit. It is always a learning process, and over the two days testing we had preseason, we made a lot of progress, or a lot of learning, as well, just understanding how the car behaves.

Q. You had to deal with just a little bit of rain today, but if it rain more heavily tomorrow, what kind of previous success or just even experience in the rain do you both have to fall back on?

MATHEUS LEIST: I had quite a lot in England, to be honest.

JORDAN KING: I was going to say, being British, it's fine.

MATHEUS LEIST: But I raced just one time in the rain

last year in Indy Lights. It's all right, I think, I'm pretty sure for tomorrow if it rains.

JORDAN KING: Being British, I grew up driving on slicks in the rain, so hopefully there's not much of a problem tomorrow, but we'll see.

Q. Matt, even if the car is also new for Tony, does he share all the experience with you? Tell us a little bit how you work with him.

MATHEUS LEIST: Yeah, we share everything. He's a very good guy. He has been helping me a lot, not just inside the track but also outside the track. Not just him but like AJ, Larry, everyone on the team has been helping me a lot because I'm a rookie and everything is just like brand new for me. But yeah, Tony is a very special guy, and I'm grateful to be working with him as a teammate. I grew up watching him racing, him and Helio, and now I'm his teammate, so this is a dream come true for me.

Q. Do you guys feel like you at least maybe surprised the veteran drivers today and perhaps even made them a bit nervous about how quickly you've come in and become factors here?

JORDAN KING: I hope so.

ROBERT WICKENS: In my honest opinion, I think that really helped the rookies because at least in my scenario, I've only ever used the red tire once and that was yesterday afternoon and I did a terrible job at it because I didn't know what to expect, and then in this really because it was such mixed conditions, in my opinion it kind of leveled the playing field for us, at least for me. I felt good grip, and who knows, maybe it was just a good session. But it's -- I mean, maybe they're surprised, maybe they're not. I think you should ask those guys. But I think my goal was to make it to the Fast Six today, and I did. I don't know about these guys. But I mean, I kind of achieved everything that I wanted to.

JORDAN KING: I think Robert covered everything.

THE MODERATOR: We welcome in our pole sitter, Robert Wickens, driving the No. 6 Lucas Oil SPM Honda for Schmidt Peterson Motorsports, starting first in tomorrow's Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg from the pole position. I was looking at the time sheets we had in here, and I was like, wow, I must have missed that Robert was so high up in practice, and honestly, only 12th overall in practice, so I guess my question is where did you find that speed that vaulted you to pole position?

ROBERT WICKENS: I think it's like what I just touched on earlier. I honestly, like full disclosure, I didn't feel that good actually in practice today. We kind of made some changes overnight that didn't do what we hoped it would, so we kind of had to go back to our car from Friday. And Friday I was really happy with the car. I

was in the top 10 both sessions, sixth and seventh in the two respectively, and I thought I left a lot of room for me to go quicker, and especially optimizing the red tire.

In pre-practice, too, the first time ever using the red, I actually missed the peak of the tire, so for people who don't know what that is, I basically just didn't do the best lap when the grip was the best. But then today in really, I learned from my mistakes and was able to put a good lap in Q1, which got me into the fast 12, and from there it was just chaos, half wet, half dry. I like those conditions a lot. As a kid my whole career I've seemed to excel in that type of session, and thankfully the team and everyone on the Lucas Oil car did a great job getting us on track at the right time with the right tire, with the whole procedure. Hats off to them. I wouldn't be here without them from the work that we've done over the winter to get me ready for IndyCar from having a great teammate beside me. There's a lot of areas that led up to this, and thankfully I'm starting from pole position way better than I ever expected my first IndyCar race to be, but I'm definitely not complaining with it.

THE MODERATOR: Even backing up to before you got to this weekend, before you finally got on track in the car here on the streets of St. Pete, did you have expectations about something like this, especially so quickly off the back, would be possible?

ROBERT WICKENS: It's tough because I've been telling everyone all along that it's something that I've done in the past, but I just never have expectations because in my experience, it kind of sets yourself up for failure. So I was just going to go into this weekend and enjoy it and kind of see where it takes me and try to maximize whatever I can. But to answer your question, did I expect to qualify pole in my first IndyCar race, no. But I would have been disappointed if I was outside of the top 10 just because that's the kind of person I am. I'm a perfectionist, I am kind of OCD when it comes down to my career and everything on that front. I was working hard over the winter, Monday to Friday, watching IndyCar races online on YouTube, anywhere I could find them, just trying to learn. Like I think I watched like eight years of St. Pete in like two days, just trying to figure out anything, see if I could find trends or lines or tricks or whatever the case is.

But it's something that I always do on every single track, so it's not -- even if I wasn't a rookie, I would still probably watch races from previous years. It wasn't like something new.

Q. I believe it was Jordan King that said your career driving different cars under these conditions was probably a big help; do you feel that way, because you've driven in all kinds of conditions in your DTM career?

ROBERT WICKENS: Yeah, all but snow, basically. You

know, I mean, I've joked around about this in the past, but I find it a little bit weird to call myself a rookie at 28 years old. But nevertheless, I mean, sure, I'm equally IndyCar experience to anyone else who's classified as a rookie, so I guess that's why they do it. But I always kind of like to consider myself -- I've always been comparing myself to the normal guys, not to the rookies. Not once have I asked where's the fastest rookie. It's just something that doesn't interest me at all, because I'm striving to be better than that. I'm not here to win a rookie championship, I'm here to challenge and do the best job I can in the overall championship.

Sure, my experience must have helped, but my entire career I've always seemed to perform well in these type of conditions, the mixed, wet, dry, when there's only one minute left and you get one more lap and the track is two seconds faster than the lap before, typically those have kind of been where I've seemed to excel.

Q. You just set up my question, with a minute to go, and you know that the track is faster. Tell me what you're thinking through that lap, and at what point you realized that you probably had the pole.

ROBERT WICKENS: I had no idea, to be honest. The team informed me what the quickest lap was while I was halfway around my last lap, but I didn't know where I was in the line of cars, if I was the last guy to cross or the first guy to cross. In those kind of conditions, all I did was from the previous lap I knew where I had some low-hanging fruit to find lap time. In those conditions you never want to go 10 tenths and risk spinning or whatever the case is because then you either cause a red, lose a lap, hit the wall, there's a lot of variables. But there's areas where I knew I had room. There was some cautious areas, like for me it was the entire first part of the lap from Turn 1 to Turn 3, every lap I wasn't sure I was going to come out the other side, so I was very cautious there lest of the lap very Q2 or Q1, so I was able to push like normal for the rest of the lap and try and actually claw back some lap time that I might have lost. All I can say is luckily the lap was good enough for pole, but I was very happy with the lap that I did, but I didn't know it was going to be good enough for pole, I was just hoping to kind of be into the top 5 and not the last of the Fast Six people because I think I was there for a decent part of the session trying to find some clear track --

Q. The story for all the rookies is very, very different. We can't really draw any similarities between you, Renee, Jordan was just in here, so it's hard to align that sort of thing. We saw Alonso, whose story was very different in his own right, come and do quite well at the 500, and then you see somebody like Lewis Hamilton make a comment and sort of devalue the series. The rookies are doing great; did you really feel like you earned it? Is the series devalued in that way, or -- all the rookies are coming in here and really

working hard to earn it.

ROBERT WICKENS: I mean, I think the 2018 package is one less disadvantage for a rookie; know what I mean? I can't speak for the other rookies, but for me I've never been to St. Pete, something where Will Power has had, what, seven poles here. So I mean, how can you kind of compare that. But on the same token, temporary circuits change from year to year, new bumps appear, it's all different from year to year, so your lines will change from time to time. The big thing for me, do I feel I earned it, absolutely. You have to do the best job in the conditions that you have.

But I don't think in any way does rookies performing discredit the level of IndyCar. I mean, I think there's a good crop of rookie drivers here. Matheus Leist has been in the top 5 in every single session this weekend. It doesn't mean everyone else sucks, it just means he's doing a fantastic job. And then if you look at Jordan King and his group in Q1, he was P1 over all, beating Rossi, beating everyone. Just the fact that I made it through that group, I was happy, and then I saw he was top of the charts, and I was like, good for him.

So no, I think this practice or this qually doesn't really relate, I think, to what might happen throughout the rest of the season because it was such a mixed session with people not getting laps in, spinning from the dampness on the track or whatever to getting caught out. In those type of conditions it's so easy to just do one wrong thing and you're knocked out. I don't know why there was three rookies in the Fast Six, but I definitely by no means do I feel like rookies succeeding right now in St. Pete does anything to discredit the level of the series. I think the fact that there are so many rookies, if anything, should promote the series and the fact that it's drawing interest. Alonso loved it. I'm here because I love IndyCar, and I'm sure the two people that were beside me will say the same thing. The series is on the rise, and anyone who tries it put it down, it's because they're probably worried about us succeeding more than them.

Q. Robert, you mentioned that you've studied the previous St. Pete races; do you have any particular strategy for the start tomorrow?

ROBERT WICKENS: Hopefully don't lose the lead, which has happened a time or two from my research. But no, to be honest, I need to polish up on the rules and see how to start an IndyCar race, first off. You know, I kind of was expecting just to go with the flow and accelerate when everyone else did, and now I'm controlling the pace of the race, so I've got to make sure I know where the restart line is and get polished up on that. Obviously starting from pole you're in the best situation you can be in, and I'm just going to go out and enjoy it like I have every single session this weekend. I have had no expectations going into this. I'm just trying to enjoy myself and enjoy kind of my first IndyCar experience, and a happy driver is normally a fast driver, so I'm always just trying to take everything

on the chin, learn from mistakes, learn from how a session goes. All I've been doing this weekend is learning, learning, learning, and once we got to qually, I felt I didn't have to learn anymore and I was ready to go put a time in.

Also with the mixed conditions, you can say whatever, but I was very confident ahead of any of those sessions once the rain started coming down, and the most important thing is just to stay calm.

Q. I know race day is tomorrow, but how are you going to celebrate this tonight, or can you?

ROBERT WICKENS: I might have a good night's sleep because there's a very early warm-up tomorrow. Tomorrow is actually the earliest day of the whole weekend, which -- I like my sleep. I've been enjoying the later starts than what I've been used to in the past. Normally in DTM you had to be at the track at 6:30 in the morning because of meetings after meetings, and I've been enjoying my walk to the circuit at 9:30 in the morning with my coffee and everything is relaxed. No, I mean, a pole is fantastic. Sure, it's nice. But the real work is tomorrow, so I'm not going to be celebrating anything tonight.