

IndyCar Media Conference

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Robert Wickens

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joined by the driver of the No. 6 Lucas Oil SPM Honda, Robert Wickens. Obviously what was looking to be your first win in your first race in IndyCar, unfortunately torn away on the last couple of laps there. Can you take us through what happened at the end of that race?

ROBERT WICKENS: Yeah, I mean, there was a few things. First off, I've got to thank the team because we had a pretty good day. Obviously it didn't end well at all, but yeah, I mean, on the restart, I mean, I don't know what the series was doing really, but it never turned the lights off the pace car, and they did an entirely different pace car procedure than what they had done every other yellow flag procedure the whole day. As the leader I didn't have my opportunity to control the pace because if we had just followed the pace car the whole time, then he just came into the pit. So I want some explanation on that to be honest with you.

But the restart was the restart. I felt like I wasn't able to get the jump that I needed to get a gap. We both were on the Push-to-Pass. He obviously got a slipstream.

I defended a little bit, but then I realized if I went any further, it would have been a blocking, so I opened up, let him take the inside and just broke as late as possible and gave him enough space on the inside. And from my point of view, he broke too late, the track was too dirty off line. It's been terrible there all day. It's been a battle all weekend. Even in warm-up it was really hard whenever you tried it.

But my opinion, he just went too deep, locked the rears and slid into me. There's really no other explanation to it. The only pity is he carried on to a podium, and I ended up in the fence.

Q. When do you think you can start processing the good things that happened today?

ROBERT WICKENS: I mean, I want to make it very clear, I'm very proud of the job that I did today. I mean, there's no -- for sure I'm disappointed, but in your rookie race -- also, honestly, that's why I didn't really fight him that hard. I gave him more than enough space on the inside because even if I finished P2, I would have been ecstatic. It's just a shame. The day went so well, the whole weekend went so well, getting a surprise pole, and to be honest, even myself, I'm like,

can I convert this into a full 110-lap race, and I think we've proved to a lot of people that we could, and the team is capable of it. I just felt like I was in a good zone today. We controlled the pace. I could build a gap when I needed to build a gap. I was hitting the fuel targets we had set and still building gaps. It was just a good day until the 109th lap.

Q. At the start of the race, it looked like Will tried to make a dive bomb pass on you, and it didn't work, but he was a little grumpy about that. What was your view of the start involving Will?

ROBERT WICKENS: I was surprised he tried to keep his nose in on Turn 2. I gave him enough space for him to do what he wanted, but I don't know where he was going because he definitely wouldn't have been on the outside of me for Turn 3. And I saw in my mirror that I think -- did he spin? Yeah. But yeah, I saw that he had spun. In my mirrors I saw him at least having a big oversteer. But in my mind I saw him there, I gave him enough space, and it just didn't work out for him.

Q. I asked Graham a few minutes ago about the shadow, and he mentioned that the front straight was very slippery, especially on the paint. You mentioned the whole day went very well. That's a huge chunk of laps you're running up front and trying not to mess up. How worried were you about messing up? How tight were you, or was it just complete comfort?

ROBERT WICKENS: You know, the restarts are always nerve-racking, right, but as soon as we got through a restart and I was able to build up a healthy gap, I was kind of back into my groove, you know. But yeah, I felt very comfortable today. I mean, I'd say more than I even expected I would have, given I've never done a race with three pit stops before.

On those restarts, I was so slippery on the paint, on braking almost everywhere, but that kind of carried through the whole weekend, so it wasn't really a big surprise, but it actually online got pretty grippy by the end in Turn 1, but on the contrary it made offline even worse. Passing was always tough. You never knew how hard to go or how late to do it. But I think maybe Alex found the limit because as far as I'm aware, he's not getting a penalty for what he did, which is kind of interesting to me.

Q. Robby, how clear were you on the restart rules and kind of the Push-to-Pass rules in terms of when you go get on it, when you could go with it,

being one or so laps to go?

ROBERT WICKENS: Very. The team kept me in the loop. They told me on that restart that you can use Push-to-Pass immediately, so I was ready. The only thing that I don't understand is that the pace car didn't turn off his lights and didn't let me control the field. I mean, from my point of view, I caught like -- I got put in a pretty bad spot because if you look at all the restarts prior, I didn't even have to use -- you can't use it, but I would build enough gap that it wasn't a problem.

Q. When you were in Atlantics in 2007, there was this guy in Champ Car winning a lot of races named Sebastien Bourdais. Now in IndyCar he ends up winning the race. 11 years later, does it almost kind of seem like he's been around forever to you?

ROBERT WICKENS: I don't know how to answer that one, but I found out yesterday that he got pole in his debut here in St. Pete in 2003, so I was quite a bit younger, but by no means -- hats off to him. He's still got it at that age. I hope I can do the same.

The team did a great job keeping me in the loop on where everyone was, and because we had different strategies I had to pass Seb on track twice throughout the race. I mean, the whole race was a bit confusing because of different strategies, and I've never experienced a race with that many different options with strategy that you could do. Like I passed Graham at some point in the race, but like our strategies were so different that it was like -- I wasn't sure if I lapped him or I passed him or he was kind of passing cars and moving on to the next guy and moving on to the next guy. All it felt like I could do was just race someone on the same strategy as me, which was Alex, and I felt like we did a good job keeping him at bay all day.

THE MODERATOR: Robert, thank you so much. Appreciate your time.