

IndyCar Media Conference

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Sebastien Bourdais Dale Coyne

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We welcome in Sebastien Bourdais, driving the No. 18 SealMaster Honda for Dale Coyne Racing with Vasser-Sullivan. What a story line, from one major story line in the race to the next, a back-to-back win for you. It has to feel just so good to have the year that you had last year and open up the 2018 season with what happened today.

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Yeah, I hope history is going to repeat itself until Indy, to be honest, but yeah, it's kind of interesting. We ended up qualifying poorly. We didn't get a good lap. I didn't get a good lap yesterday with one or another circumstance. With the one lap after the red flag we were comfortably in, in Q2 prior to the red flag, and it felt like we just missed a good opportunity to start at the front, but it definitely seems like this race is disjointed enough that it doesn't really seem to matter where you start, you're still going to have opportunities to make it happen, and we sure did today.

I tried to avoid the punches and to make sure I wasn't going to hit anyone, and it worked out, until I felt a little tap in the back and then, sure enough, I got an alarm on the dash and I got a right rear tire going down on the opening lap, like here we go again.

And so you come in the pits, change tires, it was a brand new set of red tires, as well. I'm like, this is awesome. So now you are at the back, and obviously the back isn't really -- it's not the back so much anymore because by the time I came back around there are four or five other cars that were stuffed in the wall sideways, backwards, in tires, tangled, whatever. So it was a bit of a crazy start, and then it just kept getting crazier and crazier, restart after restart, couldn't settle into any kind of rhythm, and with all those yellows, I knew this was going to turn into a two-stopper from there.

So the team played it perfect. We ended up with a bunch of other guys on the same strategy, and some of the guys offset by some but not drastically so. But the great thing I knew for us was that obviously we were not going to be exposed to yellows for the rest of the race because we just decided to shift everything forward. We didn't dumpster dive or anything, we just did it on the early side of the windows, so we were just going to run long stints until the end of the race. We

ran quick, clean, and we got ourselves in third.

Traffic was -- obviously Zach was defending his teammate's interest, which was arguably okay, whatever, but do not ask for favors down the road because they won't get them. And then Rene got in the way, as well, on the outlet sequence. I had too much understeer in the car, and as soon as we got in traffic, I just really couldn't produce any lap time, so that really compounded the effect, and I was really happy with third. As soon as those two guys got around the pit sequence, I thought, we'll just keep anything that's coming our way. The podium is a great start to the season, and then I finally got around Hinch, and then almost instantly it goes yellow, I'm like, here we are, that's going to be a crap shoot. It's just going to be terrible. Like people are just going to feel like a million dollars again, and they all feel like they're going to win it and we're going to end up with a pile of cars on top of each other in Turn 1, and I wasn't completely wrong. I wasn't completely right but I wasn't completely wrong, either.

Again, gapped myself to the guy in front. I just tried to get a good exit of the hairpin, and all I cared about was to keep that podium. And then I saw Robert and Alex just going at it. They both wanted it really bad, and I have no idea whose fault it is or if it's just a racing thing. But when I saw both of them starting to drift going toward the apex and getting themselves in the marbles, I thought, oh, boy, and then sure enough, they both skated off, one spun, the other one recovered, and I was through, and then it went yellow, and that was that. Just a crazy day. I couldn't dream of that ending.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously just what does this track mean to you and this city mean to you? I know it has embraced you. I know that you have certainly embraced it as your home and what it means to win on your home track.

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: It's awesome, and the response of the community, the support, the pulling together from everybody, the sponsors for the Kart4Kids race, the IndyCar community, drivers, sponsors, partners, people in general, we started off the week in a great way with 130, 35, whatever, who are going to be left at the end, for children, and it was just a great start to the week.

Yeah, they embraced me, and this morning more stuff

coming with the city and trying to promote and grow the event with Kim and Kevin, and everybody is doing a great job. They're putting a lot of heart in it, and I'm just trying to help, and obviously when you win in front of friends and family, it's very special. I couldn't really be any happier about that.

And also for us. It was SealMaster's annual awards ceremony, and franchisees, convention, everything, so they were in clear water on the beach, and we were with them on Friday night, and they had every single one of them on-site today. What a way to start the relationship with SealMaster. That was quite awesome.

Q. How do you look back on the last two, three years of your career? You won a couple times now. How many trophies do you have around here?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Yeah, the shelving is starting to be a little crowded in St. Pete. When we came back in '12, we didn't bring anything. We just came with all the luggage, I went to Ikea, and that was that. There was nothing in the house, and the collection is getting bigger quite nicely. Not the place it was when I was in the Champ Car days, but there's some Daytona trophies and Sebring trophies and Road Atlantas and IndyCar trophies. Yeah, we've managed to win one pretty much every year since '14. I'm pretty happy to keep that streak alive.

Q. It's always fun to read about Le Mans and how you drove on those roads going to school as a kid. It's a little bit of a different story here, but these are your two home cities. So winning it back-to-back, it's been a comeback story after the Indy debacle last year, so how do you look back on the last few years?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Yeah, I was very emotional in the car on the in lap. It's tough to put into words, that's for sure. You always get -- I think you get the questions from people, is he going to be the same, is he going to come back, is he this, is he this. I really try not to leave any room for uncertainty as far as what I was going to do and how forward I was going to go by coming back to Gateway last year, two and a half months later. It's been bumpy, it's been tough, it's been everything in between, but I've gotten a lot of support from the CEO to my family to everybody on board. It's been pretty hard for myself I think in some ways, obviously, but more for people around me and certain people, for my wife. It's quite an achievement to be able to restart the season and settle the matter right away and get back on the horse and win another one.

Q. A little bit of a follow-up off the Indy question, but there were some people who wondered whether -- what you'd be like when you came back. Did you ever question yourself at all while you were recovering that it may be a lot harder to get back to Victory Lane than in the first race of the

following season?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: I mean, for me it was very straightforward. Once I knew what the injuries were and there were not going to be any lasting events, then it was like fast forward and get back on the horse and get back to what I do, get back to my life. I don't know my life any other way. I'm 39, and I'm aging, and everybody is starting to make me feel old, especially those kids when they start to be on pole at whatever, 20, like I was when I first came. At the end of the day, this is my life. This is what I want to be doing, and as long as I'm competitive, this is what I'll be doing. It's just a great feeling to be able to, like I said, restart that way and make a statement really, because it was obviously not a given, and that new aero kit was -- everything was up in the air. Nobody really knew how it was going to shake out, who was going to have what, and we were competitive. We didn't have the fastest car, but we were in the mix, so just a great way to get the season going again.

Q. The other thing is Dale doubled down on your team again this year and brought in Jimmy Vasser, your old buddy from the Champ Car days and also Sully. How special is that to not only get Dale another victory but first race for Sully and Vasser?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Well, obviously to get Sully and Jimmy over with us and Dale and making them a part of this was a big commitment from Dale. It's been his baby for many, many years, and for him to trust these guys in the way he did and to bring them on board and bring the commercial and the marketing side, which we're probably not as a group the way we -- because it's just us and it's Dale, and that's the way we function. And now they're definitely bringing something else to the table, and when you combine forces, you're only stronger.

Like I said, the big story line is that we bring the new sponsor with SealMaster, and they're all here this weekend, and kind of bringing me back to the McDonald's days; first time that I had McDonald's on the car, I ended up winning in Cleveland, and it's just kind of paved the road for the next four years. We'll have some kind of story line.

THE MODERATOR: We welcome in Dale Coyne. This gentleman brought you a win here last year, bringing you a back-to-back win. How great is it to have him back in your health full-time, healthy, and back to his winning ways?

DALE COYNE: Well, Sebastien said the mayor is going to name a street after him now because he's won two in a row. Hopefully it's his home street. No, we're very excited about it. Did you say you were 39? You told me 34.

No, he's doing a great job. What can you say? We're very pleased he came back with us several years ago after his European adventure, and came back again

last year. You know, we worked well together.

Today's race was strange. We cut a tire early, and the race started fresh after that, the two pit stops early and the first two yellows there, but then he was in the back of the pack, but then it became a strategy race, and then same as last year, we helped him with the strategy to get to the front, but then he takes care of it from there. We were lucky this year. Last year I think we had a better car than we did this year. Pagnaud last year was pretty special. This year we had some luck, obviously, at the end, otherwise we would have been third. But that's the way it works in racing.

No, very happy with his abilities and the way everybody works together, Craig and the team and him and having Vasser and Sullivan back this year has been really nice. Good they bring something to the team that I don't do, so that's very helpful.

Q. Sebastien, you mentioned the stints being pretty long after your early stops. Is it easier or harder to manage the fuel and the tires with the new car?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: No, I think it's always a little harder on the tires when you have less downforce. You slide a bit more, so there was more degradation, and I don't think -- like Dale said, I don't think the car was as well balanced as we had it last year. The car was pretty well balanced last year. So we're still searching. We're not quite where I want the car to be. But it's a work in progress. It's kind of me and the boys and trying to figure it out with three days.

DALE COYNE: We had an eighth-place car today. His consistency makes that a fourth-place car, and luck made it a winning car.

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: There you go. I didn't know where I was going to shake out, but I guess you have the full story right there.

Q. Dale, what do you think it says about your team that you have now won this race two in a row at a place where Penske had dominated?

DALE COYNE: It's great. I mean, I think -- it was interesting this year with the universal aero kits that kind of leveled the playing field on one aspect. There's still the engine aspect, there's still Penske's shock development program is pretty good. I think the Honda engine really proved really strong today and overcame some of those things that Penske has that the others don't. The rookies here, I think we're all surprised how well all the rookies did. So it's going to be -- I think it's going to be a pretty interesting year. I think it's going to be a tight field. Qualifying is going to be how you hit the sweet spot on your tires and the track and the traffic, all at the same moment. You've got one minute to get that right, so I think there's going to be a lot of things left to chance this year. I think that's going to make for a lot of mixed-up fields and really tight grids everywhere.

Q. When you look at the start of the race and then along like 38 some odd laps in, how much did that long stint going off strategy allow to you propel yourselves and Rahal and a few others to the front?

DALE COYNE: We knew what we were going to do. Like I say, I think the race -- we had a strategy even before the race started. That all changed. The cut tire changed it --

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Yeah, we were going to stop on lap 17. That didn't quite work out.

DALE COYNE: No, 17 came and went. But that's the way races are. You can't -- you write a strategy, and you'll change it just based on the flow of the race. You know, here, you saw a lot of yellows and there's not as much downforce in these cars, so there's not as much grip in Turn 1, so Turn 1 becomes more of a skating rink, so yellows breed yellows, and so the strategy kind of evolved. And obviously when you get a cut tire and you go to the back of the field, then it was kind of like last year's strategy, okay, we're in the back of the field, now we've really got to do something different to get ourselves to the front, and it worked out perfectly.

Q. You've been around the sport a little while; give me some perspective on this as an opening weekend, not just because you won but for IndyCar in general. Seemed like a decent crowd, you've got sponsors on your cars, et cetera. How is IndyCar doing?

DALE COYNE: I think they're doing great. You look at the week leading up to the Phoenix open test, and there was a lot of sponsor announcements. Leading up to here there was a lot of sponsor announcements. I don't know what the gate was today, but it looked like there was more people here than ever before. I know I talked to Kevin and Kim, and they were both very happy with -- the suites I think were sold out. I think all in all, it's better. We're rising. Most series are flat or falling. I think NASCAR maybe is coming from a higher level, but I think we've got momentum on the uptick. I think the new television package will be better than what we have now, and I think that's just all good momentum, and there's a lot of interest in the sport. Most of the cars now have a sponsor on them. Last year it was mostly just the team name on the car. I think the sport is doing much, much better.

Q. Sebastien, you said that the lap in was very emotional. What were those emotions for you?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Yeah, I mean, it's just -- it's the first one, obviously, since the crash. Like I said, it's a lot of things that you have to overcome, the mental, the kinks, the physical of the speed, and just getting back in the game and executing. Yeah, it was just --

Q. You mentioned that there were people questioning whether you'd be able to do this again.

Did you yourself ever doubt that you'd be able to get back?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Not so much, no. The day I got back in the car at mid-Ohio, I think I was pretty much right on par straight away, and at that point I definitely was not 100 percent physically. I knew the feeling that everything was still there, and I was going to be fine. It was just going to be a bit of time to really get completely back physically, but now I am. It's kind of part of my history, part of my story. But yeah, it's behind me.

DALE COYNE: We knew the day after the accident, when we saw him in the hospital the day after the accident, after his surgery, and we knew then, this hasn't fazed him. He's coming back.

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Yeah, I mean, when the doc came and ruled me out for the season, I'm like, let's talk a little bit about timing.

DALE COYNE: He wanted to do Le Mans in June.

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: No, but, I mean, that's what I said. If you take the same approach as the riders do in motorcycles, I would have raced that weekend. It's just a matter of how do you want to expose yourself in the long run because the injury obviously physically was never going to be a big deal. You would have dropped me in the car, I could have driven it. Now, for sure if I had any kind of crash, that would have really been bad. But it's all things -- and people will say, well, you're a badass and everything. No, I just listened to the doctor. But things healed decently, the time frame was right, and when I was cleared, I wasn't going to stay home. I wasn't going to watch Esteban in my car. It just was not the way it was going to run. That's just the way I am, and I'm glad we did it this way.

Q. Dale, going back to Texas, you had the crashes at Indy, then we get to Texas, and quite literally I saw parts of your car in the trash can, that literally were thrown away. You had a rough season from a standpoint of having to fix a lot of things, but does a day like today redeem that, and is this why you do it?

DALE COYNE: Yeah, of course it's why you do it. We had a crash, was it last year, I think we figured we spent about \$800,000 in crash damage, and in the end we spent over 3 million in crash damage, so that's a pretty big hit. Texas, Indy was bad, obviously, Texas was bad. Actually the crash at Phoenix broke everything on the car. It didn't look bad, but it broke everything on the car. So financially it wasn't what we had hoped for last year, but we always come back. I remember the year with Robby Buell and Ross Bentley, and we crashed everything at Indy, and then we showed up at Milwaukee with two cars. Everybody thought we were out of business. But we're fighters, we're not going out of business, we're going to be here for a long time.

Q. Speaking of a long time, it seems like you and Sebastien have formed a very good bond in rebuilding your team, bringing your team to a point where you can take on anybody and beat them now. Do you look down the road when he decides to stop racing and maybe make him a part of your team as a team owner?

DALE COYNE: Maybe. I haven't thought of that, but that's a good idea because he's a good team player. I think anybody who comes on our team has a chance to be a teammate alongside of him, whether it was James Jakes or now look at Ed Jones last year. I think he learned a lot. Ed proved himself, and he got the dream rookie year driver thing. Everybody wants to drive for Penske or Ganassi, and he got that. We're proud of that. We're proud of what we did with Paul Tracy when we ran him for only one race. But I think Zach was got that opportunity this year to learn a lot from Sebastien, and that's strong. I mean, Sebastien is a racer. He wants to race. So when he physically can't race or when it's time to hang it up, I think he'll still be a racer. I see him in the sport long past his driving days.

Q. How much this weekend was traffic a factor?

DALE COYNE: Well, we all get paranoid in traffic, because it's so close. That particular one, Rahal was coming at about four tenths a lap and we were blocked, so he was five seconds back and getting closer and closer. They were a lap down, so we went over and talked to them about letting them by. We tell the officials, we usually put up a blue flag for a guy if he's a lap down. If he's not a lap down, you've got to earn your way by the guy, but he was a lap down, so they let him by, and it was all good. But everybody does that. We all do that for each other. Sebastien will be a lap down some days, and someone will need help, and we help each other out. That's what we do.