

# IndyCar Media Conference

Thursday May 10, 2018

## James Hinchcliffe

## Robert Wickens

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Let's start with Robert. First time to IndyCar month of May. You've been here at the facility before, you've raced here in another formula, but let's start with your excitement of being here in an IndyCar program.

ROBERT WICKENS: Yeah, I'm excited. Honestly, I don't even know what to expect. That's the big thing. We're here today for the Indy GP. Sun is shining, it's a great day. No, honestly, though, full disclosure, I don't really know. I've never been to a 500 as a guest. I think this whole event is just -- James always told me that the whole month of May will go by and then you'll be on your way to Detroit and think, what the hell just happened.

I'm just trying to kind of keep my head above water and get through each obligation that I have throughout the whole day, but more importantly, we need to do a good job here this weekend. I think it's very easy to get excited about the 500 and almost forget that we have the Indy GP starting now.

Just as many points up for offer here as there has been at any other race this season, and I think Schmidt Peterson Motorsports have done our research from the test here, and hopefully we can hit the ground running.

THE MODERATOR: James, is it difficult to keep in mind that you get to run the GP here first? Is it easy to start looking ahead?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, it really is, and especially given the fact that we were on track on the oval last week. That test was supposed to be three, four weeks ago, whatever it was. So I remember we were sitting in the trailer on Wednesday after the day was done and kind of looking around at everybody thinking, oh, shoot, we're not back here tomorrow doing the same thing. There's still a GP to run.

It is a little bit challenging, and all the engineers, all the mechanics, everybody, we put a lot of effort and a lot of heart into the 500, but at the same point, even though we're already here, we still have, like Robby said, a race that pays just as many points, and we've got to go try and do the best we can.

It's also a great way to kick-start your 500 campaign. If

you have a good GP, it keeps the team motivated, keeps the morale up and gives you a bunch of confidence heading into the 500.

THE MODERATOR: You haven't had a lot of great GPs here. You have one podium finish. Has this been a place --

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Well, I should have been on the podium the year I got knocked unconscious.

ROBERT WICKENS: Maybe you were, you just don't remember it.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: No, I remember very clearly that I wasn't on the podium. I don't remember exactly why. But yeah, the last couple years -- well, I guess last year and 2015 we kind of struggled. I've kind of been going off -- even-numbered years have actually been okay for us here, so it's 2018, right?

ROBERT WICKENS: So you're saying there's a chance.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: It is 2018, right? So I'm saying there's a chance.

**Q. James, you haven't done the wind screen test yet, but from the debris that hit you here in the first GP, with that device you probably would have just kept on going?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I would have got that podium, dammit.

**Q. But just what that innovation can mean to the series?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: No, it's huge, and I give IndyCar a lot of credit. There's another series that runs elsewhere in the world that has a lot more money and resources than we do that have landed on a ridiculous solution in my mind. I mean, it's -- I take that back. It's a much less effective and efficient solution than I think we have, so I give our team over here a lot of credit. I can't wait for it to be implemented. I think it's going to be awesome.

I've talked to Scott a lot and talked to Josef about when they ran it. There's obviously still little challenges that arise from adding something as majorly different to the cars as that, but if we solve the big problem, I think we'll have no problems getting around the little issues that come from that, and I look forward to getting it on a

race car.

**Q. What was the debris piece?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: It was a front wing upper flap.

**Q. I know you guys tested here a few weeks ago, but the conditions were drastically different. Does a test like that help you or are you worried you might go astray on setup choice?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Well, we had a pretty bad setup that day, so maybe we come back with the same and it's better in these conditions, question mark? No, it is. A lot of racetracks are very temperamental when it comes to environmental conditions, and this one's no different. Part of our job and part of the engineer's job is being able to kind of pull out what things you can relate to a very different temperature track and which ones you can't.

Our guys have done a great job all year of really learning and coming back better than we were at places we've tested. We really hope to keep that trend up, because like I said, it was a bit of a struggling test for us, but we will see. Fingers crossed.

**Q. Robert, with all your engagement in previous years, is there any racetrack on the DTM calendar you can compare with this road course configuration?**

ROBERT WICKENS: Technically, Lausitzring is something similar. Obviously not on the same scale as this, but you use a part of the oval and then the road course on the inside. There's some small similarities there, but the track itself is obviously very different.

But yeah, this is going to be a new one for me. I haven't raced here since 2006. Luckily I won, so that was nice. But yeah, a long time, the track has changed since then a bit. They changed a couple of complexes and some curbing. No, I'm just looking forward to it. Like I said earlier, it's not every day you get to drive a race car around Indianapolis in any direction, so I'm really looking forward to this weekend.

**Q. James, Robert and you representing Canada in IndyCar racing, is there any realistic chances we see more races in Canada in the future?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I think there's always a chance, certainly. The Canadian fans are huge motorsports fans. There's been IndyCar races at I think four different venues in the country at various times, and we would love to get one back. Obviously there's been rumors and talk of a street race in Calgary, where our team owner Ric Peterson is from. We'd love to see that happen. We'd love to go to Montreal. I'd love to see that race back on the calendar. If we got three races, if we got Calgary, Toronto and Montreal, it's kind of a little mini-Canadian tour I think on the championship. That would be tremendous.

But I think the appeal is there. I think having another Canadian running up front in the series helps elevate the interest back home, as well, and hopefully makes some of those conversations a little easier and more likely that we can pull it off.

ROBERT WICKENS: I don't see why we can't do Vancouver anymore.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I know. They built a building in the middle of the racetrack.

ROBERT WICKENS: We should do the Saskatoon, the Saskatoon GP.

**Q. As far as the compressed schedule is concerned, will you guys start off on very different setups and work towards a common goal tomorrow morning?**

ROBERT WICKENS: I think all season we haven't really started that far away on the base, and then obviously we have certain test items that we need to check off throughout the session, so we'll kind of go our different way, regroup between sessions, go again, and we always have tiny little kind of character things that I seem to like a little more than James or vice versa, kind of like some fine-tuning stuff. At Schmidt Peterson Motorsports we're pretty similar for the most part with car setup. I mean, in what race was it, Long Beach, I think I literally before qualifying just took his entire car. It worked. Luckily we like the same things, so good to have it in the team.

**Q. At street courses you have track walks. Have you done anything similar to that here to try to see the nuances of the course?**

ROBERT WICKENS: I walked the track here when we tested here a month or so ago in the freezing cold. But yeah, I mean, I actually didn't look at the schedule and I heard race cars when I was pulling in, and I thought, oh, well, I guess I'm not walking it again. But it hasn't changed.

But it's no surprise to me. I mean, I think there's been a few tracks already this year like Barber, for example, there's no track walking on Thursday because of testing from other categories. I think it just could be another thing I need to get used to.

**Q. Information gives drivers and teams competitive edges. You've got a road course and an oval here at the same venue. What do you learn from the GP that'll be transferable to the oval and maybe vice versa?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Absolutely nothing.

ROBERT WICKENS: Pit stops.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, even still, you're coming from different directions and that can throw guys off. No, honestly, the challenges from both a driving

perspective and an engineering perspective are so completely different from one type of racetrack to the other when you're thinking superspeedway to a road course that there really is very little that transfers, no more than something from Barber would transfer. Just because it's in the same building doesn't necessarily mean that there's more a correlation between one or the other. We very much have to treat these as two very different events, which is part of the challenge when you're set up in the same garage or running for the 500 and you're set up in the same place as you are for the 500, so it can be a bit of a challenge for sure.

**Q. I have a question for Hinch. We went into this season expecting that the racing would be better. Four races in, much better? Did it even surprise you, or is it about what you expected?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: You know, it's about what I expected, which is definitely an improvement in the ability to follow cars and the passing on track. But the other thing that I think we were sort of expecting coming into the season with a new car, as is often the case, I think given the weekend, and luckily in our series it's not one team that just figures it out, but in a given weekend one guy might figure out the setup, the magic setup, a little bit better than another, and you might see some bigger differentials than you see otherwise, like Rossi at Long Beach. Nobody was going to beat him.

That doesn't happen very often in the IndyCar Series over the last couple years. I think we've seen some bigger gaps between drivers in the timing charts than -- there were times last year where the entire field was covered by nine tenths of a second or something.

With the new car and going to all these tracks for the first time with it, every once in a while you're going to land in a place where somebody just has that magic setup, by fluke, by design, whatever that is. I think that'll tighten up as the year goes on, and you won't see somebody kind of just run away from everybody like Alex did at Long Beach or like Josef did at Barber. Nobody was going to beat him that weekend.

So there is a little bit more disparity, I think, but once you're on track and if you're racing a guy wheel to wheel, I think the racing is definitely better.

**Q. Hinch, with the new car, the universal car, you had a day to test here on the oval, so how close and comfortable did you feel with trying to get the right setup? Obviously you have a number of days to practice before the 500, but do you feel you're getting close, or is there just a lot to learn with the new car to get that magic setup?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, there's a ton to learn for sure. I think for a first day at the speedway, we were better than we've been in previous years for a first day, so that's obviously a good sign. But at the end of the day, we didn't really do a ton of running in traffic, and

that's what matters at this place. You don't necessarily have to have the fastest car, as nice as that is, as much as that does help the cause. You really need something that handles well in traffic, and neither Robby nor I spent much time in traffic. We've got all next week to worry about that. So we'll see what we need to do and hopefully try and dial the car in as best we can.

**Q. Hinch, this is the smoothest road course that you race on on the schedule. How does that change the dynamic of the race?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: The dynamic of the race? I mean, not a ton. I think it's marginally smoother than Barber, but it's more track layout and things like that that make this place a little unique. I mean, the long front straight away into a nice big brake zone, now good passing opportunity into 7, another one into 12, there's a lot of ample opportunity to try and make something happen.

You know, this kit is a lot lower drag. We're going to be hitting much higher speeds from the front straight. It's going to make it exciting into Turn 1. But in terms of the surface and all the rest of it, I don't think that changes the race too, too much. Maybe the setup a little bit here and there, but that's it.

**Q. Robby, my math may be off, but I think you were 2 when Jacques Villeneuve won here in '95 and there's been a lot of Canadians that have left their mark on the Indy 500 and the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, Scott Goodyear, James, people like that. Now that you're going to be part of it and you kind of have a whole country cheering behind you, how important is that?**

ROBERT WICKENS: It's incredible. I mean, it's a privilege to even have the opportunity to drive in the Indy 500. I mean, this guy started from pole, which is remarkable, at the 100th, which is something he can take to his grave. But no, I'm just really excited to get going and kind of get on with it. I mean, the Indy 500 is a race that I've watched, I think, every year since I can remember, watching it on TV. I'm just really looking forward to experiencing the whole thing, seeing the grandstands full over here, and kind of -- yeah, just kind of hopefully I can look back at the end of the day and be happy with the job that we did.

**Q. James, in the off-season you made it abundantly clear you wanted a teammate that could help push you and the team forward. Four races in, has Rob done that?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, you could say that. That would be the understatement of the year, I think. I think every single member of the team and every department of the team has benefitted from Robby being here. He's pushed the engineers a lot. He's brought a lot of insight on the mechanical side, things just that he's experienced in his career, and then I don't think anybody has benefitted as much as I have just

because having a strong driver in the second car is the only way to make a team really better having two strong drivers I should say, and Robby and I luckily enjoy very similar setups. I think that's one of the big problems I've had the last couple seasons is my teammates have been quick at times, but we use very different race cars to achieve that. Him and I like very similar cars. We'll come in from a session and look at the data trace, and they almost look like they overlap completely with one or two exceptions, and we learn each other's one or two exceptions and we both get better. That's the essence of teamwork in motorsports.

Yeah, I think Robby has made the team better in every department over the first four races of the season.