

IndyCar Media Conference

Friday May 11, 2018

Will Power

Robert Wickens

Sebastien Bourdais

James Hinchcliffe

Jordan King

Josef Newgarden

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We will get started with today's Verizon IndyCar Series post-qualifying press conference for the IndyCar Grand Prix. Joined now by two of our Firestone Fast Six, Robert Wickens, driving the No. 6 Lucas Oil SPM Honda for Schmidt Peterson Motorsports, and also reigning champion Josef Newgarden, driving the No. 1 Verizon Team Penske Chevrolet.

Josef will be starting sixth in tomorrow's IndyCar Grand Prix. Josef, I know that it's a good qualifying day for you but probably not quite where you wanted to be in the Firestone Fast Six, but take us through your qualifying session and ultimately how you ended up with this result.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I mean, I think the big thing was getting in the Fast Six for us. Unfortunately that was kind of my goal. We'd been in the top 10, just kind of hovering in it. We haven't been super strong this weekend, been kind of tentative throughout. So he put in a good lap, so congrats to him. That was a good lap he did at the end. I think we would have been okay.

I think we probably had third or fourth potential. I don't know, we ran out the one lap, had a huge lockup in Turn 1 with the rear, and then just didn't really get to finish it. Not ultimately where we would have landed, but I think we were in that third or fourth range, so happy to be in the Fast Six. I think that's good for us tomorrow. We can work with that. We've just got to keep trying to chip away and find our speed, and we've just been missing it this weekend for whatever reason. I think we're getting there. We made some progress in qualifying, we just have to keep going and make it last for tomorrow now.

Everyone has done a good job. It's good to have a



good Verizon IndyCar, and hoping to have a good weekend tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: You also have two teammates that have been quite dominant here on the IndyCar Grand Prix circuit. Does that ultimately add to the data information and add to the success of your car potentially?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Oh, yeah, it's always good to have good teammates. All the guys, it's good to have Helio back. He's got something to contribute all the time, so we always have a wealth of information to look at. The trick is making the most of it. We've got a lot to look at. You've got to pick it apart and take what's good, kind of ignore the bad but not let it overload you as far as trying to learn too much.

It's a good problem to have most of the time. I'd rather have more than not enough, so yeah, it's just you've got to manage it the best you can, but yeah, we have some of the best. Will has always been strong here, same with Simon, so we've got a lot of good data to look at.

THE MODERATOR: Joined next by Robert Wickens who will start second in tomorrow's IndyCar Grand Prix. Robert making his first start here on the Indianapolis Motor Speedway road course and also didn't get to test here earlier this month or late last month possibly. Robert, coming into this weekend, did you expect to be so strong right off the bat?

ROBERT WICKENS: No. To be honest, I have all the faith in my Schmidt Peterson Motorsports guys that we'd be competitive, but it wasn't a particularly strong test from us. Like you said, I didn't do it because of an injury, so kind of an unknown coming here. But we seem to do this time and time again at Schmidt Peterson Motorsports, where kind of a bad rehearsal and then a good gig the next time around.

So in the end, I was very happy with the car, I mean, all day, right from pre-practice -- to be honest, in practice we struggled with it, but we turned it around, and then was feeling great in the qually, felt really good, and then unfortunately in Q3 I made a mistake on the first lap, which made me do a second lap, and so far I've been getting the lap time on lap 1 on the reds, and basically just missed it. But bittersweet. I feel like a jerk being upset with second place, but I think when you go quickest in your first two quallies, you kind of

hope to finish the job off.

But nevertheless, it's a great job by Schmidt Peterson Motorsports, both of us in the Fast Six, and both of us have some good opportunities for tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Jordan King, driving the No. 20 Ed Carpenter Racing Fuzzy's Vodka Chevrolet for the team, starting fifth in tomorrow's race, also making his second Firestone Fast Six appearance, his first in St. Pete. Jordan, you were saying that this track was one of the first tracks that you actually got to test on prior to coming here. Do you feel like that added time really helped you?

JORDAN KING: Definitely, so after we did a whole day testing beforehand and the first lap this morning, I was straight up to speed. Normally it takes a couple of runs to really get into the circuit and learn the little characteristics, but I didn't need to do that today, so it was a good start really.

THE MODERATOR: Next to you, James Hinchcliffe, driving the No. 5 Arrow Electronics Schmidt Peterson Motorsports Honda, starting fourth in tomorrow's race, and James, kind of the opposite situation for you. You did come here to test, but it didn't go quite as you hoped it would go, and then earlier practices today weren't quite getting the results you were hoping for, as well, but able to come up with a strong performance in qualifying. Where do you feel like you guys put something together to get you up there in qualifying?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, like Robby said, we're kind of making a bit of a habit of this, and it would be a whole lot easier on everybody in the engineering office if we just started strong right away and went from there. Yeah, we didn't have a super awesome test a couple weeks ago, and we rolled off the truck with some balance problems for sure, and then in P2 we had a problem with the brake system, and I just couldn't get out of my own way. I was off track more than I was on it. It was unfortunately nothing we could fix in the session, and it just goes back to what Robby said about how great this team is. To have a teammate that you can rely on as much as that, he was obviously very quick in P2, we really had to rely on them because we weren't able to develop our car at all in practice 2, and we went out in qualifying not really knowing if the car was going to stop the way that I was kind of hoping it was going to and had to learn little bit by little bit, but still, we closed the gap to the guys up front, and to end up where we did. Again, sort of like Robby, I made a mistake on my first lap in Q3 so probably lost a little bit of time there, but just huge credit to the boys for such a compressed schedule day. It was a really bad day to have a bad day, and it started off pretty bad. But we dug ourselves out again, two cars in the Fast Six. I think there's only one race so far that this team hasn't been in the Fast Six, so just can't thank everybody at Schmidt Peterson Motorsports, Honda, Arrow

Electronics enough.

THE MODERATOR: Sebastien Bourdais, making a new career-best start here on the Indianapolis Motor Speedway road course, will start third in tomorrow's race, driving the No. 18 Team Seal Master Honda for Dale Coyne Racing with Vasser-Sullivan. Sebastien, you mentioned that qualifying is so important here, and you've had some strong finishes here before, but that qualifying position is really important to making that happen. Can you elaborate on that a little bit?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Yeah, I think qualifying is always very important, but obviously we didn't really know what that Seal Master Honda No. 18 was going to have for us, but starting off a little bit, which I really wasn't expecting. I thought we had a good test, and I really was hoping to hit the ground running, and we didn't. The car was okay but just kind of average, and then we put the Firestone red tires on, and it definitely came to life.

I was kind of hopeful, but you also look at the gaps, and you're like, man, that's just going to be really, really tricky to make it, and I really had a very, very strong first run in Q1, and yeah, just kind of happened, positioned ourselves to be there, and after that, I almost threw it away in Q2. And Q3 was really strong, just made a tiny little mistake and just we all put it together. Hats off to him, and we'll see what we've got tomorrow. But it's always important to start at the front. I think it's one of those where if you can get yourself out of the melee at the start and you can avoid the punches, they come pretty quick at you here, so it'll be cool to make it kind of a trouble-free race here. The last two years we haven't been able to do that. So looking forward to tomorrow, and we're just going to try to keep it at the front.

THE MODERATOR: Joined now by our pole winner Will Power, driving the No. 12 Verizon Team Penske Chevrolet, Will's third pole here at the IndyCar Grand Prix and his 51st all time, which brings a tie for third on the all-time poles record list. You also mentioned that you had a rough time at Barber and maybe unsure heading into this race. What do you think came together, and it's obviously a race you feel quite confident on because of your success here.

WILL POWER: Yeah, I mean -- yeah, we just obviously had a rough start to the season, but we've been quick everywhere, started in the front row pretty much every race except for Phoenix. Yeah, we've been strong, just very disappointing the way have gone how it flows sometimes, and not changing anything. I know I've got the speed and we can put races together. Yeah, very stoked to start P1. Definitely a hard fight, a lot of really quick guys here and very good teams. Yeah, good start.

Q. For whoever wants to answer this, how

surprised are you that there's some big names that didn't make this Fast Six? It just kind of shows how competitive the series has gotten, especially in qualifying, there's no Pagnaud, no Dixon, no Graham Rahal, and historically they've driven pretty well in this race.

WILL POWER: Yeah, I'm not surprised at all. You look at the competition, the guys that are up here, it's totally expected. Young guys are coming in, rookies are really fast, and obviously guys that have been around a long time and won championships. I mean, it's just the tightest field there's ever been in IndyCar, and the level of the teams is the best it's ever been, so it's no surprise the way it is right now.

Q. Will, what does it mean to you to be third all time pole winner in IndyCar history? Where does that rank on your mantle?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I haven't really thought about it. It's obviously a lot of hard work goes into qualifying, just it's something I really enjoy, but yeah, I'd love to make it to the top. That would be -- I think it's Mario, like 60 something. 51 is it?

THE MODERATOR: 51.

WILL POWER: Oh, 51.

THE MODERATOR: Yeah, you have 51. Just 16 to go, no big deal.

WILL POWER: 67, no one is going to beat that.

Q. Robert, you didn't test here a couple months ago because of an injury. How much quicker did you have to pick this up without those points of reference?

ROBERT WICKENS: To be honest, not much at all. I mean, we basically talked to the driver coach and spoke with James and he gave me his references, and I just basically started there. It was actually surprisingly pretty fast getting up to speed. But the big thing is, like we've been talking about so much here within our team is I think our working relationship is so good that I asked James, I go, where are you braking in Turn 1, and he was like, I think we were 350 at that test, so okay, so my first lap I broke a 350 and it worked, and then you're kind of like there, right from the get-go. I didn't have to creep up to anything.

We've spent time on simulators, I've watched videos, on-boards, this, that and the other. As a driver, it's actually not that hard to learn tracks, but it's hard to get the most out of them.

Q. Will, was it always your intention to do three laps in qualify in the Fast Six? Did you run two sets of tires?

WILL POWER: I did two laps Fast Six. I just did one and one.

Q. Yeah, on two different sets --

WILL POWER: Oh, yeah, two sets. Yeah, that was the plan. I felt like that would give me the best chance because I think if you went two laps on one set, you'd probably lose out on the second lap, but yeah, the tire hung on really well. It felt as good as a new.

Q. Will, James, Seb and Josef, the past several years at this race, passing has been difficult, so I'm curious with the new universal aero kit, do you expect there will be more passing, more competition?

WILL POWER: Yeah, it definitely is easier to follow. Yeah, and I think there will be more mistakes, especially it's hotter and the cars have less downforce. Yeah, I think so. I think, you know, when we raced here with the original DW12, there was a lot of passing and tires went off, and you could get a good run on people because they'd make a mistake in the last corner, which last year was easy wide open every lap, so yeah.

Q. Sebastien, if your car during qualifying wasn't perfect and you still advanced, is there anything the team could do to improve it for the last top six?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: No, honestly, it was perfect to begin with. Q1 was the best indication of the car. Like I said, I made a mistake in Q2, which was big enough that I thought we were not going to make it, and then in Q3 I made a small mistake and I was good enough to throw away the pole. No, it's not a bad position to start, so I'm pretty happy.

I think the guys -- honestly, it's no secret we have a fairly limited resource group and are pulling very hard on everyone. No one is shop-based. Everybody is coming on the road, and it's hard for everybody, and that's why it's so enjoyable to be able to put the results on the track like that, because it means a lot and it cheers everybody, and at least it makes it feel worth it. Really pleased to be part of Dale Coyne Racing as an organization. I think it's quite special what we're capable of doing right now.

Q. Schmidt Peterson Motorsports seems to be one of the teams to beat this year, more so than in past seasons, but I have to ask James and Robby after seeing yesterday's press conference how you two can get anything accomplished because you seem to have such a good time and joking with each other.

ROBERT WICKENS: We normally get kicked out of the engineering office. Yeah, I think that they're calling us the productivity sponge, kind of what's going on when we joined the room. But I think there's times to joke around and there's times to work. I mean, we're both professionals, even though -- (laughter). We do okay. We get it done. It takes longer, but we get it done.

Q. One for Jordan. With two Fast Sixes in your first four IndyCar qualifying attempts, are you ahead of

where you expected to be at this point or have you surprised yourself?

JORDAN KING: I wouldn't say I've surprised myself. I'm more just focusing on doing my own job and doing it at my own speed, and it's proven to work. It's not so much that I'm constantly looking at the timing and scoring and seeing where I am, I'm just getting on with it, and where I end up is where I end up.

Q. James, when you were mowing the grass in practice No. 2, did you envision you'd be able to be Fast Six when you were out there trying to get the car righted?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Obviously. I mean, that was the plan. We were just practicing for if you get spun out in the race. I was just spinning out a lot to make sure my style was working. It was more just test items at Schmidt Peterson Motorsports. Yeah, there's no secret that the start of our day was pretty horrendous. Yeah, we both had kind of rough P1. We obviously tried to develop the car for P2. We had that brake problem, like I said, which just had me all over the racetrack, and I lost all confidence in the brakes of the car, the handling of the car. We didn't develop anything on our side.

Obviously so much credit goes to Robby and the 6 guys, and it's just really the epitome of teamwork. We've managed to do this a couple times this year where we didn't have the most productive whatever practice session it was, 1, 2 or 3, but we managed to put it all together for qualifying, and that's through a lot of hard work and a lot of stressful hours sitting in the engineering office trying to figure out what to do. But yeah, I'll admit I'm very pleased, considering where we were at the end of practice 2.

Q. And for Will, you've got a lot of fast young drivers in the series this year that are pushing you pretty hard, but you're still the master when it comes to poles. How satisfying is that?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I mean, it's definitely satisfying when you get a pole like this. You've got to work so hard for it these days, so when you get one, you're pretty happy because you're beating I reckon the best guys in the world. Yeah, I like to give the young blokes a hard time when I can. I hate saying that now because I don't class myself as old.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: We do. Everybody else does.

Q. Jordan, I'm not sure if I saw this correctly, but it seemed to me, maybe it was the top six that you didn't go out until there was less than a minute, and I was just wondering if you had just a lot of confidence in your ability to do that and whether you were saving tires for the race. I'm just wondering what the thinking was behind that. You'd be under a lot of pressure to do that with only like one run basically?

ROBERT WICKENS: What, in the first session? Oh, in

Q3. Yeah, so in Q3, I didn't think we waited that much later than anybody else, but no, I was quite confident. I thought we would be a bit higher up after Q2. It felt good, felt like we had some good margins. But on the used tires I just couldn't quite switch them on in the same way and get the lap time out of it. So yeah, maybe we hindered ourselves a little bit there by being a bit confident, but I didn't see it being a problem.