

IndyCar Media Conference

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Scott Dixon Robert Wickens

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joined now by our third-place finisher, Robert Wickens, driving the No. 6 Lucas Oil Honda for Schmidt Peterson Motorsports. Robby, I know it was an exciting race for you definitely up there in the front competing with the top finishers all race long. Ultimately I'm sure a little bit frustrated and disappointed, but you have to be excited for another strong finish for not only you but also your teammate James?

ROBERT WICKENS: Yeah, 100 percent. I mean, that was the first race where I kind of felt like a true rookie there in that final stint because I've never had to save fuel before. We've kind of practiced it a little bit in warmup where you do like one lap of fuel save. But the amount of fuel that we were having to save to make that work was something that I didn't even think was possible.

It was tough, and obviously running in P2, I was told the number I needed to achieve, and then I was just like, okay, well, Scott is on Push-to-Pass, so I don't know if I should use it to keep him behind or if I should hit my number, and we were actually having an issue with my Push-to-Pass all day, so it wasn't quite working to the best that it could. No, it was a tough day, an exhausting afternoon, but really happy to finish on the podium.

THE MODERATOR: Joined also by Scott Dixon, who finished second, driving the No. 9 PNC Bank Honda for Chip Ganassi Racing. Also an exciting race for you, starting in a position where you didn't really want to find yourself, but how were you able to work your way up to your second consecutive second place finish here?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, it was definitely a rough weekend. The heat really seemed to affect our car a lot, especially in practice 2 and then into qualifying, and we threw a big change at it for qualifying, which is probably not the smartest thing to do, and obviously that got us pretty good.

But yeah, to qualify 18th, I think that's probably the worst qualifying I've ever had on -- going for it with a legit not crashing or spinning off. Definitely a frustrating start, but this morning we found quite a bit, I feel like, in the warmup, and then we kind of compromised between what we had found throughout

the weekend.

Big kudos to the team. Everybody on the PNC Bank team did a fantastic job. The pit stops were amazing. In that first stint, I think we were running almost two seconds a lap faster than the rest of the field in the mid 70s for that, and that's where it made that big jump, and then later on in that segment, too, we were able to pass a few more just on outright speed.

Happy with today. 18th to second, obviously we come here to win, but congratulations to Will, and obviously Penske's 200th IndyCar win is definitely a big milestone, and it was good to see him get it.

Q. Scott, can you give some detail about what changed from qualifying to the race?

SCOTT DIXON: Man, that's a long list. Yeah, it was dampers, springs, geometry, closed cambers. It was pretty much everything. I think we actually threw in a kitchen sink on most of them, too. It was definitely a lot of changes. There was no session we didn't have a lot, which is frustrating for us, a team like ours shouldn't be as lost as we were, and I think maybe with the test we had here in those really cold conditions, we tried to react to that too much, and over a two-day event, it doesn't really give you much time to sit on it and think about it, and we made a lot of knee-jerk reactions, which we should know better. But yeah, it played out well, and ended up finding a bit more pace out of the car, and the result was decent.

Q. With the new car compared to last year's car, you start totally with zeros in your car, or you can use some data from the old car?

SCOTT DIXON: I would say this was probably the closest circuit. Last year we had to trim a ton for this course, so I'd say our downforce level was probably the closest that we'll see throughout the season. Maybe Road America will be similar, too. You would think we had a pretty good baseline from last year. Our car was very good last year. But yeah, I don't know. In the off-season I think we've gone down a bit of a road that we shouldn't have, and it's affecting how the car feels. It's very hard to feel what it's going to do, and it's not very consistent, and thirdly, the heat really affects us, so we need to get on top of that.

Q. Scott, how much more difficult is it to find a sweet spot with this car compared to how it was last year?

SCOTT DIXON: You know, I guess it's a big change.

It's one of the biggest changes we've seen in probably a five- or six-year cycle, so that might be a bit of our issue, too. We kind of stuck in our ways a little too much, and we have a very good engineering group, but it's stayed the same for quite a long time, so we don't think maybe outside the box as often as we should. We definitely did that a lot this weekend, which I think should help us throughout the season. But yeah, it's definitely one of the biggest changes we've seen in a long time.

Q. Scott, were you ever worried that you weren't going to be able to make the climb, or were you always confident that you were going to be able to rise up from 18?

SCOTT DIXON: Well, you know, the goal was to finish better than 18th, that's for sure. You kind of have an understanding that you can definitely move up maybe five, six, seven spots, but it also depends on how the race plays. You can have a strategy call or a yellow that flips the race and you can go all the way back to what happened to us in Long Beach. You're confident. We're actually won from last at Mid-Ohio a couple years back, from 22nd to 1st. That was the goal today. We stuck to our strategy that we had in the pre-race meeting with pitting early on the blacks, getting rid of them and then running as hard as possible for the reds for the three stints after. Today it worked out well. Maybe next race it won't.

Q. Scott, when Will Power -- you've battled him quite a few times. When Will Power is on his game, what stands out about his driving?

SCOTT DIXON: It's hard. You know, he's Australian, so they normally -- I think he was a bit worn out after the race, though, man. He was on the ropes a little bit. He needs to work out a little bit more. But he did a fantastic job. Will when he's in a zone, you've got to give the guy a ton of credit. He's got a ton of race wins, obviously the pole positions, I think it was like, what, 51 or more this weekend. He knows how to throw a lap together. But when he gets a car that's good and gets a straightforward race that he can set his mind to, he's almost untouchable, and today they were definitely fast.

I think that that whole group, as we know, always does a fantastic job, and Will is a strong competitor, man, one of the best.

Q. Apologies if you've already been asked this. I'm sure you both already have, but that pass at the end of the front straight, that was pretty -- that brought everybody to their feet, and from each of your perspectives how you pulled it off and what you tried to do to keep him from pulling it off.

ROBERT WICKENS: Yeah, I mean, I thought it wasn't that interesting. I stayed off Push-to-Pass to try to save fuel, and I saw that he was on it, and I thought, oh, maybe I can keep him on the outside and hang on, but he kind of already had me cleared on the outside

before braking, and I thought I'd try to keep in there and see what happens, but obviously it just -- he's a very talented guy. It's not his first rodeo, he made it stick and everything was good, but it was good hard racing from everyone today. I had a couple fights with Will, with Scott, with Alex, and it was all just good, hard, fair fun, to be honest, so I thought it was pretty exciting.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I just was hoping that he was maybe concentrating on saving fuel because I knew it was going to be fairly difficult to get the mileage that we needed to, and I thought I'd try it early to be aggressive and try and get the fuel mileage later if we needed to, so that was basically the strategy. It's very hard to defend if someone behind you is on overtake and you're not, just the rate of speed, especially on long straights like this it's almost impossible. Yeah, it was a pretty basic one. That's what it was.

Q. (No microphone.)

SCOTT DIXON: No, that was much different. You know, the braking zones, you're going from, I don't know, however, 190 miles an hour and trying to get down to 35 or 40. There's a lot on the line there. It's easy to make a mistake. But everybody in this category, Robert has done an amazing job this year and been extremely fast. He's got a lot of talent, so it's good to see him kicking it off very good at the start of the season. He's going to be strong all the way through.

I was on reds, he was on blacks. It's a totally different story, man, different track.

Q. Did Ganassi slightly short you to get you out ahead of Bourdais at the final start?

SCOTT DIXON: No, I think they just had not as good a stop. Our stops were pretty flawless all day. It doesn't take much, right, you're talking a couple tenths of a second from the guy plugging in, and it can change the whole cycle of the stop, and that's pretty much what happened, I think.

Q. Did that chase give you a clue as to where the balance of power lies between the two manufacturers in terms of fuel consumption?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I was a little surprised. He was going pretty hard, and I thought, maybe I can't even make it, so I was thinking, maybe they're going to have to stop, kind of similar to what happened last year at Watkins Glen. Helio had to end up pitting with a few laps to go. Will is very talented, very good at fuel saving, too, especially when he's got a good car underneath him, and I think we expected to have a pretty good advantage in that category, but seems like they've maybe caught up a little bit.

Q. Scott, having been in the thick of things, because qualifying kind of didn't go to well, what do you make of the race overall? On our end it

seemed pretty consistently exciting.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, it's always hard to comment. I knew what passes I was doing and what I was up to. I saw some pretty close racing. There was some pretty brave moves going on there. Was right in front of the one with Josef and Sebastien I think it was at the time. Yeah, this track, when you've got such long straights and big braking zones, it's always going to create good racing. It was a little tough there at the end between Will and myself, but I think there was some pretty exciting stuff going on toward the back a bit, but yeah, it's just a good platform for it. I think it was one of our best races here.

Q. On the radio, your team said, Welcome to the world of IndyCar fuel saving. How was it saving fuel here compared to other forms of racing you've done?

ROBERT WICKENS: I've never raced in a category where you had to save fuel. In winter testing you always put it on the list, like oh, we're going to practice a long run with fuel save, and then obviously the engineers get greedy, you end up doing setup change, setup change, setup change, and you run out of time, and then we don't actually end up doing it. So really, like apart from warmups or kind of like ins and out laps, I'm not really practicing it that much, and it's something that I became very apparent to me this weekend, like this afternoon, that that's something that I have to work on because obviously they were hitting the same numbers that I was to try and make it to the end, but their pace was way quicker than mine.

Yeah, I have to work on it, but yeah, that was definitely a first for me.

Q. Robert, beginning Tuesday it's the start of the big show, and just how excited are you to be part of it?

ROBERT WICKENS: Yeah, I'm ecstatic. I mean, I've dreamed of doing a 500 since I can remember. There's been so much history, so many good drivers. I mean, anything can happen there. To be honest, I just want to take it, like I've been saying all along, just kind of one day at a time, because every day in IndyCar seems to be different. I can't find kind of a trend to get in a routine or do this, that or the other. I feel like something is new every time.

I think all next week it's just going to be interesting with practice and trying to get a good car. I was able to do my rookie orientation last week. It was fun. But definitely once we get into kind of the quality trims and stuff like that, it's going to be a whole new animal because we were just driving with quite a bit of downforce on because it was just rookie orientation. I've heard the nightmares of quality trim, and I'm cautiously looking forward to it.

Q. Scott, the changes that you made to make the car so much better for you today, are they specific

to the IMS road course, or do you think they're ones where in a state of emergency you managed to stumble upon something that's going to help at Mid-Ohio or Portland or whatever?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think it's something we can apply. You're always working on a toolbox of things, right, that you're trying to map out throughout the season and find what works, what doesn't. It was more of the fact of doing what we did in qualifying that was really bad. So it was hard to rebound, and not so hard to rebound from that. I think had we stuck with what we knew, we would have been a lot better off. We weren't super happy. We figured that -- we thought that the hot conditions really affected us, and we needed to try something totally different. I did the first three laps on blacks, and I'm like, this is horrible, so we changed dampers and springs for the first red run, but obviously our ride heights and geometries and things were all out of whack.

I think it was more the fact that we made it -- we went down a road that was not good for qualifying.

Q. Robert, coming from the DTM business to this new environment of racing, is it maybe helpful or less helpful, what you did in the simulator?

ROBERT WICKENS: Yeah, I've been using the simulator pretty frequently here in Indianapolis. I'm a driver that I think is kind of good to kind of get your eye in a little bit, but at the end of the day, I think simulation is -- some drivers hate it, some drivers don't mind it, and I'm one that doesn't mind it. But at the end of the day, it's virtual reality, so it's not super accurate sometimes, and sometimes it's not perfect.

No, I mean, I think racing in DTM in the past, it's gotten me prepared for a lot of stuff here in IndyCar, but the races here are surprisingly long. Like some seem to fly by really quickly and others take forever, and this was one that -- I remember kind of looking out at the scoreboard because not many tracks that we drive on, I think, have one, and we were at like lap 42, and I'm like, oh, man, I feel like the race should be done pretty soon. Yeah, no, it was just halfway.

No, in the end, I think I've definitely carried over some of my stuff from DTM to here, but there's still so many things that I'm learning as I go. In the past in DTM we had two separate tire compounds. Here we have two tire compounds. But they behave entirely different. Yeah, it's all a work in progress, but right now I think as I get done here I'm going to talk to the engineers about how I can save fuel better because that's the only thing I can think about right now.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, congratulations. Thank you very much.