

IndyCar Media Conference

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Chip Ganassi

Mike Hull

Scott Dixon

Ed Jones

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Chip Ganassi Racing.

Chip, as I was coming in today, I thought about this regular meeting we have, coming to Indianapolis. I suspect you're still the same, goosebumps every time you go into the tunnel. It's another year in which you're here to compete. Does it ever get old?

CHIP GANASSI: It never gets old. You come here year after year, I guess I've been here now every year since 1982, actually was here as a spectator in '81. I hate to use this term, but you got to pinch yourself a little bit sometimes.

Remember, this is still the Indianapolis 500. You get so used to going to races, but you don't want to forget how important this race is, how much it means. You do get that feeling, like you say, when you come through the tunnel. There's a lot at stake here every May. Don't let that be an oversight. A lot at stake here. You don't want to forget that.

I think it's important to get that across to your team. We right sized our team this year. I'm looking forward to it. We have new sponsorship. We have NTT continuing with us. We're very, very poised for the next step here. Part of that next step is going to be next Sunday.

THE MODERATOR: One thing I thought about when I look at Mike Hull, I don't care if you're talking about business, sports, family, stability is a really, really important thing. If I'm right, is this not your 26th year with this team?

MIKE HULL: Yeah, it is. Well, I think it is. People remind me of that all the time. I've never really looked at it that way. When I made a deal with Chip in 1992, we shook hands.

CHIP GANASSI: We haven't talked about it much since.

MIKE HULL: We really haven't. Today it seems to be on paper, but I don't know why it needs to be. I'm continuously amazed at how we have been able to combine passion together with disagreement and agreement both almost simultaneously to continue to do what we do. I never really thought about it at the time. I wasn't sure frankly if I could stay with Chip for a week, a month, a year, whatever. I'm happy that I have. Never really thought I'd be lucky enough to be around race drivers that Chip has hired to make us all enjoy what we do.

THE MODERATOR: Talking about stability, you're going to bring someone new for your team here, but you have another guy who is in his 17th year with the team, Scott Dixon.

MIKE HULL: I think Scott represents who we were, who we are and who we will be. He comes to work with a fresh approach every day. He wants to make the most out of it for himself, he wants to make himself better because he knows that makes the team better. He pushes really, really hard. He represents the lineage we've had over the years of champion race drivers. He certainly shows the way, leads the way, for people like Ed. Proud to have been with him personally for as long as I have been. Continue to strive to do right by him and by Chip. It's been a great experience.

THE MODERATOR: Ed, if we ran back the clock to a year ago, I can't imagine, there have been a couple rookie performances that have been better, but not many. That still has to be one of the big moments in your life, and I would think the reason you're sitting between these two gentlemen today.

ED JONES: Yeah, for sure. Last year as a rookie to come to this race, finish third on your first go is a huge achievement. So many things around that. I was fortunate with what the team had at the time. Luck always plays a part in this race. We were able to execute when we needed to.

Coming into this year now, especially this month, this 500 month, it kind of makes me feel looking back to last year, I didn't realize again how big the race was when I was doing it for the first time. Now I'm coming to this year, I want everything even more than I did last year.

Just work as hard as possible with the team to make

the car stronger, make myself stronger, to have a good racecar for next Sunday.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up to questions.

Q. Ed, Zachary the other day said you'd use an example about how this race can be a real career maker, if he does well at Dale Coyne Racing, who knows what may happen for him. When you look back at how everything fell into place to get you to Ganassi, how do you feel about that?

ED JONES: Going into your first year of IndyCar, there's a lot of work to do, a lot of learning. I wasn't sure what to expect. I think at the time Dale Coyne was quite a small team, so didn't know where we were going to be. Had Sebastien Bourdais as a teammate, who is great to learn off of, gave me a lot of help. Each weekend I was giving my full commitment, trying as hard as possible. I think I didn't make too many mistakes, which was something which I look positive back on.

Yeah, I was very fortunate that timing was right. The results I had, luck plays a big part in it, but it was a huge amount of hard work. Things paid off to get me to this team.

For me, this has always been the goal, to race for Chip Ganassi Racing. If I had been told a few years back to know I was in this position, I wouldn't believe someone. I want to make every moment of this count and I want to win races.

First few races this season have been a bit up and down, but we showed potential straightaway. I'm sure we'll win one soon.

Q. As a relative newcomer, how different does the car feel this year than last year's car here?

ED JONES: Yeah, it is significantly different. I think the car in general is much more sensitive than the old car. Even just driving alone by yourself on track, the downforce numbers aren't particularly different, it just felt so much more comfortable. Then especially in traffic, you're able to run up on cars in the corners a lot better. Whereas this year it's been a lot more of a challenge.

Yeah, everyone is trying to figure it out. I'm sure when it comes to race day, things will be a lot closer, there will be more passing, but it will definitely be a lot more difficult than last year.

Q. Chip, the guy right there to your left is obviously one of the bright up-and-coming drivers. There's a huge amount of them coming up this year. To what do you attribute that?

CHIP GANASSI: That's a good question. I don't know. I think with as long as we've all been in motorsports, Mike and I, there seems to be sort of waves of drivers that come along from time to time. I think that's more a

function, I think, of what's happening in the smaller formulas maybe three or four years ago, as to what it means for IndyCar racing today. Maybe what happens in those.

I think you have to look back at the popularity of those feeder series. For what reason today three, four, five years ago, what was the thing where you had a great group of talent come along at the same time in some of those series where you have really good racing, or you could have really good racing because of the package. Not only the talent, but the car, the tires, the engine in those smaller formulas match well with a feeder series.

I don't know that I have any other explanation for it other than that. It's certainly a timing issue, time and a place kind of thing where, like I said, you got to look back at where Ed started three, four, five years ago. I think that will tell a lot.

Q. Ed, when you look at this car versus the Indy Lights car you raced, is this new car more like that? How much do you have to readjust with the new car compared to last year?

ED JONES: Yeah, definitely, especially running by yourself, this car feels much more similar to the Indy Lights car. I'd say in traffic the Indy Lights car was probably nicer. When you were following cars, you were still able to get better runs than this car. It was quite possible to run two-wide, whereas with this car it's just been such a challenge to follow and get runs.

The first day, well Tuesday, I kind of made the mistake of trying to get the car to a position where I could follow, similar way to last year. It led to a few massive moments of oversteer. Yeah, it's just trying to see what the potential of this car is. It's obviously very different to the old car. Just figuring out the best ways to pass.

At the end of the day, seeing how difficult it is, the person who can pass the best, it's going to pay off huge in the race.

Q. Ed, what kind of mentor has Scott been for you this year? How beneficial is it to have someone who has won the Indy 500 on your team?

ED JONES: Yeah, it's huge to have Scott there. Also Dario, as well. Obviously Scott is trying to do his job, it's the first priority. It's not so much mentoring. But having Dario there, as a driver coach kind of, two guys who have won the Indy 500. They have had so many races here at the Indy 500, they've had all the experiences of things going wrong on certain days, how to pick it back up, how easy it is to lose confidence here, how you have to change your approach and get right back at it.

I can't tell you how beneficial it has been to have both Scott and Dario there to lean on whenever I have any issues or anything to question them about. They've been very helpful.

Q. Chip, do you ever reflect back to 36 years ago when you were a rookie, you were getting ready for Fast Friday, your first qualifying run in your first 500?

CHIP GANASSI: Oh, yeah. I mean, I'd like to reflect on it, but boy, it seemed like such a blur. There was a lot going on. I was 23 years old or something. Here I was at Indianapolis. Yeah, I mean, the thing I remember about that day was probably just the fact that I got to run later in the day. Rest his soul, Gordon Smiley was in an accident, closed qualifying down for three hours or so, and that was an advantage to me. Some guys had already gone. It was a little cooler when the track reopened, 4:00 or something, it was a little cooler in the afternoon. We were able to find some speed maybe that was a big help, yeah.

Q. (No microphone.)

CHIP GANASSI: Yeah, then of course that was the year that they had the debacle there at the start in 1982 with Kevin, Foyt, Mario, that whole thing up there at the start. That was actually a good thing for me because, okay, it took a lot of the pressure off. When the race restarted there, after that I was kind of calmed down, Okay, I got this, and off we went. It was a great, great experience. Having simply put, it was the launchpad, that was the launchpad for what you see today as our team. That was the launchpad for it, yeah.

Q. Ed, what actually is happening when you go to overtake? Front end washing out? Car goes to understeer?

ED JONES: Obviously when you're trying to close on the car in front, the front washes out. Quite a large amount more than it used to. I feel like how close you get to the car, it happens a lot earlier. Even when you're not that close, the front starts to wash out far quicker than in the past.

That also makes it very difficult, when you're tuning the car with the tools you have, the weight jacker, the bars, obviously you're going to try to make it (indiscernible) oversteering when you're trying to get a run on someone. As soon as you get the clear track, you have to work as quickly as possible to set it back because it's going to be very easy to be caught out with how much you're going to have to change things to get by people.

Q. It's been a difficult start to the season for Chip Ganassi Racing. I don't think Scott has led a lap. We know there were issues at Long Beach where he probably should have been a contender. The fact is that, like in 2013, you guys didn't lead a lap until Detroit, then Scott went off and won the title. Does that give you encouragement? Can you feel that momentum building for Chip Ganassi Racing?

CHIP GANASSI: You're still somewhat a newcomer around here. Historically that's kind of the typical start

for our season. We start slowly, we get going right about now. The strong point in the season is really from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Historically that's been the time that separates the teams from the wannabes. I fully intend that we'll have both guys in the mix going forward.

Let's face it, like everybody is talking about a new car, this and that. I think our performance has been relatively good. Ed had a good Phoenix. We had a decent Long Beach. We're certainly not hitting any panic buttons anywhere. I don't think 'difficult' is the right word.

Q. Mike, with this new car, can you use anything from last data or you start from zero again?

MIKE HULL: I think probably the only thing you're going to be able to use might be race craft. I think Ed referenced it quite well. Almost everything that we've learned with the car in the past is great information, but not information we can use going forward. That's probably what people are experiencing this week.

I think the reality is, it might be this, that IndyCar has a terrific product. The people that technically manage the series do now I think, in my opinion, probably the best job of anybody that's done the job for a long, long time.

What they've also managed to do is they push this formula to the point where there's no separation available for the teams. Teams have a very, very simple product to tune. They don't have individual identity any longer with their individual product. When it comes to finding ways to create the momentum that you need to pass, even with the better drivers, it's not available to you like it used to be.

I think the nature of the race will be similar to the way it's been in the past, but the tuning variance isn't as large as it used to be. I don't know if that answers your questions, but I think the on-track product is good, the passing here and the racing here is going to be more difficult no matter where you start or hopefully where you finish.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much for coming in, gentlemen.