

IndyCar Media Conference

Friday May 18, 2018

Marco Andretti Robert Wickens

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We will get started with today's Verizon IndyCar Series post-practice press conference following fast Friday. We are joined by Robert Wickens, driver of the No. 6 Lucas Oil SPM Honda for Schmidt Peterson Motorsports, who finished second in today's Fast Friday practice session. A new day here at the track. The weather cooperated for the most part, but how did you feel with the boost coming into today and how did the car feel?

ROBERT WICKENS: Well, first off, I feel like I don't fully deserve to be here. I mean, Fast Friday is for qualifying and all that stuff, but my very first lap of the day, two people came out of the pits in front of me, and I just got like this insane tow that got me to where I am.

Honestly, we have a lot of work to do. I think we're okay by ourselves here on Fast Friday, but we're definitely, in my opinion, on the outskirts of the Fast Nine, which is my goal for tomorrow.

But I think we're just there. I think no tow, we ended up 10th today, but everyone on the Lucas Oil car and Schmidt Peterson Motorsports as a whole, we're doing a very good job this weekend. It's not easy adding cars on to your team for one race, and I think we've brought them in fairly seamlessly. I think in the engineering meetings everything has been very productive.

But yeah, first Fast Friday in my IndyCar career, it was interesting. It was pretty crazy at the beginning because everyone thought it was going to rain like around lunch, and then it just didn't, so the afternoon was very relaxed because we went through, I think, three sets of tires in the first hour, and we only kind of accounted for five for the whole day. After that we just relaxed in the afternoon, kind of did some calculated changes, some tests that unfortunately didn't find us speed but at least it gave us direction on where we have to go for tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Not only from the performance of the car but your expectations in terms of the experience of your first qualifying weekend for the Indy 500?

ROBERT WICKENS: Yeah, it's been amazing. The fact that like all week, excluding Fast Friday because

you think, it's Friday, people might take a day off work, but Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, the amount of fans that come out here, I was thinking the other day, I'm like, how are they here? Don't they have jobs? But no, honestly, it's amazing, the fans and how passionate they are of this facility, and as a driver it just kind of makes it extra special that you go to an engineering meeting and all you hear is people yelling your name and stuff like that, and for me being a new person in IndyCar, it's nice to get recognized.

So far it's been very good. It's been very kind to me so far. But we've only been practicing so far. I need to get the job done when it counts and hopefully put ourselves in a good spot to run in cleaner air in the race.

THE MODERATOR: And then specifically regarding this upcoming weekend, the format of it, the procedure, sort of the drama that comes with a field where you have cars that aren't going to make the field, what are your thoughts heading into something like that?

ROBERT WICKENS: I mean, to be honest, it's been something that's never even crossed my mind. I mean, I've always been a big believer that don't stress over things you can't control and just kind of work on your own program and do the best job that you can, and I have 100 percent confidence in my team that we were never going to be at risk of being in the bump area.

But anything can happen in motorsports. I know that for sure. I mean, as long as we just do a level job, we should be fine. So far today and the whole week, we've shown that we've been quick enough to kind of not be in a danger zone, but if you make one wrong turn on setup or whatever, you can very easily be down there. We just need to work hard overnight because we have to find some more speed. We have to assume everyone else is going to find more speed. But yeah, right now I think we're in okay shape. I mean, we're not setting the world on fire, but we're doing a pretty good job.

Q. How have you been able to manage everything that comes with (indiscernible)?

ROBERT WICKENS: How have I been able to manage everything? I mean, it's actually kind of nice. It's my first race staying in a bus, so that's kind of cool. I have my dog with me. So whenever we have like half an hour downtime, I'm like running back to the bus to play with my dog and take him out for a pee and stuff, so

that's been new.

But no, honestly, it's just the team. I have such a good team around me that they're kind of preparing me for everything, and every new scenario I've jumped into I've felt ready, I've felt comfortable. I've never felt out of a comfort zone. I think the rookie orientation stuff was interesting, and then I was able to do the manufacturer test the following day, but when we got here, my first lap on track, I was just confident and went flat.

It's just been a good day, but I've been fortunate to have a pretty good car underneath me because I think once a driver loses some confidence, it can go downhill pretty quick.

Q. And then looking at the no-tow speed, it appears that all the Penskes have a pretty good edge. Do you expect they're going to be the ones to lock in on the front row?

ROBERT WICKENS: I think results don't lie, right, so they definitely did a very good job today. I think they're top 3 no-tows, but there's some Hondas in there, there's the Carpenter team that are good with all three of their drivers. TK jumped in there at the end when the track actually wasn't that good in my opinion. So honestly, I think Tony could be a sleeper. I think he could challenge for something because when he did his time, I don't know if there was even anyone running near the 228s really.

No, I mean, I think like I said earlier, we have a lot of work to do, but tomorrow is the time to show it.

Q. How did the car feel compared with yesterday when you had 10 less kPa in boost compared to today?

ROBERT WICKENS: Honestly, yeah, it feels better just because it's more power. I mean, it's the funnest thing actually because you're driving at such crazy speeds here around the speedway, but then because they actually reduce the boost for the ovals, when you leave the pits you feel like something's wrong, especially like coming from the Indy GP and then the next day being kind of in oval trim with the engine program that we have for the ovals. So running the 140 kind of felt a little more racy and a little more normal. But once you're on track, I mean, I think the difference between doing a 220 and a 226 in my mind is not that different because from a driver, it sounds -- maybe I'm being naïve, but I just stay full throttle and the lap time is there.

No, I think obviously from an engineering standpoint it's very different. The ride heights have to change, your aero levels change, and there's a lot of things you have to do because you're going faster. But from my point of view, the team has made all the right adjustments because I jumped in and didn't have any issues.

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with our press conference. Joined now by Marco Andretti, driver of the No. 98 U.S. Concrete Curb Honda for Andretti Herta Autosport with Curb-Agajanian, fastest today here on Fast Friday, the winner of the Harding Group Fastest Lap Award. Congratulations.

MARCO ANDRETTI: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: How is your car feeling throughout these practice days, and what are you expecting heading into tomorrow?

MARCO ANDRETTI: We've been feeling good actually, pretty good in traffic, which obviously the tow time shows that, and the car is close in race trim. I don't know how much better we can get it. But qual trim alone, I'm not pleased with the car speed right now. I think we're right on the bubble of the Top Nine to be honest. And I think it's going to take us to nail it to get it in, as with probably five or six other guys, we're going to be right there with them, and I think it's going to be all about a third and fourth lap, and we're just going to have to nail it and do everything right to get it in. Hopefully we can.

THE MODERATOR: What kind of different experience is this particular event for you knowing you have almost double the amount of teammates you normally have and a lot more information and data to work through?

MARCO ANDRETTI: Yeah, it's cool. We have four all year round, so with the addition of the other two, the meetings are long, let's put it that way. But I think even with the addition of Zach and Stef, they already have a lot to bring to the table. I've been really focused on the 98 side and just really working on what we need. But you know, still -- they still have a lot to offer, so it's been fun to work with all of them.

Q. How tough do you think or how much of a gamble do you think timing and weather will be when you're in line tomorrow, say if you catch a cloud the wrong way? How much does where you're at in the draw make a difference?

MARCO ANDRETTI: I think earlier is going to be good. It's always faster in the morning. Today it kind of took a dip in the middle of the afternoon for sure. Yeah, I think early draw will be good. Got to nail it on the first one, especially with -- I think there's weather tomorrow, so at best one attempt tomorrow, so I think we're just -- like I said earlier, we're just going to have to play whatever hand we're dealt and wring it out.

Q. Talking to a few drivers, some say don't overthink this place. Tony sat up here yesterday and said this place plays mind games with you. Others have said it's so important to win this race. How has your perspective on this race, your no-nonsense perspective changed on this place?

MARCO ANDRETTI: Well, obviously it is very

important to win the race, but the month is a roller coaster. If there's one thing I've learned in my 13 years here, you just have to be prepared for the roller coaster. You look at Graham, he's No. 1 yesterday, he's struggling today. I could be struggling tomorrow. That's the way it works. We just need to maximize every time out there, take it corner by corner and hopefully make the right decision at the right time. This place, it always helps to catch the circumstances right, as well. Not only in qualifying but over the course of the 500 miles, it picks the winner, right?

We seem to have enough speed to play, so we just need the rest to work out.

Q. You mentioned qualifying is going to come down to third and fourth laps. Is it harder with the new aero kit to keep your tires underneath you for the entire qualifying run?

MARCO ANDRETTI: I don't think it's a ton different. It's different, but I don't think it's -- it's never easy, right, so it's just a little bit different. I have a better feel for the car this year for me, and I struggled with that last aero kit. It's not an excuse, it's just I did.

I have a good feel for this one so far. But no, I mean, every time you qualify at Indy, lap 3 and lap 4, like you feel like you're done, and you're like halfway. Like geez, another eight turns to go. It's always tough around here, especially with the new format where we can go numerous times, right? Like I said, hopefully things work out to where weather-wise and circumstances puts us in the top nine. That would be cool.

Q. You seem to be in better spirits this week than your father. He seems to be a little concerned about how the car will react not only in qualifying but in the race. Have you had to kind of cheer him up a little bit this week?

MARCO ANDRETTI: No, that's not my job. I'm just focused on trying to be quickest every time out, and I'll smile when I'm quickest every time out.