

IndyCar Media Conference

Monday May 21, 2018

Sage Karam

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll start with our end-of-day practice media availability with our fastest driver of the day in the No. 24 WIX Filters/DRR Chevrolet, Sage Karam.

Sage, take us through your day, how you felt it went.

SAGE KARAM: Yeah, I mean, I ended up P1, which is cool. But we just got a big draft lap. If you put I think any car in the position that my car was at, it would have done the same lap time.

It was kind of like in the beginning of the month when you'd see guys put up big numbers, just big tows. So it doesn't really mean too much.

I wish I was sitting at the top yesterday. Unfortunately not. Got some work to do for the race. But the main goal today was basically just work on the racecar, work on pit stops, because I haven't done pit stops in a long time, in an IndyCar since last May. We got some pit stop practice in. Did some traffic running. Tried to make the car a bit better. It's still difficult to pass out there if you're third car back or worse.

I think we made it a little bit better. Still struggling a little bit. Everybody looks like they're struggling, so it's not that big of a deal. If I was the only one struggling, I'd feel a lot worse about it. So we'll see.

I think the car is pretty good. We always have a really good racecar. I was able to make some passes, run with the fast guys that were fast in qualifying. I ran with them pretty steadily, ran some good laps.

I think this race is going to be very challenging. I think it's probably going to be the most challenging Indy 500 in my five, this will be my fifth, that I've done. Just going to have to stay focused. I think people are going to make mistakes. It's just going to be about keeping the car under you, getting perfect pit stops and everything.

I think you're going to win this race on pit road. I think a lot of the positions you'll make is having good pit stops or not about good pit stops. You have to capitalize in the pits.

THE MODERATOR: As far as race preparation, is today maybe the most important practice of the month?

SAGE KARAM: Yeah, for sure. Today was like you took everything that you've already learned earlier in the week, just kept going with it today. Usually like on Carb Day, you get to run a little bit, but you don't want to risk much. I think the last three Carb Days I've done, I've only done a total of 15 laps all combined.

You won't really do too much running unless you have serious issues and need to fix your car. Like if your car is just not acting the way you want it to, like completely off balance, you will do more running. For the most part it's just systems check. So this is the last real race practice you get.

It's encouraging to know that my car felt pretty solid under me in traffic. We never qualify well here, but we always have really strong racecars. I'm kind of used to having to come from the 20s, try to work my way up. I just know it's going to be a little bit more difficult this year.

I don't think you're going to be able to see, like, the guys how I've come through the field before, I think it's going to be a lot more challenging. I don't think you're going to be to see Rossi do it with me. There are some real good guys in the field that are in the back. They're going to have trouble, I think, getting to the front.

You're just not going to see guys carving through like you used to. You're going to have to do it in a smarter way, you're going to have to think outside the box. You're going to have to really out-drive the people in front of you.

We'll see what we can do. It's hard to tell. When you're out there running in traffic, you don't know who has what fuel loads, what tires, anything like that. So everything really changes when you get to the race.

It will be interesting. I know I lot of good guys behind me, a couple good guys in front of me. See if I can link up with anybody and try to go to the front.

THE MODERATOR: Knowing how much race drivers want to charge to the front, how difficult is it going to be to be more patient?

SAGE KARAM: Well, basically today all I did was just work on, like, what I think I'm going to do in the race. Since I'm not going to be able to charge forward as hard or as aggressive as I think I can, compared to last year, it's going to be a lot more just playing safe and

working your fuel mileage, strategy things, maybe with coming in to pit like a lap later, earlier, maybe two laps earlier, I don't know.

I think you're going to see a lot of fuel saving this race. I think you're going to see a lot of guys struggling with the front ends of their car. I think you're going to see a lot of guys lose the front end of their car, skim the outside of the walls, kind of like what Wickens did today. I think you're going to see a lot of that in the race. Especially when the marbles build up, it's going to be a challenge.

You're going to have to stay focused for 500 miles. It's no joke out there. Yeah, I just think I'm going to be so mentally drained after this race. I'm not looking forward to that night of just trying to sleep with the most massive headache (laughter).

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

Q. You raced here back when they had the original DW12, the aero kit the last few years. What is the difficulty in finding the sweet spot, the right setup aero-wise with this car compared to the two previous generations you raced here?

SAGE KARAM: I'm not really sure. Obviously, like, the other teams have more time with this car and everything, have better numbers than we do to run by.

Just the hardest thing for me, with last year's car, when we had dome skids and everything, that made it difficult from the year before just because, like, the car was so unpredictable. You'd lose the front, you'd lose the rear. It wouldn't ever really do the same thing. It was just different. But you could still run fairly close no matter where you were in the pack.

But this car, it's just like, I don't know what it is, but if you're the second car in line, you're okay, you can usually pass the leader pretty easily like you could with any other IndyCar I've raced. But anything third or worse, if you're third, it's a struggle to stay close to the car in front of you. Every single position back just worse and worse and worse and worse. That's why qualifying I think was so important. Unfortunately I qualified not very well.

I don't know. I don't know if it's a lack of downforce or what. But, yeah, we just have a lot of trouble with the front end. I don't know. It's more an engineer question. A lot of the changes we're making are just very not normal changes that we make here at the Speedway.

There have been times where I've come in for massive amounts of turns of front wing. Like with last year's car, I'd come in and say I need a half turn or quarter turn. Here you get a four turns and it's still not turning.

It's difficult. But at the same time I think you're going to

see the good cars and the good drivers distinguish themselves from the rest because you're going to see guys who know what they're doing, how to save tires, how to manage a run, go to the front, when other guys are going to burn their tires off or don't have the best car underneath them.

There are probably some guys starting pretty far up that don't look that good in race trim right now. I think you're going to see who is really good late in stints and who can keep the fronts under them.

THE MODERATOR: Young man, thank you very much. You're off to Philadelphia, I believe. Safe travels.

SAGE KARAM: Thank you.