

IndyCar Media Conference

Sunday May 27, 2018

Ed Carpenter Scott Dixon Robert Wickens Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Scott Dixon joins us, third-place finisher.

Scott, it looked like you were going to make the fuel run that would win the race, but came up short. Was that the plan early in that run?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, as soon as we pitted, right before the end of that caution, we tried to obviously take on as much fuel as possible, be the first in that scenario. We knew there was probably three or four others that were trying. Oriol looked like he was, a couple of others.

But, yeah, we really struggled on restarts today. The first and second gear just seemed to be way out of sync to the pace of what everybody was restarting. First to be on a limiter, second I was like a sitting duck, wouldn't accelerate, gear was way too long.

Yeah, I don't know, we lost a lot of positions in that scenario. But the Penske car felt pretty good. It was consistent. It was good in traffic. It was very difficult to pull off passes today. Yeah, so for me, to be honest, huge credit to the team. They did a superb job of trying to pull off that strategy. Obviously we have got very lucky with that caution with T.K., which was enough to give us a bit of a window to get to the end.

Yeah, definitely a crazy day out there.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. At any time did you feel you were in a disadvantage based on engine package, mileage versus power, et cetera?

SCOTT DIXON: I don't know. It maybe plays a bit of a role. It definitely looked like the others were pretty heavy. Rossi and Oriol did a very good job of making that high line work. Hunter-Reay was very aggressive at the start.

It kind of seemed to play out that way, but I'm not going to blame it on that, that's for sure. I think we were put in a pretty good position there at the end. We tried to kind of figure out whether to keep going and hope for a yellow or try hand save a bit of fuel. That's why I let

Will pass. Obviously on the restarts we had a few guys that couldn't make it at all. It was definitely interesting.

Yeah, you know, I think Honda have done a superb job. We just missed a little bit today.

Q. Obviously aside from restarts, passing was at a premium. Rossi said downforce should be looked at for next year. Do you have any thoughts on that?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I don't know how to do it. The downforce level is maybe not necessarily the issue. If the guy in front fumbles a little, but is still behind the carrot, sucks up that you can't pass him, it's almost like the cars need a little more drag to make that happen or maybe a little bit of downforce so you can stay closer, utilize it. Seemed like you had to come from quite a long ways back.

Yeah, I didn't see the front group. Saw it occasionally on the restarts. I figured the first two or three could probably pass each other. Even when I got into a scenario with a clear track, slow competitors in front of us, it was very tough to get a run.

There was no real wind so no real corner that was distinctly harder than the others. Normally two or four has a big shift and you can get some cars that are bad, get them off those corners. That just didn't play true today.

Q. (No microphone.)

SCOTT DIXON: It won't take much. It will just be a little tweak to help that out. Yeah, I think even from the tire you could do something there, too.

Q. Was it concerning at all for you seeing so many veteran drivers spinning out on the run? Were you concerned personally it could happen to you at some point?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, you know, anything is possible. I've done it in turn four before in the race. My car, actually the rear felt pretty solid. I saw Bourdais, his looked pretty interesting in the short chute there. I didn't see the replay. I saw it on the big screen when we were under caution. That's look like what happened. I didn't see what happened with T.K.

Yeah, the car is pretty tricky. It seems like you get a lot of understeer. At the end if you get some clear air maybe from the car, if you get high on the car in front of you, it can snap around pretty quickly. I didn't have an

issue with the rear of the car today.

Q. The conditions, the heat, did it affect you as a driver? We got cloud cover for a significant portion of the race. Did that help or hurt the car?

SCOTT DIXON: It actually helped the car. I felt like stint four or five, the grip actually, the whole track I think gripped up quite a bit. It seems like most of the time the temperature hurts the tire a little bit more.

As the cloud cover came over, that definitely helped everybody's car. Didn't help just ours, but it helped everyone. It's the same for everyone.

The conditions, I didn't feel like it was too hot. I was expecting it to be, especially under caution, during the parade laps, it's hot out here, it's going to be a long day. As you got going, airflow over 200 is pretty good. It cooled everybody off. I didn't think it was much of an issue at all.

THE MODERATOR: Scott, thank you. Good luck next week.

SCOTT DIXON: Thank you. Appreciate it.

THE MODERATOR: Joined by the top finishing rookie, Robert Wickens, Schmidt Peterson Motorsports.

Was Indianapolis everything you expected?

ROBERT WICKENS: Yeah, and then some. In some ways I was hoping for more. In other ways it surpassed everything I ever could have imagined. It was one hell of a race. It was an emotional rollercoaster.

Early on I thought we were looking pretty good. We started 18th, picked off a couple on the start. On that yellow we made up a spot in the pits. Got another person on the restart. We were hovering around outside the top 10, like 12th, 13th. First 50 laps, great progress, keep chipping away at it, it's going to be a great day. Car was feeling great, pit stops were awesome.

Unfortunately on one of the earlier yellows we came into the pits thinking everybody was going to do the same. Turned out we were one of the only ones that did it. Put us on an alternate strategy. We lost track position. Today track position seemed like it was everything.

It was really hard to follow another car, because the track temp was so high, tire degradation was high, the dirty air, it was nearly impossible to keep your front alive for a whole stint.

It was a long afternoon. Honestly we were looking pretty good again because of our alternate strategy. Those two yellows in the middle, I guess was our nail

in the coffin, where we were basically stuck at the back, we couldn't make inroads anywhere.

That last yellow with 10 to go, we had nothing to lose. We put on new tires and restarted 19th and charged up to ninth. Honestly, it was an amazing 10 laps. If it wasn't for those 10 laps, I'd probably be pretty bummed with my first Indy 500. Passing 10 cars in the last 10 laps was something pretty special.

Yeah, to be the top rookie, it's pretty cool. I didn't enter the race to try to be the best rookie, I was trying to be in the top 10 all day long. We got there in the end, but unfortunately we only cracked the top 10 for the last couple laps.

Anyway, doesn't matter. Seemed like an exciting race up front. I was never a part of it. Yeah, I felt like I passed a lot of cars today. It was good fun.

THE MODERATOR: Did you find it difficult to keep track of the various strategies in play, the ups and downs of whether we're on the right one or wrong one?

ROBERT WICKENS: For sure. I don't know who was on the best strategy, when people were pitting. We were actually getting great fuel mileage the whole day. We kept on going a couple laps longer than everyone else. I think because of the tire degradation the undercut was actually pretty aggressive. I felt like we had great pit stops. The team did a great job there. We never lost spots, but we definitely weren't making progress through the pits.

It wasn't down to the guys. I thought it was more to tire degradation. We were kind of playing the statistics of the race. Historically you don't want to be the first one to pit. If you get a yellow, you can be a lap down, whatever the case is. We were always trying to go as long as possible.

The Honda engine was giving us great fuel economy. We were able to push it longer than anyone else most of the time. We were lining up there to be pretty sweet with making the fuel mileage, one more stop. Me and Oriol Servia there, we were 1-2, maybe we could do something. Unfortunately the last yellows made it possible for a lot of people.

No, I thought it was a great job by the guys. They were thinking on their feet. Yeah, I mean, it was a crazy race. I think it went by a lot faster than I was expecting.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. I saw Hinch was at your pit stand most of the race. What kind of help was he? Was it great having a teammate the whole week supporting you in the race?

ROBERT WICKENS: For sure. To be honest, within

our structure of our team at Schmidt Peterson Motorsports, there's only one person speaking to the driver. I actually don't know if James was giving input during the race.

Having him there, I mean, he's probably the most supportive teammate you could ever ask for. Even before the race, I was picking his brain, asking how it is on the outside right off the start. He was kind of telling me the dos and don'ts, some last minute words of wisdom.

It helped me a lot. Gave me that little bit of extra confidence to sail it around the outside on turn one on the start.

Q. Do you feel like your team has momentum back now?

ROBERT WICKENS: I feel like we never lost momentum. That's the big thing. We're such a strong team. I think we understand what happened on the 5 car. I think lesson learned. Things are implemented now that will never happen again.

It's a competitive championship here in the Verizon IndyCar Series. I think we learnt firsthand with James that if you're not perfect, you can be at risk of being knocked out. That's what happened to him.

With us, with the 6 car, we had a little fumble on Monday when we hit the wall. We made our lives a little bit difficult on Carb Day, into the race today not knowing exactly where our car was going to be. I thought we had a top five car all day. We were just stuck in the midfield for most of it, we just couldn't make inroads forward.

THE MODERATOR: We'll excuse Robert. Thank you.

We have our second-place finisher, Ed Carpenter. This didn't feel like how we were going to meet today. Everything seemed to be lining up just to be perfect.

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, you know, I'll feel pretty good about this in a couple days, I think. The team really did a great job all month long, all day long really. Pit stops were really good. It was almost like being out front early probably hurt us a little bit just because guys started saving fuel a little earlier. We got behind on the fuel save. Whatever segment Will got by us, went a couple laps further, my out lap we had traffic. One of those exchanges.

Track position was everything we thought it was going to be coming into the day. You heard the drivers talk all week. Just couldn't quite get it back from him. We were saving fuel through the middle part of the race when everyone was essentially trying to cut out a stop. That was a little odd.

You never know how these races are going to unfold. I

thought for the most part the team executed well. I thought there's only a couple little things that I can reflect on in the short-term right now that maybe could have made a difference.

All in all, I thought Will won the race and we ended up second, and we'll be happy with that. Come back stronger next year.

THE MODERATOR: Third pole of your career, 65 laps led, most of the day. It was easily your best month top to bottom.

ED CARPENTER: Yeah. I mean, that's what makes me, I think when I look back on this month, that's probably where I'll feel really good about it. We were strong just about every day, with all our cars, held that level of consistency and performance through the month.

Hopefully this will be a springboard for the team to jump into the back half of the season, have Spencer finally break through with some results. Jordan just needs to catch a break. He's been in a good spot, too. Hopefully this is going to be a springboard for the team to help the team make some strong finishes, win some races.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Did you feel like you had the car for Will, to compete there at the end? Seemed like you did.

ED CARPENTER: I thought we were both pretty good. I think consistently we were probably the best two cars, it seemed like. I think if the roles were reversed, he would have probably not been able to get by me either outside of a restart.

It was just really tough to pass another strong competitor today without having lap traffic in the pit or something else that was a mistake. Track position was hugely important.

He maybe seemed to get a little better than us. I would probably say we were a little stronger early in the day. My car seemed to pick up a little more understeer as the day went on. We couldn't seem to make enough adjustments to overcome that.

He came out on top.

Q. Do you have a sense of what this means to Will, especially given his reputation as a rogue guy, to win here on the ultimate oval?

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, I remember listening to him complain on the scanner, and I didn't really like him much in 2008 because he hated this place. Somewhere along the lines, Will and I became friends somehow. You can ask him now, like his favorite part of the schedule are the ovals. It's bizarre, but we kind of bonded since I'm an oval guy now. He likes to think

of himself as an oval guy. He definitely has one up on me now.

I'm really happy for him. I know how hard he worked to figure out how to be better on ovals, because he just flat out didn't like them at first. He turned a weakness into a strength. He'll make a great champion.

Q. You know how many things have to go right to have a chance at the end. Did it ever cross your mind that this is your best shot? Do you feel like it was?

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, I mean, it certainly was at this stage. '14 maybe was equal. We just weren't running in the finish, so it doesn't even matter. Certainly down the stretch, this was our best finish. I was hoping we could make something happen on that last green flag pit exchange, maybe cycle through in front of him. I was praying on that white flag lap that he was going to do a JR and I could coast home. Just didn't happen. It was his day and not mine.

Q. You mentioned it was difficult to pass stronger cars. You could get by the weaker cars, correct?

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, you could work your way through some lap traffic. It was really hard to pass anybody if they had clean air in front of them. If you got stacked up in a group of cars where they were all in traffic, I felt like my car was good enough I could kind of pick my way through some of them.

Ultimately if the race would have stayed green all day, it probably would have been better for guys like me and Will to get even more separation from the other guys. The way the race went, cautions. When you start getting cautions down the stretch, desperation comes out from everyone, you get in the cycle of more cautions. We've seen quite a few races go that direction down the stretch.

At the end of the day we had a chance to go fight one of the best teams and drivers for the 500. It's something I'm proud of. Like I said, the opening of this, I'll probably feel better about it in a couple days. It's a little (indiscernible) right now.

Q. Compare the racing today compared to previous years.

ED CARPENTER: It was a totally different type of race. I'll have to watch it from the outside to see from that perspective. I like the way it drives. It's definitely challenging to the driver. I like it when it's hard. That's why I was hoping it was going to be hot today because it makes things even more difficult.

The old car, if you had a really good car, you couldn't really get rewarded by getting away or getting separation. I think if you have a good enough car, you're rewarded by being able to get away a little bit.

I do think we need to maybe make little improvements

just because it's so hard in dirty air to do much, to even have a better finish at the end.

All in all, for this new kit, it's performed so well all year. Like every iteration of cars, the longer we have them, the better they'll get. So, yeah, it's a good day.

THE MODERATOR: Ed, thank you. Congratulations.

ED CARPENTER: Thank you all.