

IndyCar Media Conference

Saturday June 2, 2018

Scott Dixon

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joined now by the winner of Race 1 of the Chevrolet Detroit Grand Prix presented by Lear, Scott Dixon, driving the No. 9 PNC Bank Honda for Chip Ganassi Racing. Scott, May treated you fairly well, but how much of a relief is it to finally get the first one of the season off your back?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, it's always nice. I think right now with the competition in the Verizon IndyCar Series, it's just through the roof. If you look back a few years, you can sort of run off five or six victories in a season, and it seems those days are pretty much gone. But yeah, super proud of everybody at Chip Ganassi Racing, and obviously PNC Bank's first victory, so yeah, it's nice to -- finishing third in Indy is nice, but really people only care about who wins at that place, so it's always tough leaving Indianapolis unless you've won.

But it's always nice to rebound strong in Detroit. Honda have done a superb job, I think top-6 for them here in the Motor City is a pretty big deal, and congratulations to them. We're going to come back and do it all again tomorrow. Would have been nice to celebrate a bit tonight.

THE MODERATOR: I'm just going to flatter you for a few minutes here. 14 consecutive seasons with at least one win, 16 seasons total with at least one win, and then obviously your 42nd win here today tying you for third all time with Michael Andretti. At what point will this sort of sink in and you'll start to acknowledge this a little more naturally and comfortably? Is it not until after however many years from now you're done?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, you know, I feel very lucky and very privileged to be in this sport. It's a very tight-knit family group, I think, and to be on this one team obviously for 16 or 17 years, it's a very tight group of people. We win and lose together as a group, and we'd won 41 races together. I had another one at PacWest earlier in my career, but I feel very proud of them and being able to work with some of the best in the business.

I think we're also very lucky, too, to still have AJ and Mario and Michael still involved to a very high level in the sport, and the legends and what they've done for all of us is really gratifying to see.

For me, I love racing. I feel very lucky to do it, and

while I'm here, I want to do the best that I can. You know, winning is why we're in this business, and that's why we're going to come back tomorrow and try and get No. 43, but that's easier said than done.

Q. How big a role -- how much credit do you give Stef for being able early in your career to be able to connect the dots, get you to the right people, get you to the PacWest, get you to Chip Ganassi?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, Stefan? Stefan has been a good friend. It's kind of how things just worked out. Obviously he was what brought me to America. We tested, I think, in 1998 at Sebring, tested the first day with PacWest, had a pretty average day, and then ended up testing with Stephen Johansson's team and had a superb day. We were fastest out of all the cars in that preseason test, and him and Vern Schuppan were able to put together a deal where we just paid for testing and they all the other costs, but it really kicked off my racing career here in America. We were able to pick up a win and Rookie of the Year for that season and then get picked up by PacWest on the Indy Lights team and go on to win the championship the following year. But since that first contract with that team, I've always been somewhat tied with Stefan, but he's obviously a fantastic driver in his own right. The career he had in Formula 1 and many other victories at Le Mans and others throughout, he's always a good person to lean on and really he knows everybody in the sport, which helps. His contact, his black book is pretty big, so that helps.

But yeah, I think more just a friendship with Stefan is what I'm most grateful for, and between myself and Chip and the crew that I've mostly been with for these years, it's nice to do it with everybody that started it.

Q. You got your 42nd win, tied Michael Andretti. Awkwardly enough, you had to beat his cars to do it. What was it like beating the Andretti Autosport cars and Honda with the performance here in Chevrolet's backyard? Just kind of talk about that.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think it's definitely been quite obvious that the Honda have been strong here this weekend, which is good to see. I think they're working as hard as they can. The season and the parity is very close, but it's also -- there can be some polar opposites as we go through some of these different tracks, so it's quite interesting to see what you're always chasing with your competition. GM did a superb job, and they make it tough for all of us, and as you saw last week with Power's victory at the 500, nobody lays down.

Everybody keeps pushing. Honda will keep pushing, GM and Chevrolet are going to keep doing the same, too, and that's what's been really healthy for our sport.

What was the other question? Oh, with Andretti.

Yeah, I'm sure Michael was on the radio probably telling Hunter-Reay to get after it a little bit there. But yeah, no, Ryan was extremely fast on that second to last restart. I struggled to really turn the cars on, and our last stint we were actually very loose throughout, and we didn't really change anything, so I don't know if it was just the tire set that we had or maybe with the ambient conditions, the CRP was just too high. But yeah, it was definitely a handful, man. I was glad to see that checkered flag because the car was extremely tough to hold on to.

Q. Scott, after you took the lead following the pit stop there from Andretti, you extended, what, 25, 26 seconds, you felt comfortable enough to take a pit stop. Did you kind of feel like you were playing with house money almost? Those guys had to go -- you had a pit stop in the bag?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think we almost extended over 15 seconds at one point, which is nice to have that buffer, but obviously on these street courses, that can change in an instant. For us, it was nice to have that buffer. I think it was really important. It allowed us to actually pit early and not really stress about the undercut or people going longer actually on the over cut, extending that gap and trying to have a better lap. We actually caught traffic, so it worked into our favor to have that, and then that caution actually it was the first time I had seen IndyCar kind of hold off on going full course. There was a car in the runoff in 7 but actually allowing everybody to pit was nice. You didn't have the flipping strategy that sometimes the leaders are sitting ducks and get thrown to the back of the field. But for us, we were one of the first to pit just because we caught the traffic so it actually was in our favor anyway. But yeah, it's always tough, and if you can open up a gap like that, it's always going to help.

Q. On the first stint with Marco on pole, how much of that was just kind of biding your time knowing this guy hasn't been on a pole in a while, and did you ever have a real chance of overtaking him or was it just wait to get in the window?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I knew Marco was going to be strong at the start. I knew he wouldn't want to give it up too easy, either. Turn 1 and 2 can be quite tricky here, and obviously then you go straight into that big run down to Turn 3. I tried to pressure him a little bit, but their car was strong on restarts. Well, it was just kind of biding time. It was quite strange, Marco would run 79-second laps and then a 77 would come out of the blue. The pace was quite strange. Wasn't really sure what we were doing there. It was hard to get into a bit of a rhythm. We wanted to stay as close as possible just in case they pitted quite early. We knew

they kind of had to get to lap 20 to make it work anyway, and then we started to pile on the pressure a little bit there to be close on that pit stop exchange.

You know, in that process we were trying to save as much fuel as possible to make sure that whenever they did pit we could go a lap or two longer, and that's how it played out. As soon as he peeled off, we used a ton of OT, that good Honda power there, and threw in a big lap time, which the pit stop was flawless, too, and we were able to jump him.

Q. Your competitors speak with the utmost respect and reverence for you, your career. I don't think I could find anybody in the paddock that's ever said anything bad about you as a race driver. When you have that level of respect and reverence from your competitors, how does that make you feel?

SCOTT DIXON: I think that level of respect is across the board. You know, I think -- again, I feel very lucky to race all of these competitors. I think importantly for IndyCar right now, we've seen a tremendous amount of influx of rookies, too, and really damn fast rookies, and it's good to see for the sport. Some different names coming in, which is good for the future. You know, I feel lucky to race some of the veterans that I have for a while but also some of these guys that have raced in different series throughout the world, and then have come over here to try it, too. Yeah, I have the utmost respect for almost the entire field. The depth of the IndyCar Series right now is like no other.

Q. Do you have another eight wins left in you to hit the 50 mark?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I don't -- that's the goal. I'd like to have another 10 or 15, but you know, it's definitely got tougher throughout these years, and there's some really strong teams. There's no little teams anymore, and even some of these teams like to call themselves little teams, they're not little teams. They're very well funded and have very good engineering stuff and are able to pull off victories. It's good for the health of the sport, and the problem right now is any team, any driver combination out there on the grid can win.

THE MODERATOR: If you're going to shoot for 50, you might as well shoot for 52, which would tie you for second?

SCOTT DIXON: Well, 53.

Q. When you're in the lead like that, and I've seen you in the lead like that many races before, what is going on in your mind, and do you ever feel tired, think tired, anything like that? What's just your focus?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, there's plenty of oh, s--- moments, and you're like, oh -- you actually do talk to yourself, or at least I talk to myself a little bit, and it's just -- you keep pushing, you keep pushing, you're just constantly trying to find the edge, especially when

you've got somebody to strong behind you. Hunter-Reay was really good on his restarts, and the car was quite tricky at that point. You're trying to find the edge of grip and keep it on the track at the same time. It's very easy to lose control, and especially in the confinements of these concrete walls.

Yeah, it's just the adrenaline is flowing big time, especially when you see a victory so close. You just -- one, you're trying to go as fast as possible without screwing it up.

Q. Do you have blisters here that are worse than normal, and historically speaking how much tougher is the Sunday race here?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think it depends a lot on the car, how tough the car is, and especially in the last stint there, our car was very loose, so very hard to hold on to. But no, I think the American Ninja Warrior actually helped out my hands out, so yeah, I feel pretty good.

THE MODERATOR: It's coming up on June 18th, by the way.

SCOTT DIXON: There we go. Don't blink.