

IndyCar Media Conference

Sunday July 8, 2018

James Hinchcliffe

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Let's welcome our race winner of the Iowa Corn, James Hinchcliffe, sixth career win today, first win since Long Beach of last year. Great day.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Very good day. Very good day. The best day. You know, it's so nice to be back up top after kind of the season that we've had, obviously the month of May that we had. But we've had a couple good weekends in a row, really just strong performances from the whole team, and we kind of felt some momentum coming in here, and we tested here last week, and I'm very glad that we did for sure. I think that was a huge advantage. All the guys that came here seemed to be kind of up top this weekend.

And then come the race, we didn't qualify particularly well. Had a bit of a problem. But we weren't working on a quick car, we were working on a good car over a stint. We've won at Iowa before, and the key is taking care of your Firestones, the key is having a good car in lane 1, lane 2, being able to get through traffic, and that's ultimately what we did.

We got through a bunch of cars in that first stint, got through a couple more in the pit cycle, didn't have as good a car in the middle part of the race, and Josef was just so dominant, I didn't think we had anything for him. I thought we were kind of running for second to be honest, and then that last stop, the aero crew just nailed it on the pit stop, gave us a really good change, and the car just came alive. Was able to put it wherever I needed to to get through traffic, and that's the only reason I was able to catch Josef and ultimately get by him was just our ability through traffic. I think he was a bit quicker clean air.

But can't thank the guys enough for such a great car and great job in the pits. It's a shame that Robby ended up taking that pit stop at the end. Man, it would have been great to have both of us up on the podium heading into the hometown race in Toronto. But overall it was a great result for the Arrow car and for Schmidt Peterson Motorsports in general.

THE MODERATOR: Talk about the end; obviously you decided not to come in and pit. What was the discussion on the radio or what was the thought process there?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: It was like worst-case

scenario, right? You're leading the race by a couple seconds, everything is good, like 10 laps to go, and you see a yellow come out. Based on what we've seen before, we saw it at Phoenix, we've seen it at Iowa in the past, and actually I think both times Josef benefited greatly from doing it, so we weren't totally shocked that people took it.

But when we were doing the math in our head, I mean, there was still only a couple laps to go. We still had to get the lapped cars back through pit lane, and we're kind just doing the math, thinking, I don't even know if we have time to go green, and if we do, it's like a green-white-checkered kind of deal, and I don't hate my odds if it's a lap, if it's two laps. It was a tough call. It really was, because we've seen it go the other way so many times, but ultimately the right call was made, and man, if we had pitted from the lead and it didn't go green again, I wouldn't have slept for a week. This is a bad week to not sleep going into Toronto because I'm very busy this week.

THE MODERATOR: You touched on it a little bit after the first question, but after the way things have gone in May and trying to turn things around, is it more a sense of relief, or how do you feel right now?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I'm just proud, honestly, proud of this group because something like what happened to this team in May can really get you down. I mean, obviously that's our Super Bowl. That's our Wimbledon. That's our Masters all wrapped into one. To miss it is a huge blow for every single member of the team. I mean, I don't know if anybody saw the NBC feature that aired before the race, but we had grown men like in tears, like a lot of them in a lot of tears on bump day there. It just shows how much it means to us.

To not make it can very easily just get a group down and you can get despondent. You can kind of lose track of what the real goal is and lose motivation. But no one in this group suffered from that at all. If anything, it fueled us and made us want to perform better and push harder and work harder. We've come back strong; the last couple events have actually been very good for us. Texas was a strong race. If Elkhart hadn't been such a bad qualifying, our race day pace was very good. We executed very well.

So it's really coming together now. We've had a lot of changes internally on the team, both before the season

and mid-season, so it's been a bit of a balancing act trying to get all the right pieces in the right places, but I think this shows that we're starting to hit on something really good.

Q. What was the change that was made in the stop that made it so good, and what happened to you when you had that wobble and Sato got past you and demoted you to third?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: So in the first stint, the car was really good. We just made a tiny change to try and dial in a little more understeer. It was pretty free in that first stint. We overshot it and had way too much understeer in the second stint. So as we tried to go back on it, we went too far, and we were really loose in the third stint, and so that's what allowed Sato to get by us was I think I caught somebody, wrong place, wrong time, got a big wiggle, set up the track, and he went by.

That was when I was starting to panic a little bit because we still had about 30 laps left in the stint and I was maxed right on the weight jacker, max on the front bar. It was kind of dire straits for a bit. We were surprised how far the balance went for a relatively small change.

So I just said, hey, look, the first stint was the best stint; let's go back to whatever we did there, and that's what we did, and the thing just came alive. We were able to run both lanes, and that's really what helps you when you come up on lap traffic, and it's all about lap traffic at a short track like this.

Q. Of the top three, Sato was the best starter at 10th. Were you surprised by how much people were able to move forward on the grid, and were you also surprised by how few cautions there were, considering what looked like a very difficult-to-drive race car?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: It's funny, we had that conversation before the race, you know, what did we think the caution frequency was going to be. And it's so funny because we've seen it -- in practice -- if you just like went on how the car felt in practice, you'd be like, yeah, there's going to be tons of cautions; guys are going to be crashing all over the place because these things are really hard to drive right now. But what happens when tires start falling off and that starts happening is guys really start taking care of themselves and each other a lot more. You don't have as much confidence to throw it down the inside and make a stupid move, and it's contact that usually leads to accidents and the cautions. We thought it was going to go one of two ways; it was either going to be a crash-fest, or it was actually going to be a pretty clean race, and obviously it was the latter. We were glad to see that. I think that's better for the fans. I think it was a good ebb and flow with the different tire strategies.

In terms of being surprised at guys coming from further back, it doesn't really surprise me a ton. I'm surprised

that some of the guys that qualified really well didn't finish as well as I thought they might have. But in a race that's all about managing your tires, we've seen it at Texas, we've seen it other places, you can qualify anywhere, and if your car is hooked up, you can work your way to the front.

Q. Going back on what you said earlier to the changes of the car, do you think without the changes you ever would have caught Josef?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: No way. In that third stint we kind of caught up to him-ish, but there was just -- I just couldn't keep up with him. He eventually -- he pulled away from us a little bit after the first kind of 20 laps, and he caught some traffic. I was able to close that gap, but I could get to within about a second, and that was as close as I could get. It seemed like he was struggling, as well, and I heard over the radio that he was complaining of his car going a bit loose, same as us. So he couldn't really get through the traffic, but he was running definitely a bit closer than we were, and like I said, I was maxed out on my tools, so I knew if it got any worse we were going to be in big trouble.

Q. During the race was there any moment you had to -- were scared about the fuel consumption?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: No, fuel wasn't really an issue for us. With the tires going off the way they were, it was more about could you make it to the end of your fuel stint, not did you ever need to extend the fuel stint or anything like that. In a race like that, the undercut is always going to be quicker, so I think that's actually how Spencer got around us on that last set of stops.

But ultimately it played into our hands to be able to run a little bit longer at a decent pace and just take care of the Firestones, which was the plan from the start.

Q. Tim Cindric said that you had the best car at the right time. Do you see that as really the key to the race?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I think that's a great way of putting it. Josef obviously was dominant for a large part of the day, and we had stints where I don't think we were particularly awesome. But we were able to just kind of hold on to it, and when it mattered in that last stint, the guys nailed the setup changes, and that's really what won us the race today.

Q. Have you ever gone into the Toronto race off of a victory?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I have never done that. Well, in 2013 was Toronto after Iowa?

Q. I think that was in June.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I think you might be right. I don't think we ever have, no. No, I think this is a first.

Q. So how much is your life going to be taken from you over these next few days?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I had no life already for the

next week. Come on. They're going to try and squeeze in a bit, but good luck to you, sir, because there was no time left. I said I'm probably going to miss stuff. I was supposed to be on a flight in like 20 minutes back to Toronto because I've got stuff tomorrow. I'm not making that, am I?

Q. I think you have some karting tomorrow, don't you?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I do, among other things.

Q. You talked about how your car got stronger at the end. You could really put it wherever you wanted to. I think from the beginning of the race it would be fair to say that Josef's car could really go anywhere he wanted to put it and yet he built up quite a lead. What do you think happened? Is it that the car in Josef's case, did they go the wrong way on the setup and your car just got better because of the way you kept improving it? How did that change over the course of the race?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: It tough to know what happened on their deal. The track evolves a little bit. Normally when it's this hot, it gets more and more under-steery, but for us, in that middle stint it got loose, in the third stint, and same for Josef. I'm not sure. I'm not sure if they were adjusting their car or if they were so dominant at the start, they're like, just leave it, don't touch it because it's great, and maybe they didn't keep on top of it. I have no idea.

But just so much can change, and it just shows how quickly things can change on a short track like this. They were miles ahead. They were gone. They were clear of everybody. Just a couple things change, and that gets reversed.

I feel bad for him that he ended up taking that stop and he didn't go green again to get a chance to see what he could do. That's tough for him because he obviously had such a great day, and tough for Robby, as well. I'm bummed that he went in, as well. But that's racing. I've been on the losing end of one of those deals, too, so I'm okay with it.

Q. Back to the Indy stuff, is it going to take going back there next year for that all to be put behind you? Even though today is awesome, is it going to take getting back there to do that?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, people are going to keep talking about it until we go back, right. Even if the conversation dies for the next little while, as soon as May 1st comes around, it's going to come back up. Yeah, for sure. But days like this, and honestly weekends like we've had -- I think Road America was actually one of our best races of the entire year, and ninth place doesn't look like that, but if you were on the inside and saw what happened and how we performed on Sunday, I think you'd be pretty impressed. It was a really good performance from everybody. Same kind of thing in Texas. We've just been on a bit of a roll. If

we just keep doing what we've been doing and not focus on it, and when we get back to Indy next year, not think about it, just kind of put it out of our heads, I think we'll be in good shape.

Q. We talked a little bit about what it means to come here to Iowa for you; talk about today's race and the win, your second gas pump. I know that you talked to me about that. Just talk about Iowa Speedway and what that means to you.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: From my first IndyCar race here in 2011, I've just loved this place. It's a short track that races like a superspeedway. It's always exciting. There's always something going on on track. It's a tricky place to get around, especially as the track has evolved and it's gotten a bit bumpier, a bit rougher and more patches and seams and all of rest of it. Then they went and took a thousand-ish pounds of downforce away from us just to make it exciting.

But no, honestly it's a track I've always loved coming to. The crowd is always great. The support from the Iowa Corn Growers has been there from day one, which is just awesome to see as somebody involved in the business side of the sport, as well, it's always cool to see that kind of support, and I can't wait to come back next year.

Q. How important is it to have short ovals like this on the schedule?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Well, it's interesting because -- you worded that question interestingly. How important is it to have a short ovals or how important is it to have short ovals like this? I think it's very important to have short ovals like this. We have had some other short ovals that maybe didn't put on shows like this, and this is what we love doing is going out there, racing each other hard, putting on a good show for the fans here, for the fans at home, and there's no better short track on earth for that, for IndyCars at least, than Iowa Speedway. We miss going to places like Milwaukee. That's kind of in the same vein as this place.

But I think this is massively important because, again, what makes the Verizon IndyCar Series so special is you have to be good at superspeedways, short ovals, road courses, street courses, and if you don't have those short ovals, it takes something away from it.

Q. Speaking of putting on a show, how do you feel about green-white-checked finishes, and does IndyCar need them?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: If the track is clean with two laps to go, then yeah, I'm all for them. I'm not a big fan of like doctoring the length of a race just to make sure it ends under green. I get it. I get why it's done in NASCAR, but it just -- it complicates things. For me there's too many races that are fuel mileage races for us that we have guys that -- I mean, they sweat, they lose five years off their life making sure that we hit the right numbers and we run out of fuel crossing the line,

and if all of a sudden a yellow flag comes out with two to go and it ends up becoming a green-white-checkered, your race is done, and I don't think that's fair. We go into it knowing how long it's going to be, and that's what we plan for, so that's what I want to run.

Q. You already talked a bit about the variety of IndyCar just a few minutes ago, and I was going to ask you about that. The whole podium really had a tough year so far, mid-pack starts. To come up through the pack and you don't have to start up front and it's a parade, it's just not how IndyCar is. Talk about the variety and even coming from a road course to short oval to street circuit next weekend?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: So, and that's what makes it so interesting, right, is you can have a bad road course car, but that doesn't mean you're going to have a bad season. If you race in Formula 1 and you've got a bad road course car, you're screwed. You can still come here and have a completely different kind of race. But being good here doesn't mean you're going to be good at Pocono. It doesn't mean you're going to be good at Detroit. It really is part of what throws up some surprise results sometimes in our series and just makes it a little more exciting. It's not the four or five guys winning every race, and that's what I love about this series. How you motivate yourself to get up on Sunday morning when you know 12th is a win for you, I just don't get it.