

IndyCar Media Conference

Sunday July 8, 2018

Spencer Pigot Takuma Sato

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Joined by second- and third-place finishers in today's Iowa Corn 300, Spencer Pigot, his best career finish in the Verizon IndyCar Series, and Takuma Sato, third-place finisher, his first podium finish since winning the Indianapolis 500 in 2017.

Let's start with Spencer, a terrific run. Yes, the car had finished second last year, but you drove a terrific race today.

SPENCER PIGOT: Thank you. Yeah, it was a tough race out there. Right from the get-go, I knew that we had a fast car the way we were able to pass some people through the beginning of the race, and then as the stint went on, I just thought we got kind of stronger and stronger and was really able to close down and pass people. Yeah, I mean, I can't thank the guys enough. We made a few changes from qualifying yesterday. Obviously that was a little disappointing, but we kept our heads down, and the guys in pit lane did a great job and executed really well. Can't thank them enough, Fuzzy's Vodka, Chevrolet, all of our partners, Ed Carpenter Racing. It's great to be up here on the podium.

We've had a season that I think we could have executed a little bit better at times, but today everything went right, and we found ourselves on the podium, so it's definitely a great feeling.

THE MODERATOR: Takuma, action all over the racetrack today, more than two lanes sometimes, and three wide a couple times. Pretty active out there for you?

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, really, really pleased. In fact, Spencer and I had a lot of great, I think, side by side, and one stage was a little close, but I think we respected each other all the time, and today I don't think there's a much of the disagreement in terms of the lane change and things like that. Obviously a lot of drivers is not happy with the balance and grip level today, but everyone has a struggle. I think we gave a great show for the fans, and we lose a thousand pounds of downforce compared to last year, which was already low enough, so imagine how it was a challenge for all the drivers. But I think we put on a really good race, and me particularly, obviously very happy to be on the podium, but this was a great achievement from



Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing because obviously I didn't think we had a podium finish car after the first practice session where Graham and I finished, I don't know, 17th, 19, things like that. We kept that last week. We really struggled, but I think all the engineering did a fantastic job moving up over the session, and in the end I think we pulled a really great car. So big thank you to the whole team, and the No. 30 car was fantastic today.

THE MODERATOR: You had a scare late, Takuma, with Spencer's teammate.

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, I think I must send him a big check not to be in the spin. But I think Ed and obviously Spencer, they are really competitive all the time, so it was a big moment with Ed, and it was already close stage, and got huge momentum already together. I thought I was going through it, but he basically snapped it and coming back towards me. We clipped it a little bit and had really gentle contact, which gave him back in the straight, but I had a little bit, I think, the body damage, but the car was absolutely fine.

If it become a restart closing the race for the two laps, I would be able to compete with these guys.

THE MODERATOR: Did either of you consider pitting?

SPENCER PIGOT: No, I mean, I didn't even know what was going on to be honest. I saw people diving off in front of me, and I thought there were guys that were laps down, and I thought I kind of saw Josef's car and was a little confused there for a second, and when I crossed the line, I didn't really know where I was, and I was talking with the guys seeing if they wanted me to pit or not, and they said stay out, and obviously it was the right decision. Yeah, I mean, if it had gone green again, it would have been really tricky to hang on at that point because I think we probably pitted on the early end on the last stop to try and jump Takuma and James, but yeah, it would have been tough. I'm glad it didn't go green again.

Q. Spencer, you said the car became stronger and stronger at the end of the race; was there any significant changes during your stops, engineering-wise?

SPENCER PIGOT: Honestly the only changes we made were new tires. Never touched the wings. I think we might have done a little tire pressure. But

they were asking me what I wanted, and I just said, leave it alone. It felt good. I think we're probably one of the few people out there that didn't touch the front wing throughout the whole race, and maybe that was a good thing, maybe it was a bad thing. Definitely at the end there it seemed like James and Josef had a little bit more pace than us, but I was comfortable with the car and didn't really want it to do anything different.

Q. Some important or big changes from qualifying to race to make the car better?

SPENCER PIGOT: Yeah, we definitely made a few changes, nothing crazy, nothing massive, just tried to kind of fine-tune it a little bit. I think last night in the second practice we were a little bit more competitive than the time sheets suggested, so I think we felt cautiously optimistic. Definitely wasn't sure we were going to have as good of a car as we did, but the changes we made obviously worked out well, and with the heat of the day, we didn't seem to degrade quite as much as a lot of other guys.

Q. Were you both doing some quick math in your head there at the end to try to figure out how many laps were left, how long will the pits be open, how much time will we get to go green, or do you leave that up to the guys on the stand?

TAKUMA SATO: I think we always do in portionally. Driver at the end of the day, sometimes they make a decision. For example, in damp conditions, changing for the dry tire, that's heavily on the driver. But today, it's just mathematic calculation, like Spencer said, it's basically up to the team how we're going to do. At the end of the day, usually just to follow the reader. But closing a stage, like he said, when Josef and other people come into the pit like you saw in Phoenix, sometimes it's better to be stay out, and I think we are the ones -- basically it's just a driving road sometimes, but statistically I think it's only five or six laps left, I think there's no point. But there's a high chance to not be able to moving up enough with the new tire because I think we were only halfway -- not halfway but two thirds of the stint on the tires, and I think we were still healthy condition.

SPENCER PIGOT: Yeah, I mean, I have a little counter on my dash that says how many laps we've done, so I knew we were getting close to the end. Like I said, I didn't really think anyone was going to pit. I thought we were pretty close to the end, and I figured we'd all just kind of stay out, and when I saw them pit, I was a little surprised, and the guys just told me to stay out, so at that point you just do what you're told and see how it unfolds.

Q. That yellow comes out and you're trying to do the math; how much of a whirlwind of a race was it as it was, and now you've got to do math at the end of that? Was that mentally like, okay, let's get this thing over with, it's been a long enough day?

SPENCER PIGOT: Yeah, it was a long race, honestly.

I was kind of counting down the laps and looking forward to the finish. It was definitely difficult out there. But the when the yellow came out, it was just a small piece of debris, so there was every possibility that the race was going to get restarted, and I was asking the guys how many people behind me pitted and what the situation is with lapped cars because I knew I was running second at that point, and if guys are on new tires, it's going to be really, really hard to hold them off, especially with how many laps we had on them. Yeah, you just kind of count, see what you have on your dash and listen to what they're saying and just kind of hope that it works out for you.

Q. Spencer, going back to last season when you got the nod for the full-time entry this year, getting the off-season testing, do you find that this run is more gratifying or more relief given everything that you've gone through?

SPENCER PIGOT: Probably a little bit of both, honestly. It's definitely a great feeling to be on the podium. I think that at certain times the past couple seasons we've had the pace to challenge for the podium, and one thing or another happened and it didn't quite work out, so it's nice to have it all go smoothly and we were able to really capitalize on everything that was going on. The pit stops were great throughout the race. We had a few close calls, but just close enough to keep going and not have any real issues.

So it's very satisfying, and yeah, a nice weight off the shoulders to be up here on the podium and have a really good result.

Q. You've been pretty level through this since I saw you on pit road after the race. Not a lot of excitement from you, but you're pretty calm and cool and collected most of the time. Is there some more inside of you?

SPENCER PIGOT: Yeah, for sure I'm excited. In the car I was pretty pumped up and on the radio to the guys. I was really happy to see everyone when I came back into pit lane, everyone that's worked so hard for me and for this team to see all the smiles on their faces and they deserve this podium just as much as anyone else. Just really happy for the team at Ed Carpenter Racing, and yeah, I mean, I'm excited, trust me. I'm happy. But hopefully one of these days we'll be one step higher up.

Q. Takuma, you did make contact with Ed, and it really looked like you saved him from a big accident, but what about your car? How did your car handle after that?

TAKUMA SATO: It was fine. Fortunately it looked a big contact, but it was gentle because if it's big I would have spin out, too. Obviously I was also trying to avoid it, and then there was a little bit of scuff on my rear, like almost a tire ramping part just before the rear axle. There's no effect in terms of the car performance, so it

was fine. I mean, I wish if I had one more stint compared to probably Spencer opposite mentality because we were running P2 the stint before, and we lost a bunch after the last pit stop. If I had a chance to catchall the guys up, then that would be really appreciated, but obviously it was only six laps left, so nothing I could do. But the guys did a great job, and it was very fortunate between Ed and I and not going to be any massive accident.

Q. Spencer, I'm sure Ed is very happy with where you finished, but in terms of your progress as a rookie and coming through with Ed Carpenter Racing, was your car just a lot better than what you've had before for this particular race, or have you just become more confident as a driver on these types of tracks?

SPENCER PIGOT: Well, for this particular race, it was improving throughout the weekend, I thought, but this is my first race here since Indy Lights in 2015, so it was nice to come back and have this kind of car and this kind of performance. Definitely it's been a little bit of a struggle at certain times. Phoenix, another short oval, wasn't great for us, but this weekend obviously we turned it around, and it's full credit to the guys, to Ed. He's really taught me a lot, and he really brings a lot to the table in terms of development and setting up the car. Very happy to be a part of this group, and yeah, like I said, it's kind of a work in progress every weekend, and this one just kind of happened to work out a little bit better than some others.

Q. Talk about emotion; when you got out of the car, it wasn't too soon after that your mom found you and she was full of emotion. Talk a little bit about that moment.

SPENCER PIGOT: Yeah, the first time I saw my mom after I got out of the car, she was screaming and running around, and she didn't even know I was there. I was like, Mom, I'm right here. She's in the back. I think she's a little embarrassed. But you know, it's a huge family effort. They've been supporting me, my parents, since I started racing when I was nine years old, and it's always been a family dream and a family goal to be racing IndyCars. This is the first IndyCar race my dad hasn't been here for, so he's missing out, but he'll be there in Toronto and looking forward to seeing him, and yeah, it's just -- it means a lot to everyone in the family.