

IndyCar Media Conference

Friday July 13, 2018

Conor Daly

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with our Verizon IndyCar Series press conference. Joined now by Conor Daly, driver of the No. 88 Harding Group Chevrolet for Harding Racing. Back in a car for the Honda Indy Toronto this weekend. Connor, first of all, just how excited are you to join Harding Racing for this event and get back in an IndyCar?

CONOR DALY: Very excited. Driving around tracks is better than sitting around them. I really enjoy that a lot. The team is giving me a great opportunity here. Obviously I think there's a lot to be learned at this track when it comes to the technical side. It's a very bumpy, wild place, and I think -- I'm trying to do the best I can to put some building blocks in place for the race on Sunday and then just see what happens. I think it's very much a fact-finding mission for us both, and very thankful to just be here in general.

THE MODERATOR: When we received the news about you entering this weekend's race, it was poised in a very flattering way towards you, the team wanting you to bring in information to the team to help them grow and develop as they navigate their first full season in the Verizon IndyCar Series. What do you respond with when somebody comes to you and says, Conor, we feel like you're somebody that can help us out?

CONOR DALY: I mean, it's really cool. I appreciate that. As a one-car team, they're the only one-car team, and it's really hard. This is a really competitive series that we have here. Most teams have at least two cars, and it's double the information, double the amount of setup changes you can make to try and find the appropriate balance. This series is so competitive, everyone is so close that you almost need that, and I think to have me in and to have sort of my -- I guess my technical knowledge, I've dealt with situations last year where we had a lot of new people and a lot of new stuff and a whole new aero kit to deal with all in one year, so I'm sort of used to the situation of really needing to find sort of the next level of setup and things that we need to do to improve and to make the car better overall.

I'm going to do the best I can in that situation, and we're all being realistic about this situation, and I think we're going to try and have some fun with it and enjoy the weekend, and hopefully it turns out with a good race, too.

THE MODERATOR: You've already been out for a practice session earlier today, about to head into your second one. What are some things you're noticing about the track and about the team and how it operates and the people behind it?

CONOR DALY: Well, obviously the car is very different immediately. So much less downforce than last year. But it is fun. I think it's a fun car to drive. I think the brakes for me are a lot actually better this year than what I had last year, so that was really nice to get a feel for.

But 45 minutes is not a lot. We did like 14 laps, and it happens really fast. Definitely some differences, definitely -- I really like the fact that the team is open to doing a wide variety of setup changes immediately. We made a lot of different changes already in the first session, which is what we are trying to do is find a good direction for the balance, and I'm pretty happy with that so far.

Q. Tell me about a new team, getting situated, how they do things. Take me through that process to try to fit yourself into the new scheme, and they brought you in here to add to, not just keep it even.

CONOR DALY: Well, I mean, I've been in these situations before. I've jumped into multiple different cars last minute, and I'm used to getting into these things pretty quickly. But for me I've known a lot of these guys since I was an infant. I've been in this paddock for a very long time, so I'm very familiar with a lot of the guys, so it's a great group of people.

I really like the outlook on what we're trying to do here. I think it's very reasonable. I think it's very -- I like the place that we're in because I think everyone is just trying to enjoy the weekend and accept everything that we're going to throw at the crew, whether it's a lot of setup changes or whether it's a lot of different things we can do with the gears, different things we can do with the car just to try and make it go as fast as it can possibly go, and that's in the end what we all want to have happen.

Q. Josef Newgarden came up back when he was just starting out racing and did some racing at Mosport; you yourself with Brian Graham for a season I think it was.

CONOR DALY: Oh, yeah.

Q. We've got Hinchcliffe, we've got Wickens. What is it about racing in Ontario that gives you guys maybe some sophistication to go on to big-time racing?

CONOR DALY: Yeah, I mean, I spent most of 2008 here, the Ontario Formula Ford Championship. It was a great time in my life. We got a lot of wins up there at Mosport and it was a lot of fun racing Calabogie, racing Montreal, all over the place. Great time, and I think I learned a lot about really why I'm here, the technical side of racing. I was racing in the Skip Barber National Championship and then also racing in the Formula Ford Championship to try and build the technical knowledge and be able to figure out feedback, how do I deliver things to my engineer, and I think that's paid off for sure in the long run.

I love coming to Canada. I love coming here all the time. There's a lot of great people here, a lot of obviously incredible fans of the sport in general and some great Canadian racing drivers like Hinch and Wickens there, and they're obviously nice people, as well.

Q. It used to be if you were called into a meeting with Brian Barnhart as a driver, it would mean -- it was like going to the principal's office. Now he's your boss. How is that dynamic working out for you?

CONOR DALY: I like Brian. His voice on the radio, it's really assuring. I think he's very stern in the way he talks, but I know he's got a lot of passion for this sport. We've all seen that. And it's a great group to work with. I think all the guys are good leaders. I think there's some really strong leaders on the pit box there, and even having Al Jr. there, as well. I think that's really cool to have that as part of the team dynamic without a doubt.

Q. A lot of fans around here remember your dad being here, so there's a lot of daily heritage around this, and I think you're aware of that.

CONOR DALY: Yeah. I mean, dad has been here before. I've had a lot of people ask if he's going to be here, but I think all my family is not really going to be able to be here because we didn't really know until Tuesday whether I was going to drive. That's kind of cool, but they're all obviously paying attention, texting me all the time, seeing what's going on, and yeah, Dad has had a lot of runs around here himself.

Q. What sort of progress has the team made through the first half of the year that you're kind of glad they did with the car that helps get you up to speed this morning?

CONOR DALY: I mean, I think every weekend they're learning. We don't have data to look at from last year, right, so what are we looking at before the session? Not a lot. We're just like, hey, I think this is where we're going to start, this is what we've got information-wise, and I'm like, absolutely, sounds like a great idea.

Obviously from the first session we immediately learned, all right, this is what we didn't like, this is what we did like. We improved our lap time every single run, and we didn't have another set of new tires to use, and still the last lap was our fastest lap.

That's realistically how you want it to go, and now we have another set of new blacks to run and another set of reds, too, in session 2, so really excited to see what that has for us. It's just step-by-step progress, and the fact that we were even faster than some people, I think that's pretty good for us, I think, so far. To come in and having not driven an IndyCar on a road course since September of last year is pretty cool.

Q. Conor, how difficult is it to come into a track like this that's not very forgiving? Would you have preferred it to be maybe someplace like Road America, and do you know if you'll be doing any other races between now and the end of the season for the team?

CONOR DALY: Well, to answer the second part of that first, we're just starting with this weekend. Don't know what else is going to happen in the future, but I'm used to that. I'm going to use every session as best I possibly can.

But the first part of that question, I think it's actually way better to come to a track like this than Road America. The forgiveness level really never comes into your head because either way you can make a mistake at any racetrack. But Toronto and street courses in general, that's my bread and butter. I love that stuff. We've been on the podium at street courses before. We've been in the Fast Six here before. So there's a lot of good things that have happened on street courses. And no one has tested here, so obviously that's somewhat better to be on that sort of playing field.

And I like this place a lot. They've done a great job with the paving here. I think Turn 1 now the brake zone is fantastic. You're no longer -- your face isn't bouncing off the steering wheel as you brake for that corner, so I think that's really awesome. Yeah, I'm a lot happier with the changes that have been made to the track for sure.

Q. How resilient have you had to be over these last couple of years, because I'm sure that every time another driver gets hired by another team, you've got to think to yourself, well, I know I can do better than them.

CONOR DALY: Well, I don't know about that. I think there's -- hired, there's a lot of asterisks around that word these days. But for me, I know what I can do. I know there's a lot of people that still do have faith in me. I think there's a lot of people in these teams that have seen what I can do, seen what I have done in certain situations. We've had a rocky road for sure over the last four years. But I do feel like I have

delivered at the level that is needed to compete in the IndyCar Series, and I've been super thankful to have these chances to do that. I think there's an incredible group of people at this Harding Racing team that have seen enough to at least give me the opportunity here, and I'm super thankful for that. I'm just going to keep doing what I can do, keep trying to learn every time I get out on the racetrack, and if I can get more chances to race, I'm going to continue to do everything I can do to have a job more often.