

IndyCar Media Conference

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Scott Dixon Takuma Sato

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joined now by Takuma Sato, driver of the No. 30 Mi-Jack Panasonic Honda for Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing, finished second fastest in today's afternoon practice session. Takuma, seems like from this morning's session to this afternoon's session, your team, your car is showing a lot of speed. What are you noticing from these sessions so far heading into the weekend?

TAKUMA SATO: I think it's a very positive day. The car worked pretty well for me out of the box. Really the philosophy took over from last year, the generic aero setup, and obviously built on it for the 2018 kit for the reductions of the aeros and stuff like that.

No, it felt positive, the grip right away. The Firestone tire was supposed to be very similar to last year. I think the compound is a little chemical change, but it felt for me it's a lot more -- faster warmup, and I got good grip. I think it sounds like the working range is even wider than last year, so seems to be very, very competitive tires.

And of course the track change, the Toronto track is just a significant difference, especially for down the main straight. It's a lot less bumpy and very comfortable for all the drivers, and not only for that, but I think it's safety, as well, but it's less bottoming and less locking. It's a suggestion is much, much improving, so an impressive job they've done.

Entire laps, I think I was really happy from practice 1 to practice 2. There was a little bit of balance issue for me in practice 1 that could improve a little bit, but practice 2 it was much more liking the way, and I know the lap times are very close and very competitive with everyone else. So it's a very tight field, but it's nice to be ahead of them. Obviously Dixey did quite a stunning lap in the red tire. Seems to be everybody a little bit kind of finding grip and struggling to improve the time, including myself. But nevertheless, I think it was a very positive session, both two cars in Rahal team showing quite good speed, so I should be happy today.

THE MODERATOR: Takuma, it seems like this track is one of the more challenging ones on the circuit. I know you were saying the circuit seems a little different this year, but just the surface changes in themselves from

different materials seems to be something that the drivers speak about a lot heading into this weekend. How do you plan for that heading in not really knowing what the track is going to look like when you come to it from year to year?

TAKUMA SATO: It's tough. The straight-line speed you can sort of check rates from the data what you've been doing for this year, let's say St. Petersburg and Long Beach that you can compare to last year. So the amount of reduction for downforce as well as the reduction for the drag, so X minus (indiscernible) you can go faster. But I think even that, I think in the morning everybody was struck how we can pull the speed into the backstretch because I think both Graham and I hit the lining of the sixth gear halfway through the straight. Almost I was putting it in seventh speed here and there.

No, it's really good, surface obviously improving to make our car faster. Obviously less bumpy, so it's less drag effectively, and the braking point is also quite a lot of grip, so I think it's less slide, meaning less degradation I would think. So I think everything helped, and to me I think the second session was the right amount of improvement for our team, and yeah, likewise Dixon did a great lap on the red tire. But black tire seems to be very competitive, which is very important for the race day, I think.

THE MODERATOR: Scott, we just heard from Takuma, how he and the team have been managing the track surfaces and the changes in the new car. Fastest in the session this afternoon for you, also a two-time winner here. What are some things that you're noticing year to year that are different? Obviously the car is one of them, and also your thoughts heading into qualifying tomorrow?

SCOTT DIXON: Definitely a big shout-out to the people that look after the track. It's nice to have a smooth front straight. I think it's been about 10 years in waiting, that one, so it's exciting. I think they've worked really hard on the surface of the circuit throughout the past four or five years, and Turn 1 alone I think is going to create some very good racing and probably eliminate some of the mistakes going into 1, especially straight out of the pits, which has caught some of the competitors out in the past. But it's great to see those updates, and I think it will be much better for our racing.

I'm actually surprised how quick the cars are, considering that the less amount of downforce, almost 1,400 pounds less, so I think we're faster than the practices last year. For us, the PNC Bank car rolled off fast. It's always nice when you have that opportunity. We struggled a little bit to put a lap together on the blacks early on when the tires were good. We made a couple improvements later, so hopefully that transfers today. But I expect tomorrow the competition to be really tight. We put a decent lap together there on the reds, but I think a lot of others will tomorrow, too.

THE MODERATOR: You're both veterans of the sport. You're very used to the diversity that comes with racing in the Verizon IndyCar Series, but how difficult is it to go from a track like Iowa to a track like Toronto, just two completely different animals?

TAKUMA SATO: I mean, it is different, but because there's a difference, I think you're almost like switched on. It's not only for this race, but you go into the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, you go 235 miles per hour, and then four days later, it's the bumpiest track in Detroit. It's a lot of contrast. But it just goes to show the variety the IndyCar Series has, and that's a very exciting part. For us drivers, because the package is so different between ovals and street courses, for us it's okay. That's part of the job that you have to accommodate really quickly.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I love the differences between the disciplines. I think that's what's really exciting. There's so many exciting things about the Verizon IndyCar Series, but this one definitely stands out, makes it extremely tough to win the championship. You have to be good throughout those different tracks that we go to, and obviously for last week for us coming here, it's already started a lot better. Maybe we should have run our Toronto car at Iowa. We might have been a little bit quicker. And I think Iowa is maybe the bumpiest track on the circuit now, not Detroit.

But all these tracks have a lot of character. They change from year to year. The target always keeps moving, and I think that's what keeps it exciting, so it's always difficult to be competitive each weekend.

Q. Scott, in a lot of ways do you feel fortunate that last weekend when you had an un-Scott Dixon-like race, your chief competitors also didn't have a very good race, either, so you were able to maintain a decent points lead?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, it definitely helps. We had so many issues with the race. We started really loose. Then we had the gearbox issue where it would get stuck in gear for three or four laps and then it would cool off and I could start shifting again, and then we had the tires on the wrong side of the car. It was just one of those races where everything was going to happen and it did, and fortunate for ourselves, a lot of

the competitors, at least that are pointing in the championship, had a bit of a rough day, too. Some of them not so much, but yeah, to still maintain a sizable or at least a good amount of points from Iowa is good. But we've got to concentrate on this weekend now and try and rack up some more.

Q. With four different series here and four different tire manufacturers, how much of an impact is the different compounds and types of rubber have on the track, and does it make it kind of deceptive when you look at it as being rubbered in when it may not be as grippy as you'd think?

TAKUMA SATO: I don't think much. Obviously at a street course, there is a huge track rubberation, so you can see the lap times gain coming from the laps rubbered in. But all the rubber doesn't really agree together, so I don't think it was much difference. I felt, as I said earlier, that what Firestone brought here, the tire seems to be really wide working range, and it's really great straightaway, and quite comfortable with it. That's part of the reason, as Scott said -- we're just caught by surprise how quick it is. It's a lot of grip, isn't it. It's incredible.

So maybe if there's any support, it's longer duration of the race, maybe Saturday evening, whatever, and then go to the Sunday morning warmup might be different for us, but I don't believe it's a huge difference.

Q. There seems to be a lot of inexperience here this year with drivers like Jordan King, Rene Binder, Robert Wickens, who have never raced this track before. Do you think about that when you're driving around them this weekend?

SCOTT DIXON: No. You know, I think anybody that gets to this level has accomplished a lot along the way. Robert has been very quick this year, has come close to winning a couple races, and I expect him to during the season for sure if not this weekend, and I feel the same with most of the guys that have come in.

You know, like I think you always try and find your way a little bit with some of the competitors, and that can change from week to week, too, depending on how good your car is or how bad it is and vice versa for them, as well. No, I think everybody races pretty good.

Q. Takuma, you brought up the fact that the car is a lot faster than what you expected. Could you give me an idea what the top speed is going into Turn 1 and into 3, and are those the two best places to pass?

TAKUMA SATO: Unfortunately I don't have a speedometer in my car, so I don't know, but pulling-wise I think it's pretty good. I don't know, I think you can find out in the sector times, maybe in a press release, I don't know. But good 180-ish, I think. Yeah, so I think it's very fast. But I think the braking point is really similar to last year, isn't it.

SCOTT DIXON: There's a little bit of a headwind, which is helping.

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, like Scott said, seven pounds of the reduction of downforce and we lost air brake because there's less drag, right, so it's nothing, just stop by air, and doing that and stopping the car like this is quite impressive. I think it's going to be quite physical in a nice way. I think it's quite fun to drive.

Q. Honda seemed to have a lot of pace in practice at both sessions today. Is that something you expect to continue the next few days?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I hope so.

Q. Any reason for it?

SCOTT DIXON: They're doing a good job.

Q. Do you think Chevrolet perhaps since Indy isn't quite as much on its game?

SCOTT DIXON: I think they drive quite differently, and they're better in different areas. I think Honda has more of a spread. I think they've done a really good job with drivability, and especially on these street courses and road courses. I think the torque the engine has and the way it just puts it to the pavement is really good. I don't know, I think each driver complains a little bit about different things from the engine side, but I think from the Honda side everybody is a lot happier than the competition. We'll see. Some are tuned out more than others on Sundays, it depends.

Q. There was news today that it sounds like Laguna Seca will be on the schedule next year in place of Sonoma, so just wanted your reactions to that.

TAKUMA SATO: I never raced Laguna Seca, so we'll find out. I would love to go there.

SCOTT DIXON: I didn't hear that. So it's in place of Sonoma? Wow, that's interesting. My first season -- obviously I raced there in Indy Lights, but my first season in CART -- actually I think I raced there twice. It's quite a small track.

Q. (Indiscernible.)

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, they do. Yeah, not me, but the team does.

Q. Your fast lap, you were a half second faster than the rest of the field. Was that because of the tires or because of your superior driving skill?

SCOTT DIXON: No, I think you could see basically some competitors found a little bit of time on reds. I think sometimes it depends on the balance of the car, and we struggled sometimes like at Detroit for the last two years we've really struggled to get any pace out of the red tire, whereas this year we've done a slightly better job of that. As I said earlier, I expect the competition to be very close tomorrow once they --

there can be a big balance shift between those tires, and maybe we just hit it a little bit better than some of the others.

Q. Scott, you mentioned being surprised how much quicker you were considering the loss of downforce. Do you think perhaps the old kit was over-downforced and over-draggy, that the manufacturers have gone too far in that keep-adding-downforce direction?

SCOTT DIXON: I don't know, it's hard to -- no, I think you would definitely be quicker if you were running the downforce from last year. The competition between manufacturers, you actually get a much more efficient kit. This one is just the same for everybody, so I wouldn't say it's exactly efficient. It's probably got the same or more drag than a relevant kind of downforce level. But yeah, I don't know. I think to me and I don't know if with Takuma, too, it's more the surface grip. They've only really paved one straight, but the whole track, whether it's the tire, and Firestone said they brought the same tire, so I don't know, it just feels grippy.

TAKUMA SATO: Yes, it seems like a good combination of mechanical grip improvement a lot. You talk about lap time, you really talk about aero efficiency, at some of the tracks it doesn't matter much, but this track has a couple of long straits, so here you lost a lot of the twisty sections are a lot slower than last year for sure, but because you gain so much down the straight, it just compensates the same. And then today seems to be with the weather condition or matching the conditions with the tires, it seems to be we're getting a lot of mechanical grip, so it's going faster than last year.

Q. Scott, is Iowa -- is that something like as a championship team you have to have a weekend like that during the course of the season to sort of test your resilience, or is it a sign of maybe something worse, that it could be getting off track a little bit?

SCOTT DIXON: You hope not to have weekends like that. Yeah, I don't know. I was probably a little too optimistic. We were one of the teams that didn't test there, which I think in -- there's many explanations, but Iowa you get a one-hour practice for a race weekend and then go straight into qualifying. It's a short weekend. So testing there for a whole day you gain a lot more than maybe you would at some other circuit. This weekend we'll have three practices, or four with warmup.

Yeah, I think we just didn't hit it exactly right. We were too loose. I think our pace on the second -- before the second to last caution was quite good. We just started off poorly and then we had a long list of issues that got us into a bit of a tailspin. But it happens. We've had it before, and you try to eliminate those weekends, but obviously they happen.

Q. Looking at the weather this weekend, it looks like we're going to avoid the rain, but it does look like it's going to be quite hot in the high 30s come Sunday. I'm wondering how the heat affects you in a long race and how you prepare for that?

TAKUMA SATO: Nothing you can prepare other than you put a little bit more drinks in the car. You know, what it got is what we got really. You have to see how the tire degradation is coming. Obviously it's the hotter condition, you lose the downforce, and then the temperature is moving up and then the tires having a hard time. I think every stint towards the end of the stint you would see more tire degradation. I think that's part of the game. I think who can manage better, I think the hotter temperature brings more -- the difference between cars and the drivers. That's my opinion. We'll see. But it seems to me today it's hot enough, but the tire is really keeping good grip out of it. The red tire, I don't know, degradation obviously worse than the blacks, but last year the black tire seemed to be a very consistent tire, so we'll see how the reds survive this year.