

IndyCar Media Conference

Friday July 27, 2018

Scott Dixon Ryan Hunter-Reay

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are joined now by Scott Dixon of Chip Ganassi Racing. Five wins here on the track. Scott also has a very large championship lead heading into this race. We've seen championship leads disappear before, but knowing you have so much success coming into this racetrack, how comforting is that?

SCOTT DIXON: I guess they're memories. You can't really dwell on them. They're no advantage. I think every year it changes, whether it's the tires, the aero package, or even just what your approach has been throughout the season. Sometimes it works well here and sometimes it doesn't.

I think in the recent past we've actually had a bit of a rough run here. We've generally had some decent speed, but it hasn't been as consistent as we would have liked. Today we've kind of seen similar here. Hard to piece a lap together, at least for myself and the 9 car.

So, yeah, we definitely have a lot of work to do. We have good points right now. But it doesn't guarantee you anything either. As we've seen in the last sort of couple races, it can flip and change pretty quickly.

The focus right now is keep our head down and try and make the most of every race till we get to Sonoma and see where we lie. Hopefully we still have the points lead at that point. It can change quick.

THE MODERATOR: What are some of the things you are encountering today in practice?

SCOTT DIXON: The first practice was a little rough just because there were so many red flags. You also had an elongated part of overtake which gets confusing for lap times as well.

For us, I think we made a gain here and there, but we're kind of in a box that's not really working. I think we need to kind of shift the program in general maybe for tomorrow morning and see if we can make it a little easier to drive and get a little bit of performance out of it, as well. Easy to say that, but achieving it is extremely tough. Tonight will be a lot of hard work and trying to make the car better.

THE MODERATOR: Qualifying is important no matter where we go. Is this a track that in particular it seems even more important, would you say?

SCOTT DIXON: I think every race, yeah, is important. We have had situations where we won from last two or three years ago, but then you have to really rely on catching the perfect yellow, which we did in that situation.

I think if you look at St. Pete, start of the year, one of those things where Bourdais got pretty lucky. It happens throughout the year. Whether you're having a bad day or not, you still have to have the car, pace and speed at the end to pull it off. It definitely puts a huge not oversight but concentration on trying to qualify as well as possible.

THE MODERATOR: We would remiss not to ask about you making your 300th start at Mid-Ohio. What does that mean to you this weekend?

SCOTT DIXON: It's cool. Feels like 150. They say time flies when you're having fun. That's how it's been for us. We've had a lot of fun getting to number 300. Yes, we've had some bad days, but a lot of good days.

Still to be able to call myself an IndyCar driver is a big deal to me. It's a great community to be a part of. The category itself right now, just the competition level throughout the season, has been insane.

I love it. I can't honestly say I'd like to do another 300, but I hope it continues for a little while longer.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. When you look at that photo of you when you made your first career start, you were just a kid. Do you look at that and go, Dear, God, I wish they burned this video? What do you remember about that day?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I don't know. Definitely back then going from Indy Lights into I think it was CART at that point, it was a hell of a jump. I remember driving one of those cars the first time at (indiscernible) and secondly at Laguna Seca. Just the sheer power of the cars... You always wish you could probably tell yourself a few different tricks that you know now back in those days.

I think it's definitely the lows that you learn the most

about yourself, the sport, and everything involved. Yeah, I don't know. It's been a journey, man, a hell of a journey and a lot of fun.

Q. This year obviously the cars are radically different in terms of how they produce their speed. Ryan's time is only one second off pole from last year. Is the car trickier to drive now, getting back on the power later?

SCOTT DIXON: That's because Ryan is very good (laughter).

I don't know. It kind of makes you think the different approaches you could have had at some of the circuits where we've been quite fast with this new car. Obviously a lot of things have changed throughout. Especially here, it is kind of interesting that we are going as quick as we are with the lack of downforce.

But, yeah, it's a lot of fun to drive. It is tricky when you miss by a little bit. It's obviously magnified now and become a bigger problem. I think that's not just for straight-out speed but consistency throughout the race.

Even making mistakes, making a small mistake with last year's car, you could piece it together and still be fine, keep it on the track. Today, even the test last week, I crashed twice. If you miss it by a little bit, it magnifies it and becomes a big problem.

Q. Scott, you talked about crashing twice at the test. Pit lane here is extremely tight. How important is it getting through in general?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I guess some are a little tighter than others. I don't think it does you any good to think about those situations. You just got to go in with a clear mind. It's like being asked, Do you start points racing? You can't. I think you start making decisions and options that you wouldn't normally choose that will hinder you more so than anything else.

It's another race. All these races pay the same amount of points outside of Indy and Sonoma. This is a race that we're coming to this weekend to trying and win. That's the only way we look at it.

Q. At this point in the season, what would you translate or offer for IndyCar to do with the cars, to add or take away?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I'll take that one.

Really I think it would just be on the oval side of it. I would have some input for the series. I think they already know it. We need to tweak the oval package, the speedway package for Indy, so we can keep a reasonable balance on the racecars running closer to one another.

First year with the car, I think that's a work in progress. Now we know what the issue is after having run for half a season. Yeah, I think the suggestions are clear and

we'll work on it together. I think we're going to need to see that at a few racetracks.

Maybe look at downforce levels in some of our short ovals. I don't know what the answer is. I think Phoenix maybe could have been a better race if we had something different, I'm not sure. But I certainly am pretty clear what we need to do I think on superspeedways.

SCOTT DIXON: Definitely a work in progress. We have a test coming up in a couple weeks at the speedway. A couple fundamental things that stand out over other things that the teams and the series know that they can definitely improve the consistency in traffic. I think that will play true.

There's sufficient history and enough knowing what we need to do to change that up.

Q. Would you say this track is more physical now with the new package? Is it the same as before or is it taking a lot more effort for the drivers?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think it depends. I think if you have a good car, typically it's not as physical. I feel pretty worn out today. But, no, I think all these tracks can be physical on the edge that we are, the loading or the speeds. But yes, the margin the error is much smaller. I feel like you're having to adjust more than typical. I think it's going to be as physical if not more physical than what we've had in the past.

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Ryan Hunter-Reay, who was fastest today in practice.

Ryan, you mentioned in your prerace quote that practice was going to be extremely important here at Mid-Ohio knowing that you're coming to the track with a new car. It seems like you and Andretti Autosport have made the most of it. What are your thoughts?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Not having tested here, I'm pleasantly surprised. I thought we would be on the back foot a little bit for day one and a little bit for day two. The team did a good job coming back here preparing for it.

As you mentioned, it's a busier run out there. The car is on top of the racetrack. This place can be a little bit strange like that. You have to wait till it rubbers up to tune on the car. Tomorrow we're going to have to make it a bit better. I know Scott is going to be charging right to the front as well. Good thing is we have a good starting spot, a baseline I guess you can say, to build on for tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: You feel like the speed that you have now, you're going to need to take it up a notch for qualifying. What are you expecting from qualifying tomorrow?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Like Scott was saying, you feel like you really want to take that next leap. You want to try and challenge corner entry. It's just not letting you get away with it right now. That's why there's so many guys turning the car around. It's a very fine line of getting it wrong and getting it right. I felt that way in a number of corners today. I was telling the crew after I got out, I want to take that extra little bit, find an extra 10th, but I feel like I'm going to back it in if I tried too hard in a couple corners. Yeah, you got to be careful.

THE MODERATOR: We saw a good number of red flags in the session. Do you think that's a result of drivers trying to take it to the next level?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I think so. Guys are trying to figure out what they can get away with. Like I said, once you get offline a little bit, it's just gone. There's nothing bringing it back. It's tough to really figure out what you can get away with here.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Are the reds actually fundamentally changing the balance of the car or are they just offering more grip?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: The first thing is more overall grip. They do offer a bit more rear grip. But it wasn't a huge balance shift for me. It was more overall grip. I felt like we tacked on hundreds of pounds of downforce putting them on.

Q. Is there any particular corner you're working on here more than others? Anyplace you're making up time over others?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: This is such a rhythm section, it kind of all comes together as one. You can't really start giving up places and trying to gain it here or there. It's just constantly flowing. You have to really find the compromises. You really can't look for just one place or another.

It seems like there's a lot of time to be had it seemed to me in the higher speed sections, 1, 11, 9, those corners, because the risk/reward was so big. Yeah, but this place has such a rhythm to it, just have to piece it all together.

Q. A couple of weeks ago at Toronto Josh said this car tells you a story before it breaks loose. It sounds to me like today it's not really telling you a story at all.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: No, I mean, it's still an open-wheel car, right? You're relying on the downforce. Once you get it into the yaw at a certain angle, you're dumping all that air off the wings.

It does give you a little bit more warning than the previous car did, no doubt. But right now we're just dealing with a low grip situation. Like I said, sometimes Mid-Ohio is that way. I think we're dealing

with a lot less downforce and a pretty finicky Mid-Ohio racetrack at the moment.

I expect it to get more rubbered in, so... We'll see what we get tomorrow.

Q. (No microphone.)

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: It would all of a sudden give you a big one. Here you can slide it a bit more. The level of grip on the track is not that high right now.

Q. You know the track, but is it almost like you're driving on a new track? Is that the sensation?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, it is. The first time on this track with this car, it's absolutely new. I love this place. I've been driving here since I was 16 years old. What, I'm 37 now. It's been a while. One of my favorite racetracks.

Like I said, it's the rhythm and flow of the place that I absolutely love. It's nice coming to grips with it. I love a new challenge like that. The team gave me a good car to go out there and push it and see what I could get away with.

Q. You're the same age as Scott. He is starting number 300 tomorrow. Your career took a while for you to get here. This track played a big role for you. If you hadn't gotten the call from Bobby Rahal in '07...

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: It's very different. He has more wins at his age and I have less. That's what I need to focus on first and foremost. I was kind of a journeyman all over the place, hopping team to team trying to find a home. Very different scenario. That's a big difference. When you have a big team like that you can call home from the very beginning, that's certainly been very good for him.

It gave me a good base to build on. Obviously, he's one of the most talented IndyCar drivers ever. He's done an amazing job.

Yeah, I remember back here at Mid-Ohio getting the call to go to IndyCar. David Letterman was here. A couple of the races he shows up to a year. The pressure was definitely on. I remember that was the big kickstart to my career, what set the path to finding a full-time home at Andretti.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.