

IndyCar Media Conference

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Scott Dixon Chip Ganassi Press Conference



MODERATOR: Welcome, everyone, to today's IndyCar media teleconference. Earlier today Chip Ganassi Racing announced it has re-signed four-time Verizon IndyCar Series champion Scott Dixon to a multiyear extension to continue as a driver in North America's premier open wheel series, the Verizon IndyCar Series.

We're pleased to be joined by Chip Ganassi, the team owner of Chip Ganassi Racing, and Scott Dixon, the driver of the No. 9 PNC Bank Honda. Gentlemen, thank you for taking the time to join us today.

The first question is for you, Chip. You often like to use your hashtag #Ilikewinners on Twitter, so signing a guy like Scott Dixon has to make you quite happy for the immediate future of your team.

CHIP GANASSI: Thanks, Arni, it does. Obviously Scott and I have been together a long time, and he knows how to win, and more importantly, he knows how to win championships. There's guys that can win races, but there's other guys that can win championships, and Scott has proven that. He's proven that he's not just a normal run-of-the-mill driver in any sense, even in the -- where he is in the overall win column speaks for itself, I think.

I think -- you know, I can't help but think that however many years Scott and I have been together that -- and I've said this before, he's the kind of driver that any team would want to have on as their lead driver. I think on and off the track he shows that he is the man, as we like to say, or he's the driver that if you were to take a stone and inject some brains into it, you'd chisel out Scott Dixon.

I think we have a mutual respect for each other, and we've always been on the same page, and while we -- I think he has the same desire to win today as he did when he came with our team, and I think that's impressive. He's a team player. He's always pushing the limits, and he likes to get the most out of any situation.

I'm very pleased to be sitting here today announcing him for the future, and I'm a happy man.

MODERATOR: Scott is the longest tenured driver for Chip Ganassi Racing. He started midway through the

2002 season. When you signed him midway through that season, did you think he'd be capable of achieving what he has, primarily in the No. 9 car?

CHIP GANASSI: You know, Arni, I like that people always say he's the longest tenured driver. I don't know if that says more about him or more about the other drivers. That's a joke, of course.

He is the longest tenured driver, and when you sign a guy like that, no, to say that you had any idea that he would perform the way he did, you certainly want that, but I mean, to say that anybody saw that I think would be -- maybe his agent saw it or his wife, but I sure didn't see it. But he's developed -- that's probably the nicest thing about Scott is we've been together and we've all grown in that period of time, and I don't think anybody could have grown into a better person than Scott Dixon, whether he's a racing driver, a family man, a wife, a father, brother, son, whatever you want to call him, friend, racing driver. You can put a lot of monikers on a guy when you've known him for so long, and what kind of -- there's a million monikers that make up the man.

But no, nobody had any idea he could do what he's done in terms of the win column.

MODERATOR: Scott, congratulations on today's news. Obviously the last few months there have been a lot of rumors about you being courted by other teams, but you've kind of stayed silent. What makes Chip Ganassi Racing the best for you in your career?

SCOTT DIXON: Definitely very excited, pumped that this day has occurred and it's here and clears a lot of things up. I definitely respect the teams and people that we spoke to over the last few months, but to be honest, I don't think it's a whole lot different from what we've done in the past. This one has blown up a little bit more with maybe some of the other people talking.

But I've been here at this team now -- next year will be starting my 18th year. As chip sort of alluded to, I've grown a lot as a person and as a driver throughout the years, and it's due to thanks and admiration for Chip himself, his team, the people that he enables us to go out there and win. For me, there's a lot of other people that like racing because of what it is, but I love it for its passion and what we're able to achieve, and not very many of us get the opportunity to do what we love in our life, and for me, as much as hashtag, we all like

winning, and that's what the business is about. I wouldn't be here if we weren't winning. The team wouldn't be here, either.

For me it's family. Being here this long, there's a reason why that is, and that's because it works well. I've always admired Chip for what he's done throughout his career, and in all grand scales, a fairly young crew and what he's achieved across many different platforms is almost unheard of. I don't know. I love being here, I love the people, and I love working for Chip. His passion and the way he wants to win drives all of us.

MODERATOR: You're leading the points, chasing a fifth championship this season. What's your perspective been on what 2018 has been for you and the No. 9 team?

SCOTT DIXON: I think if you look in general, it was probably a little bit of a slow start, and I think we had the speed, it's just we didn't get to capitalize on that. I think St. Pete we were very good. A few races throughout that early portion we just -- we either missed a little bit and it's obvious the competition level and how just hard it is, you end up missing by a lot. I think coming down to the championship's end or nearing it, you think about those missed opportunities that you had, and you hope that in reflection that they don't affect us coming down to the wire.

But yeah, happy with how the mid-season has gone. There's always a few areas that I think we can improve as a team, and myself, too, and qualifying at some of the circuits, typically our strongest circuits, has been a little bit rough. But when you look at it points-wise, we're in a strong position, but it doesn't guarantee you anything. It's definitely time for us to all put our heads down and make sure we get the most of it and get as many points as we can coming into Sonoma.

But excited for the end of the year, excited that we've got a lot of this talk stuff out of the way and can really focus and go for the fifth championship, the team's 11th or something like that, so quite a few there.

MODERATOR: You've been in the championship chase many, many times in your career, but you haven't really been the guy who's been hunted a lot. You're usually the guy chasing the points leader. What kind of experience do you take from the past championship races into the final four races of the season?

SCOTT DIXON: I would always take leading the championship. It's definitely a good position to be. As we know, the competition right now is definitely tough, and especially with the three or four that are in good striking position now. We know those teams, and with the remaining races, I think everybody has got a pretty good shot. We definitely won't lie down. I badly want

another championship, and so does the team.

I think with the recent news, it gives us a good injection to stay focused and make sure we make the most of these opportunities because they don't come around too easy or very often. Yeah, I think every championship is kind of like its own little thing. We've come from behind with big deficits, and in 2008 I think we almost led the whole season and it came down to the wire. So yeah, personally, we just want to keep this lead and take it all the way throughout Sonoma.

Q. This is a question first for Mr. Ganassi. Is Scott driving as well this season as he has ever driven in his career?

CHIP GANASSI: That's a good question. Is he driving as well this season as he's ever driven in his career? I would have to say yes. You know, I think -- I think the answer is yes. And it's because -- let me tell you why. I think it was a little easier for Scott Dixon to drive when he had teammates like -- and I don't want to take anything away from Ed Jones here, okay, but I think it was a little easier for Scott when he had teammates like Dario Franchitti and Dan Wheldon. And again, I strongly am saying this, that it has nothing to do with Ed. But when you have teammates that are champions in their own right, I think that was a little easier. I don't mean that as a slight to Scott, either, but I think it's a little tougher when you don't have a championship driver as a partner versus having one. Let me say that. Does that make sense?

Q. Yeah, it makes sense to me.

CHIP GANASSI: And I think he's driving better, because -- yeah, I think he's driving better.

Q. And also because of the great shape that he keeps himself in, there's no reason to believe he can't keep this up into his mid 40s. Do you feel that there's still many, many, many more seasons left for Scott Dixon in this series?

CHIP GANASSI: Well, let's just say that his contract is hopefully taking him there, so we're going to find out for sure one way or the other.

Q. Scott, do you believe you're driving as well this season as you've ever driven in your career?

SCOTT DIXON: Oh, that's a tough one. I think you have some standout races here and there. I think the thing for me is that you've got to keep an open mindset, right; it's forever evolving. Each day I go to the track, you're learning so many more new things, whether it's about driving style, areas that you can improve and things you can do differently, even just around pit stops and things like that.

But yeah, I think -- I feel like I'm still absolutely giving it 110 percent. I guess on the long run, I still feel like I'm learning a lot. As I driver and as the way I think, I think there's always areas that I can improve, and from the outside looking from afar, it's probably a little hard for

me to maybe assess that, but yeah, I think as a team, we try to extract the most, and I think for me that's the focus, not just myself but getting the most out of everyone.

CHIP GANASSI: If I could add something there, I think you have to factor in, when you ask that question, you have to factor in, too, that cars kind of have changed -- when you look at all the years Scott has been with us, how many different cars he's driven, and each car does certain things well and other things not so well, and it's how you adapt to that, those changing environments. Some cars were, I think, easier to drive and some were more difficult to drive over the years, so I think you've got to sprinkle that over the top of your question and my answer, and Scott's answer for that matter. It's not -- everything else is not a static condition and we're just -- the only variable is Scott's driving ability. I mean, there are a lot of other things you factor into that.

Q. What do you think the wing changes, the extensions, will do for the racing at Pocono?

SCOTT DIXON: I think a lot of -- to be honest, I don't know the hard answer for that until we probably get there, but I think it was giving everybody more options. I think we figured as a group that we'd be out of getting enough front wing in the car, so it's somewhat of an addition to help out at Pocono, that that configuration kind of requires a little more forward COP, so I think it's just an aid. I don't think it fundamentally changes too much.

Q. Scott, I just want to talk about the championship for a minute. You've got four or five guys behind you. There's a lot of things that can happen sort of behind you on the track and behind you in the championship. How do you kind of focus on what you have to do every weekend and not let all that clutter sort of get into your mind? Can you talk about your approach to each race weekend going forward?

SCOTT DIXON: You know, personally, it's just taking each weekend as it is. We have the same approach at Chip Ganassi Racing every weekend, and when we go in, we go there to win, and as Chip always says, if you can't win, then we're going to try and be second, if you can't be second, try and be third. For me, that's the focus when I'm looking at circuits.

Each year they change a little bit, right, like some tracks that we maybe struggled at a bit last year we've improved. Some have shifted a little bit (indiscernible). It's constantly moving a bit.

But yeah, for me, definitely the worst thing you can do is fall into a points racing situation where you're thinking about where your fellow competitors are constantly throughout the race. Obviously you should have a pretty good coverage on what you need to do, but you have to be very careful to hopefully not flip into a points racing situation.

Q. You have three champions behind you, a guy who's sort of a young Turk right behind you. How tough is this championship right now, and obviously you want to win, but how difficult is it going to be?

SCOTT DIXON: They're always very tough. All of them are all very different, too, and I think throughout the years being in this category, it's one of the top three in the world, right, so you've got a pretty small and short list of competitors throughout. Everybody that's made it to this stage is well-equipped and very good at what they do. I don't think there's ever really landslide victories or someone that comes in and crushes it and runs away with the championship.

I think for us it's the same. You're always trying to make the most out of each weekend, when you've got the downtime and off weekends, think about how you could have improved the last race and then looking forward to how that may apply to the upcoming races and closing out the championship strong.

For me, it's crunch time, right. Each race in theory pays the same points throughout the season, outside of Indy and Sonoma, so you have to work hard at all of them, and that's what makes up for a great championship.

But yeah, I think it's a slightly different look from last year with the competitors, but most of the usual suspects, and they're all extremely tough. I think that's why I'm always very proud of what I've achieved with this team and how we've achieved it, and having four championships at this level and the different disciplines that you have to be good at, it doesn't make things easy.

Q. Chip, what's the team's role in this? Do you have to make sure that everything is as normal as possible for every weekend so there aren't any distractions and that the focus can be there?

CHIP GANASSI: I think the team role is somewhat integral to the championship. I mean, we need to execute, execute like a championship team. We need to make sure we're providing Scott with what he needs to, for lack of a better term, to go fast, and we need to keep the things that any sports team -- we want to keep side distractions to a minimum and just focus on the task at hand. You know, it's all part of -- whether we're working with PNC Bank or NTT DATA, these people have a vested interest in the championship, as well, and so it's all the things that any sports team does preparing for an upcoming race or an upcoming game or an upcoming championship run. The preparation that the team does is too numerous to start listing. But having said that, we've been in this position before, and I think we have a good group of guys that knows what it takes. They've all been there before, so it's not something new for us. But we're looking forward to the task at hand, but yeah, we have a lot of work to do, sure.

Q. When this thing was going on and there were so many people interested in Scott, was there ever a time where you thought maybe you'd lost him, or did it ever get to that serious?

CHIP GANASSI: You know, I think the only time I ever thought I would lose him is when I was reading Robin Miller's columns there for a while. You know, but I said to Scott one day, I said, hey, we should get together, we haven't talked in a while, we should get together. He said, all right, I'll come over to Pittsburgh next week, and he was nice enough to come over here, and he sat down and we talked and we had lunch and we did this and that and we talked about a bunch of things, and we sat down, and I said, hey, all this talk about these other teams. Is there anything going on I need to know about or anything, and he looked over at me, and he said, believe me, if there's something going on, you'll be the first to know. We're okay. I said, okay. And that was the end of it. That was probably, I don't know, a month ago or something. So I kind of took him at his word. Didn't really pay much attention before that or after that.

Q. So this thing was done a month ago?

CHIP GANASSI: No, no. No, the deal wasn't signed a month ago. But I mean, he said what he said to me a month ago. He said, if there's something you need to know, you'll be the first to know. I'll let you know. We're okay. I said, okay.

Q. Scott, how serious were you in talking to other teams?

SCOTT DIXON: Well, I think there's many different levels. There's general chitchat, conversations, lots of hearsay. I think there was some moderate discussions going on. But that's really all it fell to. And as Chip just said, I have a long history with Chip. I respect him for what he does and what he's done for me and for the team and what we've achieved together. If there's something rock solid, something that I think we need to talk about, I'm going to go to him first and we're going to discuss it and see what we can work out. Yes, there was many discussions. I think Stefan probably had many more. I think he and I have had a long and good relationship, too, where there is a lot of hearsay and a lot of fluff that sometimes goes somewhere, sometimes doesn't. So I feel like he does a good job of filtering that.

You know, it's -- I think to be honest it was a usual situation that we've gone through over past years, but this year was definitely -- there was a lot more hearsay and a lot more rumblings and different things. But yeah, as Chip said, that's exactly how it went down, and if there was something that we needed to confront or talk through, that was going to be the situation.

Q. What more can you accomplish with Chip, and also, because you already have accomplished so much, why even look around and see what else is

out there?

SCOTT DIXON: Well, I think you'd be silly not to look at the landscape, and I'm not just talking IndyCar. It's other series, it's future, it's -- things change, and I think it's good to have an understanding, whether it's for myself or whether it's for Chip, to see things, where things are moving. There's always a bit of a stigma on age, and a lot of people get that kind of flak throughout their careers. But for me, it was -- I think you're just doing a bit of research and looking to see, not really what options are out there but just sort of trying to understand the landscape, and I'm talking about across any sport in general. But for me right now, my focus has been this, winning with this team. What can we achieve? We can achieve winning Pocono 2018, and that's one. That's next week, or this week. And then it goes on after that. But for me, I want to win championships. I want to win races. We're in the business of winning races, and to me that's what's most important about what I do. It's my passion. It's what I love to do.

Q. Scott, when you made your decision you were going to stay with Chip, how much did the future and the accomplishments that you can potentially achieve figure into your decision? You're only eight wins away from tying Mario's second most wins in the series. You're three championships away from tying AJ's seven championships. Did that have a lot of impact upon you, knowing that you had a very certain future with a team that you've done so well with as opposed to maybe looking at other teams and saying the future was not all that certain about being competitive and things like that?

SCOTT DIXON: You know, I think there's lots of things that come into the decision, and I think when it came down to it, it was a pretty -- for me it was a fairly straightforward decision. You know, I think, again, it got a lot more media attention just because of some of the other entities that were involved. And I think right now -- which is a great position to be in for the series. Everybody is excited about the series and what IndyCar is doing. You've got a huge thanks to the core teams that are there right now and the racing and IndyCar in general to make it what it is.

But yeah, you know, there's lots of things to think about, the future, your next race, the people that I've cast as family, going into my 18th season next year. There's a lot of emotions, and the respect that I have for the people that have enabled me to do what I've achieved so far, and hopefully we can build on it, and yeah, that definitely becomes an emotional thing. But you've got to -- also these people were the ones that gave me the opportunity to start with, that helped me. I was out of a drive when PacWest was gone, and sticking with me in the 2003 start of the season with IndyCar and later to go on to win the championship.

Yeah, there's multiple different ways to look at it, but I

think sometimes those can be pretty simple answers.

Q. Chip, was this the biggest sigh of relief you've ever had after Scott says I'm coming back?

CHIP GANASSI: I don't know. I don't know that I looked at it in terms of a sigh of relief. I think it was -- if it was at all a sigh of relief. It was that some of the noise would quiet down about that I always felt was just noise anyway around his contract situation. I guess it was a sigh of relief from that perspective.

You know, I think we were pretty happy to bring PNC bank into the sport this year in a big way. They've always been a part of my team, but for them to come in in the way they did and to have the kind of year we were having, I think they were maybe some of the -- you know, some of the people there maybe don't know Scott that well or myself, and they were sort of questioning some of this noise or whatever around -- or chatter, whatever you want to call it.

But I think as Scott alluded to and I did earlier, I think we were on the same page, so I really didn't -- I didn't think there was a lot to it. I'm sure there was some, and there should have been some. I mean, nobody wants a driver on their team nobody else wants, right?

Q. Chip, I wanted to ask you in terms of downsizing the team for this year whether you felt that had had a direct impact on how phenomenal Scott's season has been, especially from Indy onwards and whether you would consider expanding back up to three cars for next year or whether you do think that this going down to two cars has been part of the reason that Scott -- having a team focus on two cars is part of the reason that Scott and yourself are leading the championship.

CHIP GANASSI: That's a good question. It certainly hasn't hurt him, us going to two cars. I think it's enabled me to focus a little more. I don't know that the rest of the team -- I mean, I think that when you have four cars like that, you have a lot of information flow that maybe we miss a little bit, but I think -- you know, I don't know. I think when you expand and contract your team, there are lots of forces at work, let's say, not the least of which is what's best for your team. You know, it's money, it's people, it's drivers, it's sponsors, it's a lot of things that go into those decisions of expansion and contraction. I have no plans to expand. I'm not saying I'll never do it again, but I don't have any current plans in the near term to expand back to three or four cars.

But I certainly -- I mean, it's probably a better question for Scott really, I would think. Did it help him? I don't know. It's probably a better question for him I would think.

Q. Scott, what do you think?

SCOTT DIXON: I think Chip answered it well. You know, I think there's always pros and cons, but I think from Chip's perspective, there can be a lot of noise. In

Chip's case, he doubled the team from two to four, you're doubling almost all the employees. In current times, that's not an easy thing to do, right. There's not a huge influx of mechanics, like it's not an easy thing to achieve well.

I think the team did do a very good job of it, and for me, yes, I definitely miss the data side. It was definitely a fun combo throughout the years with the different teammates and drivers that I had. But again, it can slow down the process sometimes when you're supplying two cars with even small tweaks here and there, and instead of making two parts you've got to make four; especially with the small pieces, that can be a very big lead time.

So I think there's examples like that, to try and make sure you get the right information at the right time. A lot of these events now, especially the ovals, you've really only got a one-hour practice qualifying, a short warmup, and then you go straight into the race, and then it's crammed into almost a day and a half. At some point it becomes a lot of information to try and consume, too.

I don't know, I enjoyed it. I think you've got to do what's right for the team. I think the team has functioned well in all the different platforms. Chip has a great resource of people and equipment, and they obviously know how to get the job done right. This team has won in both scenarios, so again, there are pros and cons for both.

Q. I wonder if you could just talk a little bit about this weekend's race at Pocono. That's a place you've won at in the past, just how you think the new aero kit is going to perform there and how you feel you have to do at Pocono this weekend to kind of continue in the championship chase.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, always look forward to it. I think Pocono is definitely the tricky triangle. It's very difficult to get 1 and 3. It takes a lot of compromise, I think, to have a successful race there or even a car that's not too difficult to drive. But I expect it to be pretty similar to last year. I think at Indianapolis with the four corners at least -- both ends, the two of them being quite close together, we saw the washout in big packs that disrupted the air and made it a little more difficult, but I was kind of a fan of that because I think you saw the actual really good cars stay at the front. They continued to be good in traffic, and if you weren't up there at the end, it was strictly -- I think in the recent past, the last two or three years, we've seen, not fabricated, but almost anybody have a chance of winning because it was a pack race and sometimes whoever took the biggest risk was going to come out on top. So I do like the style of racing slightly better.

From the numbers, I think qualifying levels are fairly similar. Race, downforce is probably a bit lighter, I hear from the test. There were a few cars that tested there

last week, that the track has got a little more character, too, a few bumps here and there, and that should make it interesting, too, but I expect the racing to be good. I expect our team to be good. It'll be interesting to see how it evens up against the manufacturer. The other manufacturer or our competition were definitely very strong at Indy this year, so this is probably the most similar configuration that we have to Indianapolis.

Q. And with everything you've been able to accomplish in your career, the numbers and the championships you've been able to accumulate, have you taken time to kind of reflect on that, or because you're so busy racing and still doing it, you haven't really thought about that yet, that that day will come somewhere down the road?

SCOTT DIXON: I think you have moments. I think when you have a win, it becomes prominent again and it changes some of the context. When I was at Chip's in Pittsburgh, he had just a delivery of the fresh new 200 wins book that the team has achieved. Yeah, you have those moments to reflect, and you chat about those. But yeah, I think when you're in the thick of it like we are right now for the next few years, yeah, I guess there's up and down times of when you look at it.

For me, it has become a lot more prominent in the last two or three years, but we've moved up on the scale a little bit. I'd be lying to say that you don't notice it or don't really look at it.

Q. I just wanted to get your sense of the health of the series at this point. Scott alluded to the good racing. I know there's a new TV contract kind of taking effect next year where ABC no longer has the Indy 500, NBC does. Just from both of you guys a general sense of the health of the series, and particularly with Pocono trying to get some good crowds up that way has been a struggle in the five or six years since they've been back. Your thoughts?

CHIP GANASSI: Yeah, I think I've been in IndyCar racing since 1982, and not a year goes by that someone doesn't ask about the health of the series. I think it's up, I think it's down, I think it's up, I think it's down. I think we're in a period right now when it's on the uptick, and I think when you have -- I think it's great news with NBC in the series now for 19 -- really for the rest of this season, and the job they're doing promoting the series. Like I was watching the -- I was at the NASCAR race yesterday in Michigan, and I walked back to the motor home, and I watched the television for maybe 50 laps, and right in the middle of the NASCAR broadcast is an IndyCar ad with Scott Dixon in it.

And so I think they're promoting the series on television like it's never been promoted before, and I think that's going to draw some fans. I think NBC has shown that they do a great job with the big events that they have,

so when they come to Indianapolis next year, I'm sure that it's going to be a first-class job, and I think there's a lot of anticipation and excitement surrounding that.

You know, I think with the series, as well, it just follows that that'll be a castoff onto the rest of the series. I think it's on an uptick right now, and I think the fact that we have new sponsors coming into the sport is a feather in the sport's cap, and we're happy about that and happy to be a part of both.

SCOTT DIXON: I think Chip answered it perfectly. I think the likes of what he was able to do with PNC and bringing in such a big brand like that speaks volumes, too. The TV package, I think the personnel that they have there and the numbers that are -- to be honest, in pretty tough times across sports in general, I think moving in a very positive direction compared to a lot of others, with the talk of different races coming on, the ones that they've been building on and resurrecting. I think the racing -- for me, and I'm going to be biased, right, but IndyCar racing is the best racing in the world, with the different disciplines, what it takes to win a championship to the biggest race in the world, the Indianapolis 500. As soon as you get somebody to see it, they're really locked in. The diversity of the drivers, the teams, where these people come from, there's just so much to soak up.

For me, it's definitely a really positive time, and as Chip said, it's heading in a great direction.