

IndyCar Media Conference

Saturday August 18, 2018

James Hinchcliffe

Robert Wickens

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are joined by the drivers for Schmidt Peterson Motorsports, Robert Wickens and James Hinchcliffe. I don't think you need me here, so just start talking.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Rob, you tested here last week. What do you think about your first laps around the tricky triangle?

ROBERT WICKENS: I thought it was a tricky triangle, James. Honestly, it was tough. I mean, I'm really happy I did the test because I think without that, it would be a pretty hard weekend.

The way the weather is shaping up with what could potentially be some limited running tomorrow with rain, I mean, I'm pretty grateful that we were able to get that rookie test in.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: With the weather looking as perilous as it does, how does that affect your preparations for the ABC Supply 500? I'm asking pretty good questions, right? I feel like I'm taking questions away from some of you guys.

ROBERT WICKENS: You're doing average.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Don't.

ROBERT WICKENS: What was the question, James?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Given the perilous rain possibilities and weather situation, how does that affect your preparation for the ABC 500?

ROBERT WICKENS: No, it changes things, for sure. I think the weather is the same for everybody. You just have to deal with what you got and just move on.

But, again, I'm still happy that I did the test, so I was able to get a bunch of laps in in good conditions and work on the car. So hopefully my work at the test will make your life slightly easier, James, as someone who did not take part in the test.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: That's also what I'm hoping. I'm going to be upset if I get in and the car is a crap wagon (laughter).

ROBERT WICKENS: That's a possibility.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: A distinct possibility.

ROBERT WICKENS: Not ruling that out.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: We have some questions from the audience.

Q. Robert, before you came into the series, you had some preconceived notions about what it was like. Did it meet that preconception or how has it gone for you?

ROBERT WICKENS: In a lot of ways it surpassed my expectations. In a lot of ways, it's more or less what I expected. Every day at IndyCar has been a whole new experience. They've just been kind of equally as good.

I'd never driven an oval before leading up to this season. Somehow, some way, with good teamwork, we've been in with a fight at every one of them so far. That's blown me away, to be honest. I was expecting to really struggle on ovals and be as competitive as I am on the road courses.

But the fact that we've been equally as strong across the board this year shows the depth of our team, how good James and I work together, how good the engineering staff works together.

I will 100% say I'm not just driving well on ovals because I'm naturally gifted and talented at ovals, it's a lot of hard work. It's a lot of teamwork and a lot of analyzing that's getting me there and having a good teammate beside me that I can lean on a lot and ask the stupidest questions, and he doesn't lie, I don't think.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Shucks. You know how to make a girl blush.

ROBERT WICKENS: It's been super helpful. To answer your question, in a lot of ways it's surpassed my expectations and in a lot of ways more or less where I expected it to be.

Q. James, you're the grand marshal for the USAC quarter midget event happening outside the grandstands. Did you get a chance to visit them today?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I haven't yet. We're heading out there after this in a little bit. Always excited to take part in anything that involves young racers. I

remember being one of those kids. Any time there's some influence and some interaction with the guys that are kind of at the level you're aspiring to be at is always fun. I'm excited to get there and watch some racing.

Q. Much has been made of your friendship, your relationship that goes back a long time. Have you ever raced each other for a win? If not, have you talked about what it would be like in IndyCars to be there? Can you honestly tell us you wouldn't look at the other guy and not think, That's my buddy, my friend, my teammate, you would think of him as a rival?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: There's a couple different questions in there, so I think there's a couple different answers.

Yes, we've raced each other for wins in the past. There was a picture posted on Twitter of us on a podium together from our karting days. I was lower on the podium, but still taller than Robby. Don't forget who your elders are. There was a time when I was taller than him.

We've raced together in Atlantic, for the race in Portland, that was for a win.

ROBERT WICKENS: Yep.

Q. How did that go?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: He won that one, too, actually. Bastard (laughter). Frankly, we were running 1-2 with six laps to go at Phoenix. We've already kind of done it here this season.

But at the end of the day we have an immense amount of respect for one another on track and off. There's certainly the added element of being teammates. I think you have to race your teammates a little bit differently than you would race maybe somebody else.

At the end of the day when you're going for the win, it's kind of every man for himself. I think the difference in this situation is whoever came out on top, I think we'd be happy for the other guy genuinely because we like going racing, man.

Robby made the comment after Phoenix mid part of the race, it was him and I running 1-2 for a while, it was like racing go-karts, again.

We're here to race, here to have fun. I think him and I can do that well together.

THE MODERATOR: Let me remind you, at Iowa, a race you won, James, you were also racing each other, in contention.

ROBERT WICKENS: I wouldn't say I was racing for a win in that one.

THE MODERATOR: You were both up front.

ROBERT WICKENS: We almost shared a podium on that one.

No, I think James got it just right. Especially from where I've come from, you are literally not allowed to crash with a teammate. If you do, you're basically fired. That's been a mindset that I've learnt and I take into account. I mean, I've been surprised actually in IndyCar how hard teammates race other teammates. But again, it's what I've been used to for the last six years.

Coming here is nice. It's raw racing. You have to race your teammate different, but you have to race them hard.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: DT, you couldn't pass them without permission, let alone crash them.

ROBERT WICKENS: That was a private conversation, James (laughter).

Q. Does he do that a lot?

ROBERT WICKENS: From time to time. I'm going to stop telling him secrets.

I think, like James said, we have so much respect for each other both on and off the track, we race hard with each other, and so far we're still good friends.

I mean, honestly, it's inevitable that one day we'll get involved in something on track. I think we're adult enough to kind of talk it out and move on with life.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: We'll fight it out, hug it out, crack a beer, move on to the next one.

Q. Robert, the temptation here on starts and restarts is to maybe fan out as much as seven wide. Has James given you any advice or indication on just how inviting that first turn is here, how according to Ryan Hunter-Reay it gets narrow later in the race?

ROBERT WICKENS: Yeah, to be honest, I haven't really watched a whole bunch of Pocono stuff yet. I saw a little clip that IndyCar posted on Twitter of a restart or the start of the race, I think. It's pretty crazy. Especially knowing this track, the spotters have very little visibility into turn one, it's going to be pretty unique.

But, I mean, I haven't really picked James' brain all that hard yet. I think I will eventually.

Q. James, how inviting did turn one look to you in 2013 at the start?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I mean, it didn't. I was in the front row. I mean, yeah, I hit a bump, bottomed out, ended up in the wall. Thanks for that (laughter).

The restarts are much more of an issue here than the starts themselves. The start itself, you're a little bit more spaced out, nose to tail, little bit bigger gaps. We've all seen the GIF on the Internet, it was I think seven wide. I think 15 was like the super, super crazy one.

Yeah, Robby and I are going to look at some video tonight, kind of go over it all. The front straight gets off. To get through turn one quick, there are only two car widths you can find for that. The frontstretch, there's seven car widths you can weasel your way into. Sorting it out by turn one is always a challenge.

Q. With Fernando's announcement last week, a lot of people have been pointing him in IndyCar's direction. How do you feel he would fit into the sport? With a full season, do you think it would be any different or still have that Alonso effect?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Sorry, what did he announce? I'm just kidding (laughter).

ROBERT WICKENS: Who?

I obviously wasn't around when he raced in the Indy 500. As a fan, I kind of saw the international traction that the series got for the 500. I was living in Europe at the time. Having been friends with James for so long, you follow everything. A lot of the European press took notice of what he was doing over here.

Who knows where he's going to end up, right? That's kind of what I respect about him most, he's a raw racer. I think there's equal chance of him doing a Daytona 500 because he just wants to race and win everything, which I think is awesome. It's a rarity to find these days.

It's really cool that McLaren for one is giving him as much freedom as they allow him to have. He wanted to go do Le Mans. They let him do Le Mans with another manufacturer, which is crazy if you think outside of the box.

Wherever Fernando ends up, it's going to be cool. If it's in IndyCar, it's going to be great. He's going to hit the ground running like he does in every category. A two time world champion. He's definitely one of the legends of Formula 1. If he ends up down here, it's going to be really cool for us.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: If he decides to kind of do a year of cherry picking great races around the world to compete in, that would be awesome. As a fan, I would love to follow that journey. If he ends up in IndyCar full-time, that would be huge for us.

As Robby said, the international attention he brings is not something you can really overlook. I think there be would be a great fascination to see how he would do

over an entire season with all the different types of circuits that we visit. I think he would bring a lot to a very deep driver talent pool.

Q. Do you think if he would come over, struggle a little bit, that would really highlight Scott Dixon, James Hinchcliffe, Robert Wickens, people that know those names?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I think Fernando probably has a better grasp on that than a lot of guys in Europe. He came over here, only one race, obviously a difficult one. I think he left with a much better understanding and as a result a better appreciation of what we do in IndyCar, the level of competition over here.

I think he took some of that back to Europe with him, spread that message. When a guy like Fernando talks, people in the racing world listen. If he just came here, wasn't mopping the floor with all of us, I think it would send a good message globally this championship is incredibly competitive.

ROBERT WICKENS: I also don't think he would.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, I mean, I hope not.

Q. You had a couple weekends off. Did you do anything fun, exciting?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I got engaged.

ROBERT WICKENS: Yeah, you did. That was before Mid-Ohio.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: True, yeah. Sorry. I picked a wedding venue. That was fun.

ROBERT WICKENS: Fun, James.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I got to go to the cottage to do that. I got to spend some time at the cottage, spent some time at home. Such a strenuous season from the start of May through the Toronto race, it's so flat out. This kind of stretch mid-season with a little bit more time off is nice. Came here, watched him drive in circles. Good times.

Q. James, if you could wipe out the Indy 500, how would you rate your season to this point with one win?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Man, B. I think Indy obviously is a low mark for us. But we had a really tough weekend in Detroit, a really tough weekend in Mid-Ohio. A couple races we didn't really capitalize on our pace and potential until Sunday. It was good we kind of got there on Sunday. Had we done a better job on Saturday, we could have been racing higher up the grid.

I think we've done all right this year. The natural pace that the teams had was a little surprising out of the box due to the number of changes we had. This was sort

of in the plan as a transitional year. The addition of Robby and some other key personnel on the team has been a really big jump-start for us.

I think we've done a lot of things really well. I think we've identified a lot of things we can do better. I'm already excited for 2019. We got some great plans in place, keep pushing the team up the grid.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.