

IndyCar Media Conference

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Mark Miles

Jay Frye

Scott Dixon

Alexander Rossi

Press Conference



First of all, you know that they're increasing the number of IndyCar races that will be on free-to-air, on network television, so it goes up by three, which is a 50 to 60 percent increase. Every one of the network races gets two to three times the audience that a cable race gets, so we know in and of itself, that's going to be a significant boost in the viewership of the series.

As much as anything, their plans to promote and the work they've already done are inspiring, so if you watched NFL wild card games last weekend, you saw their first 15-second tease of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, and that's just the beginning, and we were so glad to see it, by the way, at an event or broadcast that had a very big audience. It's indicative of how aggressive they're going to be to promote us.

I think I can say, I know it's true, that the divisional games will have the next installment of their promotions, and in that context, they're going to show us as part of their championship season. So they have an approach which takes the biggest events that they'll broadcast, and then they really push them through all parts of the NBC platform, from entertainment to news, obviously sports and all the rest of it. And they are really thrilled to have the Indianapolis Motor Speedway join as the newest event in their championship season, and you're going to see how they think about that a little bit if you watch the divisional games of the NFL coming up.

They are going to expand their pre-race coverage of the Indy 500. I don't remember whether that's in the news release, but you can be sure it will be on the air longer. They'll do hand-offs from NBCSN to NBC on the day of the race itself. I'm really delighted that they understand for us the importance from an IndyCar perspective on the culmination of the championship, and so both Portland and Laguna Seca, the last two races of the year, will be on network, NBC, really trying to create the crescendo that the crowning of the champion deserves from our perspective.

With this schedule, it allows for coverage on NBCSN of Texas, Iowa and Gateway of Saturday Night Under the Lights on ovals, which I think a lot of our fans are really going to be looking forward to, and it will be well watched, and soon we'll announce the details with NBC of the racing of their NBC Gold digital offering, and we believe it'll be a fantastic value for particular hard-core IndyCar fans, so we're looking forward to that.

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everybody. Thanks for staying with us. It was great to have Mario in here. We are pleased to be joined by several members of the IndyCar executive team and some of its drivers. Joined by Mark Miles, president and CEO of Hulman & Company; Jay Frye, president of IndyCar; Scott Dixon, driver for Chip Ganassi Racing; and Alexander Rossi, driver for Andretti Autosport. Mark, I'll let you go ahead and lead us on an exciting announcement regarding our NBC broadcast schedule.

MARK MILES: Good afternoon, everybody. Thanks for staying with us. I started to say it was good fun and really terrific to have Mario here and to look forward to the months of celebration that are so well deserved. You just love being around him, his passion for the sport. He reminded me that IndyCar, USAC used to include Pike's Peak and dirt tracks like -- gosh, what do you think, can we work that into the schedule, guys? He's just an inspiration to all of us, so we're looking forward to helping honor him appropriately over the next few months.

So the news today is somewhat news because you have in front of you the details of the television schedule, the television windows for the 17 IndyCar races, which will be broadcast by NBC in the United States. And while some of the top-line data has been known to you, these are the specifics, and I know fans are eager to begin to understand exactly when they'll be able to tune in for the 17 races.

We could not be more pleased with what we know is going to happen in terms of exposing great IndyCar racing to more fans through these arrangements that have been made. You know that NBC and NBCSN and then digitally NBC Gold will make our racing and all the activities around IndyCar available at a level that's really unprecedented. And since the contract was signed and the original announcement was made, they've been unbelievably focused on how to make the most of the opportunity for fans and for NBC as a broadcasting entity.

With that, with respect to television, I want to make a couple other comments as we think about 2019, and we are tired from the off-season but stoked about what 2019 offers for IndyCar fans. First of all, on the business side of it, sponsorship, we recently announced that Speedway is going to be the official fuel of the IndyCar Series, as well as the official convenience store. This company is fantastic. They're Midwest in their roots but national in their scope. They now have 4,000 stores from coast to coast, and as well as they will be providing the fuel we need to race, they will also be promoting in their stores, and this is really a terrific platform, lots and lots of people going through. If you stop, and I hope you do stop at a Speedway convenience store here, before long you'll expect to hear on their pump TV promotion of IndyCar and the Indianapolis 500-mile race. So it's just one little example of what they're bringing to the table already.

Today we are not making an announcement about our next title sponsor, but I would just say to you we expect that that will be very soon, and we are delighted at the news that we expect to be able to make quite quickly. And every time we say that, it's hard for me not to say how much we appreciated the relationship we had with Verizon. They set a great foundation for the growth of the series, but we're that much excited or more with what's to follow with our next title for the series.

And I won't be specific at all, but we're quite optimistic now that we will soon be able to name a new presenting sponsor for the Indianapolis 500-mile race. All these are great companies that love IndyCar racing and the 500 and will be, I think, great partners in helping us grow the sport.

We're really excited about the new races. These are not new news points, but there are things we're looking forward to this year, to get to Austin, the Circuit of the Americas, can't wait to see these guys in these cars on that track, in that market. We expect to get a lot of young techies and millennials out to begin to more appreciate IndyCar racing, and to get to the WeatherTech Raceway at Laguna Seca for the finale is going to be special. I know my wife can't wait to go, so I'm hoping we can figure out how to get her there.

In addition, we are working hard, and it was made public by the premier of Queensland in Australia on the possibility of having a return, really, to Surfers Paradise in Queensland on the Gold Coast of Australia. If that's possible, it could be done for probably February of 2020, so that's work that is very intensified right now and is something that hopefully might be achieved and finalized in the next couple of months, so there's a possibility to promote a great event.

Doug didn't say much about it, but from our perspective, at Hulman & Company, the 500 is also just around the corner, and there's so much going on.

We're excited about McLaren and Fernando Alonso coming back. That obviously made a huge splash for this place and the series when he was here in '17, and we're looking forward to his return again this coming May.

And for kids in particular, the Zac Brown Band being the act that we just announced for the legends day the day before the race, and I think we have announced -- have we announced Foreigner and Kool and the Gang -- if not we just did - - for carb day. Carb day is going to be very cool, too. So there's just a lot to look forward to.

We had dinner with almost all the drivers last night, and then they reassembled for three plus hours today and feel great about the chemistry and how everybody is aligned looking forward to 2019.

This is all about momentum, and I think that the sport, our company's momentum has been aided enormously by the guy to my left. Jay Frye has done a fabulous job, first in running our sales organization and then moving over to IndyCar and competition operations, and now he's broadened his responsibilities to include marketing and communications and help us out in sales for a while, and it's enormously important to our success that he's here, and I just want to hand it over to you, Jay, and thank you for your work.

JAY FRYE: Thank you very much. Like Mark mentioned, we just came out of a three-hour driver meeting, so we're all talked out, so we're going to do the best we can. In the driver meeting we mentioned this, I don't know, 400 or 500 times about our five-year plan, but that's something that the entire paddock helped create and come up with. I think one of the byproducts of our plan, last year at Sonoma we had 25 cars and eight rookies competing in the event. Of the eight rookies, think of this, not just the quantity, we have the quality is very high right now, the rookies coming in. We're very excited about the future. There's a lot of organic growth, and we certainly see that continuing on in 2019.

One of the things we do, which again, we run through a lot of these things with the drivers this morning, we have a race rating piece that we come up with, so there's -- we have a formula, we have some fan surveys we do, that type of thing. Last year 80 percent of our races were perceived to be better than they were in 2017, so we pay attention to what we do, and a big example of that is here at the Speedway, last fall we tested here twice, once with two cars - Scott participated in both, Alex participated in the second test - to see what we could do to enhance the 500 going into 2019.

If you think about it, in 2018 we had, I don't know, it was like 180 degrees here, it was hot, and I know it was a big day. But the car certainly did what we

thought was a great job, but we can always be better. We're excited about that. Got a lot of good things I think coming up with some -- we talked about OEMs a lot, they're a big part of this plan. So the future is bright. It's about these guys do a phenomenal job. We certainly thank them for all they do and as a group appreciate them very much.

That's about all I've got.

THE MODERATOR: Scott, as the reigning series champion, you're coming off of an extraordinary year. As you hear Mark and Jay talk about all these things that are moving the series forward, what does that mean to you as a driver?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think it's huge. At IndyCar it's very much perceived that we have the best racing product out there. I'm really excited about the NBC deal. I think if you look at what they've done with the Kentucky Derby or even the Olympics, they've got a lot of room to improve, one, what we sell, the package, and then obviously getting people to tune in, so I think that's very big for us.

As far as for me, with the additional races that we've added, the competition level for the drivers is just through the roof, and you can see that there's a lot more new teams coming into the series, a lot of talk about another manufacturer possibly coming in. It's just really all positive.

For me and for our team, it's trying to defend the championship. That's what's really inspiring us and sparking us to start the 2019 season strong and try and go back-to-back. But unfortunately I've got to wait, I think, another month before I get back in the car. I haven't been in an IndyCar since November, so I'm excited to get back behind the wheel, but as you can see today, everything is just so positive and what the series really deserves.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, as we prepare for spring training next month coming up at Circuit of the Americas, what are some things you're looking forward to as a driver for the upcoming season?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, I mean, you mentioned Circuit of the Americas; that's obviously a big one for us. It's one of the premier road courses in North America, so it only makes sense that the premier open wheel series in North America is racing there. I think it was something that was a long time coming and something super positive for us all to be a part of. I saw on the internet that already like the paddock pass tickets are sold out.

There's a huge amount of excitement in Austin. Austin is a city that loves racing and it's a pretty young demographic with the University of Texas right there. I think it's great for us and exactly the type of people that

we need to introduce to IndyCar racing.

That's just one of the many positives as these guys have all mentioned with where the series is going in 2019.

Q. Alex, three years ago you came over here, and most people just simply knew you as a Formula 1 test driver. Now you're like a face of the series, front and center, probably the American face of this series. To be able to be that, become that in such a short period of time, you're one of the guys that NBC is going to sell moving forward to help the telecast. How do you accept that responsibility?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, honestly, I think it's the responsibility of all of us drivers of the IndyCar Series to really take it upon our shoulders, to go above and beyond. I mean, this is a sport that we obviously all love and appreciate the opportunity to participate in, but at the end of the day, it's up to us as the people who are putting on the show to ultimately convey to our fans and to the people watching how much we're passionate about it and the reason why we love it.

I don't think it's just me, I think all of the drivers do an amazing job kind of promoting the series and pushing the series and doing everything that we can to kind of increase the excitement leading into races. I definitely can't accept that as something that I've done. I've seen by example, I guess, guys like Scott, guys like Ryan, obviously my teammate, who really take it upon themselves to make sure that the people love this series and this sport as much as we do.

Q. Mark, you had mentioned a month or so ago that IndyCar was taking over the distribution of the series in Europe, and of course with Fernando Alonso coming in, when he was here, the attention in Europe was huge. Do you anticipate with him coming back and the fact that you now have the marketing capability to get into Europe that the exposure in Europe will increase dramatically?

MARK MILES: Yes, but it's more than Europe and broader than Europe. Business-wise, some of you know, we decided to stop the practice of licensing our international media rights and managing the distribution of our racing signal and caring for our licensing partners. We wanted to stop doing that through a third party and do it ourselves. We're lucky to have Imus Productions as part of our corporate family and they have all the technical expertise needed to handle that part of it. We geared up a little bit, and with Steven Stark, who's right behind you, leading it, we have more horsepower to do the licensing around the world.

And so we are -- we'll make announcements about deals subsequently, but several are getting done, and the reception generally, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, Europe, around the world, IndyCar is more top of mind. So we think that can be helpful to us as a business but

also a real uptick in the amount of coverage and the amount of fans who can watch IndyCar racing.

So more on that later, but Fernando is a help for sure, especially in Spain, and I think other fans around the world pay attention when an F1 world champion races the Indianapolis 500-mile race. But it's really good news broadly, and I think it's a tribute to what these guys have done over the years and how they've proven that it is the best racing in the world.

THE MODERATOR: Scott, as the reigning champion, you certainly have a target on your back, so to speak. What are some of your thoughts? You've been in this position, you certainly are familiar with it. What are some things you do mentally to prepare for a season like that?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I guess the target is not there anymore. I guess it's PNC branding now --

THE MODERATOR: A metaphorical target.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I've never gone back-to-back so obviously I've got a problem with that. It's something I need to figure out. It's something that's obviously at the forefront of not just myself but the whole team.

But yeah, it's always difficult. I think as everybody has spoken up here and everybody knows, just the competitiveness and how tough the competition is right now, there's never one stand-out. There's four, five, six teams that have the possibility of winning with many drivers, so that's what drives me every day of wanting to train harder, prepare better and obviously work with our partners to try and get a bit of a leg up.

It's definitely not going to be easy, but going into the season, we know that's definitely the goal.

Q. You were front and center on the Eagles-Bears playoff game the other night with the NBC Indy 500 commercial. What did you think of it?

SCOTT DIXON: I felt bad for the kicker. (Laughter.)

But no, that was fantastic to see. As Mark said, that was huge to see the activation that NBC is already putting in, and I was at an event actually in Florida, a golfing event, the Father-Son PNC event a few weeks ago, and spent a lot of time with the heads at NBC and just how pumped they are about this and how much they're going to push it, and they know what a big deal IndyCar racing is. It's going to be very cool to see, obviously, the Indy 500 under their belt, too.

Q. Both Scott and Alexander, you mentioned, Scott, about being in condition. How important is it now today to be physically fit to race?

SCOTT DIXON: I think it helps. You know, there's no downside to it. For me, it's always been a big part of preparation for my season, and I know Alex puts in the

effort and time, too. We actually train out of the same facility. The cars have changed a lot, the forces, the length of the races. But it's always trying to eliminate something that may take you out of a race or not allow you to think as easy as you should in those high intense situation or if it's a hot day like we saw last year here in May.

Yeah, for me it's something I enjoy but something also that I think is very important at any level of racing but obviously at the pinnacle.

Q. Mark, I'm slightly excited about the Indianapolis 500 being on Channel 13. Any chance that we could show that live this May?

MARK MILES: You sound like your general manager.

Q. And everybody in New York.

MARK MILES: Our policy hasn't changed. We were delighted when we really couldn't sell any more tickets here in 2016, to be able to make it available live in Indianapolis. At this point we still believe that this event being the biggest attended sporting event in the world every year places a special importance on that crowd, and so -- and a big part of the crowd, certainly not all of it but a big part of it comes from this viewing market. We're not really reevaluating that. We'll do everything in our power and with our partners at NBC and here to get it sold out. That's a long ball to hit, but in the meantime, I think you have to expect the same policy.

Q. Jay, with the added responsibility you now have, I feel that one of Mark's high points is he knows how to put the right people in the right job, get the people in to do it, and certainly you are there. Does this added responsibility take away from what you do putting the series together? I know when I go through the paddock and talk to the teams and owners and so forth because you'll listen, you'll take the time to hear what they have to say and they'll listen to you, as well. But does this new thing take away from the time and effort you put into the series itself?

JAY FRYE: I certainly don't think so because it all ties together. We're a racing series in racing week. There will be a couple more direct reports to me. There will be a couple more things I have to do, but on a race weekend there won't be anything different than what I'm currently doing right now. Again, as we've -- as you plan and have a process and do different things, it becomes where you're just executing your plan and your process. We'll come up with some different things to do about how we go about the approach, but it shouldn't affect that, no.

Q. Alexander, what's it going to take to go up one step next year and beat the guy on your right?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: A lot of things probably. I think the big thing with Scott and his team is just the consistency that they had over the year. Obviously he

won a lot of races, but when we look at kind of where it went wrong for us, it was quite a few races we gave away, pretty easy points.

It's a competitive championship, as we've all said, and it punishes mistakes, even small ones, so I think we've just got to continue hopefully our development that we saw from 2017 to 2018 and carry that forward to next year and just be more consistent across the board, and hopefully that will be enough. But I'm sure Scott will continue winning races, and he's won like 100 now, so he'll be hard to beat until he stops racing, which I hope is soon. (Laughter.)

Q. Jay, has the wind screen made any further progress? Do you anticipate that being implemented this coming year, or are we still a year away?

JAY FRYE: It's one of those processes where you're maybe two steps forward and one step back. There's a lot of different things that are going on with it. We should know more in the next couple weeks. There were some tests done last month, and part of it was really good, part of it wasn't so good, and that's one of the things that you've got to go about -- again, I bring up this word the process, but there's so many -- you want to make sure it's foolproof. You want to make sure what you do, there's always a cause-and-effect to everything we do, so is there a negative effect, that type thing. It's on going, the development of it. Actually there's other ideas, too, that we're looking at, so it could be all part of the whole piece. So it's still yet to be determined.

Q. Mark or Jay, Jay has a tremendous amount of resources that he had at his previous position through sponsorship, marketing, sales of that nature. When he moved over to competition, he was a little bit removed from that although still very involved. To now have him in that loop, does this really help to be able to tap into all the resources that he's got on both sides of the fence?

MARK MILES: Yeah, from my perspective, and I appreciated Jay's answer to Don's question about will it in any way dilute his focus on competition operation, which is really job one, and we both believe the answer is no.

Saying that, why did we want to do it. We think it's better to more tightly -- if you want to think of it this way -- connect the communications and the marketing to the sales to the product, to the racing, and he's shown that he has the skill and the experience to deal with all aspects of that. I just think it makes us operate in a more tight way, and there's going to be no air between what he's doing on the track, what's happening on the track and how we're communicating with it and the drivers and the teams. The same for our marketing. I think it's going to be really good for helping NBC develop their marketing aligned with ours, because we're all going to be in great close communication with

fewer reports. I think it's a good structure for us, I think it'll add value, and I think Jay is up for it.

JAY FRYE: We're very much in the people business. Obviously this is -- everything we do is about the people, from the race teams to the league. You've got to have really good people. You've got to make them accountable and give them the tools that they need for success. So I think we've got great people. This whole paddock is spectacular. It's a pleasure, again, with the five-year plan, we created together. It was a lot of work, but we've got a really great people in the series, and we tap into that as much as we can.

At the end of the day, we obviously have to make the decision, but it always, I thought, behooved us to talk to our stakeholders to get an opinion, a direction, their thought process, and we'll continue to do that across the board now, where before we had one element of it, but we'll do it across the other two buckets of business, too.

Q. I wanted to ask, I realized in the press releases that qualifying broadcast schedules will be announced at a later date. Will they need to be -- will it be a pay-for service on NBC Gold or will some qualifying sessions be broadcast live on regular TV?

MARK MILES: For sure you'll see NBC and NBCSN involved. Whether or not Gold has anything that they can stream live from the track is among those things that we've got to sort out. But the qualifying two days will be a combination of NBC and SN.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, thank you so much.