

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

Friday April 12, 2019

Scott Dixon, Chip Ganassi Racing Ryan Hunter-Reay, Andretti Autosport Patricio O'Ward, Carlin

Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach

The transcript below is from the Friday end of day news conference at the Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach on the streets of Long Beach, California with Ryan Hunter-Reay of Andretti Autosport, Patricio O'Ward of Carlin and Scott Dixon of Chip Ganassi Racing.

THE MODERATOR: We are joined now by Ryan Hunter-Reay. Finished second fastest overall in today's combined practice session, but on top in this morning's session.

Ryan, it seems like you and Scott Dixon are switching top spots in practice. What are some things that Andretti Autosport found throughout the two practice sessions?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Really, we're just getting back to finding our baseline. Last year, we had very competitive cars. Again, this year rolled off with a really good setup I think. It was a good starting point. We've made some changes to it trying to find what to do, what not to do, as you regularly would on a street course.

The tricky part of a street course is you have to keep up with the racetrack, you have to be proactive with keeping up with it. As you go through the race weekend, it's constantly changing conditions.

So, yeah, it was a good first day. Definitely learned a lot. I know what to apply for tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Joined also by Patricio O'Ward, finished fifth fastest in today's overall time sheets.

Pato, we saw you very close up on the timesheets, top five, your first time around this track. What are your initial impressions?



PATRICIO O'WARD: This place is a blast. It's quite hard to get those last 3/10ths. It's really, really hard to get everything right. You have to be precise because here you don't have grass, you have a wall. It's pretty tough to get around here with a perfect lap.

But I'm enjoying so far. We've done some pretty good running. Struggling with the blacks for some reason. But look to be OK with reds. So, we're going to be working on that for tomorrow.

Yeah, looking forward to the event. All I hear is good things about this place.

THE MODERATOR: Ryan, we're hearing Patricio's initial impressions of the track in his first time around it here. You're obviously a veteran, winner in 2010. From a veteran's standpoint, what makes this track so special?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, I'm not sharing anything with him. There's no way (laughter).

This place, outside of the Indy 500, is my favorite event, not only because of the second biggest. The fan attendance. The fans are passionate about their IndyCar racing. They know who is who, what is what. They know why they're here.

The location, southern California. The track layout is my favorite street track layout, as well, even if it wasn't Long Beach. It's got everything. It's got the history of it. I feel fortunate enough to call myself a previous winner.

If I look back on the years, there's been a lot of missed opportunities. Trust me, that's always on my mind. Hopefully we can take advantage of it. It's a great event to be part of it.

Patricio is right, it's tough to put the lap together around here, especially that last little bit. You have to be at 10/10ths putting your car in an awkward spot. At the same time have you to be precise. If you're off a foot in some corners, it could mean several positions in qualifying.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Ryan, as was mentioned, you won here in 2010. I think since then your best finish has been sixth. What makes this particular street course so tough to be continuously successful?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, when I finished sixth, I got penalized, as well. I haven't had a drama-free Long Beach other than 2010. We were leading in '14, had a gearbox failure. I mean, '11, had a gearbox. '14, made an over-opportunistic pass. Was leading then, as well. It's one of those tracks you have to put it all together.

But I just enjoy getting around this place. I don't know, it suits my driving style. We've worked hard to put the setup on the car over the years. It's been a development in progress.

Q. Ryan, you said you enjoy it. Pato, you said it was a blast. Are you actually having fun driving out there?

PATRICIO O'WARD: You have to be having fun doing this. I mean, I feel like if you're not having fun, then why are you doing it, right? You have to enjoy it. You have to have fun where you're at.

But I think it's just a place that everybody likes to come to because of the energy around this place. I've never been here, but today is a Friday, man, and the paddock is full. The stands are, like, packed. I've never seen a Friday so full in my life.

It's cool. It's really cool. I wonder what it's going to be like Sunday. So, I mean, I think Ryan knows better than I do, but I'm super excited.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, it's excellent. Don't mistake what he's saying. He's not out there giggling while he's on the track. He's enjoying it because it ticks every box off for a driver that you want. You have the passion; you have the energy from the fans. The track is challenging you as a driver. It has that aspect to it that you really enjoy, you can't wait to get back in the car.

PATRICIO O'WARD: Every time, it's a track that rewards you in a way. If you get something right, it feels good, for sure.

Q. Ryan, what do you make so far of the start to the season? There's been some unusual winners. Alex was in here earlier; said he doesn't think we'll see a guy win five races again because this field is so closely covered.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I would tend to agree with that, unless somebody really goes on a streak, finds a hot streak, which champions often do when they have a championship year.

Yeah, it is crazy how tough this is. The series has been very tight for years. It just continues to go that way. Probably due to the fact that we have rookies that come in and are not really rookies. They don't look like them anyway, they don't perform like them.

There's a lot of talent that's come up and has done some impressive things, I think filled some holes in the

top 10. Really in the first place, there weren't that many big gaps there. These guys have done a great job.

I agree. It'll anybody's guess who can win an IndyCar race. That's the beautiful thing about this series.

Q. Ryan, you smirked. What do you think when you see a kid run into the media center? Strange?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, he did a cartwheel right here as he jumped up on stage (laughter).

He's enjoying himself. You got to love it. He's got that talent. He's got the fire to do it. That's what it's about. It's cool to see, for sure. Yeah, the more you go to press conferences, the slower the entrance becomes, I'm not sure how that goes (smiling).

Q. Does that help keep you motivated, seeing the kids on the chart?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: The lap times motivate me. I see how close that is. That motivates me enough. It's tight. Like I said, you miss something, you miss a brake point by a foot around here, it feels like you've lost position. It will be an interesting day tomorrow for qualifying, no doubt.

THE MODERATOR: Ryan, Patricio, thank you very much.

We welcome in Scott Dixon, fastest in the overall speed charts, and the 2015 winner here.

Scott, I think I saw your teammate Felix Rosenqvist third. Things are starting off strong for your team. What's clicking today?

SCOTT DIXON: I think we've generally had pretty good cars here in the past. I think there's definitely a lot to be said rolling off quick in the first session. Felix has done a fantastic job. I think most of the street courses and road courses that we've had this year, the rookies get an extra set of tires, but he definitely makes the most of it. In practice too. It's the same for everybody.

Yeah, for us, the car feels like it's in the window. We're just trying to make it a little easier to drive. It's quite nice that Felix and I have a pretty similar feeling. I haven't had that kind of crossover for a few years.

He's a big talent. It's great to work with him. He's a good person, someone that's definitely going to push the team hard but also I think someone that's bright for the future of IndyCar, which is definitely needed. As we see with Pato and Herta, there's a lot of fresh talent coming in. It's good to see.

THE MODERATOR: We heard from Ryan and Patricio on what in their eyes, from somebody who is seeing it from the first time, someone who has seen it a few times, what makes this track so special. In your eyes, what is the answer to that?

SCOTT DIXON: It's very difficult. It's quite a technical circuit, hard to piece it together. I think any street course, it's very easy to get caught out. I think even in that session I probably hit the wall three or four times just lightly. You're constantly just rubbing the walls or getting close.

Especially with how tight the competition is right now, you give up a little bit, as Ryan was kind of alluding to, you're going to slip down the field pretty quickly.

I don't know. Long Beach, it's a race that's been around, this is the 45th one. The history here, whether it's IndyCar, Grand Prix cars, Can-Am cars, always a strong event. I think what we all love the most is the atmosphere. The fans here and the people that come out, the event the promoters turn this into, is a big deal.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Scott.

Q. Scott, you're a slow starter typically. You're second in the standings with two runner-up finishes. How has that happened?

SCOTT DIXON: Well, we fixed that at COTA with a 13th.

Yeah, I don't know. At COTA, it was going to be a third or a fourth. We didn't have the speed to win. I think had we had track position at St. Pete, could have been a good run. Alabama was just holding on. We had the speed. We just had such big degradation. When you push, the tires didn't really stay there.

Yeah, it's good. I think also with Felix, working with him even in off-season testing, I think his process is a lot different. I think when you're in a team, you keep being part of people that are part of the sport or just this formula, it's a lot of the same, whereas Felix has driven Super GT, Super Formula, Formula E. There's a much bigger difference in the process they use.

I think it's opened not just my eyes but the team's eyes with how we approach things, maybe things we hadn't thought of before, even style a bit. I think it's maybe broadened the box that we fit in a little bit better, so the car is maybe a little bit more compliant, a little bit more adaptable. Plus, I think Honda has been doing a fantastic job. I think they're doing pretty good right now.

Q. Going into Saturday, knowing that the past couple of years there's been different winners, what do you feel it will take?

SCOTT DIXON: I think you mean the mix of the winners for the last few years?

Q. At Long Beach.

SCOTT DIXON: I don't know, this one is a tough one just because of the strategy. Last year I think we were running second the whole race, missed the last caution, ended up running 13th. That definitely flips it.

It always seems getting up to speed out of the pits here creates a lot of opportunity to pass people. That crossover becomes very important. It's determined the race many times. We've won a race that way. We lost a race in '16 because of being maybe too complacent on in and out laps. Qualifying is very important, as it is most weekends. Definitely on the street courses, it's a little harder to pass.

I think here there's definitely a much bigger emphasis on the pit exchange, the in lap and the out lap. Now with how everybody is using the overtake, that can change from being the same to plus or minus a second. I think that for us, for the drivers and for the teams, it's a big part.

Getting back to your point. I think it just shows you how tight the field is. There's so many good car and driver combinations now that if anybody just hits it that little bit better or gets that lap a little bit put together, it's going to make all the difference. Placement here in qualifying does definitely help.

Q. Watching you in the last practice session, you were standing on it real good, coming down the back straightaway. It looked as though any other driver would have wadded it up, yet you gathered it up. Are you finding the track to be dirty? Is that bothering the drivers at all?

SCOTT DIXON: I think in that scenario, I just closed my eyes and let go of the steering wheel, it went straight (laughter).

No, yeah, definitely Tuesday, Wednesday here the winds were horrendous. We were out here for a Honda meeting. Yeah, I couldn't believe it.

I think if you look at the times, the times in this session were over a second faster than last year. But the temperature, last year was very hot. The heat is the biggest performance factor for us right now, especially track temp. The tires don't like it, the engine doesn't like it.

Today we had a really nice headwind into turn one, that definitely helps. Makes it difficult getting into the last corner, turn nine on the back straight there.

I think the track surface has been pretty good. It's always a little funky through 9, 10, 11, just because of the Drifters. There's an inch thick of rubber out there. If you get a little wide, it builds up on the tire, you go straight into the fence. I think you notice everybody staying pretty tight on that corner.

Q. If Chip called you for the Ford GT, would you have said yes?

SCOTT DIXON: He did call me.

Q. You said no?

SCOTT DIXON: I said, Call me back if you get stuck.

THE MODERATOR: Scott, thank you very much.