

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

Thursday May 9, 2019

Press Conference

Scott Dixon

Chip Ganassi Racing

Will Power

Team Penske

Colton Herta

Harding Steinbrenner Racing

THE MODERATOR: We are kicking off with the INDYCAR Grand Prix race weekend with the press conference of the weekend. We have race winners, Indy 500 champions, series champions. A great lineup to kick off our month of May at Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Starting with Colton Herta, winner of the INDYCAR Classic at Circuit of The Americas this year.

Colton, you really emerged onto the scene, now you're here at Indianapolis Motor Speedway getting ready for the month of May. How do you feel heading into the month?

COLTON HERTA: Super excited. This is a cool event to kickstart May. Obviously, the anticipation builds up to the 500 from this event.

Yeah, it's cool for me because after so many years of looking up to all these guys that have been able to race in it, finally be able to have the chance to be able to race in it is something that I hold really dearly into my heart. Yeah, I'm really excited for it.

THE MODERATOR: Joined also by our reigning NTT IndyCar Series champion, Scott Dixon, racing for Chip Ganassi Racing.

Scott, this track is one of the newer tracks to the INDYCAR circuit but has built a lot of consistency and has become a sort of a way to kick off the month of May with more racing. What are your thoughts on this event and what makes it special?

SCOTT DIXON: I think it's really good. It's a fun way to transition into the month of May, and also for the community here. I think for almost 100 years they thought we only turn left. It's nice to have that mix.

It's definitely a nice event where it's not as hectic as the (Indianapolis) 500, too. I think it's much more suited to families, sitting on the banks. Hopefully, the weather is decent this weekend. Looks like it should hold out for the race, which would be great.



It's a lot of fun. This track plays out to be a very good race. We saw that last year, especially with the difference between the tires. Yeah, try and win here. It's tough. Try to do what Will did last year and sweep both races.

THE MODERATOR: The gentleman next to you did sweep both races last year, winning the INDYCAR Grand Prix and the Indianapolis 500 a few weeks later.

Will, what did that dominance here in May do for you mentally and physically heading into the rest of the season?

WILL POWER: Yeah, it was obviously a fantastic month. Winning the 500 for me was something that I've been working on for so long, obviously weighing heavy on my mind, wondering if I'd finish my career without one. In every way, it's fantastic.

But it's a great, great fun month, it really is. It showcases what IndyCar is all about. You have to be very good at road courses and ovals. It's a fantastic road course, great for the fans. There's a lot of good viewing points.

It was really good racing last year. I think it produces great racing, long straights, just a cool way to start the month off.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions for the drivers.

Q. Over at Team Penske last Friday, one of the engineers said something interesting about this race. We talked about how it shows the drivers' versatility, but it also shows the diversity of the car. The same car you run ovals on, with changes, of course, is the car that runs this race. Talk a little bit about how diverse the car is, how it can run all these different circuits.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think it's the mechanical side, which is a fairly big shift, and also aerodynamics.

I think that has been the story of Indy car racing for decades, right? Its ability to go from short track, ovals, superspeedways, to road and street courses. It's a lot of time and effort. That's the hard part, especially for these crews. It's nice they gave everybody Mother's Day off on Sunday. They come back in on Monday and have to make that transition.

I think some of the bigger teams have different cars for the speedway. There's more fine detail, especially for the 500, that everybody tries to push towards. But some of the smaller teams will have to probably utilize the same car.

Q. (No microphone.)

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, it's what it's made to do, right? I think that's fundamentally what it's about. I think even if you look at NASCAR or Formula 1, they have very specific configurations for different tracks, things like that. Maybe not on the mechanical side of things. Well, Cup does.

Yeah, I think it's a lot of effort I guess to get it switched over. As drivers, I don't have much input on that.

Q. It's been almost a month since you guys went racing. What has this month been like for you? What have you tried to do to get ready for this? What sort of adjustments do you have to make with that long of a break mid-season?

COLTON HERTA: It's been crap for me. I crashed at Long Beach. It's a long time not to be in a car in between, having two kind of back-to-back bad results.

We did get a lot of testing in. We got to do a test here on the speedway. Then Honda engine manufacturing day on the road course. I think a lot of the Honda cars will be very well prepared for this weekend.

It's always nice to get back in the car. That's the best thing to get your mind off of a bad weekend. Yeah, it was a long time of no racing, but we kind of kept busy in between with testing.

WILL POWER: Yeah, it was just a good time to get a bit of fitness in. Flat out basically for almost two months. Aren't going to be able to get to the gym. Good time to spend time with family at home, kind of be recharged, ready to go.

SCOTT DIXON: Again, I think it's actually the schedule, the way it's been timed out this year has been really good for the crews. Seems like there's a bit of a lull before we get to the month of May. For some of us that also do Le Mans, you go into an eight-week stretch.

I love being in a car, I love racing. The breaks are frustrating. As Colton alluded to, at least you get some test days kind of scattered in between.

Q. Dixie, how challenging is it to win the Will Power Grand Prix?

SCOTT DIXON: It's the Penske Grand Prix, isn't it (laughter)? I don't know, how many years has it been? Four, five years.

Q. Penske cars won all five.

SCOTT DIXON: Grand.

Q. Well, four of the five. Pagenaud was with the other team.

SCOTT DIXON: Pretty good streak going.

Q. We were talking before about how you've been dominant at some tracks, like Watkins Glen.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, absolutely. Will is fast on most if not all circuits. I think it's probably a good five or six you have to get through. But Will is probably the one that's got the target most of the time.

So, yeah, they're very good here at this circuit. The goal is always to win for all these teams. That's what we're going to try to do. They definitely have a strong track record.

Q. Will, you mentioned kind of the weight on your mind the past couple years about not winning the 500. Do you think you entered this month a little bit more free there, your approach is more loose, you can relax a little bit more?

WILL POWER: Yeah, definitely. Although last year I was actually quite relaxed during the month. I had a comfortable car. Obviously winning the grand prix always makes you feel very positive, the team as well around you.

But, yes, great satisfying feeling. I have to say it probably does take some pressure off, but definitely doesn't take any of the determination away. You understand how good it feels to win. If anything, it adds a bit more determination.

Q. Colton, I spoke to a couple of Indy Lights drivers earlier. Back a year from now, how much did you think this was possible, what you've done so far? Can you appreciate how what you've done is inspiring other drivers to say, I can do this?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I knew it was possible just because of how many people have moved up from Indy Lights before. The Road to Indy does a great job of getting drivers ready, giving scholarships out, as well, for drivers that can't find sponsorship.

Yes, it seems like it's a plan that's worked for a lot of guys. I know Dixie did it. I don't know if Will did it. He was in Europe most of the time.

Yeah, it's worked for a lot of the INDYCAR drivers present and past. I definitely thought in the back of my head, if I do my job, I can definitely do it.

Q. Scott, last year you had a bad practice and horrible qualifying for this race. Probably one of your best drives of the year coming through to second. If you start off with the setup you had for the race day, does that suggest you're going to be fast from the word 'go' here or have the cars evolved already?

SCOTT DIXON: The goal is to be quick right out of the

gate always. Yeah, last year was very interesting. We found most of the problem that we had in qualifying was a simple thing that we kind of overlooked.

But, yeah, things have changed. Even our setup from what we raced at some of the road courses last year has evolved a ton and in a very different direction. Plus the tire for this weekend is totally different from what we had last year with the reds and the blacks.

I think we seem to be in a happier window at a lot of the road courses this year. We haven't got a pole yet, but we've been in the Fast Six for each race. I think we're a little bit better there.

You can never tell. The competition is so tight right now. If you give up a little bit, you're going to be back. Hopefully not in 18th or 19th where we started last year. Definitely makes for a fun race, if you can come through, got a quick car.

But Will was extremely fast last year and dominated the race.

Q. Will and Scott, Turn 1 here, is it as challenging as turn one was at the old Cleveland course?

WILL POWER: Yeah, it is actually like that. It's so wide with such a long stretch, you end up four-wide. Definitely a tough first corner. If you're anywhere but pole, seriously, you actually worry about getting through there because there's always someone who hits someone into you.

Yeah, the standard of driving in the series is very high now. You don't see that very often. Everyone races hard but pretty fair. Honestly, the races are like qualifying every lap these days. No one is slow. There is simply no one slow.

Like Scott said, if you're a little bit out of the window, you're going to be starting back a little bit and you're going to be in that mess in the first corner.

SCOTT DIXON: I think it's a little easier reference-wise than maybe Cleveland was, and a little smoother, too, which helps a little bit. But, yeah, last year, everyone fanned out a ton. Yeah, it's just one of those things, you hope you get through it.

It's difficult. You're going from very high speed, try to slow down to first or second gear. You can kind of make three-wide, it seems. Most of the time you see them trying to make it six-wide, and that's when you get in trouble.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, thank you very much. Good luck this weekend.