

# NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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**Press Conference**

**Elton Julian**

Owner, DragonSpeed

**Ben Hanley**

DragonSpeed



you don't gain any performance, and it's easy to get frustrated. We had a little bit of that one day, but we stayed cool, and more important, Ben stayed cool, and we kept pretty much to the program, and here we are.

**THE MODERATOR:** Elton, you've been around motor racing for a long time in many different disciplines. How does this process for this event compare difficulty-wise, stress-wise, to other endeavors you've had?

**ELTON JULIAN:** Preparation away from the track, being our first time -- we did as much as I thought we needed to do to bring a car here. I always felt that once you got here, you pretty much had the car you brought. There's a lot of stuff to do with the body and the fit and all these things that you can't really react to once you're here, so you can only tune. So that is not too different to Le Mans or anything else that we do.

But the massive difference is the format and the magnitude of the event, and I think you really start to feel that as it ramps up during the week. Watching the people come into the stands yesterday, they just kept coming and more and more and more fans came in, and it's a sequence of events of qualifying you've heard since you were a little kid. So to be part of that was really special.

**THE MODERATOR:** Ben, how helpful is it to have the four days of practice to be able to work up to qualifying?

**BEN HANLEY:** Very. I think the rookie orientation program is amazing. It's easy to go quicker than 205 average. But it really makes you slow down and think. You have much more time to think about what the car is doing, and it's probably something that's underrated, I would say. Not many people talk about it, but it really helped me get up to speed, thinking much more about what's going on in the car through the corner, and like I said, it's not to be underestimated how important that is around here. It's pretty easy to jump up to 215, but then if you have a small moment at 215, it can turn into a very big moment after that.

So yeah, that in itself was a big benefit to myself. And then you say it's three days, but it goes a lot quicker than that. It doesn't seem like -- you can always have more testing. You know, people came here a few weeks ago and did a day. Just that one day makes a huge difference, and it's spaced away from the event, so you have time to go back and analyze lap by lap all

**THE MODERATOR:** We'll get started with our media availability. We are pleased that the members from DragonSpeed have joined us. On my far left, team owner Elton Julian, and seated next to him, driver of the No. 81 10 Star DragonSpeed Chevrolet, Ben Hanley. First of all, congratulations on a fine job yesterday, gentlemen. Ben, if you could just run us through your day, the emotions, the highs, the lows.

**BEN HANLEY:** Started off a bit low. We got stuck in sixth gear on our first qually run, so that wasn't helpful, especially the last two laps where I needed to downshift, yeah, we were stuck in sixth, so we were just losing momentum every lap. But obviously we knew we could go a chunk quicker than our first effort, so it was always the plan to go again.

And then jumped up to 30th, which wasn't enough because there was still plenty of time left in the quallies, so other people were going to run. So again, I knew we were going to have to make another run. So just a few small adjustments, and it came together really well for our last attempt. It was a big chunk for us. Even though it was small adjustments, this place is pretty special and unique, and tiny little changes, very, very small, has a big difference. Those speeds, you don't need to do much, and the car gave me some -- car gave me more confidence and the car was quicker. So those two things together, and we made a significant step forward, and it was enough to make it straight through to the 500, which was an amazing achievement by everyone at DragonSpeed and 10 Star 81 Chevrolet.

**THE MODERATOR:** How does it feel to know that you're going to be in the Indianapolis 500 a week from today?

**ELTON JULIAN:** Who are you asking? Massive relief. Big relief I think for both of us. I think for everybody. We expected to come and fight for the last row realistically, so there was always potential. Had a chance that maybe we could crack that habit and exceed our no-tow speeds during the week and thinking, well, maybe just. But like Ben said, little things make big differences, but sometimes little things make no difference. So sometimes you don't gain any speed,

the data that you've gathered. So that makes a big difference to how you just roll out for the actual event here. So we weren't able to do that.

But like Elton said, we just made small changes and didn't lose focus, didn't get frustrated, even though we definitely had a difficult day on Fast Friday. But we just kept making small changes, and we almost used our qually runs as a testing, as well. We weren't trying to go from struggling on Friday to aiming for the top nine. We knew where our goal was, and not aiming too high, but at the same time, just trying to keep moving forward, and that made a big difference to how we feel out there test days, the event, even the qually day, and it was a testament to the team that we got through as comfortably as we did, even though it doesn't feel comfortable when you're out there watching everyone else run after you.

But jumping up to be 24th, 25 I think it was on that run, you kind of knew there's no enough time for everyone else below to run, so we were pretty safe at that point. But still, it's nail-biting watching everyone else do their runs.

THE MODERATOR: And of course the successful run yesterday comes on the heels of the team's announcement that you're going to focus on the NTT IndyCar Series and the future with the program. If you could elaborate on that, what's the thinking with that, and what direction you're looking with that.

ELTON JULIAN: Well, we've grown rather quickly in the past -- I stopped driving myself in 2012, so we started in the Porsche Cup and Ferrari Challenge and then moved up from there, and we were fortunate enough to win in every formula we've been in, but always very quick to step up to the next formula, a bit like a driver's career, trying to go through the ladder system. In that process we ended up racing in sports cars, and we've had a successful time there and really, really enjoy the formula that we're in with the LMP2, and we stepped up to LMP1 in the world championship this year, but it's been quite frustrating both from the championship side and the technical side for us. We've had a lot of drama with our package.

But moving forward, having had a chance to come to INDYCAR, a personal aspiration of mine, but also looking for a place for the team to grow and to have a long-term future. Commercially there's no other championship that seems as viable as this one, so the decision that you read about yesterday was to pull back a little bit on some of the world endurance championship stuff that we're involved in, still keeping our prototype racing program in the European championship, which I think is a fantastic championship, and individual outings in IMSA and stuff like that, the big events. So we're not leaving sports car racing by any means. That is our bread and butter and that's what we do really, really well, but dropping the

WEC stuff will really allow me to spend more energy and time in doing as many or more races next year in this championship because now that I've got my foot in the door I don't want to leave.

**Q. You're both competitors, and when you show up at a race, you show up to make the field and race for the win. But in a lot of ways, did it bother you when people already before the month started had you listed as one of the three teams that was going to go home?**

BEN HANLEY: No, because we weren't planning on going home.

ELTON JULIAN: At the same time I also felt that about myself. It's unrealistic to think you're not in that group. So I knew. I knew. I said it to Robin yesterday. We're fighting from the ropes. And we don't plan on letting that mentality go away.

BEN HANLEY: I think that's one of the key things that people can follow quite easily this week is we've never been at the top of the charts. More often in the bottom four. But it didn't faze us, and we knew our job, and we knew what we needed to do to get the job done, which our primary focus was make the race. So whether that's going through as we did yesterday, which is a fantastic achievement, but we were just as ready to knuckle down last night and try and make some more adjustments and come back today and make it into the field. We weren't expecting to be in the top 10.

But at the same time, we were working really hard and systematically to make the improvements to get us in the field.

**Q. Can you put into words how different this style of driving is compared to everything that you've known to be driving for your whole career?**

BEN HANLEY: Not really. So when we did the oval testing in Texas a few weeks ago, did the first six laps, and I came in and I thought, this is a different sport. It's nothing like anything I've done before. But by the end of the day, it was fascinating myself, and I was loving every lap I was doing at Texas. If I could have, I'd have stayed another day and done some more laps, but I really started to enjoy it the second half of the day. I got really into it.

**Q. Coming into this kind of motor racing world, were you able to prepare maybe for this kind of stuff with the simulator? And for Elton, I understand you have two team locations, one in France in Europe, one here in America. How big is the challenge logistically to make a coordination between the two locations?**

BEN HANLEY: I've done quite a lot of development work on simulators in the past, and I find it difficult to learn as much as I need to from the simulator without first turning a lap at that circuit. The simulators are an impressive tool if you use them in the right way, and to

use them in the right way, you have to have some data to be able to compare with some real-life data to correlate what you're doing in the sim. So without that correlation, it's difficult to get a hold of the direction of what you need to send the car in.

They're not a game. It's a very sophisticated tool. But like I said, you have to have the correlation to be able to learn the right way to drive the car in the first place. So I feel -- I didn't feel that bothered about doing much simulator stuff before I came here, because my personal view of that is that I need to do a few laps minimum a day and then go to the simulator, and then I feel like you can use that tool to learn on the engineering side and also on the driving side. But for me it's important that I run at the circuit first in real-life conditions before concentrating on simulator work.

ELTON JULIAN: On your second question, it's not easy. Obviously we're not the biggest operation. We're quite a small team. There's probably only -- in the office there's maybe three people, four people including myself that are making all this happen. Myself basically being the head of basically everything. But with some great support from Brian Bailey in Europe that's helping me do all the logistics there for the sports car stuff, and here with Philippa that's joined us earlier this year, she's done a fantastic job keeping things together here while I go back and forth.

But sometimes the back-to-backs this year will be complicated. What people don't realize is we've been using our same crew for everything, so guys were flying in, flying out, building a P2 car, building a P1 car, building an Indy car and flying back, literally flying back and forth with wheel guns that did both -- the same wheel guns that are here are the ones that won Spa two weeks ago. So that's the way it is.

But we've been able to make it pretty seamless thus far.

**Q. What was the moment you both realized you were in?**

ELTON JULIAN: Eight minutes from the end (laughing).

**Q. And if you could just describe the feeling that you felt when you realized, we're in the Indy 500?**

BEN HANLEY: I said last night, that for me personally was the most satisfying qualifying performance I've done. This place is like no other, and there's a much more real risk-reward scenario when you're driving out there. Those last two laps, they start to get a bit sketchy, so you really need to have some confidence in the car to be able to keep it flat. But at the same time, you know that a gust of wind or the little wiggle has big consequences. So you really need the confidence to do that.

Yeah, it was an amazing feeling. I was watching the times on the dash, so I knew we were really

competitive and a big step up from the previous run. And then I think I got a "well done" and then radio silence, and I assumed that everyone was pretty happy because I knew it was a good run, and the radio silence kind of said that everyone was pretty happy in the team.

ELTON JULIAN: Yeah, the boys were really, really happy with that, man. Obviously it's like a slow rise. First it's just the pure racing side of it, overcoming small victory literally. It's a massive victory for us. It's not an overall victory, but we met the first target, so there's a lot of pride in that. I've won races as a driver, and I've won championships as a team owner now, but this is other-level stuff.

But that curve doesn't stop late into the evening. You start to really understand it.

Coming back this morning, first feeling was relief, pulling into the parking lot knowing that we didn't have to go out there and fight for the position we really thought we were going to have to, so that has allowed us now to clean up the mess in the box and start to prepare for -- like a normal team. What it does for us probably more than most people is because we're so small, this extra couple of days, or at least this extra day, means everything to our preparation for the race. So this is huge.

**Q. Ben, it's one thing to do four laps around here once on edge, but you had to do it multiple times yesterday. Did the nerves get better as the day went on or worse knowing that you had to put it in multiple times?**

BEN HANLEY: I don't know, probably worse because you know you've got to go faster. But yeah, I had the confidence in -- one thing we've always said from the start is we keep this group of people because we trust each other. If I ask for something, nine times out of ten we'll make some changes and I get what I asked for. And vice versa, if the engineer thinks I need to change my line a bit or be a bit cleaner or a bit smoother then I'll trust him and I'll try it. So I knew we were going to improve little bits.

But yeah, it was a great feeling yesterday.

**Q. Elton, a long time ago you raced yourself open wheel racing back in Europe when we had a very hard championship, Formula 3000 with Derek Mower's team. Depending on the right circumstances and funding and sponsorship, is there a possibility that you go maybe the same way like Carlin and expand into European open wheel series?**

ELTON JULIAN: I don't think so. I think we've got enough on our plate. I think we do -- like I said, we just made a slight shift, and I think that we're in the right place. We'll stay here, we get it right. We proved that we're consistently improving. I feel so confident in the

LMP categories that we can show up anywhere and do the job. We've reached that point that we can with multiple lineups, multiple drivers, multiple championships, we're able to be competitive, so that package is pretty much sorted. That formula will change eventually, so it'll take a big effort to get going again there. But in the meantime, take advantage of this time to grow here.

**Q. How have you seen Ben progress as a driver since he's been with you?**

ELTON JULIAN: The reason he's with me is because I think he's the best. So that's a simple answer.