

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

Sunday May 19, 2019

Charlie Kimball

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are pleased to be joined now by Charlie Kimball, driver of the No. 23 Fiasp Chevrolet for Carlin, who qualified 20th yesterday, solidly in the field. Why don't you take us through your day yesterday. How did it go for you?

CHARLIE KIMBALL: It's nerve-racking. I think qualifying day at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, it's fun because it's typically the fastest you go all month long. It's terrifying because 10 miles trimmed out in an Indy car around IMS is extremely challenging. It is the longest day, the longest weekend of the year because you're always watching the weather. You're always looking at conditions. You're always looking at what other people do. It is a day that it is the absolute easiest for common sense to become completely uncommon.

But I'm really proud of the 23 crew for Carlin yesterday. We executed when we needed to. We got the one run in the books. It was good enough to put us in the show. We felt pretty comfortable all day long, but we were ready to go again if we needed to. And yet it's still pretty bittersweet, frankly, because it's really hard to celebrate making the 103rd run of the Indianapolis 500 when I have two teammates who are still on the bubble. So I know that they didn't sleep much last night.

I did that back in 2011 my rookie year. Rain washed out my second run to put me back in the show. We missed the window a little bit on my first run, got bumped. Second run, drove into a rainstorm in Turn 1. That was the end of the day. And so I didn't make the show on Saturday.

So it was a fairly tense dinner that Saturday night, and that overnight before when you're not in the race is hard, so I feel for my teammates and the whole as a whole.

THE MODERATOR: What is the atmosphere like back in the garage, and from that experience, what kind of advice or guidance can you lend to their support.

CHARLIE KIMBALL: Well, I think it's determined is probably the single best way to describe it. They are willing to give it everything they've got to make this race. From my side, we're here to help as much as we can as teammates, from me as a driver to the engineers, the mechanics, the tire guys. Everybody is

pitched in. That's one of the greatest things about Carlin as an organization is I think you see it with (team principal) Trevor (Carlin), even after (Patricio O'Ward's) incident the other day, he was in there working on the car.

Sometimes it's maybe not with a wrench and sometimes it's not a rag and polish, but he is always in there willing to help, and when that culture starts at the top, it carries through.

So today, while you can't control the weather, you sure wish you could on a day like today, the hardest thing, I think, for my teammates is just trying not to burn nervous energy and make sure to keep something in the tank for that four-lap run, whenever it happens.

THE MODERATOR: You've seen this relationship for two years close up with the Carlin team, but your history dates way back with this team. You know the strength of this team going back a decade.

CHARLIE KIMBALL: That's right. Having driven for them back in 2005, and they were there in 2007 when I was diagnosed and went through that journey initially with me, is I can look back a long ways and see a lot of examples about being part of Carlin and how strong they are as a team. They've faced adversity before and come up with solutions, and there are a lot of very smart, very qualified people within the organization, and their goal is to get the 59 and the 31 into the field of 33 today. Or tomorrow or whatever.

THE MODERATOR: And you mentioned when you were diagnosed with diabetes. Your sponsor this month, Fiasp, is one of the Novo Nordisk products that you use personally.

CHARLIE KIMBALL: Correct. Yeah, the Fiasp brand that's on the car for the month of May, and this is probably a little insider baseball, I'm not sure I'm supposed to say, but will also be on the car for the 23 car at Texas Motor Speedway is one of the two insulins that I use in combination to manage my blood sugar. Tresiba that was on the car in St. Pete is the other insulin. So it's a long-acting and a fast-acting insulin, Fiasp being the fast-acting insulin, mealtime insulin.

I've used Novo Nordisk insulins and delivery devices since the day I was diagnosed back in 2007, and the relationship with them has been really rewarding for me. As a driver with diabetes and the first licensed

driver with diabetes to qualify for and race in the Indy 500, being able to share that message to the racing community, bring that diabetes community to the racetrack, so to speak, has been incredible. For 11 seasons the Race With Insulin program has reached thousands of people and encouraged them to overcome the challenge in their life, be it diabetes or otherwise, to live their dreams.

And for me, whatever the results are or aren't on the racetrack, I know that being out there, just getting to the start line is a victory for a lot of people.

THE MODERATOR: This is your first year in the NTT IndyCar Series as a part-time driver. Was it a more difficult adjustment coming in this month?

CHARLIE KIMBALL: It was different. It was a little different prep. I feel like with only five races on my calendar, my exercise physiologist, my trainer, myself, we came up with a plan in the winter to maximize. I have five opportunities to go out and get the job done and pull into Victory Lane. But it also gives me the opportunity to train more specifically and specialized for those five events. So I have trained and prepared differently for this month of May, not having the rigors of the Indianapolis Grand Prix and the road course before getting on track on the oval.

It's also helped me grow as a driver because being on the timing stand and consulting, working with the team, very integrally during race weekends on the timing stand, on the intercom, listening to what is happening and the communications, the dialogue with the engineers, the engine technicians, the electronics guys, the drivers, the crew chiefs, has really opened my eyes to how much actually is happening on the timing stand, and it's a lot more than I ever thought it would be, because in the car, when you ask for a fuel number to get to the end of the race and it doesn't happen in the same straightaway, it's easy to get frustrated.

But now I realize when you ask for that fuel number, there's about a million other things going on on the timing stand, and sometimes the fuel number, while it may be the most important thing to me at the moment, isn't the most important thing to the result of the race.

And so being a part-time driver is challenging, but at the same time, I think it has allowed me the opportunity to learn, grow and develop and become a better driver because of it.

Q. Charlie, there's got to be a little bit of satisfaction from you, the fact that you are a part-time driver, you're a former Indy car race winner, and that you were able to get in here and put it in the show fairly safely, while others even on your same team have had struggles. What does it really say about your ability as a race driver that you'd

like people to know about?

CHARLIE KIMBALL: Well, I think a lot of it comes down to experience. Eight times around here, I finished in the top 10 50 percent of those, the top five 25 percent. My personal statistics around here are, as I was reminded by Donald Davidson at an event with him earlier this year, fairly impressive. And that experience means that there's no panic. There's never any panic. And we've done a yeoman's job Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday to prepare for yesterday. And sometimes as tough as it is, this place is still really hard, even with eight years of experience. It is extremely challenging to do what it takes to make the field of 33.

And I think that's one of the reasons why it means so much. So for me being able to rely on that experience but also bring it to bear to help my teammates, as well, not just last night and getting ready for that last-row shootout, but all week long as much as possible. Trying to lead from the front has really been a mantra of the 23 crew. It's not just me, it's the whole team.

Q. Obviously you qualified in the seventh row. Last year you guys had a lot of pace here. Same body kit, same engine, same drivers. You're probably one of the better guys to explain what can happen year to year or what can happen in between car to car on a same team that makes one car slower, one car faster.

CHARLIE KIMBALL: Well, I think the first point about it being the same car, the same team, the same engines, the same drivers. It's a different tire, it's a different surface on the racetrack. There are things that have changed and developed. The weather conditions are completely different from last year, the wind direction. Everyone pushes forward. Every time the cars go on track, INDYCAR teams are getting better and better. That's one of the things, again, about the NTT IndyCar Series is if you weren't moving forward at 100 miles an hour, you're getting left behind. If you just stand still from year to year, you will get further and further behind.

So I think that's a big indication that things have changed. And honestly, I'm really disappointed -- not really. I would say I am disappointed with where we qualified. I was ready to go out and move up yesterday because we didn't -- while we executed and put ourselves in the show, I believe looking at the data and all the information after the run, we didn't get things quite right. We didn't optimize the car we had from Friday to Saturday.

So there was probably a half to three quarters of a mile an hour in the tank. Discretion was the better part of valor with that, though, and the car was ready to run with that if we needed to, but it didn't hit the racetrack, and I'm not sure that my heart or my wife's nerves could have handled another four-lap run like yesterday morning's. It was a handful.

Q. You have experience here, but every driver has a problem with one corner. Is there one that bothers you more than the others?

CHARLIE KIMBALL: Well, if I promise no one will print it so that the other drivers all know about it, I'd tell you. No, I'm kidding. It really depends on the wind direction for me. The way the wind was blowing yesterday, 2 was very, very tough, and traditionally it's where -- of the two times I've hit the wall around here, it's where I spun in 2014 during the race -- in fact, I think it was the first yellow at about 125 laps in. But Turn 2 is challenging for me. There's a bump at the turn-in point, the site picture with the paving it pit out, those things make it harder than some of the other corners, especially when the wind blows like it typically does from Turn 1 to Turn 3.

Q. I wanted you to expand on what your race weekends really include this year, even when you're not in the car. You mentioned you are still involved in the team a little bit. How has that side been treating you, and what involvement do you hold when you're not racing?

CHARLIE KIMBALL: So when I'm at the racetrack, I'm trying to contribute and lend the benefit of my experience as much as possible. Carlin is a great team that has a very storied successful pedigree in lots of different racing series, but it's still only their second year in INDYCAR. And when you're racing the Penskes, Ganassis, Andrettis, Schmidt Petersons, there's a depth of knowledge there in INDYCAR that's very specific, and so I try and lend the benefit of my experience to the drivers, to the engineers, to the mechanics, as well, management. So typically in the practice sessions, I will go stand -- at the road courses so far, being the first oval here and being in the car, with the road and street circuits, I've been going out to corners during practices watching. I'll watch the NBC Gold coverage on my phone, listen to what the commentators are saying, do sector times, do any photos or videos, take notes, and then come back and listen to the drivers in the debrief. Sometimes I try and help translate from driver speak to engineer speak, and vice versa, as well. Sometimes I just lend perspective to drivers about -- to both Pato and Max. Max obviously has more Indy car experience, but Pato, it's his first year and he's quite young. So try and lend some perspective about how to approach the weekend and the mindset going into the weekend.

And then usually in qualifying and in the race, I'll be on the intercom on the timing stand trying to learn myself but also lend the benefit of my experience to strategy, to how things play out. Just an extra set of eyes sometimes on the telemetry for alarms, an extra set of eyes on the timing and scoring screens to pick out trends. Sometimes I'll listen to a scanner to the other teams to hear what they're saying and what they're pushing for, what they're worried about, what they're conscious of, just to make sure that all of that information is helping as much as possible.

Q. Knowing you, obviously you want a full-time ride next year, so do you think in a lot of ways what you've been able to do in your limited duty here is making you a pretty good candidate for a full-time ride?

CHARLIE KIMBALL: Well, if it was up to me, I'd be in the car every day of the week, 365 days of the year. There's no place I'd rather be than in a race car. My goal is definitely to work towards being back in a car full-time. But motorsports is a sport and it's also a business, and so I've got to make sure that I take care of both those sides and work with partners and work with the team to develop relationships.

If it was about -- if it was only about results on the racetrack, I think there would be some drivers that would still be in INDYCAR, and then other drivers that may not be. But it's not, and that's the reality. I think a lot of people underestimate the business side of the sport, but it's critical. You know, partnerships are key to it.

I have a friend who is in the NFL, and he goes, I can't believe that you're talking to people and signing autographs 15 minutes, 30 minutes before you put your helmet on and go 230 miles an hour. He goes, if anyone talked to me two hours before game time I'd rip their head off. And I went, yeah, but you have one boss. You have one owner that -- all you answer to is your coaches and your ownership. We have partners, we have sponsors, we have to -- that's part of this sport.

And so every sport is different, and I have come to really enjoy the business aspect of racing. I never thought that I would enjoy that sometimes chess match of figuring out how to plug a partnership in racing into a program, but I really do enjoy that, those conversations, that development.

And when you win in the boardroom, sometimes it replicates a little bit of that feeling of a success on the racetrack.

Q. Is it hard to have so many sponsor appearances during the month of May?

CHARLIE KIMBALL: So the question was is it hard to do those meet-and-greets at Indianapolis before the Indy 500. The nice thing is with a couple of weeks of practice -- or a week of practice and a weekend of qualifying and a week of media events, you can take care of a lot of conversations and meet-and-greets and shake a lot of hands before you get to race day. But it's pretty busy on race day, and definitely that sort of helmet goes on, figuratively, sooner here at the 500 than other events, yes.

Q. Is it your sense, too, though, that this track for whatever reason, you've seen drivers come along, that this track kind of fits their sensibilities about

driving, et cetera, from a comfort level? Not that you're ever totally comfortable, but when did you discover that maybe that was the case for you as you cited your results a whole ago? And what does that mean to you to kind of feel comfortable at a place like this?

CHARLIE KIMBALL: I think it comes down to personality and temperament partly. I'm a very linear person, son of an engineer through and through. One plus one always equals two in my world. And so coming here, one of the mantras that I've worked with my team and really focused on internally this month in coming in in years past is being very disciplined, almost militantly disciplined. I think that combination really fits, because no matter what happens, if common sense goes out the window, this place bites you. And I think that ability to be a student of the sport, a student of the racetrack, learn from the racetrack, learn the cars and learn from the history, each and every time I go out on the racetrack, and the benefit of experience means that if I'm not totally committed to a run, I'm not afraid to say to the team, hey, I need to get out and clear my head. Give me a minute. We need to go back to the garage sometimes. Hey, something's not right, let's go back, let's check. Let's just take a minute and clear our head.

And that -- I think that experience was taught early on with my years at Chip Ganassi Racing watching how Scott and Dario approached this place, listening to Dario as a mentor the last couple of years at Ganassi.

But I think it suits my personality type, as well. I'm pretty dry. I'm never one to get really emotional, and I know some people, some drivers need that emotion to get fired up around here. But just getting in the race car, that fires me up no matter what, and that really makes me get out of bed in the middle of winter to go to the gym, and this place especially, this is what I wake up thinking about in the middle of the night in December is here.

Q. You don't have a full-time ride this year, but 2020 is approaching very quickly. Do you also have an optimistic feeling we'll see you again in a full-time ride in 2020?

CHARLIE KIMBALL: Like I said to Bruce a little earlier, if I could write my own story, I would, and I would be in the car every day of the week. I hope that I can continue to do my job on and off the racetrack to open up those opportunities, both in partnerships and to make sure I prove my value and stay in the cockpit. I think there's -- 2020 is coming quickly, but I'm not thinking about that this week, not this month. Today I'm focused on helping the 31 and 59 get into the field, and after that, then the rest comes down -- maybe I'll start thinking about 2020 on Monday night next week. Maybe I'll start thinking about it more after Texas, Pocono and Laguna.