

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Press Conference

Dario Franchitti

Speaker1 Title

Felix Rosenqvist

Speaker2 Title

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, gentlemen. What are you guys doing to fill your day today?

DARIO FRANCHITTI: One of us was in the engineering truck talking to engineers, and the other one just got here.

THE MODERATOR: Shall we guess which is which?

DARIO FRANCHITTI: I'll leave that to you guys.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I had to wake up just to come here.

THE MODERATOR: Talk us through your day yesterday.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, it was an interesting one. Maybe not the one we all expected once we came here to Indy on Monday. I think from my point of view, it was -- I sort of just focus on driving. I try to push everything else away and just let my team worry about the rest. But I could tell that everyone was a little bit stressed out. But just tried to sit there in my little bubble and do the job. Yeah, if we just managed to get through to the race without having to worry about today or tomorrow, whatever it's going to be, so that was a real relief. And yeah, just proud of all the boys and girls after what happened on Wednesday to do that.

THE MODERATOR: Have you ever faced something as stressful as the past few days?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Nope.

THE MODERATOR: Do you want to do it again?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Nope.

THE MODERATOR: Dario, what kinds of things have you tried to do to help him through the last few days?

DARIO FRANCHITTI: To follow up on what Felix said, the funny thing is it's as difficult if not more difficult for the people in this end of the sort of row 6, 7, the people that are on the edge of getting knocked out as it is for people going for pole. They work probably a little



harder in the car and take -- the teams certainly take more risks with the setups so the driver then has to take more risks with the setup. So it wasn't an easy thing that any of the drivers did yesterday. But I was really proud of the job that Felix did.

The team are so professional. The car was ready to go again. But the job Felix did of come back from a crash, I've read somewhere this morning he was the only one who crashed earlier in the week yesterday to actually get locked into the field yesterday, and I think that says something about his determination, to get back on and do the job. From my side yesterday, it was really trying to keep him calm, trying to just make -- sort of step by step do the right -- make the right choices, whether it was with setup, helping Julian sort of what I would want to do in his position right now because Felix has never experienced it before, so I was trying to put myself in that position a little bit of what I would want, what would I want to hear, what would I need to hear during the run, all those things. And Barry Wanser was really good at I think talking you through the runs, as well. We all tried to keep him calm. He had that look on the third run of, I really don't want to do this, but then you've got to get up and go because it's a lot better feeling to be sitting here today locked into the race than those six poor drivers that are now fighting out for the three spots. I've done that, and it's not fun.

Q. What kind of things did you take in from Dario, from Barry, from Julian as you were going through the process? What helped you?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I think it's probably just the basic things in the end, just trying to keep your calm, focus on what you need to do, working on your tools in the car, working on your shifting. You know, just -- I mean, it sounds simple when you talk about it, but in the heat of the moment, it's all a big rush, and people are stressed and everyone have their own thing to work on. And yeah, it's just a coordination thing to get everything together and I guess to keep me calm because there's no reason for me to get stressed, as well, I guess, and I think they did a really good job with that.

I felt probably as calm as I've been still during -- after that crash I had. Actually the last run I did yesterday, I felt really comfortable in the car. I felt I was on top of the driving again, and that was a good feeling. And I also had a feeling we could have gone much quicker, as well, so even if we just made it, the feeling was that we could have been better with the car we had. So yeah, it's still a lot of positive things to take out of it,

and that position doesn't say more than we made it. I think we're not here to fight for 29th. That's nothing to brag about. Yeah, we're here to fight for good results.

But you also need to take it in the right step. You cannot just crash and expect you're going to be on pole. It's a long upward climb after you do something like that, and yeah, and this is where we ended, and we could have ended anywhere else because I think we did all the right steps from what we could do.

DARIO FRANCHITTI: I was looking at my phone there, and Chris Simmons, Scott Dixon's engineer, said something this morning on Twitter: "Very few have any idea how intense Indy qualifying is." He's talking about "a good car is yawed at 4 degrees in the corners. A not-so-good car wavers between 2 and 6 degrees." Think about how small that is. And the driver is controlling that. So absolutely everybody from back to front is absolutely on the edge of control, and we saw yesterday and during the week what happens when it goes a little bit wrong.

Yeah, I was really proud of the job this guy did yesterday.

Q. Dario, you posted this morning about 2002 and having to go through that bump day and all the stress that went along. Can you kind of revisit what that year was like coming in in 2002 and knowing that Felix doesn't have to go through that this year?

DARIO FRANCHITTI: Yeah, I still feel somewhat -- I certainly did when I drove. Actually since I retired, too, coming here, if the car isn't quick, you've got that feeling of I don't want to go through that. Luckily the last couple years there hasn't been so much bumping to put somebody in that position. But this year with the 36 cars, there's -- I think there's a situation, there's a time when you come down the straight on your qualifying run and you've ended the first lap, and you're absolutely on the limit, you come down here, and you get to the Yard of Bricks and you look down at your dash and it shows you your speed, and when the car is fast, you look down and it's got a good number, and you think, yes. Then you're really trimming it for the next four laps.

When you're in that situation at the back of the field and the guys are going through it today, you come down there and it's got a number and you know that number is not good enough, and you know the thing is trimmed out and it's sliding and it's only going to get worse as the run goes on, and it's just -- it's a very sort of soul-destroying experience. And then you come in and the engineer says, we're not fast enough, we're going to have to trim out some more, and you look at him and you go, we can't, we're already sliding, and you don't know why the car is slow, and we saw that with some guys yesterday, and they just keep running more and more and more. You watch this sort of spiral

that people are in.

So it's -- to me that shows how difficult it is just to qualify for the race when you see a driver of the caliber of Fernando Alonso struggling to make it. There's so many little things, especially with the current rules package, there's so many little things you have to get right as a driver but also the engineers and the technical side.

Q. Dario, since you just mentioned Fernando, what do you make of this whole McLaren situation?

DONNA ANDREWS: I think it's very difficult to come into a new formula even with experienced people. To go from a dead start from zero to compete with teams that have been doing this for 10, 15, 20, 50 years in the case of Penske, to try and start to compete with that, and it's not just about money, it's about how the team works together, the know-how in that team. It's very, very difficult to do.

And so I think the guys are probably struggling a little bit with that. I think it shows how difficult it is. You've got a great team, you've got great people, great driver, and they're struggling.

Q. Felix, was there ever a point yesterday that you worried you were not going to make the race?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Actually not. I think from my point of view, I was pretty confident we would make it. I had good trust in the car and what we've been working on and also in myself. Maybe it was tighter than expected, especially like when you get the whole thing -- when you look back and watching what happened yesterday, and some of it I couldn't see when I was in the car because I think on purpose my guys didn't tell me, but yeah, from my point of view, I wasn't worried. I kind of knew we would make it somehow.

DARIO FRANCHITTI: I can only laugh. I'm glad you were calm. That was the job. Our job yesterday was to keep this guy calm and let him drive the car. We were all stressed. I went home last night and just went straight to sleep. I was knackered. Barry, the whole team was just worn out. But the job is to keep the driver kind of insulated from all that stress and let him do his job, which he did. So mission accomplished. It's much easier driving the car I will say than doing my current job.

Q. Dario, obviously you retired. I'm not sure you wanted to, but you did. Is what you're doing now as a coach, is that fulfilling your life?

DARIO FRANCHITTI: Yes, absolutely. I mean, there's nothing like -- that gives me the buzz of driving an IndyCar around here on the limit. There's nothing I think that will ever replace that buzz. But when I can help a young talented driver like Felix, in some ways that is incredibly fulfilling. When I can help Scott in some small way, which the times you can help

somebody like Scot are few and far between because he's so good, so experienced, but that, and when I can do that, I get a lot of fun out of that, that situation, working with the Ganassi team still that I enjoyed so much success with. It's the same group of people, and the fact I can still do that, I feel very, very lucky, very fortunate.

Q. Felix, the early part of the week you were out there driving the car was doing pretty good, then you had your crash. In some ways did it just kind of take you a little bit to kind of get back up to speed after that crash, and how big an impact or effect did that have on your qualifying effort?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I mean, it just puts you on the back foot. I mean, I'd say you lose two days minimum having a crash like that that you're behind all the others who have been able to have clean running and working on their setup, on their driving, and you just -- it's like missing two days of the week.

And also going to the spare car is never an optimal thing. I'm very convinced that the cars are very similar, but still, all the extra detail that goes into the first car and then you have to basically start from a base setup again and doing all the -- just getting to the window of what setup you want to run around here takes some time because it's all in the details, and even if you put the same setup on two cars, it's not going to feel the same, so you have to do all those little adjustments again, which takes almost a day, and then at the same time as you're rebuilding your confidence, you're not able to give the right feedback because you think -- every time the car moves a little bit, if it's like a one-mile-an-hour change in the wind, you think the car is going to slide and crash. It's just an awful experience. I think I've never been that sensitive to everything that's going on in the car. Like you can feel everything, and you think everything is going to just work against you. But then you loosen up. I would say now I'm probably ahead of where I was when I crashed. Like I feel more confident than I was. But all the others have been way ahead.

So yeah, it's just a catch-up game.

Q. Dario, Dixie is usually starting within the first row. This is an unusual year where he'll be coming from row 6. Even for a veteran, how much of a challenge is that with the traffic being in mid pack?

DARIO FRANCHITTI: Yeah, it's not ideal. Clearly the car was -- it wasn't fast enough yesterday for what we wanted. We can talk about conditions and stuff, but yeah, let's not make excuses. We weren't quick enough. I think we've got better race cars with the balance counts for a bit more maybe. Early laps, I don't know, we've won, I think I qualified 16th or something the last time I won. So Scott is well aware of what he has to do and how he has to do it. It's definitely possible. And if we put a good car underneath him, a good race car with a good balance

that he can pass people and stuff, he'll get up front in the fight, and I expect Felix, what he's learned the last couple days, he'll be moving up, too.

But the early race is -- it's nice to make some progress to get closer to the front, but you've got to be cautious, too. We've seen -- there's no point making a big move and ending up in the wall in Turn 2 in lap 1. You've got to get to the finish and figure out how to do that, too. I'm confident both the drivers, one with a lot of experience with Scott and one with no experience with Felix can do the job.

Q. Did you have to calm him down at all yesterday?

DARIO FRANCHITTI: Dixon? No, I had to wake him up. Dix just does his job. He's just such a machine, and he's in such a rhythm that his first run he came in, I said, How was it? He goes, Well, it was a little loose, mate, and you watch the steering trace, and he's like turning right more than he's turning left, and he's just so calm about it. That's why he's won five championships.

Q. Felix, you've got a great teacher there, but sometimes experience is the best teacher. Is that something, going into the wall for the first time, the pressure of qualifying, is that just something you have to do and no matter what you hear you have to experience it yourself?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, I mean, this whole buildup and the whole Indy thing, I can sort of compare it with previous things I've had in my career where people keep talking for weeks and months about how difficult something is going to be. You have to pay attention for that. You have to focus on that. But once you're there, it's like, you know, you just have to do it yourself, and you're probably going to run into the same mistakes that everyone else has done. There's no way you can just -- I don't think anyone who won here haven't done a mistake around here. That goes for many other races, big races that are tricky.

Yeah, I mean, it's just something I wish I didn't do, but it happened, and it's a question of time, I guess. Yeah, I have it done now.