

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

Sunday May 19, 2019

Press Conference

Sage Karam

Dreyer & Reinbold Racing

Kyle Kaiser

Juncos Racing

James Hinchcliffe

Arrow Schmidt Peterson Motorsports

Ricardo Juncos

Owner, Juncos Racing

THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome the two drivers sitting before me, Sage Karam, driving the No. 24 DRR WIX Filters Chevrolet for Dreyer & Reinbold Racing and Kyle Kaiser, driving the No. 32 Juncos Racing Chevrolet. Sage, we'll start with you. After a day like yesterday, to come out with the speed that you had today, did you have any idea that was in the car?

SAGE KARAM: I mean, I always knew that speed was there. It was just getting it out of it. You know, I had a really bad first qual attempt yesterday and skimmed the wall, and I got out and the first thing I said was, we're fine, we're fine, because I genuinely believe that a run like I did just now was going to be like yesterday, I would have been able to bounce back and do that yesterday. But we just kept slightly missing the balance for the weather, and then you know, ended up having to come back today to fight into the field, and that was probably one of the most -- that was the most stressful 48 hours of my life, probably one of the biggest battles I've ever had to go through mentally. And yeah, we put a good run in.

I knew the speed was there. My teammate did it, and our cars were pretty similar. We had a really good car for two laps, but we didn't really have a good car for four, so today we bettered that drop-off, and that was the difference. If we would have fell off even more, who knows then what would have happened. But the team rallied, and it's just been a really, really tough month. To be able to say we qualified when we were kind of backs against the ball there for a while, and I mean, the last row in general, I mean, I didn't have as tough of a month as the other two guys, but those guys nearly going upside down and putting backup cars together and coming back is pretty freaking amazing. That's an amazing story for both those two guys. I'm happy I got in, and in 2014 with this same crew, same car, everything, started 31st and finished ninth as a rookie.

If it shapes up like that again, I'll be quite happy. We'll



see how we can do it.

THE MODERATOR: Kyle, obviously the past few days have been an absolute whirlwind for both you and the team. From a driver's perspective, and we also of course want the perspective of your team owner next to you, what has the past 48 hours been like for you and how much of a victory does this feel like?

KYLE KAISER: It felt like we qualified on pole when I came in, to be honest. It was pretty wild. I didn't really know right away. Everybody keeps asking, when did you know. I had no idea. I had somewhat of an idea because I got to see the laps, but I heard it was really close. And I came across start finish and first thing I asked was are we in, did we make it, and I just heard screaming, so that was a good sign. But the last 48 hours, like Sage said, has been an absolute whirlwind. It's been crazy. We had really good pace with our main car, but obviously we had an incident, and it's been just an uphill battle since then.

I have to give the team pretty much all the credit here because they've been working super long nights. I think they had 40 straight hours of work trying to get that car together, getting us ready to practice the next day at 8:00 a.m., just an unbelievable effort. Obviously the backup car didn't have the same pace as our main car, but we didn't give up. This was just an amazing battle from their end, just looking for every little thing we could do, no matter what it was, sanding the car, just changing pieces, just doing everything possible to try and get the speed out of it, and even yesterday when I don't think we had a perfect first run, the balance wasn't quite what we were hoping, it was very difficult conditions, we rallied, we got the balance right later in the day with our other two runs even though the speed wasn't there, which I think paid off today. We felt like we didn't need to go out this morning. We had the balance where we wanted it, we got the data we needed yesterday and kind of stuck with our guns, and it really paid off.

THE MODERATOR: Ricardo, what does this effort say about the resiliency of your team? I hear that in the midst of getting the car back together, even crew members from your Road to Indy teams were involved in that process.

RICARDO JUNCOS: Yeah, I think it's an amazing kind of story now that we are in the race. But regardless if we are in or not, like I said yesterday, the group of

people that I have in my team is amazing. Like you said, we have all the Pro Mazda Indy Lights crew members, so we have a mix of people, and everything was looking so good that we were thinking it cannot be that good because we were showing like top-10 speed with the car when we crashed, so unfortunately that was a big, big moment. My first thinking was we just need to go home because there is no way we can come back from this situation.

But then the other team said, let's put back together the car we used at Austin. The car was complete but it was a road course and it was totally disassembled because that's what we do, we disassembled so many things. We do all the (indiscernible) properly and everything never were thinking have something like this. So then we said, okay, let's start working on this car, and if we make it, we make it, and let's how fast it can be.

And like you said, yesterday we were about 42 hours straight, and we couldn't think anymore. The car was not good. Obviously the balance was off. We only can make one lap because the engine temp, we couldn't hold the temp, and now you've got to go back on the fast line again to try to make it, so it was going worse and worse. So we were in this situation, but from last night and today morning, we come in early, we decide not to go to practice, and I think that was a key decision because it allowed us to work an extra four, five hours on the car. We probably wouldn't be here because of that. So it was a lot V test that we were working on the main car over one year, and now here you are, you've got to do all that work in two nights.

Obviously the car is not like the other one, but so happy to be in the race, and this is just all my team members, it's all my mechanics, it's always a group of people that make something happen, and I'm so proud of them, and this is just unbelievable.

THE MODERATOR: So many unbelievable stories in front of us right now, including James Hinchcliffe in the No. 5 Arrow Schmidt Peterson Motorsports Honda. James, yesterday when we heard from you after the care center, you weren't even sure you would be able to get back out with the backup car. Then faced again that evening with the possibility of missing the race two years in a row. How did you overcome that, not just you but the team mentally and how much of a relief is it to have that weight off your shoulders?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: First of all, I just want to say congrats to the other guys that made it in and comprised the last row. And just my heart goes out to the ones that didn't make it, to Max (Chilton), Pato (O'Ward) and Fernando (Alonso). We all know how much goes into this race and how much this means to everybody, and I've been on the other side of this a year ago, so I know how much it sucks. I hate that we have to send guys home today.

But yeah, I mean, when I got out of the med center I told everybody there's no way we're getting back on track yesterday. It just shows what I know. And I got to echo a lot of what Kyle just said about the teamwork and the effort. Everybody on Arrow Schmidt Peterson rolled up their sleeves and went to work, and we had the backup car out on track two and a half hours later, which is just incredible. And similar situation, it's a road course car, it wasn't really built for speedways, it didn't have all the trick bits on it. But being able to get out there with enough time left to do three runs gave us a lot of information, a lot of data that we could kind of look at overnight and spend long nights working on the car trying to make sure we had the speed today, and man, it's a nerve-racking feeling knowing that you only have one shot to get it done at this point, and with the weather moving in and being first, that was the same thing that happened to us last year, which was certainly not lost on anybody in the garage.

But ultimately everybody at Arrow Schmidt Peterson, like I said, we took some parts off Marcus's car, everybody from Honda that pitched in to get us in there, man, it's crazy. Way more dramatic than -- I'm getting too old for this stuff. I need a week off now, but we've got to be back in the cars tomorrow.

Q. James, when Jay Frye came up with this idea for a last-row shootout to give somebody who had bad luck, a bad episode on qualifying day a chance at -- they call it a golf mulligan. Now in a lot of ways it's done that for your situation last year. Now that we've gone through the last-row shootout, do you like it? Do you think it's something that should remain part of this race?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I liked it before, but I really like it now. You know, what happened to us was, yeah -- it's weird. I any in a lot of ways what happened to us last year was part of the reason that rule was created and what happened to us this year is exactly the kind of situation that benefits from it.

You know, at the end of the day, we got a car back on track yesterday, and had it been the old rules, we would have had three more chances and we just would not have got in. We'd be sitting here 365 days later in the same seat we were a year prior, which would have been just devastating.

For me I think it's great. It does add a little bit of drama. I think as long as we have enough cars to make it a cool session, which today we did, and -- I mean, it was close. Good job, man, that was crazy. I was nervous. But yeah, no, I think it's a cool thing. Hopefully the fans enjoyed it, and it kind of made today a little extra special for everybody.

Q. Two questions for you, Ricardo. First of all, congratulations you made it to the race. I think besides Kyle to drive the car and make it to the

race, you also had maybe very sleepless nights, a lot of pressure to make this happen. How many sleepless nights you had before today and how big was the pressure, the stress?

RICARDO JUNCOS: We were so intense and focused. No time for relax. Obviously last night I couldn't sleep. You put so much, and in my situation it's everything on the line all the time. And yet you feel -- you get used to this, but this is so big. We're talking about the Indy 500. So it's just an amazing. But I give you, at least in my situation, so much adrenaline, I was so tired last night, but then I tried to sleep, I couldn't sleep. Kept thinking what it is we can do on the race car for today.

So first thing I did when I came to the track, I started talking to the engineers and the mechanics on everything I was thinking. Probably 80 percent of those things were stupid things, but you never stop thinking. I mean, like I said, today morning we was working until the last minute. We were rushing to put it together because we keep working on the last little things to the last minute, and I think that was the difference.

Q. I was personally surprised when it was announced you lost in short terms a sponsorship for this race for your team. Was there any explanation given by your sponsors why they pulled out?

RICARDO JUNCOS: Well, we knew that could happen. It was a company actually in Europe. You're working and you're working and the days keep going and the race is coming up, so you try to close the deal and situations -- sometimes the companies time progress is not the racing time. So there's a point that we've got to call it, and now we are here, we are with no sponsors that I was thinking we were going to have.

So that's why the car was white, because we've got to decide what color we're going to paint the car based on the sponsor. But I knew that could happen, so that's unfortunately what happened with us. But in the last week, I mean, we have a good momentum and a lot of companies start calling us, a lot of people. I think the fans did a fantastic job of following us, supporting the team and all this, giving us extra power it looks like that we never had before. So now you won't see a white car now in this weekend because we already have something on the table that we need to materialize now in the next few days, but it won't be a white car, and I think that's because some of the things that we were saying, I think Marshall Pruitt was the first one to send us, so really I've got to thank him. Thank you, buddy.

But after that, the phone never stopped ringing since then.

At the point that we had no more space on the car. Small company but everybody you can see had the attitude to help. It never happened before with us, so you never know, but now we are in the race. Hopefully we can make something with this.

Q. Ricardo, how many employees do you have?

RICARDO JUNCOS: We have about 25, 28 full-time, and when we are all the teams together, like when we do the Road to Indy plus (NTT) IndyCar (Series) like last year, it's about 45. Now we have the IMSA team because I like to be busy, and yeah. But it's about 45 altogether.

Q. So how many did you have working on the car for 48 straight hours?

RICARDO JUNCOS: Everybody. Absolutely. Nobody went home. I mean, there is a few people that about 4:00 in the morning we sent home because they just want to stay there because they feel they don't want to leave the race alone, but also we have to have some energy, fresh energy the next day, so marketing guys, the PR (rep) was there and Jason was there. My wife went back and forth bringing food to the guys. So everybody stayed there, and that's the way we are all the time.

Q. In the end, it came down to your tiny team vs. McLaren, and Kyle vs. Alonso. What is the satisfaction like for you to have pulled this off and sort of defeated the giant?

RICARDO JUNCOS: It's good to be in, but regardless, McLaren or not, I think this is very difficult. Like I said all the time, you can never underestimate Indianapolis or the Indy 500. There's more than 500 years of history here. So that's what we do, and I think like James was saying, you feel sorry for the guys that are out of the race now. This is part of the game, but that's what makes this so special. So I was actually thinking tonight and last night, what I'm going to say if we are not in the race.

But this is what it is. I don't focus on any particular team. We are happy that we are in, and we focus on ourselves all the time.

Q. I wanted to ask, with all the pressure trying to get in there at the back, you also had a world champion in there with you. How is it that -- did you have a feeling of this guy is great and everybody knows about him and we're up here trying to make this last row?

SAGE KARAM: I mean, I guess I could answer shortly just -- I once had a wrestling coach tell me when I was in high school, it doesn't matter who you're wrestling, it doesn't matter the seed, don't look at it, don't look at the brackets, records, nothing. Who's going to win is going to be who wrestles better in that six minutes. And for some reason, us three or us six didn't wrestle the track, the car, whatever, the weather as good as other guys did yesterday, and when I went back to my team, I knew we had to figure out how we were going to do better today, and we did that. It doesn't matter who you're up against, it's just you've got to do the best job you can do, and if you do your absolute best, then that's all you can do. But it doesn't matter who you're

up against. The pressure, yeah, I mean, it's insane. I never want to go through this again.

I don't know how James hasn't had a heart attack yet two years in a row. But it's not a fun feeling. And yeah, the front row guys can wait because we had to wait over 24 hours before we knew if we were in the actual race itself. Keep the questions coming. (Laughter.)

Q. Do you think there's some people in Europe tonight, some Formula 1 people that are kind of like, wow, that series must be pretty tough after all?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, I'm sure there are. I think obviously McLaren and Fernando brought a lot of attention to the race and they did two years ago and they did again this year. And the story has been all along that it's not easy, and I don't think anyone on that team thought that it was. I don't think anyone came in with misconceptions of what it was going to take. You know the problem that they had mid-week, it obviously complicated the situation. I think a lot of people hopefully over there have a new appreciation for just how difficult it is to come over here and get 10 miles, four laps done at a fast enough speed to make the show because very high-caliber engineers, mechanics, everything, and obviously one of the highest caliber drivers that's ever set foot on earth. They didn't get it done today for whatever reason. Hopefully that does kind of help raise the stock of this event globally.

Q. Ricardo, if McLaren approached you wanting to buy your entry into the 500, what -- how would you respond?

RICARDO JUNCOS: We're racing this weekend. That's it.