

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Press Conference

Takuma Sato

Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing

THE MODERATOR: It may have only been third, but there for a minute, it looked like it might be a second Indy 500 win. Did it feel like that to you?

TAKUMA SATO: Well, of course it's always possible. But before we get started, I wanted to say huge congratulations to Simon Pagenaud. What a strong run, and obviously got a pole position in the month of May and obviously started from Indy GP winning. But it's unbelievable for Penske and Simon. It's great to see. He's pulling such a strong race. It was fun.

My race, one stage it looked really tough. We got some little issues after the first pit stop, so we had to come back, and then I think it got a lap down in 31st place.

But I think we had to do head down the job and recalculate. Our team did a great job to stretch the field and then get back to the pack. I think it took more than 100 laps. But I think it was brilliant, and after the restart, it was very exciting. Pato, P6, P5, P4 and finally got P3, and then I got everything I had. Obviously I have on board Alex, but we were just flying all over the place with the temperature, and it was a great battle. It is a little bit of a pity that we couldn't challenge for the win, but we got third under some very difficult circumstances, I think. It's a huge credit to the team. So a big thank you to the team for getting me back.

Q. Did you go to the grass on the restart, go low to get to one of those positions?

TAKUMA SATO: I don't know if I was running on the grass. Perhaps maybe, but yeah, I was overtaking from outside. I think Josef and Ed, and I was clean, but obviously hard battle up there. But I think everybody did a great job in terms of the making Indy 500 what a great spectacle.

Q. You praise your team and everything, but how surprised were you to be there at the end like that, and what was your attitude the last 10 laps?

TAKUMA SATO: I think, as I said, it's a huge credit to the team, engineering side, and the boys worked so hard. Honestly, let's get down to the qualifying speed of 14th and 17th me and Graham, and that was a showing -- unfortunately that was pure speed we had. And we might not be the first person on the grid, but I think, as I said in the morning in a couple interviews, that I feel we were one of the strongest in traffic, and I think Graham and I were happy with our balance.



That's how it showed, too, the performance in the last 10 laps.

I think the team did a great job. We're still not quite there to get the win by ourselves, but I think it showed a tremendous performance and tremendous potential to Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing, so huge credit to the engineers.

Q. Did you feel like the top two were that much better than you, or did you feel like you just ran out of laps?

TAKUMA SATO: I think honestly Simon looked something in the pocket. He had definitely -- showing a great speed and skill. I think Alex and I could possibly battle each other at the end of the day, but honestly, last eight laps I tried and tried and tried and I couldn't get to Alex, so that means I think physically we were third today, which is -- I think it's still great result to the team, especially considering we were a lap down in 31st. I think it was a great -- it's just a little unfortunate for Graham, had an accident. But I think the entire team lifted a huge potential again, and really looking forward to competing at the highest level in the second third of the season.

Q. Takuma, how confident were you that the car was going to stick on the outside passes there? That was supposedly not something you want to do, a two wide, which you are not really supposed to do here.

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, no, probably not. Under normal circumstances, I think you wouldn't be able to pass people. So I figured out while I was a lap down, I had to battle through the field, and then I just gradually learning something over there, and then just in case, when I have an opportunity to go by Pato, I had to use it. And then mostly really, honestly, the whole idea of concept come from Helio Castroneves from 2017. He overtook me outside, and he overtook Max outside in Turn 3, and it was amazing move, and I just tried a little bit similar, and it worked out.

But I think IMS the resealed new tarmac as well as the Firestone, the new construction of the front tire, the new compound worked extremely well with the package we had. Very similar downforce to last year, I think the race looked a lot more exciting, and then I think INDYCAR -- all of INDYCAR did a brilliant job for that.

Q. You're sitting there third and you're watching

that battle in front of you. Did you have any kind of like feeling these two guys might do a little tango and there you could be? What were your thoughts as you watched that battle?

TAKUMA SATO: Well, there's always a scenario. Always a scenario. If something happened between two -- of course I was thinking, just make sure you're not involved. You always want to have extra caution. But then of course if you have a little cushion then end of story, you're not in there. So you have to grab every single opportunity, just never give up, and just try to challenge all the time, and I know in my years of counting down lap 5, lap 4, lap 3, and we're just not quite there yet, but it was an exciting race. But I think it was a great race for the Indy 500, and I'm sure fans really enjoyed it.