

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Press Conference

Scott Dixon

Chip Ganassi Racing

Takuma Sato

Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Scott Dixon of Chip Ganassi Racing, the fastest car in practice. Scott, NBC Sports Gold called you "Mr. Texas" during your brief practice. How does that nickname sound?

SCOTT DIXON: Interesting. No, that's cool. I think Helio (Castroneves) is Mr. Texas. He's got four wins.

THE MODERATOR: Helio is not here.

SCOTT DIXON: He's going to be here.

THE MODERATOR: He will be, actually.

SCOTT DIXON: So, yeah, it started OK today. Obviously, we had the test here, the tire test. I think that just helps a lot of us kind of roll off. Had a few issues I think with balance. I think a lot of people have just with the added temperature, especially from when we tested here. That was interesting for us.

Unfortunately, we got the weather. We didn't really get to run as much as we would have liked. Hopefully, they can add some additional time tomorrow. All in all, the PNC car feels good out of the gate.

THE MODERATOR: To go from Indy to a doubleheader in Detroit and here, how does the team stay fresh and motivated moving into the weekend?

SCOTT DIXON: I think that's tough, just the hours that everybody has to work. For us, with the damage we had in Race 1 of Detroit, adds to the issues there, which I felt extremely bad for. I think the win definitely turned that around in that scenario.

I don't know, I guess all of us are kind of used to it. Some of us go straight from here to Le Mans, then straight to Road America. I think as a driver, you kind of like the stretch because it is so busy. For the crews, it's hard work.

THE MODERATOR: Joined also by Takuma Sato. Best finish of fifth here at Texas Motor Speedway.

Takuma, obviously an abbreviated practice. In the time that you did get on track, what were you feeling and



noticing from the car?

TAKUMA SATO: No, I feel good. Honestly, I think it's a bit early to say for the tires and downforce and stuff. I don't know if Scott told, but we had only a few laps, to be honest. Even one set of tire. Did not even get through, I don't know, half of the stint I wouldn't think.

I think Firestone did a great job to bring the tire that's a really good feeling, solid feeling, more downforce than last year. But not only for that, I think Firestone doing a great job.

So I was obviously looking forward to a little bit more traffic runs, go through the stint, how the balance shift will be. But obviously the rain, we cannot do anything at the moment.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Scott and Takuma.

Q. Scott, because the rain shortened this practice, I guess we still don't know whether these tires will blister or not. There's an alternate set on standby. What would you like to see done to determine which tire compound is used for the race?

SCOTT DIXON: I think they are working on additional time for tomorrow. We were getting almost I think an hour and a half more than we had last year. I think there were some blistered sets out there, I'm not sure how they're going to address that.

I know there was an option tire, but I haven't heard. I think from what I heard, they are kind of happy with what they saw. Again, it's early days, right? They'll probably go through everybody's tires tonight and figure out a plan for tomorrow.

Conditions were kind of ideal. I think today as far as Texas goes, it actually wasn't even really that hot. Running this late in the day, the track temp was down almost a hundred degrees, which is very low.

Q. What do you want to see out of a tire here? I know the track has changed over the last couple of years with the pavement and configuration. What makes a good tire? With a little bit more downforce with this tire compound, what kind of racing do you expect to see on Saturday?

SCOTT DIXON: I don't know. We'd like a tire that works really well with the 9 car.

You know, I think it's hard, right? We had zero issues

with blistering last year, yet there seemed to be a few teams that had some major issues and were falling off pretty hard. I feel like in that scenario, you should be able to adapt to it. You shouldn't have to change it for the situation of maybe a few cars or few drivers.

But Firestone is always trying to make the tire better. I think for us this year, the problem is, once you have a new surface and a new track, the falloff comes pretty quickly in the first two, three, four years. That's what we've seen.

The grip is a lot lower than what we saw last year. IndyCar reacted with adding downforce on that. I think that's the right direction.

The end of the race last year I thought was quite good. I think for the drivers, we want to have a car that's difficult to drive, something that you can make a difference. The last thing I want to see is pack racing. It's easy for everybody, but creates issues. Maybe the person that takes the biggest risk, if they pull it off, is going to be rewarded.

I think a balance of what we had last year and maybe a bit closer would be good.

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with questions for Takuma. I know that you need to leave, Scott.

TAKUMA SATO: I think Scott is the only happiest last year. All the other people honestly struggling. Obviously, the Ganassi car and the No. 9 car worked beautifully last year. Wasn't anybody able to catch it.

I think blistering, it was obviously a huge issue for us in terms of competition and safety. I think that's why Firestone made a great commitment to bring the tire here. Seems to be working really well with the addition of the downforce. It's definitely helping. Blistering is temperatures on the tires going really high. Seems to be working very good. We'll see honestly.

The pack racing is always tough to draw the line. You want to see exciting race here, especially for the Texas, two-wide, three-wide. But again, I completely understand the safety issue. More weight for the driver to control the car.

Anyway, I think a driver has to really drive in any circumstance, in my opinion. I think last year, I don't know, downforce quite a bit. Obviously same situation Indy 500. Is not close racing, which is tough to draw the line.

Sometimes really temperature related. If it's hot, then lacking a downforce. But if it's like five, ten degrees lower, then it's too much downforce. Always difficult to draw the line.

Tonight I felt pretty comfortable. Still, it's a lot of work to

be done in the traffic. I don't expect to be huge pack racing, but somewhat more closer racing than last year, that's for sure, especially towards the night when everything is cooled down.

I tried the second line today, but no way I could drive. Hopefully Saturday night we are able to go side-by-side. That's oval racing, meant to be to me.

Q. Takuma, what about the other operational change for this weekend, the two-stage pit limiter? Have you ever used that before? Are you staying on the button the whole time or go on and off it?

TAKUMA SATO: I don't know what the other team, but my team, usual pit button. When you latch it, basically just active. Once you hit again, it's going to be disabled. But this one is two stages.

If you're on the pit limiter already, 60 miles an hour, in the pit lane you press one more time, that's bump into the 90 miles per hour. After that, you press again and is disabled.

It's a very simple cycling. Pit lane, one, two, then off. One, two, off. That's what we have. Seems to be very, very simple. At the moment we don't have any issue, but obviously, in close racing, I don't know how is going to make a mistake possibly.

I think in terms of safety, they did a great job. First of all, the apron is always too challenging here with the cold tire. That's why reducing speed by speed limiter is a good idea. But last year off the turn two was way too much speed differential. That's why I think they brought the 30 miles, which is definitely helping to go to turn three.

Still, when you see the cars coming out the pit, screaming after 200 miles per hour, it is absolutely huge, how you say, speed differential. Fortunately here Texas high banking, so you going to be able to work towards two, three, one and a half, two-second delay so you can avoid it. Unlike Indy, is very difficult.

I think here you can get away. I think they did a good job in terms of a step up the speed.

Q. Have you ever used that before?

TAKUMA SATO: No, never used it.

Q. What would you like to see them do with this practice, with additional practice time, in order to find out which tire you're going to go with?

TAKUMA SATO: That's really up to the Firestone decision. Obviously, for pure driver point of view, I would like to try two different tires. But I think just the safety comes first. If Firestone is confident with the primary tire, I think we shouldn't really try any option tire. If there any sign of they think is should try the option tire or alternate tire, by all means.

Like Scott said, hopefully, we have additional testing tomorrow. Otherwise, I think it's too little running to go to the race. That's just rolling dices, I think. No good in terms of safety.

Q. You and Scott say you want more testing time tomorrow. How representative will that practice be if it's held in the heat of the day? You can't hold it tomorrow evening because the trucks are racing then. Will it actually give you any good data for the race or not?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I still think you can. Obviously tire degradation I different from the track temperature and downforce. Let's say you have to be done one stint complete. If it's hotter temperature, hotter on the tires. I think that's quite a good test. If the tire survives in that temperature, I think in the evening that tire should be very, very healthy.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for joining us.

TAKUMA SATO: Thank you.