

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Press Conference

Scott Dixon

Chip Ganassi Racing

Alexander Rossi

Andretti Autosport



HE MODERATOR: Welcome, everyone, to today's INDYCAR media conference call. The 2020 NTT INDYCAR SERIES season starts on Sunday at the Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg. The race will be at 3 p.m. on NBCSN with their prerace show starting at 2:30 p.m.

We are pleased to be joined today by a pair of NTT INDYCAR SERIES drivers who are expected to be among the frontrunners at the Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg and the 2020 NTT INDYCAR SERIES season.

We welcome in Scott Dixon of Chip Ganassi Racing, and Alexander Rossi of Andretti Autosport.

Scott, we'll start with you. The 2020 season is just a few days away. As you get ready for your 20th season in INDYCAR, do you still get the butterflies anticipating the season at this time of year?

SCOTT DIXON: I think everybody is just excited. I think especially when you live in the Midwest, everybody is looking forward to getting to some warm weather. I think some of us have had the luxury of doing additional races, which is always good, before the season takes off.

Yeah, I think just the format of the INDYCAR season right now, how long the off-season is, how little testing there is, I think there's a lot of built-up energy and people eager to get going.

There's no difference for me. I think everybody is just trying to prepare as well as possible and make the off-season gains and development and just try and take off and fix the areas of weaknesses that we had last year.

Ultimately, yeah, excited to get going and can't wait.

THE MODERATOR: Alexander, you have gone into the last two season finales with the chance to win your first NTT INDYCAR SERIES title. How important is it to start the season off strong and take some of those lessons from the last few seasons to help you stay up top of the standings?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, no, it's very important. Obviously racing is a pretty big momentum-based sport. If you can start off the year on the right foot, it's a positive thing.

St. Pete is an interesting place. It's a very challenging street circuit. It's one that most guys have a lot of experience on. It's always very close and pretty tightly in it together in terms of the qualifying results. You have to be on your A game for the first race of the year which is always a little bit of a challenge having been out of the cars for a while.

As Scott said, we've been lucky enough to have some races since the season finale in Laguna. Feel pretty excited to get the season going. Hopefully we can roll off the truck pretty strong and have a fairly event-free weekend.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up to the media for questions.

Q. This race has kind of got its own special feeling, its own special vibe. Part of the INDYCAR schedule for 15 years. Got its own traditions the way they honor the previous years' winners. What is it about St. Petersburg that has developed into INDYCAR's top races?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I don't know. I think it just has the combination of everything. It's the first one. I think the circuit itself is a really great layout. It has opportunities to pass. Typically it's been one of our longest races. They made some adjustments to the actual race this year.

The city really embraces the race, too, which I think is really special. It's just the general size of the event, the viewing areas, the downtown atmosphere. What Green Savoree have turned it into, it's been an all-around top race to go to.

For me it's more about being a really tough track from the driver's side. Quite technical and quite difficult to get right. It's one that I've always wanted to win, still trying to tick that box. Definitely a challenging race, one that we've seen in the past that for whatever reason can kind of flip the field.

We've had a lot of winners from the back of the pack at that place. I think that's more prominent to maybe just the start of the race and people kind of finding where they should be at that time, too.

I don't know. I think it will create fantastic racing. It's a circuit that drivers really love.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I would add to that most city races, street races, that we go to, there's kind of a buzz and an atmosphere that comes along with that. St. Pete is no exception. I think just the fan turnout is always really strong. Not just people in numbers, it's a really knowledgeable fan base. That's always exciting for us.

You obviously have people that either love you or hate you. Hey, that means people are passion about it and excited to be there, which is a great thing for everyone participating and the series as a whole.

Q. With the testing that you've done so far with the aero screen, what are some of the handling characteristics or changes that you've discovered through testing this year?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Scott is probably a better person to answer that than me just because we've really only had at Andretti a day and a half with the weather at COTA. That was kind of a half day. Sebring is kind of its own unique animal.

I don't really know that we know, to be perfectly honest with you. It's definitely different, but the extent of that won't become clear to us until probably at least Friday night in St. Pete.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think I've only done oval testing till we did the COTA and Sebring. There was a lot of kind of emphasis on the cooling situation. Some people have brought up some issues with that. They've been able to test at some of those circuits. Even when we did the short oval test at Richmond, cooling seemed to be a little bit of an issue. COTA was extremely cold. That was going to be a non-issue there. The Sebring testing, which typically can be a little hot, you don't get a whole lot of time to rest at that test track.

The adjustments have been made. The cooling at least was very sufficient for us. Handling-wise I think the CG is a little higher, the car is heavier, definitely one of the areas we've really got to try and turn around because we keep adding weight to this car, which especially for accidents is not a good thing.

It's the same for everybody as far as the handling issues. We haven't seen too much of a difference for us. Springs and dampers and things like that. But every team is unique on that side of things, too.

The oval stuff, it did seem to be quite interesting in traffic, especially Indianapolis typically where you get big washout behind the car in front of you, it seemed to kind of actually do the opposite, got loose once you kind of got close to the car. We'll see how that plays true once you start getting into bigger packs.

Q. Scott, in looking at the big pool of young drivers that we have in the sport entering 2020 with six guys full-time at 23 or younger, what do you remember from starting your career several years ago at an extremely young age in INDYCAR as far as maybe something you didn't know about competing in this series or in this sport that maybe surprised you or something that a rookie or someone really young maybe takes some time to figure out and master?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I don't know. I'm not sure I can remember that far back.

I think at that age, I came in I think I was 19 or 20, you're just really excited to be there, to be honest. You're trying to do the best job you can. Kind of came in with a smaller team, quickly moved to quite a dominant team which had a lot more resources.

I think the biggest thing that's changed these days is the team size. There's a lot of teams with more than just two cars. That really wasn't apparent when I started. You kind of got more information to pull on, more drivers, plus the data and video. The video especially I think has kind of evolved.

All the data, you can pretty much have the data of any other person's car, which is kind of interesting. Some guys are quite good at sort of analyzing and copying that. I think that has kind of helped in one way quicken up the process.

I also I think my first year had maybe 50 or 60 days of testing, compared to now where throughout the whole season you might get six or seven depending on a test.

I don't know. I think for me it's always been the same process of keeping an open mind. I think each weekend changes significantly from the year before or even from race to race.

Never think that you know everything. I think that's the worst position you can be in. You're constantly learning, it's constantly changing. I think the sport, even over the last 19 or 20 years that I've been a part of it, how much it evolves and changes from season to season is pretty impressive.

It's cool to see. I think it's fantastic to see the amount of young guys coming in now. There was some pretty good influx probably five to six years ago, as well, with a lot of the guys. You can see their performance, how they've adjusted, how quick they've been.

It's extremely important for the health of the sport. Hopefully they can keep charging.

Q. When you have a group like this either coming into the sport or maybe in their second year, we've seen some really young guys, you both included,

be able to start your career at a pretty young age and really take off while some guys start and kind of fizzle out even in a couple years. What are some of the most important things the young driver has to be able to do or have or master in the first couple years of their career to be able to hang onto a career in INDYCAR?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I think you got to expand the question. It's not just young guys any more. Racing is a very difficult sport in the sense that you're only as good as your last race. You're constantly having to go out and reprove yourself regardless of what you've accomplished in the past. There's so many guys coming in, your job security really doesn't exist.

As Scott said, you have to each weekend be willing to adapt and change on things maybe you've been doing your whole career. Just having the ability to do that and the wherewithal to do that is one thing, but also having the mindset and even the team around you to help kind of find the areas of weakness that you have, kind of help get you in the right direction to better yourself.

In a series where it's generally very spec, the difference between first and 10th is very, very small margins. A lot of that comes from you as a driver, just being able to know how to find that bit of lap time each time you show up at the racetrack.

I don't think it's a talent or a skill set that's necessary just for a young driver, I think it's necessary for every single one of us.

Q. Scott, how beneficial do you think it's going to be to have Marcus in the team now? Obviously you're going from a two-car team to a three-car full-time team this year. How beneficial will that be not just for the start of the season but going through to the likes of Indy and further on during the season?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think we've gone from two to four then back to two, adding a third this year. The most I can see from right now is just the amount of personnel we've been able to bring on. We've kind of been pretty thin there for a while, especially in the engineering department. We've been trying to hire people for almost two years. Just couldn't find the right fit.

We added actually a lot of people this year, probably four or five on the engineering side, then the depth of the whole GT program coming over has helped as far as management and also crew people as well.

I think personnel-wise the team is probably in the best situation I've seen it in the last maybe five or six years. So I think off-season development has been really good.

Also the change of mindset. I think we kind of got stuck there a lot of times just doing the same thing and looking for different answers, which just wasn't working

in some of our weak areas. We definitely have always had a very good base.

Marcus, again, it's difficult, as Rossi pointed out, the lack of testing doesn't really get you down that road too quickly. I think the addition of him and more cars on the team is going to be great. I think we're looking for big things from him especially with his second year. The first year is always fairly daunting trying to get up to speed, going to a lot of circuits you haven't been before.

Pretty much a Team Swede now with him and Felix. It's been a lot of fun so far and hopefully we can keep building on it.

Q. Alex, you were talking about having to constantly prove yourself and be willing to adapt and change. We're announcing this week installation of an electronic flagging system around the WeatherTech track. Considering the new aero screen, what is your initial reaction regarding any perceived benefit?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, I don't really know that there's a downside to that. You take I guess the human error aspect side out of it.

In terms of it making a difference with the aero screen, I don't think it really matters whether it's flags or lights. I think obviously with the lights, it's pretty much a foolproof system as long as there's light bulbs and power getting to it. Yeah, that's great.

Q. Alexander, I was wondering how the enlargement of Andretti Autosport team will help you finally get over the top for the first championship this year?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, hopefully that was the missing piece: keep adding cars until we get a championship.

No, I think it's really cool to be able to bring Colton on kind of into the fold full-time I guess. He was kind of already there with the Harding Steinbrenner Andretti relationship we had last year. We have already noticed a positive difference having the engineering staff back in the office and everyone kind of under the same roof, being able to just more efficiently kind of bounce ideas off each other, just progress the whole team forward.

Colton is a super big asset for us. He has a lot of just raw pace. He certainly was already contributing in his rookie year last year. Really excited about it.

Obviously the partnership kind of got made with Meyer Shank racing and Jack Harvey. It's kind of a similar deal to what we had this Colton last year where Jack will be working with us on race weekends in some aspects.

I think in a time where, as I've said before, it's so

competitive, you're looking for 10ths and hundredths of seconds, to have a variety of inputs is a positive thing.

The important thing for us at Andretti is to make sure we have an ability to get through all that information in an efficient way. We have processes in place. We've been a big team for a while now. It's not that we're going from two cars to five cars. We've been four ever since I've been a part of the team. This is kind of just the natural progression.

We've done a lot of really positive things this off-season. Hopefully it's enough to finally break through that barrier and we can come out of the last race with a championship.

Q. Alex, how excited are you to have your co-host in James Hinchcliffe as your new teammate for a couple of races this season?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, it would be pretty awkward to have a racing podcast with someone that wasn't driving racecars. It's great from that standpoint. Obviously he's one of my very best friends. Happy for him on a personal level.

Yeah, he's someone that has been on pole at the Indy 500 before. He's had lot of pace around there, a lot of success. Yeah, I mean, it's again kind of like the previous question, right? It's a lot of information that we're going to have access to. It's going to be important for us to kind of have a way to go about it in an efficient manner so you don't get lost in the fray with different opinions and numbers flying around.

James is a great driver. It's exciting he's bringing a new partner into the series with Genesis. We'll be looking forward to having him for three races.

Q. Scott, you've won practically everywhere on the schedule except this one. Is that a head-scratcher to you?

SCOTT DIXON: No, they're all tough. There's quite a few others. I don't know. I think we finished second there four times or something. I don't know. I've led races there, checking out, hit the wall, done crazy stuff. We've been in similar situations with strategy where it's been flipped as well.

It's tough, man. It's tough to win. Place doesn't owe us anything. We just got to work harder and try to eventually get to that top spot. Each year I swear just keeps getting more difficult.

There's never one thing. I think it's constantly changing. Just keep our head down and keep working hard, man.

THE MODERATOR: Seeing as we have no further questions for our guests, we will thank Scott and Alex for their time today.