

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Genesys 300 Press Conference

James Hinchcliffe



THE MODERATOR: Thanks for joining us again. We have James Hinchcliffe with us, who actually has Genesys as a sponsor for the Genesys 300 coming up at Texas Motor Speedway next Saturday, as we mentioned earlier on the call.

James, why don't you kick us off and tell us how excited you are to be back on track and competing next week at Texas Motor Speedway.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, I think everybody is excited to get back to racing. Certainly we've managed to watch the NASCAR guys pull off a few events now, I think, and I think it's made the itch even stronger. For us to be able to head to Texas Motor Speedway and finally get our season started is exciting. For me doubly so because with my limited calendar for the year, I wasn't supposed to be in the first couple races; now I get to be a part of the season debut, so I'm excited about that, and hopefully the Genesys car can have a strong race in the Genesys 300.

THE MODERATOR: Also, it's the debut of the aeroscreen, so tell us a little bit about what it's like to be racing with that new safety feature.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, I mean, obviously we're excited that it's on the car. It's an incredible innovation from INDYCAR. There's a lot of question marks still. We haven't run it on an oval, we haven't run it at night, so we're all going to kind of be learning on the fly, but because we're all in the same boat, it's going to be good, and with a team that has quite a few cars on track, maybe that gives us a little bit of advantage getting on top of whatever set of changes needed to be made and just the slight and subtle differences that we're going to be experiencing with it.

Again, overall it's an incredible addition to the car, and kudos to everybody at INDYCAR for working as quickly as they did to get it on the race cars, and it's no more valuable than at a place like Texas Motor Speedway, which is known for fast racing and potentially some incidents, so we're definitely happy we've got it for this weekend.

Q. James, since the series has not raced since September and we've all of these delays and cancellations, what's your biggest concern? Is it your physical, the shape you're in, the team, not racing with fans? What's your biggest concern going to TMS?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Well, it's definitely not the physical side. With not having a lot to do lately, I think training is the number one thing that every driver has been able to stay on top of. If anything, I'm probably fitter than I've ever been to start a season. Certainly for me there's a lot of changes with a new team, and I've been out of the car a little bit longer than everybody else. While we're all "unraced" since September, pretty much every other driver was in the car throughout the winter and as recently obviously as the open test at COTA, where for me the last time I sat in an INDYCAR was at Laguna Seca.

I think the biggest concern for me is just kind of getting up to speed. We've got a very narrow window there in practice to do that. There's a lot to accomplish in just an hour and a half with two sets of tires while all trying to learn a new way of doing things, new procedures and protocols, working with a new engineer, so it's a lot to take on in one go in a short period, but luckily it's a team that I have worked with before. A lot of the people I know and I know that they're going to support me in the best way possible and prepare me in the best way possible. As much of a challenge as it's going to be, I'm just excited to get the chance to do it.

Q. You get a three-race deal with Andretti; is that right?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: That's correct.

Q. James, when you were let go by Schmidt Peterson, how long did it take you to get over that and realize that you were a free agent hunting for a ride?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I mean, that's a realization that happens pretty quick. The issue was just the timing of it. By that point of the year there aren't a lot of rides available. But luckily we had an incredible partner in Genesys step up to the plate and an incredibly welcoming group at Andretti Autosport to bring me back into the fold. It's a team I've worked with in the past, and so I'm very excited to the opportunity to get back there. If I'm honest, it was always kind of a career goal to get back. We never wanted to leave in the first place. It was a sponsor issue that took us out of the team back in 2014, and Michael and I always joked about making it work again and getting the band back together one day. When a door closes, a window opens, and this was a hell of a window to open for us.

Q. Just wanted to ask you a couple questions. Going back to 2016 at Texas, obviously the photo

finish, does that race -- as a driver does it still sting that you didn't win, or have you kind of appreciated how good of a race that was four years later?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I mean, it didn't take me four years to appreciate how good of a race it was. That was an incredible bout there with Graham and Tony and Simon and everybody involved, but I've watched that race back 100 times as you can imagine, that sort of last 10 laps there, and there are a lot of races in my life that I lose sleep over because I could have done something different and maybe altered the results, and every time I've watched that one back, I look and say there was absolutely nothing I could have done differently. We by far were the most dominant car. If that race was one lap longer or one lap shorter we would have won. If we hadn't had one of the plethora of yellows at the end we would have won.

But at the end of the day, the way things unfolded, and I won't get into all the mechanics of it without the video in front, but there's quite literally nothing from my seat I could have done differently to have altered the outcome of that. It's a tough one to swallow in some ways, but I don't lose any sleep over it because I knew that I had done everything that I could.

Q. And then kind of a two-pronged question here, but there's going to be a lot of viewers I would think that might be watching INDYCAR for the first time. As a driver what would you tell them to expect from Texas Motor Speedway, and how would you explain INDYCAR open wheel racing maybe to a first-time fan?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, so I'll answer the second one first. Open wheel is obviously quite a bit different from stock car racing or drag racing or other forms of racing, purpose-built race cars, single-seater, high downforce, high speed. And the race at Texas, if you're a first-time fan watching -- and I do hope we have a lot of first-time fans watching on Saturday night; we're primetime on network with NBC which is very exciting. But that is probably one of the best tracks you could have a first-time watcher tune into. It's known for its photo finishes. It's known for its side-by-side action. Other than Indianapolis it's the fastest track we go to but it's a mile shorter, so from the cockpit it feels even faster and crazier. The racing is a little more dynamic, a lot more side-by-side, wheel-to-wheel.

It's an incredible series across the board. The talent is incredibly deep. The variety in tracks I think is what makes INDYCAR so special, and then again, for a first-timer, Texas you're going to see sparks fly and tempers flare, and it's going to be a hell of a show.

Q. You've already kind of addressed obviously the strangeness of your season was already going to be with only three races set up right now, and I know you're looking for more. I guess I want to ask, with the environment the way it is, with the pandemic and the economy the way it is, has it

helped or hurt I would assume you trying to get more races?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Well, I think with the economy in the position that it's in going around and asking for money doesn't make me the most popular person in the room. But that said, it's a very unique situation. It's not like what happened in 2008. There are certain industries and certain sectors that are booming right now, so it's not quite as blanketed a loss for everyone across all sectors.

So for sure, there's some reason to be optimistic, and there might be some opportunity there to explore with some of these industries and some of these companies that are actually finding themselves in the catbird seat with what's going on.

Q. You expected to have a strange season, now everybody else gets to have a strange season with you, right?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Exactly right. I haven't missed a race yet; let's put it that way.

Q. The way the setup is, it's a one-day setup, everybody is going to be quarantined together, come together, leave together. Talk about your understanding of how all that's going to work and your thoughts about that and that process and what it does?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, so we received a pretty thorough document from INDYCAR explaining all the procedures, and I've got to say I'm very impressed with what I saw. They are definitely sparing no expense and leaving any stone unturned and making sure all the measures are in place from how we transport to the racetrack, the procedures when we get there, how the days are run, who can go where and when. It's all very, very controlled.

From what I've seen with the NASCAR side of things, I think obviously we've got a little bit of a basis to go off of there, and from what I understand, kind of even going above and beyond. I'm certainly very comfortable with what's happening, and I feel like my safety is being taken into consideration, as is that of everybody that's participating in the events, drivers, crews, officials, what have you.

It's going to be different, there's no doubt about it, not being able to sort of really walk in and out of the track and all the rest of it. It'll be a bit of a change, but it's the same for everyone and we're doing it for a good reason. Like I said, I think INDYCAR has stepped up to the plate in a big way, and I'm happy with that.

Q. Clearly no fans are going to be there and that's going to make it different for a lot of people there. Is that the thing you're going to notice when you're basically out of the car? When you're in the car you're so focused on everything else, but is it going to hit you when you get out of the car and

there's pretty much dead silence when all the cars get turned off?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, it's funny because there's been scenarios where that's sort of happened in the past. Let's be honest; not a lot of people are sitting in the stands during practice at 1:30 in the afternoon in the blazing Texas sun watching us go around, and I get it. And we've had rain delays that have pushed us to either super late at night or on a Monday or whatever, which means fans couldn't come as a result of the date change. So in different scenarios we've had different versions of it sort of, and for us more than any other athletes, it's going to affect us less. We don't hear the roar of the arena like football or hockey or basketball or baseball. It's a very sort of different deal. Once we're in the car, helmets are on, engines are on, you're not seeing or hearing everything but your car and what's in front of you on the racetrack. So it'll definitely be a little bit different but not necessarily something that we've never experienced.

Q. Obviously I look at this rookie class, they haven't had a chance to actually get to INDYCAR racing and race in an INDYCAR race, and yet their first experience is going to be at Texas. Can you kind of describe maybe how different your comfort level is going to be racing with those guys considering the lack of track time that they're going to have, let alone at a place like Texas?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, I mean, I think a better question, or it's better to direct the question to the comfort level of those guys. I certainly don't envy their position. But I think it's a good crop of rookies. They're all accomplished drivers. They're all intelligent guys, and they're in this sport and at this level for a reason. So I'd like to think that the approach for them is going to be, hey, this is our first-ever race in an INDYCAR for some of them. Obviously I know Pato has done a couple, but for all of them that are racing at Texas for the first time, it's a long game. You've got to be patient. Obviously the safety element is heightened here and the danger factor is heightened here, but I think the teams will prep the drivers appropriately. I think the guys are smart enough, they've got good heads on their shoulders.

And so will you give them a little extra room in the first stint? Yeah, probably, but at the end of the day, they're all professionals, and like I said, they've made it here for a reason. I'm happy for them that they got that extra session to start off, and that was something that actually I think came from the drivers, the non-rookies really pushed for that session for those guys, so it was nice to see that that was added, and yeah, we're all kind of in -- none of us has been on track for a long time, so we're all going to be a little rusty.

Q. James, our friend Eddie Gossage when the date was finally confirmed at TMS said that this race will be one of the most important races in INDYCAR history, given the background and everything. Is

that how you're looking at it, too, that this could be a landmark race for the series?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Well, I mean, I think from my position, I've got to treat it like any other race. We've just got to show up on race day and do our job as a team, execute in every way that we can and try and get the best result. You don't want to put any extra pressure or any kind of heightened sense of expectation on an event from the competitor's standpoint.

Do I think it's a hallmark day for the series? Yeah, absolutely. Do I think it's a make-or-break day? No, not really. I think INDYCAR racing is going to get back to what we do, and that's going to continue for years to come regardless. Certainly we want this to be a successful race. We want it to be a good show. We're on network in primetime. There's a lot of reasons that we really want this one to go well.

But you know, Eddie needs to make it sound like it's the biggest race in history so that way more people tune in and show up, and that's totally fair. Actually that's exactly what he should be doing and what he should be saying. And yes, it is important, and we're very excited to go back and we're very happy in a lot of ways that we get to do it at Texas Motor Speedway.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks to all of you for joining us. We will see you all in Texas next week.