

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Press Conference

Scott Dixon

Chip Ganassi Racing

Marcus Ericsson

Chip Ganassi Racing

Felix Rosenqvist

Chip Ganassi Racing

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for joining us for the first of a series of video conference calls that INDYCAR will hold to preview the Genesys 300 at Texas Motor Speedway Saturday night. The race will be at 8 p.m. eastern on NBC.

We're happy to be joined by the three drivers from Chip Ganassi Racing: Scott Dixon, driver of the No. 9 PNC Bank Honda, Marcus Ericsson, driver of the No. 8 Huski Chocolate Honda, and Felix Rosenqvist, driver of the No. 6 NTT Data Honda.

We're getting the 2020 NTT INDYCAR Series season started a few months after we originally intended. You have already geared up for the season once before. How does the extra time since March make you more anxious to get back in the car?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think for all of us it was pretty strange. I think we geared up. We had the off-season, done all the pre-season testing, all of us had made it to St. Pete. You kind of had all that pent-up tension to get going. You wake up a day later and of course everything could change.

Definitely nothing is normal right now. For us, I think to even have the opportunity to get back racing is amazing. A lot of us have been waiting for this week, race week. We thought it could have been Detroit to start with, maybe a few other circumstances.

Excited to get to Texas. I think it will be a fantastic race. It will definitely be interesting with the changes we have, how we have to deal with it. I'm just super excited to get going.

THE MODERATOR: Marcus, your thoughts? How anxious are you to get the season started?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, I can't wait. It's been a long and strange off-season already, a long off-season in INDYCAR. Then, like Scott said, we were ready in St. Pete, it was called off in the last minute. Then it's about preparing yourself even more.



I feel happy and confident in myself that I've done everything to be prepared as possible to start the season now. I feel really good with the team. I think we've done all the preparations possible. We are more than ready to start the season.

It's going to be a strange one with the one-day event and everything. I'm sure we're going to put on a really good show for everyone.

THE MODERATOR: Felix, your thoughts on starting the season Saturday night? How anxious have you been to get into the car?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, I think we ended the last year on a really good run. Obviously when you're on a good run, you want to keep going, right? It's been tough.

At the same time I think we've been lucky with how well INDYCAR has handled it. We're kind of lucky as well that our season didn't start before this all happened. I couldn't imagine what it would feel like to have the season go, then breaking it for three or four months. That must be really tough for everyone involved when you're in that competitive mode.

We actually had a chance to kind of relax, go into off-season mode again, get back to training. It could be nice with a bit of a break as well sometimes. We all get the chance to make sure we're fully up for starting the season.

But yeah, I mean, it feels unreal we're actually going again. It's a really good feeling.

THE MODERATOR: Scott, you raced at Texas since 2003. The track and the cars have changed quite a bit over the years. What is it like to race at Texas Motor Speedway under the lights?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think as you kind of pointed out, it's changed over the years from where it was flat-out pack racing to some separation. It's a big separation to really big tire deg and falloff, which for me in the past has been a lot of fun to try and manage that.

This year I think with some of the rules they've implemented with the maximum of 35 laps, it's definitely going to be interesting to see how that plays out. We'll put a lot of emphasis on pit stops, in-laps.

Could create other issues. Fielding is going to be short. A lot of pressure on the pit crew guys.

I think truly coming out of the box this is going to be a really big team effort to make sure you try to cover all bases, to have a good opportunity to win this race. Again, I think it's more the fact that we're in an opportunity to get back racing here. That's what really counts.

With Texas, I think it's always difficult, even from when we've tested there previous years, to what actually plays out in the race can be very different. I expect it to be a very exciting race. It's going to be pretty crazy. Hopefully we just put on a great show for everyone.

THE MODERATOR: Marcus, you're making your debut with Chip Ganassi Racing on Saturday night. How important was it to use the hiatus, some of the iRacing, the extra time to build chemistry with the No. 8 team?

MARCUS ERICSSON: It's been really good this extra time. Especially the iRacing Series has been great for me to get that relationship started with my engineer, Brad Goldberg, my spotter Bruce. We've already started working in a racing environment.

It feels like we definitely have started that process so we can continue that now when we get to the racetrack for real. That's been really good and really useful.

Then, yeah, I mean, for me it's going to be the first race with Chip Ganassi Racing. I'm extremely proud to get this opportunity, to race for one of the best teams in the sport. Yeah, I'm really excited to go to Texas and finally start the season.

THE MODERATOR: Felix, can you talk a little bit about starting the season at Texas. Not only is it an important race as the season opener, but it's pretty important for NTT Data as they're located not far in Plano, and you'll be carrying a tribute to John McCain.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, he passed away a couple months ago. That's been obviously a shock for our whole team. We had a close relationship to NTT Data for a long time. We will pay a little tribute to him with a sticker on the nose of the car this weekend. Obviously they will not be able to come and watch. But it's always a special race for NTT Data. Located in Plano, very close.

I think going to Texas is going to be cool because my biggest improving thing from last year is definitely ovals. That's been a thing I've been thinking mostly about during the off-season. I think I have more to gain than anything else.

Starting off in Texas, it's going to be a nice feeling to see how much of that work has paid off, where we sort of stand compared to the others, especially on the

ovals and superspeedways straight off the bat in the beginning of the year. Yeah, it's going to be fun.

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

Q. I'm sure everybody is anxious to get back to racing. Of the series that have returned, they put on some pretty good shows with the limited amount of practice and qualifications. How well do you think it's going to be with INDYCAR? At least you get some practice and qualifications in a very condensed format.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, so I think some of the other, like NASCAR, if you're referring to them, they've done four or five events before we got to this shutdown. I think Texas is kind of a different kind of version just for us because there's a few rookies, some people that have never been to Texas before. Plus it's the introduction of the Aeroscreen which actually most of the teams I think by the time we get to the race would have previously run in that configuration. Ganassi hasn't, which is quite rare for us.

Yeah, I think it's an hour and 20 minutes. There was a rookie session plus a few guys that haven't been to Texas before. I think any time we're getting on track is going to be enough to get rolling. Hopefully it runs smoothly as far as there's not too many cautions or lack of time. As you sort of mentioned, I think Cup have definitely proven you can even go straight up to a race and the race was fantastic.

I think sometimes actually the race could be better because you have good cars really good, then you're going to have cars falling off and the field is going to be pretty mixed. All of this is different for us, but I expect it to not really change too much from what we typically do.

Q. Marcus?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, I think I agree with Scott there. I think one of the big things for us as a series is the fact that we haven't raced on an oval since August last year. It's been a very long time. Yes, we had some testing here in the beginning of the year, but it was all on road course.

I think that's why it's good for us as a series to at least have some practice and a qualifying session before going into the race. That for me is the biggest sort of thing.

I'm sure we're all going to get into it. We are all professionals. I think after that practice and qualifying we're all going to be ready to put on a good show there on Saturday night. I'm sure the race is going to be really entertaining and fun, both to drive and to watch.

Q. Felix?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, I think I always been in favor of running shorter events anyways. It might be

tough for some rookies coming. Must be a lot of thoughts going through their minds right now coming into Texas. At least INDYCAR has been good in giving them some extra running, which I think is fair.

Yeah, there's plenty of other series that do it one-day events. It's been shown many times, like when we go to Detroit, for example, have a more packed weekend, it's possible to do it. I think it creates probably a bit more excitement because, as Scott said, more ups and downs through the field.

Yeah, I'm pretty sure it's going to be a really good race.

Q. Scott, you mentioned you raced at Texas in so many different ways and configurations throughout the years since 2003. Do you feel like even with the small amount of preparation practice-wise that you will have at the track on Saturday, maybe guys like you that have a little bit more experience in INDYCAR racing in general and at Texas might have any sort of advantage at all?

SCOTT DIXON: I don't know. I think each year it changes so much, right? It's just about adapting. I think having some knowledge and having raced quite a few different configurations, yeah, sure, that will help with knowing the ins-and-outs.

I think each year probably more about the testing. I think all of the teams except for ours and Carlin would have run after the rookie session. And people that haven't been there would have previously run it before at Texas at the actual race. I think it's about us doing our homework, making sure you've tried to prepare as well as possible.

An hour and 20 minutes, you've got the possibility of trying to do gear changes. Once you go into qualifying, too, then you go into impound, you can't change anything for the race. You got to cover a lot of bases in such a short amount of time.

Then the fact that the race is really changing from last year we ran 65 laps on a stint to this year we're limited now to 35, half tanks in the car. It's going to be a bit crazy in knowing what you should try to do in that short amount of time.

That's where I think that maybe expanding to three cars this year for Chip Ganassi Racing will hopefully benefit us. Also with the 2 car, then you're competing against teams with more again.

I don't know. You just got to go in with the positive mindset. Yes, I think a team like ours that has a lot of resources, running in different configurations, might have a slight advantage. But honestly the competition now in the series is through the roof. It's going to be tough in any format.

Q. Scott, at a track like Texas that typically has one

or two fairly large accidents due the track and the tough racing that guys exhibit there, is there any sort of worry about what that may look like given the fact that you are opening the season there and haven't been in the car much at all this off-season?

SCOTT DIXON: You hope not. I think they're still thinking the tension from the iRacing was going to maybe convert to the track as well. Hopefully that doesn't transpire.

I think, you know, if you got to this level, you've got to be pretty well-rounded. Yeah, there's some guys that will have to play catch-up a little bit more in trying to understand it. You hope in those scenarios that you don't have the big crash.

It's kind of the situation, too, of making these stints so short, the tire grip, the possibility of it becoming a pack race again could be interesting, too, which you hope doesn't happen. Plus the emphasis of having good in-laps because it's going to carry over so much of your pit stop time, the time you're on pit road, you don't want people overextending themselves on pit entry and sliding back up onto the track, which we have had in previous years when that wasn't something that's going to be so important. Again, there's all these possibilities.

But you hope that it's not going to be something that occurs. I think the professionalism of all these teams and drivers now I think is very good.

Q. Marcus, unrelated to Texas, we've seen the news about a week or so ago about the Indy 500 and Monaco not running on the same day in 2021. As a former Formula 1 driver, would you think that any guys might consider trying to potentially test out running both races? From a driver standpoint, would that be something seen as remotely viable, possibility or desirable?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Difficult. I think the F1 guys are obviously having long seasons, a lot of races. I'm not sure they would have enough time to prepare themselves properly for the Indy 500. It's not like a race you can just jump into for a weekend, then leave.

I think even if it's not the same weekend, it's a very difficult task to do. You need to prepare yourself, especially if you've never raced on an oval before. I think it will be difficult because of that.

I know there is drivers in F1 looking more and more at INDYCAR and the Indy 500. Obviously Lando did the iRacing thing, seemed to like running on the oval there. I know, for example, Kevin Magnussen, a friend of mine, he's been talking a lot about INDYCAR as well.

I think there is a growing interest. I think the fact that INDYCAR as a series is growing, gaining momentum all the time, I think it's also something that's working in that direction.

But to answer your question, I don't see an F1 driver doing at the moment just because you need so much preparation. I don't think you have that with that F1 calendar that you have at the moment.

Q. The delayed start to the season, did it allow Ganassi to further develop its cars in a way it wouldn't have been able to had the season started back in March?

SCOTT DIXON: No. I think some of the development lines kind of continue. But I think as far as like machining things or parts, production, it's been difficult, right, because most of the factories have been shut down.

I think some things have progressed, but it would have been stuff that was in the pipeline from the off-season in general. I think some of our simulation stuff, whether it's tire models and things like that, have probably progressed a lot further which will hopefully help us earlier with how the season is now being kind of offset.

But, no, if it's physical parts and things like that with how the shutdown has been, I think that would be tough.

Q. Marcus, this is your second year in INDYCAR coming over from Formula 1. What adjustments, what did you learn in the first season that maybe you were not expecting to see, to be a part of now that you are ready for in your second season with INDYCAR?

MARCUS ERICSSON: I mean, for me everything was new last year. It was a complete new series. All the tracks were new, the cars, everything. It was a very steep learning curve for me. I felt throughout the year I was progressing, sort of getting into it more and more.

I think one of the biggest things that I found with INDYCAR is just the way you have to be complete as a driver because we go to so many different types of tracks. It's everything from short ovals to superspeedways to street tracks to sweeping road courses. You need to be a complete driver to be competitive in this series.

Also talking about competitive, the competition in this series is extremely high. That's also something I found last year, that one small mistake and you're down towards the bottom of the field. You need to get everything right, get the car set up well, then really maximize in qualifying and the race.

So, yeah, there's a lot of things. But mainly for me learning all the tracks and knowing all the tracks now going into my second year is going to be huge. Also joining a team like Chip Ganassi Racing is obviously a massive opportunity for me to work with Scott Dixon, obviously Felix, two of the best drivers in the field. It's also going to be really good for me to try to learn as much as possible from them, as well.

Yeah, I really hope and think that I can show a lot more this year in my second year. Yeah, looking forward to finally starting the season and show that for everyone.

Q. I think it's fair to say a transition year for INDYCAR with new ownership. Where would you assess INDYCAR is at right now? Where do you think it can go moving forward? How is the transition to the new leadership going from your perspective as drivers?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: The feeling I get overall is that INDYCAR is on a good path right now. There's a lot of talk about it. It seems like it has a peak in terms of popularity that we haven't seen for a while. It's probably been like two or three of those peaks in the last 30 years. This is definitely one of them.

Maybe also back in Europe, there's a lot more talk. Obviously me and Marcus coming into the series, back home in Sweden, I think it's actually more popular than F1 now. Think the world is kind of getting to know more about it.

I think also with Roger coming in, it seems to be a more aggressive mindset going forward. I've only seen positive things so far. Let's see when we get going what more things we can do and progress with.

MARCUS ERICSSON: I really agree there with Felix. I think the series is moving in the right direction, gaining momentum all the time. I think especially being from Europe, knowing that European racing scene, I really feel and believe that INDYCAR is growing more and more over in Europe as well, gaining more interest, more followers, more drivers that's looking at INDYCAR and the American racing scene. It really feels like the momentum is going in the right direction for the series.

Also with Roger taking over, as well, I think it's been another thing that's been very positive. I think the series is going very much in the right direction.

I think just from a personal view to be able to go back and do a race in Europe or somewhere else in the world I think would be even more to grow the interest for the series. I think that will be another step in the right direction.

SCOTT DIXON: I tend to agree. I think INDYCAR probably even the last sort of five plus years has been on a steady progression I think in times where a lot of other sports have been going the other way. I think it's definitely been good.

I think obviously this was a weird and strange kind of timing, especially for the new ownership. I think with what Roger has been able to do in his personal life to his business life, even living in Indianapolis, driving by the Speedway, seeing updates they're continuing on

with already. Having him at the helm, whether it's manufacturers or different circuits or racing maybe a little more internationally, I think he knows how to do it. He's in a lot of other countries, as well. I think just his general knowledge is going to be huge.

It's going to be exciting. I think it's going to be really exciting for us drivers, but for everybody involved in the series to see where this is going to go. The sky's the limit.

Q. Scott, looks like it's going to be 97 degrees on Saturday. Aeroscreen, is this the toughest test for it with the high heat, high-bank track, a lot of tire deg? Is this the baptism of fire for the Aeroscreen?

SCOTT DIXON: I think it should be pretty good. I think with some of the testing that we had done even at Indianapolis, Richmond, then a bunch in the road course kind of platform, I think the unknowns we've never really run at night with the Aeroscreen. They moved the race starting time up by an hour so you're going to have that transition from the light. It could be a bit of an issue.

Honestly, some of those things we kind of witnessed a little bit of that at COTA when the practice session ended quite late. There were some pieces that you could kind of put on the screen to help with some of the reflection. That was better.

As far as tire deg, I don't know. We're going in with a little bit of an unknown. There's a few teams that have run the tire spec we will run. We have not. Shortening the stint by half I think kind of eliminates the whole tire deg thing. I wish there was more of a range they'd come up with as opposed to chopping it right in the middle.

I don't know. I think the short answer is I think we're going to be perfectly fine. There's always the opportunity of an unknown that trips a couple of people up. I think it's going to be perfectly fine.

Q. Do you see this as an opportunity for your team, based on the data you've been able to collect, to get a little farther ahead of some teams that don't have as good of a simulation programs?

SCOTT DIXON: I don't know. If the simulations are correct, yeah, it would be great. I think the sim world is still very young, there's still a lot of progression to be made in that, especially on the tire front. That is one of the hardest things to try to replicate. Tire deg is almost impossible. You see some forms of it that kind of have progressed.

No, I wouldn't say we've got any advantage over any other team in that situation.

Q. Scott, higher percentage of oval races on the calendar this year. Obviously that was somewhere where Ganassi were hit-and-miss at times last year.

How do you rate your chances going into the season with more ovals on the calendar? Are you confident with the work that has been done in the off-season to correct that?

SCOTT DIXON: It's definitely one of the focuses. I think Texas we were running second when we got into the accident towards the end of the race. We were second. We had a mechanical failure at St. Louis with the radiator leak.

I think really our biggest downfall last year was Indianapolis. Our race pace was decent. We weren't just that good in traffic and qualifying was pretty horrendous.

I think we've worked a lot on our deficits from last year. I think with what we've been able to do with adding Marcus to the fold has created a lot of opportunity with new people coming into the mix, plus more engineering staff from the Ford GT program which has been huge in the off-season to try to process some things, try to fix some of the issues.

I guess we'll just have to wait and see. I think we've made some good progression. I think having two great teammates that have had some good miles on ovals to try to help the process of these short practice sessions, to get on top of it, it's going to be big for us as a whole.

Yeah, lots of positives we see. We have to really wait till we get to the real world and get to the race, see how that plays out.

Q. I've heard a few drivers talking about a little bit of dizziness you're expecting towards the start when you first get in the car with the Aeroscreen. Is that something you anticipate? Is there anything you can do to alleviate the effects of that? Is it something you are ready for?

SCOTT DIXON: I think everybody is pretty ready. There are the scenarios like I talked about with maybe the sunlight going from day to night, which will be something new for most of us.

I think as far as car fit and how the screen is, we've had plenty of miles, albeit on road courses, earlier in the season. Yeah, it's going to take a few laps for everybody to get used to it at Texas, getting back going. I think it's more the downtime that we've all had, it will take a few laps to get up to speed.

Honestly, I think all of us should be pretty good.

Q. Scott, do you have to change your approach this weekend given that it's a condensed schedule compared to other races that you might have on the schedule?

SCOTT DIXON: I think Texas is normally pretty short. We maybe are missing a warmup session. I think those races, the only difference normally is that a lot of the teams have probably tested there previously, which we

haven't really, or done some oval kind of practice of some substance before getting there.

I'm in favor of these short events. I love the fact that we're throwing in a ton of doubleheaders, as well. I've always been a big fan of the doubleheaders. If you are going to be there, you should be racing. What better way than to have two full-distance races.

The only thing I don't like about this coming weekend is we're limited in the amount of laps we can do in a stint, the race is a bit shorter. Again, it goes back to the alternative of not racing. That's just not a possibility.

I'm just excited to get there. Kudos to the NTT INDYCAR Series and all the partners and everybody to make sure that we can get going.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I agree on everything there. The preparation, you can only do so much to prepare for it. It's obviously a very rare situation. As I said before, it's been proven you can do these kind of events.

I've heard a question, How do you prepare for only one day? I think it's mostly mentally, you just have to set your mind up that it's going to be a long day. You're going to be almost a different person at the end of the day compared to the beginning.

But it's pretty cool. You put us in a tough situation, I think that's what people want to see as well. People watching on TV, they want to see us do something difficult, see a good race. That's what they're going to get I'm pretty sure.

MARCUS ERICSSON: For me there, I agree with Felix and Scott. It's going to be a tough day. But we're all in the same boat, we're all professionals, on the top level of motorsports. We should be able to handle it.

Yeah, I feel it's fine. We're going to have the practice and qualifying. When race time comes, I think everyone will be up to speed. It's going to be good. Obviously the race is going to be tough with quite warm temperatures, the track already being a physical track. It's going to be a tough one for sure. Everybody is in the same situation.

Personally I've been working really, really hard this off-season to prepare myself. I feel really strong and ready both in my body and mind. I'm ready to take on a tough day of driving. Can't wait to go there and do it.

THE MODERATOR: That's all the time we have with the drivers from Chip Ganassi Racing. Thank you.