

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Press Conference

Tim Cindric



THE MODERATOR: Good morning, everybody. Welcome to the first of today's video conferences with participants from the NTT INDYCAR SERIES. INDYCAR is holding these in advance of the Genesys 300, which takes place Saturday night at Texas Motor Speedway. The race will be on at 8:00 p.m. on NBC. We're pleased to be joined this morning by the president of Team Penske, Tim Cindric. Tim, welcome to the call.

TIM CINDRIC: Good morning, guys.

THE MODERATOR: Tim, starting the season a few weeks later than we had hoped to in March, what kind of unique challenges has Team Penske faced as they get ready for the Genesys 300?

TIM CINDRIC: Well, I think everybody, knowing that we haven't actually raced in, what, eight and a half months or so right now, has a bit of anxiety for how it's going to turn out, and obviously going to Texas as our first race, yeah, it brings a lot of questions as far as how prepared we are and really how the season is going to start. Yeah, ever since Friday the 13th of March, it's been a bit of a whirlwind up and down, and we're just glad to be going racing again.

THE MODERATOR: As a team strategist, do the unique challenges of Texas and all the things that have been announced about tire stints and things, the one-day show, make it any more of a challenge for you?

TIM CINDRIC: Well, it's something we haven't experienced before, so honestly I wish it were the other way around because I think there's probably more strategy involved in having the tire falloff and the degradation at Texas, and you saw that play out last year with Josef and kind of how that race went back and forth. Either way, I think it's going to be really good racing. I am glad that we've got veterans in our cars right now because if I'm a rookie and I have to start at Texas as my first race, that's pretty intimidating for sure, but yeah, thankfully they're getting a bit of practice and not having to hop in and just race like NASCAR has had to do here quite a few times.

Q. In February you guys had the opportunity to take Scott McLaughlin to Texas to run some laps, so you have a little bit of data with the Aeroscreen on the car. Was that a helpful test for you guys?

TIM CINDRIC: I think it was really more helpful for him. At the end of the day, it was just him being able to get

up to speed and be in a position to understand what an oval is like and how fast it really is, but any time you get a chance to run somewhere, it's beneficial, but I think the windscreen and that type of thing, once we go night racing, I'm not sure really anybody has experienced that at this point with the current screen. I know that Scott Dixon did a few runs I think it was at Phoenix if I remember correctly, but when you do it for real, it's going to be different.

Q. I actually wanted to follow up on a question up just asked regarding testing. Jay Frye announced earlier this week that teams for the rest of the 2020 season would be limited to essentially only testing on the grounds of trying to develop a new potential future driver down the road, and so when you guys have the opportunity to get that extra test in with Scott at the beginning of the year on an oval, I know as you mentioned, maybe not a ton that you could take out of that and you guys weren't anticipating this whirlwind season going, but just that one extra day on an oval which not too many teams have gotten, if that's the only data that you guys will have, does that give you any sort of an edge going down the road the rest of the year?

TIM CINDRIC: I think the perception is that it may. It probably depends on what side you sit on. But what we ran there with him was obviously something very different than what we would plan to race with our guys because you're trying to give him the maximum level of comfort. He didn't really run -- I can't remember even how many laps that he ran, but just getting to the point where he could hold the thing full throttle all the way around was a bit of a learning curve. You have to remember he's never been on an oval whatsoever before.

But yeah, any time you go there -- I don't think we learned too much more than I guess we anticipated doing. I don't really know how to answer the question because it's all going to be really a matter of perception. Every team that didn't get a run there is going to say that we gained all these big advantages and we're going to say that really it wasn't that big of an advantage. It was a bit of an inconvenience in some ways to go do it in the way that we did it right after the previous test, but we felt like we had him here in the country and it was a good opportunity for him to learn what that was all about.

In fact, he was actually scheduled to try and run the Richmond open test and the reason for the Texas test

was that they weren't going to allow him to run the Richmond open test with the other competitors unless he had run on an oval, so the background to why we actually went to Texas was it was the only oval that whoa could run, that we could actually get him cleared to do the Richmond open test.

Q. You mentioned your veteran drivers that you have in the car for this weekend. In such a breakneck season, especially in July that we're going to have with I think about five races in 15 days or so, how important will that experience between Power, Pagenaud and Newgarden be for you guys as you try to navigate so many ever-changing things, a new landscape in such a short period of time for this shortened condensed season?

TIM CINDRIC: Yeah, I think when you look at the schedule, it's so different than what we're used to, and I think the competition in INDYCAR, you saw it last year and I think you'll see it again this year, the competition just continues to get greater and greater. You see some of the guys that came on board last year like Rosenqvist that now has a season under his belt, Herta. Look at all these guys that are up-and-coming and then you combine that with the veterans that we have and the fact that we've all been running these cars -- yeah, OK, the windscreen is a bit different, but I don't think that's really going to give us a whole lot of handling characteristic change; it's going to be more about how you execute on race weekends. With the number of double-headers that we have, it's going to be a very momentum-based season, and I think you're going to have comers and goers, and you're going to have those that are seemingly out of it, but all of a sudden are in it when they have a great weekend at Iowa or Elkhart Lake or anywhere else. You're going to continue, I think, to see this championship all the way down to St. Pete.

Q. The fact that you're also in charge of the NASCAR side of the operation, even though they were drive-to races, the fact that they got rolling back in May, did you learn any processes and things of that nature that will be helpful in getting the INDYCAR team set with the parameters we have with the COVID-19 situation?

TIM CINDRIC: Yeah, without a doubt. I think the fact that we're running a NASCAR team out of the same building has probably given us a lot bigger edge on what to understand at Texas than maybe running Scott McLaughlin there for a few laps. But I've got to commend NASCAR and their aggressiveness in terms of getting back on track because I think they've really served as a catalyst for the rest of motorsports worldwide to show the world that it can be done, and there was a lot of risk in doing that in terms of being the first and taking the risks of, hey, what happens and what protocols you have to have in place and secondary procedures or whatever else. Without a doubt, we've learned a ton from the way in which it's

transpired within the NASCAR world.

I think honestly that the way they started the protocols, there hasn't been too many changes. They had things pretty well covered from the very beginning, and it's just been a matter of executing, and when you look at how NASCAR operates and whether it's the pit stops or just how their haulers are arranged or how their communication happens relative to INDYCAR, relative to IMSA, everybody has their own little idiosyncrasies of how you operate as a series, so I think there's some uniqueness there that's going to continue to play out. But certainly, I think not only our team but I think motorsports in general has learned a lot from NASCAR.

Q. And also, how have you staggered the work schedules with the crew, and also, it's going to be fairly ambitious for you to get to the races. You leave out of the Statesville airport Saturday morning and that's going to be -- you're doing what the Indy guys are doing except you're coming from a different part of the country. How do all those logistics come into play for you?

TIM CINDRIC: Yeah, it's been frustrating for many, but it's a part of life now, as everybody understands. Yeah, we've chosen at this point to work in shifts rather than have our entire workforce together. You have to remember we have almost 500 people in the building on a normal basis, so we've really been working to maybe a third of the workforce, if you will, on any given day, split into shifts. Our shifts have been six-hour shifts, so we've been working from 6:00 to noon, and then we've taken a two-hour break for sanitization and so forth, and then we've worked then from 2:00 to 8:00 with a different shift. That's been across the board through all of our series, and we'll continue that process here for the foreseeable future, and really it helps us maybe take less risk with our people but also put ourselves in a position to where we're not as vulnerable should someone get infected.

Q. Tim, I wanted to ask you about what Bruce was asking about in terms of the itinerary of getting to Texas. I've heard that the Indianapolis teams are going to be leaving very early Saturday morning, getting back very early Sunday morning, a very long day. How will that work coming from North Carolina? Do you have any sense of what the itinerary will be? Are you leaving very early and expecting to get back very late?

TIM CINDRIC: Yeah, I think it's the same really. The drivers are taking a different approach. The drivers are going in early just so that they get a decent night's sleep there and can get acclimated, whereas the team, yeah, we're going to leave before the sun comes up for sure, go through all of our screenings and protocols before we take off, and then yeah, go through that process just to get into the racetrack. It's going to be a long day without a doubt, but wouldn't trade it -- don't want to be home on Saturday. I'd much rather be at

Texas.

Q. What are you expecting from the Aeroscreen? I've heard some sort of surprising takes on it like it actually might mean less downforce on the cars by a slight amount. What are you expecting in terms of how the cars will handle and how it might impact the racing?

TIM CINDRIC: Well, obviously there's a weight distribution change, so on the road courses we've seen that. Everybody has had a chance to test those things at COTA or whatever else, and really from a physics standpoint, what we don't understand is how we're going to draft and how things are going to be in traffic. That's probably a pretty unknown right now. When you're running by yourself and what we thought was going to happen with Scott when we put Scott out there, honestly, it was pretty immune to the whole situation. There wasn't a lot of unexpectedness. There was some drag. But yeah, it did maybe make a bigger hole in the air, but at the same time, is that helpful or not helpful in terms of drafting?

I think we're not going to know until we get in a pack to really understand how it's going to affect the race, so it's yet to be seen, really.

Q. Are you expecting with the tire stints, will there be more pack racing than normal if you have 35 laps at a time?

TIM CINDRIC: You know, I don't think we've raced this tire combination, so I'm not 100 percent sure. I do think that without having the falloff that we've typically had there where it starts to string out toward the end, I do think that it's going to be pretty competitive there at the front and that the cars will certainly be closer and we'll have less cars a lap down. When you look at only running 35-lap stints, you're going to have more cars on the lead lap than what you would typically have in say a 70-lap stint or something that's more normal for a place like Texas.

So I think the fact that you have more cars on the lead lap, you're going to have less people moving over or they're going to have harder racing for sure. So I certainly think it's going to be a competitive night.

Q. I just wanted to start with Scott because you mentioned him a few times. Is there any update on his situation in terms of will he be racing with you this year and is there still appetite to do that because you've spoken about the benefit of having your experienced guys in the car, obviously, with having reduced practices. Is there still appetite to get Scott out there at some point this year?

TIM CINDRIC: Well, there's certainly an appetite. Whether that's reality or not is yet to be seen. Currently with the schedule that he has and the quarantine rules that exist within travel at the moment going to and from Australia, if those stay in place the way that they are relative to the schedule, I just don't see that it's

feasible. It's just not possible to be able to clear quarantine and actually have him continue with the Supercars schedule and the schedule that we have. Until some of that is lifted, I really don't see him having an opportunity to be here, and obviously, from an economic standpoint, I think everybody is challenged on that front.

I think for sure there's a huge appetite, and he understands the reasons why we need to be patience on both ends, but right now he's focused on the Supercars series until really things change.

Q. We've heard from Jay Frye that they're considering a staged introduction of the next chassis for INDYCAR. What are your thoughts on what you've been told as a team so far on the next sort of phase of the rules cycle? Is it something -- the things that you've heard so far, is it something you're behind, or is there anything you think needs to be ironed out? What's your feeling about the whole situation at the moment?

TIM CINDRIC: Honestly, we've been so tied up in what's been going on the last three months or so that I couldn't give you too many details of even what's been discussed. Our focus has been on today and how to get through today to get to tomorrow. This process that we've been through, it's turned into three days a week, right. There's today, tomorrow and yesterday. You forget what day of the week it is.

Been really struggling with trying to keep up with what's happening on that front, and I think there's been lots of discussion, and I think it's really encouraging to hear that a manufacturer like Ferrari might be interested in the series itself. It tells you how far the series has come in a very short period of time here, and I think if we can get back on track, a lot of those things are going to be pretty exciting. But from today, I can't honestly tell you that we have a very good perspective of even what's been discussed just because we're so focused on just getting through the next day.

Q. We've heard lots of stories about how people have been coping during quarantine, stuck at home, unable to go out. Just wondered if you'd share how you and your family have been coping and dealing, staying busy during the quarantine.

TIM CINDRIC: I haven't had any trouble being busy. I think it was probably the first week after St. Pete where you're trying to really understand what this all means for everybody, but from that point on, honestly, it's been probably the most frustrating few months of my career because every day is a different day. Every day is changing, every day is a constant change of scenario, and what might or might not happen and really how you keep the workforce not only motivated but quite frankly employed.

When you look at all the different trade-offs that we have with not knowing what the series was going to do,

what the schedule was going to be, there's just so much uncertainty, and some of that still exists. I still think it's a pretty fragile environment. The fact that we're still not racing with fans and some of these other things, I think motorsports has done more than any other sport to be relevant, and we're very fortunate from that perspective.

But for me personally, I think I've had as much time and energy devoted into my job than I really ever have here in the recent times. As much as I thought maybe the first week that this all occurred that I'd be catching up on my domestic list, I can't say that I've really had a chance to do much of that. But on the other hand, there's quite a few people that have kind of in some ways been at home too long, so you have to look at all the different perspectives of what it is.

The one thing I am thankful for is that my kids are old enough to where I didn't have to home school any of them because that would have been a real trying thing for me to try and home school my own kids and keep my family intact. Fortunately, that's beyond me as far as the age of my children, but as I see the others having to home school kids and all that, in some ways I'm really jealous that they spend the time that I didn't really have to devote to my kids at that age, but in other ways I'm like, man, I don't know if I could have got through that or not. It's interesting times.

Q. How beneficial is it to you as a team going into Texas having won there last year, given that you're starting new with the Aeroscreen this year?

TIM CINDRIC: Well, you certainly look at that race, and we weren't really the dominating car until toward the end of that race. I think it gives us, yeah, kind of a check on the list to say we know what's possible with the way the tire situation is probably in my mind going to be more influential than what the Aeroscreen scenario is, provided that the sightlines and the reflections and all the things that we really haven't experienced yet don't come into play more than what we anticipate. I think right now we anticipate all that being -- based on our runnings at COTA and some other things, unfortunately, we didn't get the chance to run the Richmond open test. That would have given us a pretty good perspective on how it is to run on the banking and the ovals and that type of thing, and I think we were going to be able to run there at night a bit.

But I think the bigger concern with the Aeroscreen honestly is just adapting to racing at night, and we really haven't done much of that at this point in time as well as the tire combination that we have and the 35-lap - if that's where we end up - regulation to how long you can run a stint or half stint on tires is going to keep the field pretty packed up the entire time, which with that many cautions or that many situations of pitting, if you want to call it that -- the in and out laps is where I was trying to get to, they're going to become that much more important. So when you look at the number of in

and out laps or the pit stops itself, I think track position will still be pretty key.

Q. I wanted to ask how much your role has changed, not because of the pandemic but with Roger getting involved in the series and IMS, and also I wanted to ask if there's going to be a lot more day clashes this year, given not only NASCAR but also IMSA is going to have to compress its schedule towards the latter half of the season, how your duties are going to change and priorities are going to change now that you're kind of like leading the race team.

TIM CINDRIC: Yeah, well, honestly, he's given me that rope here for the last 20 years in a lot of ways, so I think our relationship really hasn't changed in terms of the way he and I operate.

Indy right now has taken probably more of his time, so he's maybe a little bit distant in some weeks, and in other weeks he's right on cue. But from a running-the-race-team perspective, he's kind of always given me that ability to go do those things and has never really micromanaged what we do. I've always felt like I have an understanding of when to pick up the phone and when to make sure he's in the meeting and when to make it happen, so I think that's probably why I've survived here so long, because I think I understand that balance. Some days maybe I get out of check, but lately, I've felt more of an accountant and an HR guy than I have a racing guy here in the last two or three months, so it'll be fun to actually be a racing guy here for a little while.

But yeah, my role within the team, I guess I refer to myself as the team guy. He's got to focus on the series, and I really don't have much influence in the series itself, except I probably have a seat closer to the table than I did before as far as being one that he'll reach out and ask your opinion about a certain thing that's happening or what he's trying to achieve and maybe try and give some direction with who else out there might be a good sounding board for some of the things that INDYCAR or IMS is trying to be. But the quality of people there, he's come to find that there's a really good core within INDYCAR and within IMS, and his leadership has really brought that to another level, I think. Unfortunately, we haven't been able to see that.

I got a chance to actually go to Indianapolis a couple weeks ago. Hadn't seen Roger really since the Daytona 500 was the last time that I saw Roger up until two weeks ago, other than these Zoom calls. He taught me what Zoom was, so he was ahead of the curve relative to myself on this Zoom business. He took the initiative to have my come to Indy and spend a couple hours with him on a golf cart going around the speedway and just understanding what's transpired since he took over the speedway, and it's amazing.

Having grown up there as a kid, I thought I knew that

place like the back of my hand, and there's so many places that I went to and that I saw on the outside of the racetrack that I had never seen before, and the best way -- he said, "What do you think?" After I thought about it, I'm like, the best way I can tell you is that this whole place looks younger, the entire place, what he's done, and I'm really interested to see what the die-hard fans have to say because the ones that -- you know how it is. You know your little space. Like for us we know the garage area like the back of our hand, we know the men's bathroom, we know exactly where the paper towels are, what all works, what used to be there and what's there now, and you walk it and it's amazing; you have LED lights in the bathrooms. Okay, people have made jokes about the bathrooms, but when you understand how many of them there are and the fact that that's where everybody goes, you know, as part of it.

But when you look at what he's done with -- that's one discussion. But what they haven't really understood is just the sight lines, the video boards, the additional video situations that he has, and the overall customer experience, what you see as you drive in, what you saw as you walk in a gate, when you look at when you walk up -- the actual grandstand that you've walked up for years, and you've had this particular seat for years. It used to be a rusty banister, now it's not. It used to be this and it used to be that. It's unbelievable what's happened in a short period of time. It's unfortunate we are where we are now, but in some ways, it's good for the speedway in that they've had even more time to do some of these things. It's quite an evolution, and I think it'll continue here for a while.

THE MODERATOR: Tim, we appreciate you taking the time to join us and wish you and Team Penske the best of luck this weekend at Texas.

TIM CINDRIC: Appreciate you guys calling in, and hope to see you at the racetrack soon.