

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Press Conference

James Hinchcliffe

Ryan Hunter-Reay

Colton Herta



THE MODERATOR: We're going to start with the other half of Andretti Autosport that wasn't with us yesterday. We are pleased to be joined by James Hinchcliffe, Colton Herta and Ryan Hunter-Reay. All three of them are entered in Saturday night's Genesys 300 at Texas Motor Speedway. The race will be on at 8:00 p.m. on NBC.

First question is for all three of you. The race is Saturday night; it's been a while since you guys have all been in a car for a race. How anxious or excited are you to finally get into a race car?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, feels like it's been an eternity, especially when we were sitting there at St. Pete ready to go and you're kind of in that mindset to get the season kicked off and all of a sudden everything is put on hold. Yeah, we're just ready to get back to work. This is what we do. This is our livelihood and this is what makes the world go round for us. Just ready to get back to it. Obviously, we're going to miss the fans, but it's a great opportunity to get back, and obviously under the right guidelines, being safe about it all, being smart about it, and putting on a good show.

THE MODERATOR: James, same question for you. Anxious, anticipation? What goes through your head as you get ready for the race?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, I think all of the above. I think all the drivers are experiencing a bunch of emotions right now, but none more than just excitement to get back to the track, like Ryan said. This is what we do, and to have been in St. Pete and everybody ready to go, it almost makes it that much harder, and we were sort of directionless for a while, not really knowing when we were getting back and how to prepare. But once it was released that Texas was going to be the race, the focus really shifted and I think everybody sort of kicked into high gear, and now it's race week and we're just sort of counting the minutes now. We went from counting weeks to counting days to almost counting hours before we get to go back racing, and I'm just happy that I'm going to be in the first race of the season now because I wasn't supposed to be doing that.

THE MODERATOR: Colton, how about you, anxious,

anticipation, excited? What emotions have you been going through this week?

COLTON HERTA: I think just excited. I think a lot of us, this is the longest that we've ever been out of the car, especially for me. And so yeah, it's been really tough, but like everyone said, I think we're all really excited to get back, and we're all really excited that we're doing it in a safe way. Sucks that we don't have the fans, but at least we get to go racing and put on a show for everyone on TV.

Q. James, your sponsor of the car is also the sponsor of the race. This was going to be a really big weekend on the schedule before the shutdown happened because it was going to be a chance to entertain and bring this company into the sport and try to get them engaged into a full-time deal. The fact that it's kind of being done the way it is, we all understand why, but how much does that kind of affect the program that you wanted to put together with these guys?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Well, I mean, it certainly affects how they approach Texas. This was supposed to be the third of three races for us, and obviously they jumped on as the entitlement sponsor. It was kind of going to be a big blowout swan song for our season. But ultimately the way it worked out, it's the first time the Genesys car is on track, it's at the Genesys 300, and no one is allowed to be there.

Obviously, that's a big kick in the pants for everybody there, but I've got to say the company and everybody at Genesys is handling this incredibly well. They're still super motivated. They're very excited. We're going to be in the first two races of the year, which is great for them, great exposure. The fact that the race is INDYCAR's season opener, I think it brings a lot of added exposure for them, which is good, as does the change from NBC Sports Network to NBC proper on Saturday night.

It's definitely a bummer, and they're very sad they can't be there, but they're still fully behind the program and hopefully, we can go out and put on a great show for them and bring home a great result for the Genesys car.

Q. You mentioned NBC, it being on the big network. Although it doesn't necessarily guarantee it's going to be a big rating, the fact that it is a primetime race on the big NBC, talk about the --

what do you think the potential is for that?

COLTON HERTA: I think it's huge. You know, I think obviously not a lot of sports are going back, and especially not a lot of motorsports. To have a primetime network and on NBC, it's going to be incredible because they already do such a fantastic job and do a great job for INDYCAR. So to be on the primetime network and perfect timing, and it should be a good show, so I'm hoping that it brings in a big number.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, I echo Colton's thoughts. It's Saturday night, we're going back racing under the lights. INDYCAR, it's going to be fast, it's going to be a great show, so I think it's a perfect opportunity. It's going to be on network television in that time slot.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, I'm kind of just echoing the other guys. It's the first race of our season, so hopefully, it draws all the fans out and everybody that's just kind of craving not just motorsports but live sports in general, and we're all very hopeful that it's going to be not only a great show on track but a big show in terms of viewership.

Q. Colton, last season there was a lot of positivity in your first INDYCAR season, particularly qualifying was very good, and obviously some standout results, but if there was any downside to your campaign last year it was probably the oval performance. Is that something you've been working on in the off-season, and is it something that you feel the kind of change of scenery is going to help with this year?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, for sure. I think that's probably the -- not really all ovals, but definitely, the short ovals is what I struggled on most. It's probably the least amount of experienced one, too, so I think still learning a little bit in that department. Obviously I've got some good guys because Alex is good and especially Ryan is really good at all of the short ovals.

We have good data there. I think we've improved the cars over the off-season in places like Gateway and Iowa where I think we struggled last year compared to Ganassi and Penske, but yeah, also I've learned a lot, and yeah, I think just taking everything in that we learned last year, not from the car but from the driving itself and really just the race prep for me I think I'll be very well prepared going into this year on all the ovals.

Q. Wanted to ask two questions for all of you. One is how the shortened stint length affects how you actually tackle each stint, whether you kind of hold something back for the final two or three stints, and secondly, I wanted to ask how much you felt your sim racing -- I realize that none of you were major sim racers before, but how much you felt like that actually helped.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Well, on the stint length, I think folks will get creative with it. It depends, right; if you've got a car that's hooked up and it's good on the long run

you're going to be pretty disappointed in the fact that it's limited to a half a stint. But if you're good on the short run and you start to see some weakness on the long, then you're going to be happy about this approach.

It just depends when we get there. There's so many unknowns at the moment. Most of us, including myself, haven't been on the oval yet with the Aeroscreen, cooling, weight distribution, difference in COP, center of pressure, aerodynamics and stuff like that. Just so many unknowns. We're just kind of taking it one step at a time, and like I said, though, I think we'll see some folks getting a little bit creative with their approach.

And sim racing was fun, but I don't think it really applies.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, I think Ryan is spot on when he says there's still so many unknowns. It's definitely going to be a very interesting race from a strategy standpoint just because we still have a lot to figure out. You're definitely going to be changing the kind of philosophy of your setup, to not have to look after tires for twice the distance. That's kind of what's dictated success at Texas the last few years, and it sort of goes out the window, so if anything it might actually widen the number of cars that are going to be competitive over what is now a stint.

But again, until we get there and get those laps in practice, we're not really going to know.

As far as the sim racing side goes, it's really just left me with one question: How many quick repairs do we get this week? I don't know.

THE MODERATOR: That would be zero quick repairs.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Oh, damn.

Q. NASCAR has obviously made a success of midweek races. Is that something that would interest you going forward in terms of having a captive audience, no other sports to compete with? Do you think NBC would be wise to consider that?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Absolutely, I'm all for it. I think that would be a great idea. Put us primetime television on weeknights. For sure I think it's a great idea. I think it's something that we should consider moving forward. I think Robin Miller has talked about it for a while, but obviously it's whatever makes sense for the teams and the crews.

Q. Obviously Texas is a very daunting track; is it a tough place to start the season, and does it change your approach to the weekend?

COLTON HERTA: I think it is a very tough place to start. Obviously going from zero miles an hour for a very long time to 230, 220 is very difficult. But with that being said, I think it's going to be more about getting all

the unknowns out, like they covered kind of the COP, the aerodynamics of the car, the weight distribution that the aero screen changes.

And I think it's actually going to be a very interesting race. I think with these 35-lap stints, it can open for more rubber going down on the track and can open up a second lane possibly and make the track grippier so we can follow closer and hopefully get more passing in. So I don't think this 35-lap stint thing is terrible news like I think a lot of people think.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, I agree with Colton. It's going from a compete standstill to one of the fastest tracks on our schedule, so hopefully everybody has got their wits about them, and I think we should be smart as we go about it obviously as the race unfolds. It is definitely an interesting scenario to go straight into Texas. But I think this driver group can handle it, so hopefully we can show that.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, we're all professionals, and so hopefully it ends up being a professionally run event from our side. But normally we're heading into Turn 1 at St. Pete at the end of an off-season, and it's always incident packed and there's always a big risk there. Heading into Turn 1 in Texas is obviously a very different deal, but it's no less intimidating, no less dangerous, just kind of for a different reason. So hopefully everybody is patient and understands that it's still 300 miles of racing, and iRacing quick fixes don't apply, and I've recently learned, so it's definitely going to be a game of patience, I think, and kind of building up to it as the race goes on.

Q. I know it's going to be a long day Saturday and it seems as if some teams are going to be traveling in that morning and leaving very early Sunday morning. How are you guys all approaching it? Are you guys all arriving Friday and staying there to get some rest ahead of time, and are you worried about the long day, how challenging it'll be for each of your teams?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, it's obviously going to be a strenuous day for everybody. Like you said, the guys that are flying in that morning, and then we don't have a green flag until 8:30, 8:45, that makes for a very long day for everybody, in the nice, cool, dry Texas climate that we normally experience in June.

But for me, I'm going to be flying in a little early. I do actually still have a sponsor commitment to attend actually tomorrow, so I'll be heading in there tomorrow afternoon, and yeah, Friday will very much be a rest day and try to gear up for Saturday.

The thing is we've had races that were rained out on a Saturday or a Sunday and had to be run the next day, and we've had events where we've had to cram a lot into a single day, so it's not completely uncharted water for us. There are other factors that make it completely

uncharted waters for us, but I think getting through a day with a practice session, a qualifying and a race isn't the end of the world. It's definitely a long day because it's a night race, but I think the crews and the drivers have handled similar situations before, and I don't think it's going to be too big an issue.

Q. Ryan?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, I agree with James. Not only are we going straight into one of the fastest tracks we go to, but we're going into one of the longest days I think all of us will experience. So it's ramping up quick.

It'll be tough, no doubt. I think it'll be tough for the drivers physically. A lot of heat, as James mentioned, and to wake up at whatever it is, 4:00 in the morning, and we won't be done at the track loading up and everything until close to midnight, so it's going to be an extremely long day, but we're doing this to get it in, to get the racing back to where the INDYCAR season starts and to get it on TV for our fans, and hopefully the fans will be there with us soon. But this is what we have to do right now, and I think everybody is up for the task. We're just looking forward to putting the helmet on, shutting the visor and going for it.

Q. And for you and Colton, Ryan, are you guys both coming in Friday?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I'm coming in Friday.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, I'm coming in Friday.

COLTON HERTA: I'll be saying at my family's house that I have out there, and then leaving Sunday morning.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: James was going to come down and pick me up in the jet that he's chartering, but he somehow just a few days ago said that's not going to happen.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Well, it's because you didn't clear off the helipad on your yacht for me to land and come grab you.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, coming in Friday, just to make it in time for the screening at Texas. My motor home will be there. So just a night early.

Q. Hinch, you guys have talked about all these challenges, obviously, that are going into this first race, and I'm sure you're giving due attention to all of them, but as a competitor, how do you embrace this challenge, and are you looking forward to experiencing some new challenges in your career that maybe you've never experienced before and just eager to see how you and how your entire team handles all these new challenges that are brand new to you?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, I think any time there's a new situation and a new challenge, each team/driver

combination thinks they're going to get on top of it faster and better and it's going to be an advantage for them. You have to try to have that mindset and you have to try to figure out what those potential advantages could be and how can you manage a situation that's maybe a bit unique better than the competitors. I think one of the general advantages that we have at Andretti Autosport as a team is we have about a third of the field in our garage, so for limited practice, with a new component on the car that's going to be a big effect on a lot of different elements, I think that does put us in a good spot. As Colton alluded to earlier, we've got some very experienced guys at this place and some guys that have had a lot of success at tracks like this.

It is a challenge, but yeah, this is what we live for. We survive on challenges, we thrive on challenges, and even more so in my situation because it is a new team for me. I don't know a lot of the procedures and protocols. By the time I was coming into the racing side of this season, I was going to have four races to kind of be with the team and learn how they operate and sort of incorporate myself a little bit. Now I'm going to get half a day.

But again, it's what we do, and we're going to go out there and put on the best show possible. I don't think there's a team that would be better than Andretti Autosport to tackle this one with, so I'm excited about that.

Q. Hinch, I know you've obviously got a limited schedule this season, but is there scope there to do more than the races that you currently have on the schedule?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, it's an interesting question because it's sort of twofold. It did buy us some time certainly to try to go find the funding and put a situation together to do more races, but at the same time, the economy has also sort of tanked a bit and everybody is terrified of what's going to happen and where everything is going. So it hasn't been a great time to go knocking on doors asking for money. That said, some industries actually were booming through the pandemic, and it's not the worst idea to kind of look into some of those.

So the short answer is it's something we've definitely been working on. Nothing concrete at this point, but we're definitely hopeful that we can keep pushing, and a strong result at Texas, we have another month before the next race at the GP, which is still one of our events, so it buys us a bit of time to try and piece together a few races if we can, and that's certainly the goal. Going to do it Hunter-Reay style; go win Texas like he won at Long Beach and then turn it into a full season.

Q. You obviously haven't driven with the Aeroscreen yet, but what do you anticipate from it?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: You know, from everyone that

I've spoken with, the basics are actually fairly straightforward. Everybody was worried about ingress and egress, and it's not that hard to get in and out of. Visually having something in front of you, I think most guys have gotten used to very quickly. The big question mark I think going forward to Texas is going to be the cooling side of it. It's going to be the hottest conditions anybody has experienced really with it. Do you use the helmet ducts, do you not, that's been something that's left open to the teams for this particular event, and getting used to just the difference of not having airflow. Caution periods, I know some guys are worried about because your body is obviously generating a lot of heat, but you're not going to have that steady airflow like you would before, so speed is not the issue. Maybe if we have a lengthy caution period. So I think those are the questions we still have to answer, and I wouldn't necessarily say they're concerns, they're just questions at this point.

THE MODERATOR: That appears to be all the questions we have time for with the three drivers today. We will thank James, Ryan and Colton for their time this afternoon and wish them the best of luck this weekend at Texas.