

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Post-Race Press Conference

Scott Dixon

Chip Ganassi Racing

Graham Rahal

Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing

Simon Pagenaud

Team Penske



up, and the PNC Bank No. 9 was just strong for the last half of the race.

THE MODERATOR: Graham, it looks like you had a strategy to win, finishing second on a two-stop strategy. How difficult was it to manage the tires on a track that was pretty hot and slick?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I thought the strategy was honestly working perfect. Honestly with the two-stop coming out of the pits after the first stop and still being right with Power and Harvey and all the good guys, the guys I was racing at that time, all I kept thinking was when the pits cycled through for the last time, we'd have about a 25- or 30-second lead, but obviously the yellow came out and kind of nullified our strategy because then everybody just got to pit under yellow and then there was just one more to go.

But obviously Dixie had tremendous pace during the late part of the race. I was on black tires struggling a little bit. The Fifth Third Bank car was great today. I thought our guys did a tremendous job. It's a shame for Spencer; he was right up in the battle, as well. But for our team after Dallas, this feels extremely good for us.

THE MODERATOR: Usually when we're talking about a driver starting in the back and driving through the field, it's Graham. Today it's Simon Pagenaud, started 20th in the field, came all the way to third place, had a nice battle with Graham there at the end for the second spot on the podium. Simon, talk a little bit about your race, please.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, yesterday unfortunately was not the day we wanted in qualifying. We unloaded well, and we went the wrong direction with this basically new car. Actually that's the way I really think about things is it was a negative for a positive because I think it sets us up for the season really early on knowing what we need for the car.

We weren't totally happy starting the race and we adjusted the car and then got better and better, and we were also able to keep the tires underneath us really well. Made a lot of ground in the pit sequence by really pushing really hard when everybody pitted and gained a lot of ground that way. The yellow also helped us a bit because we had pitted already five laps before, so that did help us. But at the end we had good pace. It was very hot, so thanks to all the training I put in because it was a very physical race.

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everybody. Welcome to our GMR Grand Prix post-race news conference. We're joined by the top three finishers from today's GMR Grand Prix, Scott Dixon of Chip Ganassi Racing, Graham Rahal of Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing, and Simon Pagenaud of Team Penske. Guys, congratulations on today's performance.

Just a few notes while we wait for a few more people to get in. Today's win was Scott Dixon's 48th INDYCAR win. It's his first win in the GMR Grand Prix here at the Indiana Motor Speedway and his first win since 2008 when he won the Indianapolis 500. Graham Rahal finished second for the second time in his career. He was second in 2015. And our defending race winner, Simon Pagenaud, finishes on the podium for the second year in a row and the second time in 2020.

Scott, we'll start with you. Obviously I think you were helped a little bit by an early caution that helped with strategy. Talk about the performance of the No. 9 car today.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think we kind of got a little bit lucky, but I think it also played into our strategy. We started pretty aggressive, all three Ganassi cars on the black tire, which was definitely pretty tough. We were able to pick up one spot on the start and kind of maintain, and that kind of set us into a pretty aggressive three-stopper, and that's when our window was to pit, and then three, four laps later the yellow came out and we were the ones that cycled towards the front.

Definitely a little bit of luck there, but honestly it was just the strategy we were on, and hung out the leaders for sure. But we had the pace. We kind of struggled at the early part with the rear of the car and the same with the red tires. I think I went out a little bit too hard on the first set and the rears got abused a little bit and we made several changes to the car throughout the next couple of stops and the car was just on rails after that. The track went through some changes, as well. It's kind of like the track cooled off a little bit and grip came

I also want to say a big thanks to Chevy because that was a -- I don't know if you saw, but there was a lot of horsepower down the straightaway to pass all these people, so big thanks to them.

THE MODERATOR: Scott, I mentioned win No. 48 in your INDYCAR career. You're four behind Mario Andretti. I ask you this every time you win a race, but you're just pushing the history of the sport and continuing to climb up the record charts.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, you know, look, it's a lot of fun to win these races. They're very tough. The competition is crazy and just even how the strategy can flip. I feel very fortunate when we're able to pull them off. Four wins from Mario is still a long ways. We'll keep our head down and just keep trying to win races and win championships, and then the rest of it will take care of itself. But each win feels amazing in this series, and again, just feel very fortunate to be able to compete at the top and be with this team and have great partners like PNC Bank and obviously Honda.

Q. Scott, with that race turning into kind of essentially a 40-lap race with how the caution fell and you guys having that pit stop just before the caution came out, winning by nearly 20 seconds, what did you feel like allowed you guys to put together such a large cushion there in those last 40 laps or so of the race?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think it kind of just reset the field, really. With the way we started the race being on the black tires, it kind of got the less desired tires out of the way quickly, and then that kind of set the tone for our strategy. We didn't really switch up or change anything to try and take advantage of a caution. That is the problem when you're leading; sometimes you have to be careful about putting yourself in a pretty vulnerable situation.

I think once we worked on the car, as I said earlier, just the first stint or two, especially on the first stint on the reds went really hard and kind of burnt the rears off and we made a couple of changes to try and help that, and it just made it better and better.

Kudos to Cannon and everybody on the team. It's kind of a new team for us, a lot of new people, so obviously we've got a lot more depth this year, too, because we kept most of the other people, as well, they just kind of moved around to different areas and helped for support and management. But it's still a lot of unknowns.

But yeah, I think once we got to that lap 40, we were kind of clear in what we were going to do. We had good tires. We only had a one-lap set from qualifying and then a two-lap set from qualifying when some of the others had done a couple of runs in the Fast Six. All in all, it just played out well for us and the car was really fast at the end where shifting helps.

Q. Graham, the teams that did decide to try and go for that strategy, when that caution gets thrown there on lap 36, what's going through you guys' mind? What are you guys talking about on the radio? Certainly a solid finish today in second, but what's going through you guys' head when you guys feel like maybe you're caught out in maybe a bit of an awkward position there?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, look, first off, we had a change in the stand this weekend as probably most of you guys noticed, and I thought the guys just a did really good job. I thought the strategy was great. Early on I think we were the only guys that -- I'm sure others could have made the fuel mileage work perhaps, but with the pace that the leader, Will, was setting, it was just really easy for me to get a huge fuel number, and we just decided right away we're going for two.

It played out perfect. Like I said, our first stop we went to, what, lap 26 or something like that, and when I came out of the pits I was right behind the leaders, and I knew from that point I had one more stop and they had two to go and we had a nice gap behind us.

But look, that's life. Strategy has burnt me before, and it's helped us a lot before. We've won races because of it. We get that, and Dixie was very fast today. Would we have won? We certainly would have had more of a buffer, but he was definitely quick. As he mentioned, I had to do the blacks mid-race on our second stint, and I struggled with them. I struggled pretty good. So when he caught up to me, it was almost impossible on the blacks, plus fuel saving to keep him behind me.

With that being said, I was still very proud, I think, of the Fifth Third Bank team, particularly after Dallas. Dallas was very frustrating for us, as everybody knows, and I thought everybody responded well coming here, and all the cars had pace throughout the weekend. But heads down, focus now on Road America, but it was certainly a good points day for us and gets us back into a little bit more of a comfortable points position. Obviously if Dixon keeps winning it doesn't matter, but we'll certainly give him everything we've got.

Q. Scott, if you could talk about that pass that you made coming down the frontstretch to pass Graham Rahal going into Turn 1 to take the lead, which ultimately ended up being the pass that you needed to win the race, if you could talk about that.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think really just for us, it was more about we were on a clear kind of flat-out situation. The red tires especially after the last corner kind of enables you to get quite close and then the big tow, and then overtake is going to be pretty hard to fend off, as well. We were in a really good situation after that caution that enabled us to attack hard. We were on the right tires, and ultimately I think the four cars that restarted in front of us were all on blacks and kind of had a little less fuel than us.

Yeah, it wasn't -- it was a bit of a no-brainer as such. I think as just some of those guys were sitting ducks unfortunately with how the strategy was and the tires they were on.

Q. Simon, this track, the history of this race has generally not had a lot of passing, but the last few years you've proven that you can drive your way through the field, pass your way all the way up to the podium.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Definitely I think Chevy has done a phenomenal job over the winter of finding some horsepower. It definitely affected the race. I said it on the radio. We had an advantage on the straights, and it clearly showed with all the passing we could make, and we were passing people before even Turn 1. I'm very impressed with that. Maybe we had less downforce. I know we trimmed quite a bit on our car to be able to do that, but still, I think Chevy is the reason why we had such a great race today. We still need to do some work on the car, but overall very, very good two first races for us.

Q. Scott, you've been notoriously a slow starter at the beginning of the year. I guess the solution is to start the season in June. You're already at mid-season form.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, who knows. What's normal these days, right? So it's always nice to start strong. Maybe in the early years when I was younger I seemed to start seasons okay, so maybe I need to go back to that. But yeah, it's amazing to pick up the first two wins of the season, but it doesn't guarantee you anything. We'll just keep our head down and try and keep staying up front and trying to get some of those points, and yeah, it's a great way to start. But again, it doesn't cement anything.

Q. Scott, I know we talked about being four behind Mario, but actually did some digging and you've actually passed him now on natural terrain course wins to lead everybody in INDYCAR history. I know you say you don't think about the numbers, but thinking about, okay, you're ahead of Mario in one discipline, what does that mean?

SCOTT DIXON: I don't know, man. It's amazing. It's amazing just to be in the same conversation as these people. I remember looking back and watching races of Mario, watching races when I first came to America in '97 and watching races of AJ Foyt. They are legends of the sport. I just feel, again, lucky to be doing what I'm doing, coming from a little country like New Zealand, and yes, we have a huge racing history and background, but this definitely changed over the last few decades. But yeah, I don't know, man. I love the sport. I love racing. If we can keep winning -- we're in the business of winning, so you have to do that.

Again, it's not just me, it's the team behind us. It's the partners like PNC Bank, it's Chip, it's Honda, it's

hundreds of people that make it possible. So I just feel very special to be a part of it.

Q. All three of you, you've got four races coming up in a two-week span. How hard is that for you guys, and how hard is it for the crews and how much do you have to appreciate what they do over the course of the next couple weeks?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, I think it's hard. Obviously this is a good way to start for this little string. I'm not going to lie, man; my neck was toast today. I'm just looking forward to some recovery this week. Road America is going to be cool. We've got nice straightaways to breathe a little bit compared to here, and today was definitely a physical race, as Pag said. It was a tough one.

This is an important time. There's a lot of points to be had over the next two weeks, so for a team like us who kind of threw away Dallas, this was a good way to start the next few, and we've been pretty strong at Road America, we've been strong at Iowa in the past, so definitely a good string for our team, and we're looking forward to it.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I mean, it's intense. INDYCAR racing is probably one of the most physical sort of racing that there is. We don't have power steering. Now it's also really hot in the race car.

Personally we're probably going to do some work on trying to vent inside the car better, try and make sure that we absolutely 100 percent the whole time, which I was today, but I'm exhausted. Those are the kind of things that you say thank you to your training, and I've been trying in the heat, but I'm going to keep doing the same, and maybe adjust a little bit the training to be even stronger. But yeah, it's evolving every year. It's fun, and I'm glad I trained this hard this winter.

Q. Scott, talk about the significance of winning this race. You've been so close here for the past few years. And winning in this building, it's been a while since you've enjoyed a victory here. I don't know if you know this, the last two Grand Prix winners have gone on to win the 500, as well.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I'm pretty aware of those stats. So yeah, it is really nice. I think kind of after the race we had last year with --

SIMON PAGENAUD: I thought you didn't care about numbers.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, this one is nice, man. I like this. Finishing first here was a lot better than the last -- I think it was the last three years I've been second maybe or something. It's really nice to be in that situation. It's great to obviously get another win at Indianapolis even though it's not the big one. We'll try for that later as everybody else will be in this field.

But it's significant, man. Trying to win at this place and trying to tick off some of these tracks that we've come close but never really been able to get on top of, sometimes you need a little bit of luck and sometimes you need a clean race like we did today to make it happen as opposed to having dominant cars and going the other way.

Yeah, I feel really good, really pumped to be able to win here, and yes, it's been a long time since 2008 and that victory, and it's definitely eluded us, but we'll keep our head down again and try and get another one of the big trophy.

Q. Talk to us about no fans in the stands, and what was it like to pull into Victory Lane, pull your helmet off and it was pretty quiet; what was that like today?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, it was definitely different. I think probably the first for us was Texas and just how that played out. But ultimately when you're driving around you don't really see too much. You think when there's cautions and the pace slows down, you kind of see the fans and the people, especially here at Indianapolis where they fill up the middle straight on the grass bridges and all the families, you see them out there having picnics and things like that. It's definitely very different. It would be very different if it was the Indianapolis 500 with the amount of fans that we have for this race, but again, it's super special to be here, very special to be on that new lift today and have the car put up on to victory circle there, and yeah, again, what's normal at the moment. I think all of us feel extremely lucky to be able to be racing right now.

Q. Scott, obviously that's two wins to start the season. Can you talk about specifically how important Mike Cannon has been in that? Obviously there's a breaking in period any time you have a new engineer coming in, but from his ability standpoint he's come in and you guys have been able to win the first two races, so can you talk about how important he's been to that?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, it's been good. I think just a different way of looking at things. I think with our we've had our team -- yes, our team has been very successful over the past 20 years or even longer than that, but I think you keep doing the same things a lot, too. It's nice to have a fresh set of eyes not just from Cannon but also the Ford GT program, especially in endurance, which I think was a big help. Brad Goldberger has been massive in just thinking about different ways of looking at dampers, car setups and oval stuff. There's definitely areas over the last few years where we've kind of let slip and maybe not been as dominant as we should be as a team and kind of on the back foot a lot.

I like Cannon. He's a great person. He's a real racer. He's a racer himself. I just like his approach. He's pretty laid-back but methodical and doesn't just throw a

bunch of things at it. He really thinks to think about it. It's been a fun start to the year so far, and if we can keep this rolling that's obviously the goal, but we'll see how it goes.

THE MODERATOR: Scott, we'll release you and thank you for your time. Congratulations.

Q. Simon, you said that you went the wrong way yesterday during qualifying and you went the right way today. Could you give us more details about that?

SIMON PAGENAUD: We started on black, which was the strategy. We were going to do three stops and attack. The pit window was very open, so you could pit early and jump back in a sequence of pit stops. When you come out of pits, now when you're on the track and with worn-out tires you had more degradation than other years, so coming out of the pits on new tires, you would actually gain a lot of time, so the undercut was very interesting, and we played that game a lot, and it gained us a lot of position at the beginning of the race.

I put myself 100 percent from the beginning. I did a little bit every pit sequence with a lot of use of Push-to-Pass, and there I must say that again, I think the Chevy power played a big role in the comeback. We were able to pass cars. We were really fast down the straightaway. We also trimmed the rear wing, but the balance was decent. Like I just said, we still need to do some work to find a little bit more mid-corner front grip, but overall today was much better and much improved.

Overall it was an attack race, and the yellow fell five laps after we pitted. It worked out well for us. It's funny, my spotter actually after the race said I had a weird relationship with this place saying one day it's tough on me and the next day she rewards me, and I said, yeah, my personal life is not as dramatic, so I like that.

Yeah, that was my day basically.

Q. My question is about qualifying yesterday but also factors into what happened today. After qualifying did you think that you would have a chance at a podium today?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I always believed him. I never give up. Whether it was me being exhausted in the car, I never gave up. I had just enough juice to go after Graham at the end. That's my nature. I don't give up. And I love that feeling of pushing myself further than I think I can go.

I was very disappointed after qualifying. It's not the performance I want to display, and certainly my team deserves to be up front. We just made a mistake. I think the decision process we had with my engineer Ben was not as good as it's been other times. We need to go back on Monday and think about why we made those decisions. I think I know why, quite frankly. We just thought it was going to be better, but we made a

mistake.

We improved for the future, but after today I think we learnt a ton. I think we know now what direction to take, but there's going to be some work to be done for sure.

Q. I just wondered if it was almost like you kind of traded the win today for knowledge in the sense of the win obviously wasn't there for you today and you've won three times at the track before and it's obviously always somewhere you come to with a lot of confidence and feel like you want to win the race here, but have you almost learnt enough today that it was worth not winning the race in order to have that move aboard, if that makes sense?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, it's a great question, and thanks for being here. You know, yes, I must say you're right. I'll come here with one thought, and the thought is to win. I got spanked yesterday, frankly. I was like, man, what did I do wrong, why was that all about, and there's always something to learn from it. I came back today with the lion's spirit that I have, teeth out, and made -- the warmup was a blessing. It allowed us to try something that was completely kind of the opposite of what we had in qualifying, and that allowed us to recenter and know exactly where we needed to be.

It was a blessing and a curse, in a way. But like you said, I think finishing second and third the first two races, at the end of the day, points matter, and you've got to establish yourself up front right away, and we're doing that. But what I love about the 22 team is how they rebound, how we rebound in general. It's like there's a no-giving-up attitude, and I love that.

But like I said, we need to do some more work to figure out qualifying pace.

Q. Simon, I know you talked a little bit about just general health and fitness going into this stretch, but the first big test for the aeroscreen on a road course in this heat here at IMS, what were some of your initial thoughts and reactions from any issues with heat and what you guys might feel next week at Road America?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, it's extremely, extremely hot. You know, if you want to compare it to NASCAR, it's just that the air doesn't circulate well in the cockpit. It's such a small cockpit, and it feels like the air just stays, doesn't come out of the cockpit, and there's no wind. You could actually run with your visor open just to get some air. But I think we just need to do some work on ventilation, maybe work on the helmet and work on the tube and work on also having a bigger drink bottle. I think those were what we had in the past, and the heat level, it doesn't work for me. Those are little things that you've got to work on, and that's how -- we're a top team. This team always thinks about these things, and little details make you better. That's what we're going to work on, but we've got the sports car experience, as well, on the Team Penske side that might help. So I

look forward to Monday. Those are the kind of things that I enjoy doing with my engineer and my crew, so it will be an interesting Monday.

THE MODERATOR: We'll thank Simon Pagenaud for his time. Congratulations on the performance today, and we'll see you next weekend at Road America.