

IndyCar Media Days

Tuesday February 2, 2016

Conor Daly

Max Chilton

Spencer Pigot

Mikhail Aleshin

Media Day Presser



THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, Verizon IndyCar Series Media Day. Our first press conference with the newcomers and the returning stars to the Verizon IndyCar Series. We're welcomed by a face we saw at the end of 2015, Mikhail Aleshin, Max Chilton, Conor Daly, and Spencer Pigot.

Mikhail, we'll start with you. We missed you last year. Great to see you at Sonoma. Had a great run, but a problem with the pit stop at the end. What have you been doing since you've been away?

MIKHAIL ALESHIN: I missed IndyCar a lot as well. We've been working very hard last year. First point was to do some races in the end of the year, so I did one race in Sonoma, which was very successful. After that, I think it was a little bit easier to get the deal for the year.

I'm really happy to be back on the team I started with. I think it's great people that are working there and for sure we're going to be even more successful this year.

Last year I've been doing ELMS, some race in Le Mans Bahrain, driving for SMP Racing and developing a new Russian car, BR01, which was very interesting job actually. So it was important and interesting experience for me which for sure going to help.

THE MODERATOR: Did you find that you missed Verizon IndyCar Series racing while you were away?

MIKHAIL ALESHIN: Well, I tried to watch every race from there. Of course, I missed IndyCar a lot, I missed this racing, and I missed the tough competition that you have here. I think it's one of the best series. Again, I'm very happy to be here.

THE MODERATOR: Welcome back.

Max Chilton, congratulations. This came together in a hurry. You ran a limited schedule in Indy Lights last

year, but were very successful. How did this thing come together? We heard rumors you were talking to different teams. How did the deal with Chip Ganassi come together?

MAX CHILTON: You said it came around quickly, but it took a very long time (laughter). It came about June, July last year when I won the Iowa race. It was the day my teammate passed away. The team looked into it and they realized it was my second only oval race. In the following weeks I got contacted by every team. It was a filter system. I got it down to two pretty quickly. There was one that I wanted to be with.

I guess, yeah, that did come along not too long ago. Signed only a couple weeks ago.

Chip has a fantastic history in IndyCar, having 11 titles, and four Indianapolis 500s. This is a fantastic opportunity for me. It's been a difficult last few years because even though I was in Formula One and that was my dream, it's frustrating not having a chance to win. You finish 13th, it's disheartening.

Now I'm with Chip. Not too sure on the ovals, plenty of the road courses I haven't raced. But I have the chance to win. I'm looking forward to it.

THE MODERATOR: You're only the fourth Brit to come out of Formula One and run in the Verizon IndyCar Series. You talk about running the ovals. Was that a big learning experience for you? We talk about the Iowa race. You were fantastic. Quite surprising for everybody. The transition from Formula One and running that limited schedule last year.

MAX CHILTON: I haven't actually made the transition yet. I'm yet to drive an IndyCar on a road course or oval, wherever it may be. I can't really say how it's going to be. I can remember the first time I drove an Indy Lights car on the oval last year. It was Homestead. I'm sure it's the same for many of the European or Formula One drivers that come over, you feel completely out of your comfort zone. I'm not going to lie, I still feel that way. Given time, it should become normal.

It's not like I'm quick. I won a race. I spoke to Dario. He said it took a few years to become comfortable. I

have to soak it up. I have the best teammates I can imagine with Tony, Scott and Charlie, who have so much experience I can soak up. I'm in a very good position.

THE MODERATOR: They're big practical jokers, just so you're aware. Just get used to it.

MAX CHILTON: English humor. Have to get used to it.

THE MODERATOR: This next young man will be running three races this year, Spencer Pigot. Talk about St. Petersburg. Initial toe in the water. It's going to be a tough one to learn.

SPENCER PIGOT: Absolutely. I'm looking forward to the three races I have so far. St. Petersburg is my home track, I grew up in Orlando. A track I've enjoyed, have had success at. I'm excited to get there.

The plan is to do as many races as I can. It comes down to the same old story we always hear about, finding more money to do more races. Right now the team is working hard on it, I'm working hard on it to get more races.

Hopefully after Indy the second half of the year, we can be on the grid a few more times.

THE MODERATOR: What is it like to walk into Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing, what has the environment been, and the learning process getting to know everyone?

SPENCER PIGOT: It's been great so far. I enjoy working with everyone on the team, very welcoming, very patient with me, answering all the questions I've had, very open. I've been at the shop a lot.

I've been to the testing they've done in Sebring with Graham, listening to the radio, talking with the engineers, learning as much as I can. I'm only going to have a day or two testing before I get to St. Petersburg.

As much information as I can soak up before then is going to help. So many experienced people, Bobby, Graham, the engineers, they've all been around a long time. Very good place for me to be as a rookie not really knowing a lot about the IndyCar. I've driven it once, but there's still a lot for me to learn. Definitely fortunate to be with this great team. Hopefully it's the beginning of a long relationship with them.

THE MODERATOR: Have you caught up with your sleep? You were driving a lot at Daytona.

SPENCER PIGOT: Unfortunately that car didn't go the whole race so I was able to sleep the second half the

race. Might have lasted a little bit longer than Mikhail's car, but not too much.

It was my first Daytona 24 Hour race. I've always gone to the event. Very excited to be a part of it. Hopefully I'll be back next year.

THE MODERATOR: Conor Daly, I would think at this point in your career driving the racecar would be the easy part because it has been a long ride for you to land this ride, Dale Coyne Racing. Talk us through what it's been like these last couple years for you.

CONOR DALY: It's not going to be easy at all. Yeah, it's a culmination of many years of gaining experience and working towards this, kind of all the pieces finally coming together.

There were a lot of pieces, more than I thought. Finally we figured out how to put the puzzle together and here we are. Massive thanks to Dale. Dale put a lot of effort into this. We were able to find our friends, Jonathan Byrd, all having fried chicken one night. So fried chicken and meat loaf for everyone for the season. It's going to be an exciting year for everyone, even though I'm in Irish colors.

THE MODERATOR: The Jonathan Byrd family have been around racing so many years. Great to have them back as well.

CONOR DALY: For sure. Not a lot of stuff in racing make sense, things that puzzle your brain a little bit. But this makes sense. Very much an Indy-based company, group and family. Me being born and raised on the northeast side here, it kind of all fits together well.

Dale loves it. All the guys on the team are super pumped because we had a deal on in December. I have a suit on, which I'm sorry about, I was told I had to have a suit on (laughter). But it's cool to have these things and have the luxury of going testing. Imagine that. You get to prepare for a race instead of hopping in before qualifying at Long Beach.

I'm excited about that. Another test day. It should be fun.

THE MODERATOR: You turned a lot of heads in Long Beach. Is that where really the foundation for this ride came about?

CONOR DALY: Yeah, I think it did. I've been trying to call Dale for years, never got an answer. When I saw him calling me that morning, I was like, Oh, maybe it worked finally.

That was the beginning of a great relationship. I got to know all the guys. Mike, my engineer, he wasn't engineering me that weekend, but obviously we had a good relationship starting there.

Apparently there was a scheme where they weren't going to run me at any other races so I could maintain my rookie status.

There was sort of like a strategy behind this?

Yeah.

You could have told me that six months ago or something.

But, yeah, it's cool. I appreciate it. It's going to be a fun gig.

THE MODERATOR: Sometimes drivers are on a need-to-know basis.

CONOR DALY: Yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Let's open it up to questions.

Q. You mentioned maintaining your rookie status. Will you be able to run for Rookie of the Year?

CONOR DALY: What I've been told, yes. There's a couple different interpretations of it. But, yeah, from what I've been told.

Q. Mikhail, can you talk what it was like to go to Daytona. Was that your first time at that event?

MIKHAIL ALESHIN: Daytona, it was first event for the car that I was developing. But I was participating in this race two years ago in 2014. It was a big challenge for us because we didn't know where we going to be because it's different here in the U.S. with the sports car.

It was a bit difficult, but the qualifying showed we could be pretty competitive there.

Q. Max, these large organizations, what do you think the opportunity to engage in extracurricular activities this year might be?

MAX CHILTON: Are you implying I'm trying to drive in NASCAR (laughter)?

For my age, I've experienced a lot. I'm always willing to try anything. I think the most exciting project, which I'm not part of, which Chip is doing, obviously the full program is amazing, if I was doing Le Mans, I would love to do it again.

If he says, Happy birthday, here is a test at a global

rally course, I would shake his hand and have a go, because that would be fantastic.

Q. There's so much heritage here of fathers and sons racing in the 500. Has he talked to you and given you any advice?

CONOR DALY: I think most of the advice came in 2013 when I did my first 500. He's really excited. Every time I see him, he's pretty pumped, seems to be smiling a lot more, which I guess is good. Finally made him proud.

It's been a tough deal, especially for him. He's been trying everything he can do to help put programs together. Now we can get back to giving advice on like the actual driving and the actual sport rather than the commercial side and the funding side and all that. So that will be cool.

We've been discussing kind of goals for the year, what our plan is, how I'm going to best use this experience and the opportunity we have. It's obviously really helpful to have him on my side, for sure.

Q. Max, I don't know how well you know Dario, but he is a bit of a driver's coach. Are you expecting to work with him going forward?

MAX CHILTON: Dario was a huge help last year. He was probably on speed dial last year when I was on an oval, What do I do now? He was the one that said, I didn't feel comfortable for three years. That makes me feel better. It should feel abnormal because it's not normal to be constantly turning left. Might get bored with it, but I'll give it a go.

He's a massive part of going to Chip. Top guy, great experience. Then I have two teammates who are just as experienced. I'm just in the best place. For someone that is coming across, not having a clue about the Indy scene, ovals, I'm in a fantastic situation.

Dario is a great bloke. Good he's a Brit as well. I'm hopeful he'll help me succeed this year.

THE MODERATOR: We'll wrap up. We'd like to thank our drivers. Thank you and best of luck in St. Petersburg.