

# IndyCar Media Conference

Wednesday February 17, 2016

## Max Chilton

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome, everyone, to today's IndyCar media teleconference. We are joined today by Max Chilton, who earlier this month was named to drive the No. 8 Gallagher Chip Ganassi Racing Chevrolet in the Verizon IndyCar Series.

Max made 35 starts in Formula One and holds the record for being the only F1 rookie to finish every Grand Prix of his debut season. In 2015 he competed in Indy Lights and was the winner of the race at Iowa Speedway driving for Carlin. He also had several podiums for the team.

Max, welcome to the call.

MAX CHILTON: Thank you very much. Hello, everybody. Hope you can all hear me loud and clear, I'm a few thousand miles away in the UK.

THE MODERATOR: Max, it's been a busy February for you, from your announcement with your drive with Ganassi to last week testing your car for the first time. After testing at Sonoma and the oval at Auto Club Speedway, what are your impressions of racing an IndyCar?

MAX CHILTON: It's an amazing bit of kit. I knew they always had an amazing amount of downforce. They perform well in the corners. They performed better in the corners, better than I expected.

Sonoma was where I drove the car for the first time. It made it a little bit difficult, I didn't know the circuit that well. Most of you on the call know, Sonoma is one of the trickiest circuits on the calendar.

The test went well. I got up to speed pretty quickly. In the afternoon we concentrated on not doing a full race distance but we did fuel stints, you know, 25 laps at a time. It was good to sort of see how the tires wore down throughout the run.

It's very much what I'm used to in F1. The tire deg is pretty high, but it's manageable as long as you drive sensibly, control the wheel spin, you can find ways of extending the life of the tire. So it was a really, really good day.

The cars are great. They're well-designed. Dallara always build a good car. That's why they're the most used single seater tub in the world. There's a few things I'd change. I'd change things other drivers wouldn't change. It's just part of it. Everyone is just a bit different.

THE MODERATOR: For a rookie to join a team like Chip Ganassi Racing, it's a huge opportunity for any driver. What is it like to work with one of the biggest and most recognized teams in IndyCar?

MAX CHILTON: It's an amazing experience. I have to thank everyone at Chip Ganassi, including Chip, for giving me the opportunity. I am a rookie. I know I've had experience in one of the highest categories in the world, but they're still taking a risk with me as I'm new to all of the ovals but a couple, and also a lot of the street circuits. I did eight rounds of the Indy Lights Series last year, or maybe a bit less, so I've learnt some of the circuits. But there are still quite a few that I don't know.

It's going to be a steep learning curve next year. They've obviously seen the talent I've got. I think it was after Iowa, when I won only my second experience on the ovals, that they realized there was something there. That's when they called us, as well as many of the other teams.

It's great to be with such a great team. They haven't got the No. 1 history in the IndyCar championship because Penske has more titles. But if you look into it, Penske has been in it another 25 years longer and only won another couple of titles. In a short period of time, Chip is by far the best team on the grid. It's great to start with a team where I've got the best opportunity.

I've been in a car the last few years, especially in F1, where you can have the race of your life, and you'd still finish in middle to the back of the pack.

It's nice to know that if you perform well, you have the car to give you the championship at the end of the race.

THE MODERATOR: A lot of drivers who come over from Europe talk about the different environment in the paddock in the IndyCar Series. Have you found that to be the case in working with Scott, Tony and Charlie?

MAX CHILTON: Yeah, it's a good point well made. It's quite eerie how welcoming everyone is. I understand why the teams are welcoming, but the drivers, I'm not used to that. The drivers get along, there might be a couple you have as sort of mates.

Everyone in IndyCar, even with Indy Lights, the whole sort of Road to Indy process is so welcoming. All the drivers seem to be best mates and they don't seem to have other friends. Their best friends are I guess their rivals on the track. That's sort of taken me awhile to get my head around.

Including my teammates, Tony, Scott and Charlie, are so welcoming. Scott is four times champion. They're willing to help as much as I need to sort of get me settled in learning the ovals and any tips I need. Even Tony came all the way down to L.A. just to do an eight-lap run at the start of the day on my Fontana test last Saturday just so I felt comfortable going flat out, knowing someone else had already done it in the same car that day. That's amazing to have teammates like that already.

Yeah, I'm really looking forward to getting to know a few more people out there.

THE MODERATOR: Let's open it up for questions for Max Chilton.

**Q. Max, could you elaborate a little bit more on the team dynamic of working with a champion driver like Scott Dixon and Tony Kanaan, as well. If you could, elaborate a little bit more on your oval test at Fontana, talk about what else you think you need to learn on the ovals.**

MAX CHILTON: You know, there's endless things that I can learn. Scott and Tony have both been in IndyCar for, say, 14 years for argument's sake. They're still learning. I never stop learning.

But I am in the best place. It's hard for me to say because I've only done Sonoma and Fontana, and Fontana was just me. Okay, T.K. got in the car and did a few laps in the morning. I've only basically done one day in the car with other drivers and my teammates testing at the same time.

From my experiences, they were very open. Everyone can share the data. Between all the stands, the engineers are talking to each other throughout the session. T.K. didn't like this, don't bother trying that.

So instead of having four cars going out and finding information or data, basically like a street circuit or where we haven't been, for example, like Boston, we'll

be able to get to the setup technically four times faster than someone else. Okay, each driver has their preference, but we'll be able to progress very quickly with four of us. Two of them have fantastic stints. Charlie has been in it for six or seven years, and he's a race winner as well. I'm in the ideal situation. So very fortunate to have that.

Fontana, the test, it was sort of a faultless day. There was zero wind all day. Lovely. It was nice and warm, clear skies. T.K. got in the car and did an out and in lap, then an eight-lap run. He was flat out pretty quickly. I stood up in the stands with Dario Franchitti and a spotter just watching how it seemed.

Fontana's got five different sort of lanes. Was just keeping an eye on what lane he was staying on throughout the lap. So I learnt that way.

Then I got in the car. In the first run, ovals, I don't think you can ever really feel comfortable on an oval. I know I got comfortable quite quickly. I'm sure that changes with other cars around you, especially at Fontana with the seams. I'm sure when you have to dip down halfway through a corner with other cars around it becomes a lot more daunting. It was a good way for me to learn without other cars around and just built up to it as the day went down. Took back the downforce. It was a fantastic test.

Phoenix in a couple weeks is going to be a completely different experience because it's a short oval. There's going to be plenty of other cars around. I will have to learn a lot that day.

But as oval speedway first days go, it was a good day. I'm very thankful for T.K. and Dario come down and give some help.

**Q. One of the things you mentioned at Media Day was your role with Dario, how he helped you in the process of selecting your team. What is his role going to be with you? Will it be an advisor role? What advice has he given to you thus far?**

MAX CHILTON: Dario, he's there for the team's sake. He has been before I joined. He's nothing directly for me. He's employed by the team to help out. He's been doing that I think since his accident.

Scott and T.K. were both mentioning to me they've learnt quite a lot of information from him last year with him being at the track helping out, even though they have just as much experience as Dario. Obviously you share things as teammates, but not everything. I think there were things that Dario kept back because he thought, Oh, I've got an advantage here. But now he is working for the drivers. They learnt from him last year.

Having him around, giving us the secret tips, is a big help. He's just such a genuine, lovely guy. He's there for the right reasons, loves the sport. Yeah, I think he misses it a great deal. That's why he loves coming back and hopefully helping out a fellow Brit trying to replicate what he's done.

**Q. Max, do you see IndyCar as a way to get back to F1 or is that chapter closed for you now, do you think?**

MAX CHILTON: The one thing I've learnt about coming to America since sort of February last year with doing the Lights is you really don't know where life is going to take you and you should never say never. I said I would never do IndyCar. Look, here I am at Chip Ganassi Racing full season IndyCar.

I'm not going to say I'm never going to go back to F1. If I suddenly do amazingly well in IndyCar and it gives me the opportunity to go back to F1, I would jump at it because F1, at the end of the day, was my goal. I still have a lot of unfinished business there. Since a child, I wanted to become a podium finisher or a race winner, for example, and that didn't happen because of certain circumstances of the car you're in. Yeah, no, I wouldn't say never.

I would look at what teams offer me something. If it was backfield drives, then I wouldn't be interested. I'd rather be in IndyCar where the drivers are just as good and it's just as competitive, yet everyone has a fair chance, to a certain extent, of doing well.

So, yeah, it really does depend on the situation. But, yeah, I would never say never.

**Q. Have you spoken to Chip about the potential of Le Mans in the Ford GT?**

MAX CHILTON: Not directly. I think they know I'm a big fan of LMP1 racing, where I went after Formula One, and I'd done it before Formula One as well. Everyone has always said (indiscernible) racing suits my style, especially with the record I got in Formula One with never being broken.

I would look at it. Personally I don't really fancy GTs yet because I still feel I'm at an age where I can do well and I can prove myself more in single-seated racing and get victories, maybe championships under my belt, before I jump into a GT car. I'd probably rather go LMP1 before I did that.

The one thing that Chip has is a world rallycross team, and I would absolutely jump at a chance to have a go at one of those. People like Scott Speed have gone across and done very well in that. It seems to be where some drivers have gone and done well. It just seems a fun, new sport. If I got offered a little job in

that, I'd definitely have a little play.

**Q. Now that you're sort of an outsider looking in when it comes to Formula One, I'm wondering if you could advise the series to do something or change something, technical regulations, whatever, what would you as an outsider see that they need to do?**

MAX CHILTON: It's very hard for me to judge because I haven't done a great deal. I've been in the car for two days. But I have done Indy Lights for a year and sort of understood the meetings, the way they race, the circuits they go to.

The only thing that stands out to me is the track safety personally. You go to some tracks and think this would never happen in the rest of the world or Europe. They don't have the same safety standards, in my opinion, when it comes to certain tracks.

But as the cars go, the cars are just as safe as Formula One. I think they're looking just as much at Formula One at putting canopies or some sort of head-covering device. But they're definitely not behind Formula One on that because Formula One haven't gone about it. IndyCar are apparently looking at it for next year. I definitely think with certain circuits, Charlie Whiting would come over and say, Change that, change that. I've spoken with a couple of drivers that have been doing it for many years, without mentioning names. They go, Yeah, we've seen that for years but they're just not interested in changing it.

I think safety at certain circuits need looking at. Apart from that, they're very good. They're definitely more organized, in my opinion, than other sport when it comes to keeping drivers together, understanding what the drivers want. It's definitely more of a close field, a close feeling in the IndyCar paddock than Formula One. Formula One, you sometimes hear something through someone else. IndyCar, everyone gets told and has time to discuss things.

**Q. If you wanted to tell Bernie or the strategy group in Formula One what they need to do to make the sport better on that side of the Atlantic, what would you tell them?**

MAX CHILTON: What would I say? Cheapen the prices of a ticket entry. Don't scare away the young fans. I think Bernie was quoted as saying his target audience are wealthy pensioners. Well, it should be young race fans in their teens, 20s or 30s, who are going to become fans for the next 30, 40 years. That's what IndyCar does. Ticket prices are a fraction of what F1 tickets are. Easier to sell things to sponsors saying they've got this attendance at a race. With more people being there, it makes it easier.

They're definitely advanced in certain areas. But it's a way up between the two. Yeah, I think IndyCar's definitely easier for spectators to get involved. It's easier to get around the paddocks than Formula One. Formula One is very restricted.

I do think IndyCar needs to try and get some foreign races, but from what I've heard they're already looking strongly at that for the next couple years. It's good to see that IndyCar is trying.

**Q. Max, talk about your mindset compared to when you were with Marussia. For 2016 you're kind of with the Mercedes of IndyCar. Talk about the mindset you have as a driver this year.**

MAX CHILTON: It's going back to more of what I was used to on my way up to Formula One. From the T cars I started off in, then British Formula 3, then GP2. I was always a front-runner in those categories, going for championships, race wins or pole positions.

It's a nice added pressure because you know you're succeeding and doing well compared to a majority of the other drivers on the grid. But it's also stressful because you know you've got a chance and you know that maybe if you don't get it right it's your fault. Compared to when you're at the back of a field, it's not noticed as much. It's a good feeling to have.

I know Chip is going to give me the car to grab podiums, for example. If I don't do that, there's things I need to learn at. It's important this year I don't get overly strict. Dario has been quoted on this week already. He's not going to come in and set the world alight his first year. It's one of those things where people stick around it for years and progress. Time is the thing which is key with IndyCar.

But I hope to, you know, make a good stamp of my authority showing what I've got this year, which in Formula One, as much as you'd like to have the race of your life, I remember having a couple races where I still think they are the best race I ever had, but I finished 13th or 14th just because it's not as level a playing field at IndyCar. It's a good to know that I've got an opportunity to go forward. It makes you work harder, to be honest with you, just knowing that you are that close. It's all the little bits add up to make the difference.

**Q. Do you see more F1 drivers jumping to IndyCar in the future?**

MAX CHILTON: Yes, if certain things are looked at. There's certain things I don't think they would like and I don't like personally. But I know it's a good opportunity for me. Hopefully they'll change it in time. I'm not

going to mention everything.

Formula One, it's the pinnacle of motorsports. They are very elite with everything they do. At the end of the day, no one is perfect. There are things that IndyCar does better.

I think with time, IndyCar will start to improve that. From the meetings we had a few weeks ago in Indianapolis, they are really looking to improve, and they have done, with the TV ratings in IndyCar have tripled definitely in the last two years. They're really sort of progressing that. They see they've got a good championship and it just needs working on in a slightly different way, which they are doing.

Hence, I've come over. I'm sure other people will.

**Q. Max, I was wondering if you feel able to give good technical feedback yet or whether at the moment the testing is more focusing on getting yourself to working with the team and getting yourself used to IndyCars. I was also wondering if you think you will get frustrated by the fact the rules are such that it's quite hard to tailor an IndyCar to your specific chosen way of driving.**

MAX CHILTON: Yeah, so I think it's a natural thing. When it comes to a race driver, if you're of any standard, you should be able to tell the way the car is handling. Now, drivers are different. I'm not an engineering driver like my brother. My brother is in the World Touring cars. Honestly he could quit his job tomorrow and become a race engineer, he's that orientated. He could tell you exactly what roll bar is going to do, what spring he needs, pressure, all this sort of stuff he's very good at. That's not my side. My side is I focus on the driving and let my engineers do the work. I tell them what issues I'm having, and I leave it down to the engineer. In my experience, an engineer spends all day every day understanding a car. Who am I to say, Right I want these springs. I should say, Look, I've got this problem, and he'll come up with what he thinks is the right chosen thing.

I've been racing for 15 years, I think. I know what a car's doing. Sometimes it's hard to feel. For example, this year on ovals, it's difficult for me. Especially when I was testing at Fontana, you don't know, but when I'm on an oval, you've got to have the car basically planted. If you don't, you're going to have big snaps of oversteer. It's very hard when you do a setup change for me to give sometimes the right feedback.

I can't feel nothing. The car is either glued or it's not. If the car is not moving, you can't tell what the car is doing. On an oval, you don't really want the car moving. I now some drivers say you need a bit of

oversteer and understeer.

I've started to feel what that is, but sometimes it's impossible to tell. Even Dario said you can't feel every change. That's something I've got to try to get my head around.

The most important thing is always give honest feedback. If you can't feel a change, then don't say you can, because you end up going the wrong direction. That was a negligence change, I didn't feel anything.

THE MODERATOR: Seeing as we have no further questions for Max, we will thank him for his time this morning and wish you the best of luck in the 2016 season.

MAX CHILTON: Lovely. Thank you very much, everyone.