

IndyCar Media

Conference

Saturday March 12, 2016

Juan Pablo Montoya

Ryan Hunter-Reay

Helio Castroneves

Simon Pagenaud

Scott Dixon

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with the first drivers joining us for the Firestone Fast Six.

We are joined by Scott Dixon, who qualified fifth today. Next to Scott is Juan Pablo Montoya, qualifying fourth.

Scott, could you give us a recap of how your qualifying session went today.

SCOTT DIXON: Generally not too bad. I think as far as our cars, we made pretty good improvements. This track typically for us has been a bit of a bother.

Qual one, the track was really dirty. Might have been those trucks or something. There was crap everywhere. Definitely slippery for the first few laps, especially on the blacks.

Each lap just got better and better as the track got cleaner and cars ran through. Messed up a little bit on the last qual. Probably a little too cautious into turn one, into 10, a little bit into 13. All those would have given us a 10th or a 10th and a half.

Good to see Chevy in the top five. Sad to see the first four being Penskes. That's the way it is.

THE MODERATOR: Juan, if you could talk about your session today.

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: It was okay. We struggled. We were really good this morning. I was really happy. We only ran one set of new tires. On red tires we were not as good as we needed to be. I think the track went off a little bit. Didn't adjust the car enough for qualifying, so we were a little bit behind.



Overall it was good. Last year I won the race, so I don't mind.

THE MODERATOR: Next to Juan is Helio Castroneves, starting third.

Helio, talk about your qualifying today.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, the car was pretty good, man, I have to say. At the beginning we were not that strong on the qualifying, but we were able to dig in. My engineer and Roger and the entire No. 3 team did a phenomenal job. They were working during qualifying. Great job. Every step of the way we were making improvements and the car was getting faster and faster.

In the end we took a big gamble. It almost paid off. Unfortunately it was a little bit too much. But great effort for the whole organization. To have 1-2-3-4, again, it shows we're really working together as a team, we want to win as a team, and we're going to keep pushing. Great effort for Team Penske.

THE MODERATOR: Next to Helio is Simon Pagenaud, starting second.

Simon, talk about your day.

SIMON PAGENAUD: It was a good day. It was a really good day. It's been a good weekend so far. You can feel a good difference in our group, on the 22 side, in our second year together. It's a lot of fun actually. The lap time shows. It's all good at the moment.

Qualifying was super, super intense. I had a blast out there. The car felt really good. It's just about getting those last little bits everywhere you can.

But, yeah, super happy about the performance so far. I think in race trim we will be in probably a little bit better shape, so I'm excited about that.

THE MODERATOR: Next to Simon is Ryan Hunter-Reay, starting sixth tomorrow.

Ryan, sum up your day, please.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, it was a bit of a struggle

today. It was a thrash. We were really searching for some speed just to catch up with these guys. They've been the class of the field so far. It's been very tough for us, to tell you the truth.

But we pulled it together, found some speed in qualifying. It's tough to be happy with sixth, but we're slowly today talking ourselves into it. We salvaged something today.

Those Firestone reds were like a life vest for me in the middle of the ocean. Once I got those on, finally the car woke up a bit and I could really hustle it and drive it the way it needed to be driven. Prior to that we'd been struggling for overall grip.

We'll take the starting spot and hopefully we can go out and have a really good race tomorrow and start the season off the way it should.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Scott, there are a couple of rookies that have Formula One experience and maybe they're not used to some of the IndyCar policies about getting out of other people's way when they're on their hot lap. We have three new stewards. Did you run into any issues or anything you think they should be aware of?

SCOTT DIXON: I don't think it's a newcomer thing. I think we have kind of a lot of veterans that do the same thing, too (laughter).

It's tough. This is one of the shorter tracks we come to. Getting up to speed takes at least a lap or two. So you are easy pickings if you're just coming out of the pits, the way you exit the pits here.

No, I think everybody has been doing a fairly good job. We haven't seen too many reds with people crashing into the fence, runoffs. Definitely a steep learning curve coming to an Indy style of street course for the first time.

Yeah, it all kind of figures its way out.

Q. Will broke last year's track record in the first segment. In the second segment, all six of you went quicker than Will in the first segment. What is the difference this season that speeds are even faster?

SCOTT DIXON: All the extra energy from not doing the autograph sessions (laughter).

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: Being realistic, the track gets quicker and quicker. Remember, we haven't been on red tires since Sonoma qualifying, so...

SIMON PAGENAUD: It's a big adjustment when they put the reds on at St. Pete. Again, we haven't been qualifying for six months. We haven't run on the red tires for a long time. The car feels different. The grip level is up. You got to push harder. We have a new aero kit which provides a lot of grip on the Chevy side, a lot more stability as well. You have to push it, find the limit. You only get two, three laps, so it's not much.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I think the track is great. They shouldn't change the track. I heard they going to pave next year. The mayor do a great job and should not spend the money on repaving the track. If you want to spend money, there are other places to spend money. You can give prize money to the drivers (laughter).

But in the end of the day, as I said, the track is phenomenal. You see the fans out there. The cars are much better. Firestone also did a great job during the off-season to make the tires better. It's a combination of little details. That's why we're going faster.

Q. Scott, Will Power's 43rd pole (indiscernible).

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, it's obviously a big step. Converting them is obviously what we all try to do no matter where you start from.

But, yeah, you know, qualifying is one thing, racing is something else. He's obviously won a ton of races in a short career, too. He's well-accomplished. Does a really good job.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Every driver has his quality and he certainly likes the way the car is set up, takes the best out of it.

It's good and bad to have him as a teammate. In the end of the day, I think it's more on the positive side because it makes all of us find different areas. I feel all three of us contribute as well.

It's great. He definitely is a quick driver. That's what he's showing out there.

Q. Now that we're in year two of the aero kits, what makes the cars different to drive this year than last year? What are the changes?

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: Who said it was more difficult?

Q. Different.

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: Different, oh. I don't know, I'm ready. Let's go, I'm ready.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: What was the question? I didn't hear it (laughter).

Q. Now that we're in year two, how different are the cars to drive this year and what makes them quicker this year?

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: I think it's just more downforce. With the upgrades of the aero kit, Honda has a lot more downforce, we got a little more. But it's okay.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: New package for us so we definitely have more downforce to work with. It's trying to find that sweet spot, like I mentioned. These guys are the quick guys. Can I come to the party, too, guys?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: In sixth place, you can come to the party, no problem (laughter).

Q. Helio, you'd like to see the track be the same. It looks like it's pretty rough, the bumps. What is it actually like in the cockpit? How are you going to feel by the end of this race? How tired will it make you feel?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: It's bumpy.

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: Does it really feel bumpy?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I feel bumpy. Actually, it's a street course. Every street course, always there is some bumps. Like I said, I was not joking about the paving. Every year, even a little bit more, a little bit less, it's characteristic of a place. It's becoming very different.

It's fun to drive.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Same. I don't see why we would change it. Bounce makes it more difficult. That's the sense of racing.

We're not jumping off the racetrack. We're not going through railroad tracks. I think everything is going pretty well. It's a great track, really good.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I'd say it's going well. Turn it upside down, I don't know (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: Will Power will not be participating in today's post-qualifying press conference. He's been battling a stomach bug all day that got worse after qualifying.

We hope he feels better and will be ready to race tomorrow. Thank you.