

IndyCar Media Conference

Saturday April 2, 2016

Scott Dixon

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Pleased to be joined by the winner tonight of the Desert Diamond West Valley Phoenix Grand Prix, Scott Dixon. This is Scott's 12th-consecutive season with at least one win, which is an IndyCar all-time record. This win also moves Dixon into a tie for fourth on the all-time IndyCar racing win list with Al Unser, Jr., and that is a tie for fourth with his 39th career win. Tell us what it feels to win the first race back for IndyCar in such a long time here at Phoenix International Raceway?

SCOTT DIXON: It's fantastic obviously to be back at Phoenix. I think 10 or 11 years since we've been here, and I think I was one of the few on the grid to have actually driven here in previous years. The weekend wasn't totally smooth for us. We missed a little bit in qualifying, and we knew we had a good race car, and a lot of it was going to be about track position amongst people with similar speeds. It was definitely a tough fight out there tonight, probably one of the toughest short ovals that I can think of in recent history, just with how you had to manage the tires, fuel-mileage strategy, and for me tonight, a lot of credit goes to the team. Strategy was perfect. The pit stops were just amazing, and the setup was fantastic on the car. But yeah, it was really tough.

I think for next year, everybody did a great job for first time back after being away for about 11 years, so the track has changed a lot. I think we learnt a lot tonight. Everybody did. I'm excited to come back next year.

THE MODERATOR: When you look at the top 10 tonight, a great mix of youth and experience. When you look at the drivers that led most of the races, a lot of experience, a lot of guys that had raced here previously. How much did that help you?

SCOTT DIXON: You know, I think being in scenarios of knowing what you need to manage definitely helps, and the correspondence with the team, too, and just trying to maintain something that you knew you could do for the whole stint, and that was the hardest part. You could run flat out, you could pass cars if you needed to, but you didn't want to be doing it all the time because it definitely took a toll on the tires.

It was mostly about management, and I think that

helped definitely a lot of the veterans tonight. I know TK was charging through the field. They had a bit of a misstep on strategy there I think towards the end, and I don't know, I can't say enough about obviously the Verizon IndyCar Series and getting us back to Phoenix and seeing the passion that the fans have had this weekend and even at the test, and the enthusiasm at all the autograph sessions and how excited everybody is to have us back here, and that's what it's all about. We've got to keep pushing, keep growing the sport, and it's a great way to do it.

Q. Your records, do they register with you? Do they mean a lot to you at this point in your career?

SCOTT DIXON: It's mindboggling for sure. For me, I feel very privileged to be racing, being an IndyCar driver, being part of the Verizon IndyCar Series, and then being part of Team Target. We push as hard as we can day in and day out, and you know, this is a team sport. It's a team effort. All my wins except for one have been with this team. I hope we can continue to build on it, and the numbers are great, and it sounds a bit strange when you hear the names that we're amongst them fighting on the wins list. A lot of people have been a part of this, and just feel very -- obviously very happy and excited about it, and just hope that we can build on it, as well.

Q. Scott, even without the caution, were you pretty certain you could hold off Simon and Will over the last couple laps?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, it was really about management and how hard we had to push the car, whether we needed to pass some of that lapped traffic. The Target car was fast, really, really fast. I think at any point we had enough for anybody that was challenging. We definitely, definitely had some speed in reserve for sure.

Q. After the race there were a number of drivers and team engineers on pit road talking about IndyCar gathering up a lot of data from tonight and using that to make adjustments for next season. Would you expect that to happen, and would you be disappointed if it did not happen?

SCOTT DIXON: No, I think we can definitely make a better show. You know, it's tough coming back here, yes, we've run some test days here, but it's very hard to make changes when you don't really know how it's

going to play out in the race. I think tonight was maybe a little bit conservative on some sides, and I think that the question is can we make it a better show, and absolutely. I think next year when we come back, it's going to be bigger and better and in the right direction. Yes, it is about gathering data, it's about listening to everybody from the teams, whether it's the team managers to the drivers and how we can -- we're always trying to make this product better, even though I think we have the best racing on earth right now, and can we keep improving it? Yes, we can, and next year will definitely be better.

Q. It was a real active race on Twitter and social media tonight, everybody weighing in from Jimmie Johnson and Dario and Brad Keselowski, and the main point everybody seems to say is take away downforce, but it's not that simple. What did you think of the quality of racing tonight and the downforce levels that the league mandated?

SCOTT DIXON: It's a tough one. You know, the quality of racing, I haven't seen -- only saw where I was running tonight and you're running with cars that are very similar speed. I know TK was going through the field towards the end there and made some pretty big passes, and I know if we were in a situation where we had to really push, we would be getting past cars, too. Can we make it better? Yeah. It's our first time back here. I don't know what you can expect out of this. I think everybody did an amazing job. Yes, there were some accidents and some cautions and things like that, but it's tough coming back to tracks with packages that you don't really know what to do with.

You know, the downforce question, it's easy to drive from the backseat, man, and everybody has their two cents, but it needs to be looked at, and everybody is going to comment on it. But you know, you can't go to a middle ground. You can't go halfway. You're going to have to go a big way. All of us are talking about it. It is a topic. So yes, I can see some changes maybe in the future, but we'll have to do it as a group and we'll have to do lots of testing to make sure it's a better product when we come back and it works.

Q. You're notorious for getting off to a little bit of a slow start to the season. Here we are two days removed from the month of March and you're in victory lane. How do you assess that?

SCOTT DIXON: It's good. It's a good change-up. Last year we had my first victory at Long Beach, so this was the first victory at Phoenix for myself and the team, so it's a big milestone. We always comment if we could start the season a little bit better, it would make the end a little bit easier for us. The Verizon IndyCar Series is so tough. The competition level is through the roof, and what it comes down to is nights and days when

you can get points, you've got to maximize on it, and today was one of those days we maximized as a team and as a group to get most laps led, the bonus points, and obviously the victory. So yes, it's great, but it doesn't mean -- didn't guarantee us anything. We're going to have to work out every race.

Q. You tested here earlier I think during the daytime, and the race was finished under lights in the dark. Is this a big impact to the setup when you go and do this kind of race including under the lights, and you have testing under day conditions?

SCOTT DIXON: It does make a bit of difference. You know, you have to keep up with the car. We made quite a few changes from the start of the race. The car started out quite loose actually and on the start had a big moment in Turn 1, and as I said Ed was beside me, looked like he had a similar sort of sideways moment there, too.

But yeah, the track is always going to evolve, whether it's during the day or night. I think you definitely get much more of a shift from a day-to-night race, and with the testing that we had, especially with spring training over two days that we had here, we did a lot of running at night, too. I think we as a team had the bases covered as far as thinking what we should do anyway.

Q. Considering how difficult passing was, how much of a peace of mind is it to know that your pit crew can get you stops and then move you forward because this isn't the first time they've helped on a race for you.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, absolutely. As I said, none of us win by ourselves. This is a team effort, and sometimes it's forgotten. So yeah, as I said in just about every interview tonight, it's a huge credit to Team Target, Chevy, everybody that -- Firestone. All of us work together to maximize the most. I think last year at Sonoma, we saw a real team effort, whether it was strategy, pit stops, and trying to pull off the unbeatable part of what we did for that championship.

That's what this team does the best. Everybody that joins this team is there to win, and as I said, I'm privileged to be a part of the team.

Q. Relative to other races, if you got a position tonight, were you fairly certain you weren't going to lose that position unless something goofy happened? In other words, did you feel like you weren't going to get passed whether you were third or first? Did you feel pretty comfortable with the position?

SCOTT DIXON: No. I don't think you can ever feel comfortable. Yeah, relative to -- well, relative, right. You know, you did have comfortable moments, but you

also know that -- when you're going into Turn 1 here at almost 200 miles an hour, your margin of error is very small, so it's not like you're out there cruising around, and especially when you're in traffic it's very tough. You're waiting for the moment of maybe where you go in a little too fast and wash up, and as soon as you wash up you're going to be in the gray and struggling a lot and probably getting freight trained by two, three, four cars. A lot of it was definitely a very mental component, trying to maintain what you had and make sure you stayed in the groove and stayed focused. It was definitely a mentally tough race tonight.

Q. Can you explain exactly how difficult it was to pass tonight, especially coming up on the lapped traffic?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think for us in some situations, if we had to push the fact, I think it wasn't going to be a problem, but as I said about maintaining gaps, we were just as a team maintaining what we needed. If we needed to push harder, yes, I think it wouldn't have been too much of an issue. It was a little bit tougher than some of the other tracks we go to, absolutely, but as I said, it's the first time for us back here, and I think the show, I haven't seen it, but there's definitely quite a bit of passing, a little bit of side by side, and we can improve it.