

IndyCar Media

Conference

Saturday April 16, 2016

Helio Castroneves

Scott Dixon

Simon Pagenaud

Tony Kanaan

Juan Pablo Montoya

Will Power

Fast Six Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Let's get started with the Firestone Fast Six qualifying conference. We're joined here by Juan Pablo Montoya, driver of the No. 2 Verizon Team Penske Chevrolet. Juan qualified fifth fastest today with a lap time of 1 minute 7.9054 seconds. He will be starting in the top 5 for the third consecutive race to start the season.

Juan, talk about, it was a little bit of a different kind of session all the way through. Talk about your qualifying day.

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: It was good until the last session. Will made a mistake, and the five minutes guaranteed were out, and the rules say when the five minutes guaranteed are over, the session is over, so I don't understand how the rule -- how did the rule work. So you'd better explain it to me because the rule book says when the five minutes guaranteed are over, the session is over. Like that, I should be P-3. It wasn't a great lap, but the five minutes guaranteed were done.

So the rules are there to be broken whenever they feel like, I guess.

Q. Is it similar to the rule of (inaudible)?

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: I guess there is another rule that says they can go green if they feel like it, so I guess the five minutes guaranteed doesn't really count unless they feel like it.

THE MODERATOR: Well, it's at least five minutes guaranteed time --

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: Yeah, after it's over and they



decided to apply another rule that they felt like they wanted everybody to have another lap. But at the end of the day it's our decision whether we run later or not, no? I think. You run early, we decided to run late, and we're willing to take the risk. It's good to know now that whenever they feel like it, depends who's on pole, they can change it. But that's what it is.

And then we're not assuming that they were going to restart it, and we didn't add any fuel to the car and ran out of fuel on the next lap.

THE MODERATOR: Overall, though, does your car feel good?

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: Yeah, not for fifth, but good.

THE MODERATOR: We're also joined by Tony Kanaan, driver of the No. 10 NTT DATA Chip Ganassi Racing Chevrolet. Tony qualified fourth at 1 minute, 7.7951 seconds. Tony, as we were discussing with Juan, kind of an uneven session. Talk about your qualifying effort today.

TONY KANAAN: We made a big improvement from the first session this morning and from the first qualifying run. I think it was a little bit messy at the end there, but that's what happens if you decide to go late; you pay the price. We went earlier to guarantee a lot. I was on blacks. Obviously I wasn't -- Helio, I think, did the right thing. He's kept doing that for a few races now, and it finally worked for him. I think it was more on his side to do it.

We've got a few things to change in the car still. I think we're not the way we wanted it to be yet, but it's a good position to start.

THE MODERATOR: We're also joined by Simon Pagenaud, driver of the No. 22 PPG automotive finish Chevrolet for Team Penske. Simon qualified third at 1 minute, 7.7410 seconds. Simon, if you could talk about your qualifying effort today, please.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, it was an interesting Fast Six. We locked in one lap. Luckily that was good for P-3. But yeah, I was concerned. We didn't have a lap in when the red came out. I'm happy with third right now because I really thought we were getting sixth.

Yeah, the car was really good. PPG car has been strong all weekend. Everybody at Penske has been really strong.

I think we actually have a better race car than a qualifying car, so P-3 is good.

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

Q. A little bit hotter than it was last year. What are your thoughts on tire wear, especially with the reds?

TONY KANAAN: It's hard to predict. I think it is a little bit hotter, but we have more downforce in the cars this year, so you might see a different race. I'm not sure. Tire wear-wise, I think we're all -- it's early. I mean, I think tomorrow morning we'll know a lot more. Up until now we've been working a little bit of qualifying, a little bit of race, but we don't put enough laps on the tires to probably say how it's going to go. The track always grips up towards the end of the race.

I don't think it's going to be a big deal.

THE MODERATOR: We're also joined here now by reigning Verizon IndyCar Series champion Scott Dixon, driver of the No. 9 Target Chip Ganassi Racing Chevrolet, who qualified second at 1 minute, 7.445 seconds. Scott, if you could just summarize your qualifying effort today.

SCOTT DIXON: It was a lot better than this morning. We were definitely struggling, but yeah, once we got the car dialed in in qualifying, especially Q-2, it was pretty much just a scenario of good old-fashioned front wing. We just kept adding front wing in the car, just kept going faster.

Obviously kudos to Team Penske and Helio, sticking to his running two sets of reds in Q-3 and that time sticking. Unfortunately I think we definitely had speed to go for the pole, so we missed on that a little bit, but it's definitely going to be an interesting race tomorrow. The competition is so tight, and definitely looking forward to it, but it's great to have TK here and obviously two Ganassi cars in the top six.

Q. Tony, towards the end of the second round of qualifying, not only were you doing opposite lock, but you were moving your hands like a magician or a poker dealer in Las Vegas. What was going on?

TONY KANAAN: I'm asking my engineer the same question. Me and Scott, we were talking in the truck before qualifying, and we're looking at each other, and we're like, man, we're looking at these Penske guys,

and they look to be making a lot less effort than us, so what's wrong, what we are doing wrong. It was busy, man. To catch them up, we had to put a lot of work in, and for sure it was a lot of hand movement there. I hope my engineer saw the same footage that you saw because I'm going to talk to him right after this.

Q. TK, you've known Helio a long time. He just continues no matter what's going on in his life, where he's at in his career, to win poles. He just qualifies well. I know there's different circumstances, but talk about his qualifying performance year after year.

TONY KANAAN: It was always his strength, since we are like eight years old racing go-karts. The guy is always -- to put that perfect a lap together, I think he was one of the toughest guys I've seen doing it. He's here so I'm not going to talk more about it, otherwise he's going to be like, well, you know. So that's it. That's all I'm going to say.

But yeah, he's definitely -- he knows how to do it for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Let's welcome our Verizon P-1 award winner for the pole position, his 47th career pole position today, second straight here at Long Beach, third of his career at Long Beach, his second straight this season. He's fourth on the all-time list in career poles, trailing Bobby Unser by two, driver of car No. 3, the Auto Club of California Chevrolet, Helio Castroneves. Talk about the effort.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, first, what a bizarre qualifying. It was a little bit strange. But at the end of the day, it showed that our team, it's very consistent. It's very -- we're always being -- all four cars basically, myself, Juan Pablo, Simon and Will, always putting ourselves in a very good condition. We're working together very hard, and as they say, it's better to be lucky than good. So I'll take this one. It was great. We had a fast car. We were consistent, and we just repeated pole position again, so I'm happy that finally our plan paid off, and we're showing speed and we're starting in the right position today.

THE MODERATOR: For any of you guys, in the second round qualifying, Scott was within two hundredths of a second of Helio's track record from last year. Did you guys think if you had the full Firestone Fast Six you might have been able to break the record?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I thought it was going to go fast this year. Like I said, there was a lot of situation with the beacon and then the yellow, so it was not normal, but you've got to be there. AAA car was -- it's been very consistent, like I said, and it's great to be on

the pole again.

THE MODERATOR: We're joined on the far right by Will Power, driver of the No. 12 Team Penske Chevrolet, three-time pole sitter here in the past, but not quite what you wanted in the Firestone Fast Six. Will, tell us what happened.

WILL POWER: Yeah, I wouldn't say I locked up, but I kind of went a bit deep and didn't want to take a risk and hit the wall and tried to spin it back around. I thought it was all over then anyway because once you cause a yellow you lose your best two laps. But that's okay. I always seem to start way back. It's not way back this year. It's a lot better than the previous two or three years. At least I'm in the top six.

Q. Helio, at the end of the session that finalized the six that we're going to go for the Fast Six, there was a timing and scoring issue and nobody really knew who was in and who was out, and for a while it looked like you were the one who may be out. What were you sitting there thinking with all the uncertainty as to whether you were in the six or not?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, that was kind of weird because I was about to yell to my data guy and say, what the heck are you doing, man, all of a sudden you take it off. And they're like, no, it's not me, it's everybody.

I didn't say that, but I was thinking -- that's what I was thinking. But when they said, you might be in, might be not, we didn't have much time to think about it. It was a close call. It was definitely a close call. Anyway, it was kind of an iffy situation, but once they said it was good to go, my mind was already set on the top six.

Q. Helio, they were saying that you ran on two sets of reds. If you did, how much of a gamble is that for tomorrow?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Well, we've been doing that several times, and sometimes -- in fact, we didn't use much the second run because of the yellow, but yeah, because I think sometimes this kind of situation could happen, and today it paid off. So you've got to know the game. You've got to know the plan. It's in the rules. So we played the game, and finally it paid off.

Q. Simon, they had to change where the start-finish line was for qualifying due to that timing and scoring issue. That changing in the middle of the session like that, do you really have time to change how you're going to attack a lap?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, you certainly -- it's an adjustment. You think about it before you go on track because you've been used to preparing your lap at the

hairpin all weekend long. All of a sudden it's a different story in Turn 9. It was about having a good exit out of Turn 8 on cold tires, so yeah, it was a little bit more tricky, and it certainly also changed your first lap because you don't have as much time to warm up the tires.

Yeah, I mean, the biggest thing, like we just talked about, the data guy basically tells you the line has changed, it's there on the data, so it gives you a visual before you get on the track.

Q. Helio, considering that you won the pole at Phoenix and that gives you the pit out first position, and remembering last year's race you were on the pole, and I think this gentleman next to you kind of got in your way leaving the pits and then his teammate won, so he sort of helped his teammate --

TONY KANAAN: Yeah, it was really, like we timed it so perfect.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, that's a big advantage, if we don't have to worry about that scenario. Whatever happens in the track, we'll be ready to go. It always paid off to be in this situation, and I'm glad that I don't need to worry about who's coming behind, and we've just got to go.

Q. You've been driving for a long time. Have you had two consecutive poles before?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yes, I did. I think it was St. Pete and -- I think St. Pete or here. Yeah, I think. 2006 or 2005. That's probably the years. It's been that long, yes, and we're still doing it.

Q. Helio, you started racing here many years ago. How has the track changed and the competition changed between then and now?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: The track changed this year. They took some curbs out. They add a little bit on Turn 5, a different type of curbs. Still don't know if it's better or worse --

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: I think it's better.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I didn't answer that. I was just saying. I don't know if -- I'm just saying. The point is it did change this year, but in the same way the competition has been really hard.

In fact, I think Juan Pablo and I were talking about that, the timing difference on the braking, it's becoming so huge now. It's very difficult to pass someone because everybody is braking so late in the corner for you to try to pass someone, it's very difficult because everybody is already on the limit. So the competition is definitely

harder.

With the aerodynamics, the tires, Firestone tires, it brought quite a lot of the equipment to the high level, which makes sometimes the way to drive the car a little more suitable to everyone, not only for those that are able to be more comfortable.

It changed a lot, so we've just got to keep updating your computer and keep going.

Q. Any of you can really chime in on this. You now have I believe it's 20 more horsepower with the Push-to-Pass, and it's 10 pushes for 20 seconds here. I don't think you've had quite that much horsepower here. Being that some of the places have bumps, maybe it's successful trying to get by someone, maybe not, but how much of a difference is that going to make in passing here at Long Beach?

SIMON PAGENAUD: It's a track where passing is possible because it's such a long straight line, it definitely should be easier than St. Petersburg. It's always a game of downforce level, as well, so we'll see who does what and who decides to do what on that. It's a good track here, and the pit sequence is also super important. That's where you see the most passes because it's really hard on cold tires when you leave the pits, so there's always something interesting happening on the out lap, and I think there's going to be some action tomorrow.

Q. There's no surprise on the two teams that are represented up here in front of us, but are you at all concerned with somebody else that was very, very strong in qualifying or just throughout the weekend so far that got to keep your eyes on?

WILL POWER: Are we concerned about anyone else?

Q. Outside this top six.

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: When you look at the practice, we were all -- all these cars were the fast cars normally in practice. The Hondas looked pretty good in Q-2. I don't know what happened. In Q-1 it was. Muñoz had speed, too. Yeah, I think we were probably sandbagging.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Apparently we do that very well. We sandbag until now, and then we go.

Q. What does hitting the paint on the curbs, how does that affect your grip level here, if at all?

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: Not at all.

Q. Not at all? Tell the truth.

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: No, it's fine. I like the curbs. They're tricky to hit them right, and that's it. The grip

level is fine.

Q. I know all six of you are very loyal Chevrolet drivers. With what we saw at St. Pete where it seemed to be fairly competitive between the two makes and then to come here in practice it looked kind of competitive between Chevy and Honda, are you surprised there's not a Honda driver up there in the top six?

TONY KANAAN: I mean, I think it comes down to qualifying. Nowadays it's so close, it's going to depend on so many things that have to happen right, and at the end, I think we were able to put a better lap than those guys. I think it was a lot of noise around so many things that we are doing right instead of them looking at what they are doing wrong. I think they're strong. I think Graham looked pretty strong. Like he said, Muñoz looked pretty strong. But it came down to the fast -- the fast 12, I think it comes down to one lap sometimes. You never know, sometimes somebody makes a mistake. I don't know if that's a coincidence, but we just did a better job.