

IndyCar Media Conference

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Takuma Sato

Jack Hawksworth

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joined now by Jack Hawksworth, who finished second fastest in overall practice today, along with his teammate Takuma Sato who finished first and will be in here shortly. Jack, it's been kind of a bumpy start to the season, especially for you personally, but how does this feel coming out of a tough rain day, obviously very challenging track, and having the team up top?

JACK HAWKSWORTH: It's been good. I mean, we've been good on practice days at every single race pretty much this year. You know, kind of just focused on continuing it throughout the weekend. And yeah, capitalizing on the performance of the car. We've gone to St. Pete, Long Beach, certainly both tracks where we had a very, very good car, and in practice. For several reasons it didn't work out, but we seem to have a good car here, as evidenced by both cars being at the front, so I'm looking forward to the race and hoping we can finally turn it into a positive result this weekend.

THE MODERATOR: You've mentioned that you've had some strong practice results in a couple of races. What does that take to have that translate over to a qualifying run or great race run?

JACK HAWKSWORTH: Not much really. It's just bibs and bobs which we've stumbled -- we've tripped ourselves up on occasion, and that's really what's hurt us. You know, I don't want to make any predictions for this weekend because I've thought each race this year we're been pretty impressed, okay, this is going to be a good weekend, and then it's all gone down the pan, but I feel like we should be good, and no reason why not, so we've just got to not shoot ourselves in the foot and have a good weekend.

THE MODERATOR: This track specifically, what kind of challenges does it present to drivers and teams as they try to win the race?

JACK HAWKSWORTH: I love this place. It's one of the few tracks we go to where you really get a sense of what an IndyCar can do in terms of performance of the car. We go to street circuits, ovals, very different

techniques, various different driving styles and tricky things you have to do to be quick, but when you come to this track, just from an enjoyment perspective, I think you get more out of it than anywhere else just on the basis that you're going through these big undulations and elevation changes, fast corners, and it's just so much fun. You realize how much grip these cars have got, and you get other cars around this track, it's a lot of fun.

THE MODERATOR: There's no need to kind of beat around it, there's been a lot of discussion this season around Honda versus Chevy and the performance of each. What does it mean to have several Hondas at the top of the time charts today?

JACK HAWKSWORTH: Yeah, it's good. I think it's been close on occasions, and especially a circuit like this, high downforce suits us for sure, and yeah, I mean, it was close at St. Pete and it was close at Long Beach. I'd like to see what happens in qualifying tomorrow. I'm sure that big teams like Penske and Ganassi will be pretty strong, so we'll see how that goes. Certainly it seems pretty close this weekend, and hopefully it should be close battle at the front.

Q. New engineer this weekend; how has that gone so far?

JACK HAWKSWORTH: It's been good. I say he's a new engineer; I've worked with him for the past three seasons. He was my performance engineer at Bryan Herta Auto Sport, and then when I moved to AJ Foyt he came with me and was the performance engineer on Takuma's car last year, but I obviously still had a very close relationship with him, and this season he was working on my car as the performance engineer. Very clever guy. We have a very good relationship.

I always knew he was going to end up engineering my car at some point or another in the future. I didn't realize it was going to be quite this soon, but it's been good. He's very clever. We have a good relationship, and I think it's a good dynamic. Hopefully we can go prove that this weekend.

Q. I talked to George yesterday and he felt this was going to be a pretty competitive track for both Hondas and Chevrolets, and I guess from looking at today's action I think he was spot on on that.

JACK HAWKSWORTH: I think so. The big thing is I think this is a good track for Honda. It suits us going to these places where we have a lot of downforce on the car, I think. Yeah, I think it looks pretty close from practice. We'll see what happens in qualifying.

Q. What's it been like having George join the team?

JACK HAWKSWORTH: George has been fantastic. He's really helped bring the team together. I'd say he's like the glue for the team. I've enjoyed working with him, it's great having him on the stand, and he's done a lot for the team so far, and as Takuma showed at the first three races the results are good, and hopefully we can continue that throughout the season and get that 41 car in the points, as well.

Q. We've had drivers in today that have been on a four-car team, we've had a driver like a Josef Newgarden who's essentially running a single-car team, but you guys have each other. What does that do in terms of data sharing and having a teammate that you can bounce off ideas and strategies, especially around a challenging track like Barber?

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, that's the whole idea, to have a two-car team. Maybe last year the team operation wasn't maybe 100 percent. But I think, like Jack mentioned, George came on board, and it seems to be working for us much better this year. We share the data all the time for sure. Jack and I are working together to build to make the car faster, and today we could see the achievement that the whole engineering did a lot of studies and then preparation after the spring test, which usually very cold here, but it's only a month ago, and it was pretty warm testing, a similar event for today's testing, so everything was working pretty good.

THE MODERATOR: And obviously you finished fastest of the day. What all came together for you this afternoon?

TAKUMA SATO: It's good. Just tiny details, working on the small factors, and Jack and I divided a few problems and experimented test items, and we got everything back together, and then show the trim and the speed for the team, for team showed, and he had mentioned the Honda package seems to be working pretty well, so we were happy to see it, of course, and good competition out there. Extremely close to everyone else.

I don't know what's happening for tomorrow. Conditions might be changing and maybe we'll see, but at least we've been competitive the first two sessions. That's been promising.

Q. Takuma, how difficult has passing been this year? That's always been something you've been good at and known for in the past. How difficult is it to get by now?

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, it was tough. Clearly Penske seems to be more trimmed car than our car, just only looking at the height of wickers and gurney flaps, and obviously we don't know the competition's aero package, how does it work, but just cosmetically we are a little bit dragging. But in hindsight we might have generate more downforce, so that's why I was one of very maybe let's say happy cars on the track last weekend, to be able to consistent lap times, and then still we are in the shadow of good cars from the readers and we had a chance, and I was able to challenge with Penske, which is something big compliment for the team. Very, very good, so we were happy. Not easy to overtake here and there both, and here probably you need to be different tires to overtake, and still, I think it's only Turn 5 hairpin in normal circumstance. But I think still was a challenge doing everything.

Q. As a two-car team, I think maybe the two of you can try different things when you get here. You only have so much practice time, and I don't if your driving styles are similar, but as far as this track is concerned, when you want to make a car go fast and there are long straightaways, then it would seem to me that you don't want a lot of drag on the car. How do you balance that with trying to make the car stable on this kind of track with the high-speed turns?

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, I mean, like you said, this is one of the long straight. But equally there's so many long turns in the corner actually, so the corner is generating a lot of lap time, so actually high downforce. Of course we have something, put it on if you want it, but like I said, that's only draggy part. It's not very efficient. I think team in Honda found a good balance, the drag versus downforce, and that's something you have to ask for the tire, as well. Tire needs some -- the downforce to get into the proper working range. If you're out of that, you're just not generating heat and not properly using tires, then your grip is extremely go down.

Just finding balance, and then you need a good platform control for the consistent aeros, and that simplifies a little bit for the mechanical grip. So it's always balance, and I think Jack and I, I would say it's not far off. Driving style is slightly different, but I think we pretty much drive a similar setup, and I would say we were happy each other to back and forth, and then if he found the speed and we took it, and then I'd go faster and I'd go faster, and then he gave me and he'd go faster, so I think it working pretty good now.

after that we can sort it out on the track, so I think that'll be what happens.

JACK HAWKSWORTH: Yeah, for sure, completely, I agree with Takuma. As he said, driving style wise, there's little differences, but fundamentally, if he likes something usually we put it on my car and I like it and vice versa, if I like something, usually we put it on his car and he likes it. You're always going to get that one or two small intricate changes which you make for qualifying which maybe helps him get that last tenth out of it or maybe helps me get that last tenth out of it, but fundamentally if one of us is happy with the car, both of us usually are, so that works well.

THE MODERATOR: I think the final time separating you guys today was like four thousandths of a second.

Q. Takuma, I'll ask you the same thing I asked Jack before you got here, but George yesterday thought it's going to be a real good even battle between the Hondas and the Chevys at this course. Why is that? What is it about this track that's going to allow a little bit better competitiveness than what we saw last week and when you were pretty much the only Honda driver that could pass?

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, I mean, the proper answer is I don't know. It must be our aero efficiency is matching about the same level, so that's why I think we are both very similar competition-wise. At some of the tracks, like if you go to Phoenix, which is obviously oval, it's different, but if you see the extremely low drag, low downforce situation with low course package, and we had a little difficulty, but here it seems to be working, pretty happy place, and that's hopefully our kind of reason. We really need to go back in and do an alliance with all the Honda groups why we are good and why we are not good on different parts of the track.

Q. Let's say, last lap, two AJ Foyt racing cars are fighting for the league up to the checkered flag. Is it going to be friendly or is it going to be all hands on deck?

TAKUMA SATO: We see just the healthy competition down here. Jack and I, it's usually trying to work as a team. That's the first priority, and at the end of the day, he's a racing driver so he doesn't want to be beaten, and so do I. But I think, as I said, it's a healthy condition, like other teams, too. So we are happy.

Firstly, we need to make sure we have no mistakes, no problems, because with a good qualifying tomorrow, and after that I think Larry and AJ can decide.

JACK HAWKSWORTH: Exactly the same as what Takuma said. We're very competitive. We're racing each other hard all the time and pushing each other, but the important thing is we get both ABC Supply cars at the front. That's really goal number one, and then