

IndyCar Media

Conference

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Gabby Chaves

Charlie Kimball

Townsend Bell

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Townsend, the speed was good today.

TOWNSEND BELL: Yeah, obviously had a nice tow this morning, but worked a lot on race setup all day and made a lot of gains. Really proud of my team of guys that have come together to support this fifth car one-off entry with Andretti, and also really thankful to be part of a five-car program where there's so much information to learn and reanalyze what I do and all of that. Also the chance to run with them in traffic repeatedly is, I think, helping me a lot.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously this isn't your first rodeo, so does it make it fairly easy for you to fall right back in?

TOWNSEND BELL: Yeah, I think so. Everything feels very familiar, so new engineers, first time working with Craig Hampson, he's been just terrific, and Jeff Grunds (ph), my crew chief. The car has been just meticulously presented every day. The guys haven't made any mistakes, and they're very methodical with the preparation of the car, and that just gives you a lot of confidence knowing that you've got really solid, experienced people that are making sure that you've got the best thing that they can give you.

Q. Speed-wise you and Carlos are very close. How identical is your setup?

TOWNSEND BELL: I don't know, actually. I'd have to look just for where they ended up. We did a long run towards the end of the day with Carlos, as well. I know there's some fundamental differences, but a lot of that is kind of just driver feel, I think, at this point. I've learned some things that Carlos tried early on on Monday and yesterday that I tried and liked. I tried some things Ryan tried. Those guys have tried some things I've tried.

So I tend to think we're all kind of migrating to something similar, so that's been really helpful. That's huge to have that amount of information.



Q. It's been a while since you've been in the car, but you've come back to the Indy 500. Can you explain, have there been any differences you've noticed with some of the safety features they've added to the car? Do you feel any differences?

TOWNSEND BELL: Not at all. I just watched like everybody did when Spencer unfortunately had his issue, which I understand was a cut tire. It's really unfortunate when you're a rookie to have that. I feel bad for him. But certainly it looked different than crashes we've seen previous in the last few years of a similar nature, 180 in Turn 1, and the moment it went backwards, you could just tell that the car was on the ground the whole time.

I actually think it might slow down better if it goes in the air just because it's like an envelope flying off the roof of a car, but I think it's probably a good idea that we stay on the ground.

Q. And what about the safety feature of the domed skids? I understand you have to raise the ride height of the car up higher. That's not what normally a team would do.

TOWNSEND BELL: Yeah, I think that part of it clearly makes the setup maybe a little more challenging and the driving maybe a little trickier. I think that maybe the setup window is a little narrower if you're running higher, at least that's kind of what it feels like to me out there, but it's subtle. It's not like it's way higher. But again, I think the Andretti team has done a good job to come prepared, as has Honda. I think I'm in the television media a good part of the year, and it's almost weird because two months ago it was all about, oh, my gosh, Chevy is just dominating, and Honda, you know, has just done a phenomenal job to keep their heads down, keep working, and they've come here very well-prepared, and I'm super proud to be in one of their cars. It's been neat.

I told somebody earlier, you know, for as long as I've watched the television, which is since I was probably five, Honda has always won. You know, they've won in Supercross when I was a kid. They've won in Moto GP. They've won in Formula 1. So in the back of my head, even back when things might not look so good at the beginning of the season, I just knew that they would come back, especially for this race, with a strong

program.

Q. From what I remember Marco saying, but having to put the domed skids in, this was probably back at the time they did the original test here at the speedway when it was kind of cold and windy, but he said something about having to raise the ride height half an inch was huge. So I'm wondering, are you able to find -- I think that's what everybody is trying to do, find ways to get the mechanical aspects, the mechanical grip back that you would lose by raising the car up?

TOWNSEND BELL: Well, I think you're just finding ways to deal with it. There's no way to lower the car back down, so there's kind of no free lunch, as they like to say. But I think we feel like we've got things to a pretty good spot where that change is manageable, and that's what you look for. You know, you can't undo the ride height, but you just try to look for ways to manage the dynamic change that comes along with it.

THE MODERATOR: Gabby, you're at the top of the chart and that's got to make you feel pretty good.

GABBY CHAVES: Yeah, it certainly does. It's only practice, but it feels pretty good. It's my first time at the top of the charts here at IMS in IndyCar. Just pleased with the work the team has been doing. Very pleased with the performance that Honda has been putting out, as well.

Overall I think we've got a pretty strong package.

Q. Back to this conversation that Mary had with the ride height, yesterday Ryan thought that -- we're talking about a pack or running in traffic, that it worked for the guy that's fifth or sixth in line as opposed to the person who's right behind that person that's ahead of that. Did you see any of that or do you have any sense that it's worse at one place or another when it comes to just all the dirty air and the turbulence, et cetera?

GABBY CHAVES: Yeah, I think there's a difference. Certainly in my experience, when you get behind five, six cars, it's worse than when you're just behind one. But again, that's the way it is, and that's why we're running out there trying to find those groups, so we can tune the car for that.

THE MODERATOR: Charlie, you're becoming a regular here. You've been in this room a lot; that's good, and you had a good solid day, and you've had a good solid month thus far.

CHARLIE KIMBALL: Yeah, I think we're pretty good. The 42 has been decent. It's kind of weird saying the 42 rather than the 83, but the 42 has been pretty good

in traffic, and we worked a lot on the race car today. I think at the moment it's pretty tough. The conditions were fairly good. The weather was nice, the wind not terrible, but I think we're fighting from a little bit of a hole here.

But at the moment, we're focused kind of from today moving forward into tomorrow to see what we get when the boost level changes, at least for qualifying, because it is a whole different package. We did a little bit of qualifying work at the end of the day, and that was enough. So we'll focus on that tomorrow. But we spent a lot of time earlier in the day working in the packs, working in traffic, and pretty happy with it. Like we tried something that just didn't work, and we tried to work with it and tried to work with it, and then went back, and it's like, all right, we're back on solid footing here.

I think everybody at Chip Ganassi Racing, we're sharing data. We're learning a lot kind of following each other's leads when they're promising, and learning from each other's mistakes, as well. That's the greatest thing about having four cars like that that are solid, and Max is doing a great job, and then Scott and Tony are always forces to be reckoned with around here.

Q. Charlie, you mentioned tomorrow in qualifying you have higher pulls. Does it require a lot of changes to cars in any kind of areas? Do you start at zero again with the setup?

CHARLIE KIMBALL: As far as I'm concerned, what I do doesn't change much. You'd have to ask one of the engineers and the mechanics what goes on. I know it's a little bit of tapping on the computer and then some stuff mechanically as far as I know, but other than that, in the cockpit it doesn't really change, and that's kind of my area of expertise.

Q. It looks like you guys are still able to get by another car this year fairly easily but a little later in the straightaway. Is that probably a fair assumption to make?

TOWNSEND BELL: Yeah, maybe. I think like years past, if you get a big train of 10 cars and somebody gets a run off a corner and then pops out, they're meeting the cold front, as it were, of hard, fresh air, and then you're trying to pass a car that's still in that funnel of pretty serious draft. That's always the challenge.

But I think we've had really good conditions these first three days. I mean, at the end of the day, the wind socks were just hanging. The track temp wasn't that high. And it's not that easy driving this track. It never is here.

So I think if the wind picks up and it's hotter later in May, it makes it more difficult, and I think that that increases the little mistakes that we all will make, and then it increases kind of the raceability of the race because guys are lifting or checking up and that sort of thing.

When the conditions are good, I think it limits the number of little mistakes that help lead to more passing.

Q. Years ago when Formula 1 was here, Ron Dennis had a little press conference, and he made a comment which was interesting. He said, some of our guys come here and they think, how hard can it be, it's just a circle, and he said, you need to think really hard about that. Do you think some drivers come here and think, how hard can this be, it's just a circle, and then they're just amazed at how much the track changes and how much it takes?

CHARLIE KIMBALL: I mean, listening to Max and his sort of first foray, he spent a decent amount of time here last year racing in Lights practice and qualifying in Lights, and then as the wind conditions, having Dario mentoring him has helped, but it's amazing, still to this day, me, I am blown away by how much all four corners change with a little wind direction, a little wind velocity, cloud cover, sun. One car in front of you, two cars in front of you, a train in front of you, cars behind you, it completely changes the complexion of each corner, and so you need to make sure as far as mechanically and aerodynamically with the car, you've got a car that can work within that window as those corners evolve, as the racetrack grows and evolves during the course of the week and then on race day as those 500 miles develop, as clouds come and go and wind comes and goes. The racetrack does not stay the same for 500 miles, so you have to make sure that you've got a car and you can race the track as it changes.

But I mean, the challenge of it sure is a lot of fun.

Q. Gabby, how fast has this month kind of moved for you, especially the past couple weeks? Has it been tough to adjust or anything like that?

GABBY CHAVES: Well, this month for me started 10 days ago, or eight days ago when I found out I was going to race at the Grand Prix, and now I'm just really stoked just to be here. And then to be out there and I think pretty competitive, it just feels pretty good.

Q. Gabby, in case you have extra very positive result here, does that mean maybe it brings you back in IndyCar, or are you staying with the Lexus program for the rest of the year?

GABBY CHAVES: I think you're talking about Sage. I

mean, for me, regardless of the result here, I want to be in IndyCar, so that's what I'm trying to work on. I think obviously a good result will definitely help that.

Q. (No microphone.)

GABBY CHAVES: I mean, I'm trying to work on and hopefully finishing up the season, but for now, yes, just in this race.