

# IndyCar Media Conference

Thursday May 26, 2016

## James Hinchcliffe

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome, everyone, to today's IndyCar media teleconference. Today's guest won his first Verizon IndyCar Series pole position and did it for the biggest race of the season, the 100th Indianapolis 500. We welcome to the call James Hinchcliffe of Schmidt Peterson Motorsports.

James, welcome to the call.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Thank you very much.

THE MODERATOR: As I said, James is the driver of the No. 5 Arrow Schmidt Peterson Motorsports Honda, and sits provisionally fifth in points after winning 42 points for winning the pole for Sunday's Indy 500.

James, has it all sunk in what was accomplished by you and the team over the weekend?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yes and no. Obviously it was a huge day for the whole team, not just getting pole position, but getting all our team cars into the top 10. Earlier in the day, Sam was on track in his car doing 150 miles an hour. All in all, Sunday was a pretty special day for everybody at SPM.

To a certain extent, it's sunk in and we're appreciating it. We know 10 miles in qualifying is one thing and 500 miles on Sunday is a totally different thing. That's what we're focused on.

THE MODERATOR: You mentioned it. There are 500 more miles, 200 laps around IMS for the weekend. How do you approach the start of the 500 and the race, having the best seat in the house?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: There's no doubt it's an advantage starting up front here. We've seen time and time again, it certainly doesn't guarantee a good result and it doesn't mean that anybody starting outside the top 10 can't have a good one either. You see winners come from the high teens and low 20s and beyond.

For us, the strategy is just to try and run up front and stay up front all afternoon. There's going to be a lot of things thrown at us. There always is in this race. Patience is going to be the key of the day. There's going to be a lot of ebb and flow.

We have a fast car. The Arrow car has been fast in race runnings. There have been a lot of strong cars, though. There's going to be a lot of competition, no doubt. The number one pit stall is going to be an advantage, as well. We have a few things working in our favor, but it's definitely going to be a hard-fought battle out there.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions for James Hinchcliffe.

**Q. James, do you think being a Honda driver, having a pole position with Honda, is that going to be an advantage for you, or do you think your performance at Indy for the Grand Prix where you finished third, do you think that gave you a bit of momentum going forward into the month of May?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Well, I think if you look at last year's race, the whole 5 team has been getting a lot of momentum on our side. We had a pretty strong race in Long Beach, a little bit better in Barber, as you said better at the Grand Prix, getting on the podium.

To get a Honda on pole position at the Speedway, it broke a pole-less streak of 32 races for Honda. It's a big accomplishment. They deserve a ton of credit for the amount of work they put into their program for the month of May. The engines that we have here at the Speedway are obviously producing big horsepower. It's great we were able to do that.

Yeah, for sure, I think momentum is kind of on our side as a team. Hopefully this is a little bit of a shift in terms of the manufacturer battle as well.

**Q. James, how significant is it for you to be on the pole for the 100th running of this race? You raced a lot of places, but what is it about this race and this Speedway that makes it so enduring, so special?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: For me I think pole for us was probably a little bit extra special than it would have been for anyone else. I mean, being on pole here at the Speedway is something that everyone's obviously fighting for. It's a huge point of pride. The race teams and the mechanics put so much time into these cars. It's the time you're going for ultimate speed.

The drivers will tell you those four laps are one of the hardest, scariest things we do in an IndyCar all year. It is a huge point of pride.

When you look back a year for us as an entire team, to have come back from where we were a year ago, to now be sitting here, I would strongly argue anybody that would have tried to say that this pole would have meant more to them than it would us.

I'm so proud of the guys, like I said. It really validates all the hard work they put into all the cars to have all three in the top 10.

As far as the track goes, this place, it has something that money can't buy, and that's history. You can go out and build a brand-new racetrack somewhere. You can make it a billion-dollar facility that's start-of-the-art this, nicest that, top of this. But at the end of the day there's no substitute for history.

Not only does this race have a hundred years now, the tradition that goes along with it as well. It's not just a race; it really truly is an event. The whole city gets behind it from the day the calendar switches from April to May. You feel the buzz around town, the amount of events there are. All that goes into this race, it's a combination of things that really make it so special.

**Q. James, you will have had basically an entire week to kind of sit back and more or less reflect on your position, hear some of the hype surrounding your position heading into this race. How are you dealing with that? Do you try to harness that energy or do you become a recluse from it all?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, it's tough sometimes to kind of have that balance. Part of you really wants to enjoy the moment and appreciate the accomplishment that we've managed to achieve as a team. But the other part of you is the fierce competitor that understands we still have the race to go. Qualifying even isn't even half the battle.

It is a balance for sure. Obviously with the particular storyline of this pole, it being my first, it being the hundredth running, it being one year on from the accident, there's a lot of reasons to kind of take a moment and reflect. I certainly allowed myself some of that.

I'm wiser now than I was a year ago and know that these opportunities and moments don't come along very often in life and you need to kind of take pause and appreciate them.

I've allowed myself to do that a bit. At the end of the day, we're here to race. We weren't here to qualify.

The focus is now very firmly on the 500.

**Q. Since last year's situation took place, do you have any special routine or ritual that you've since included into your life, whether it be at the racetrack or away from it? Is there something you do specifically leading into a race that you didn't do before? Is that something you keep private?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Honestly, no. I've said from day one that professionally I didn't change. The accident didn't change me. I'm just as hungry, just as driven. I approach race weekends and individual sessions and things like that in the exact same manner. There's no additional ritual or routine. What I was doing before, in my opinion, was working. So I've kind of just carried on that way.

**Q. When it comes to getting in the zone, what sort of techniques do you use to get yourself there? What is the sensation like when you are there?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: For racing drivers, it's incredibly difficult because unlike other athletes, we are still subjects of the public and sponsors and media until the minute we get to our racecars and start putting on our helmets. We don't have hours before an event to start getting into a mental zone. We're literally shaking hands and taking pictures while standing beside our racecars on the grid.

They force you to be able to make that transition almost instantaneously. For me over the years, I've really kind of used the moments as I'm getting ready to get in the racecar, putting in my earpieces, putting on my balaclava, my helmet, my gloves, my HANS device, strapping in.

That whole sort of process and procedure for me is the time I get myself to flip that switch to go from the public figure to the competitor and try to get your mind into the right place.

Sometimes it's easier than others, there's no doubt. Sometimes you wish you had more time to do that. But it's the nature of the beast. It's the same for all the drivers on the grid.

Like I said, it's something we've just kind of learned to cope with. The good news is, once you get in that racecar and you're strapped in, the engine fires up, the visors go down, it's very calming and peaceful in a sense because it's just kind of you and the racecar finally, which is what you are really here to do. There's no more people talking, no more distractions, it's just you and the job at hand.

**Q. Around Indianapolis in particular, have you had any particular moments where it's felt perfection**

**for you when you've been in the car?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: There's been a couple moments here where you kind of allow yourself to really take in what's happening. I led my first lap here back in 2012. One of the few times in my career in a racecar at speed I kind of gave myself a second to take in the situation, take in the scene, coming out of turn two, nobody in front of me, 32 cars behind me, the balloon in the air from the start of the race, the grandstands absolutely full. It's a special feeling for sure. It's not one you can enjoy for too long because turn three comes at you pretty quick at 220.

**Q. James, you mentioned being a racecar driver, you're also pretty much a team member with the engineers. We've seen the evolution of the Dallara DW12 into this new aero package era, even with changes happening this year. What is your impression of what's happening with some of the setups being asymmetric, different side pods, different wings?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I mean, I think it's typical of Indianapolis Motor Speedway. If you go back through history, you see a lot of funny things happen here, a lot of guys getting creative on the engineering side to find that extra 10th of a mile an hour.

For us it's pretty standard to see people trying things outside of the box when you're running around this place.

**Q. What did you see as far as the changes on the setup on the No. 5?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I could tell you but I'd have to kill you (laughter).

No doubt the aero regulations this year changed the cars a bit. Firestone brought a new compound tire that changed the way the cars handle a bit. We did have to get away from things that were traditionally Speedway setup changes, to get the cars feeling a little more normal, back to how we want them to.

This week of practice was a little more challenging than in some of the years past just trying to get a handle on that and get the cars racing well again.

**Q. Having a three-car team this year, do you think that gives you a bit of an advantage going into the Indy 500 so you can draw on the experience of the other two guys on the team?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Absolutely. I mean, to a certain extent, the more the merrier. I've been on big teams that had five cars. I've been on a two-car team.

Certainly during practice week there's always a lot of things that teams want to try. You like having additional

cars to try and cover as much information as possible.

The huge benefit that comes from more cars is being able to simulate race running together. You can all go out, new tires, really get some valuable information about how the car is going to handle in traffic, which is what this race is all about.

So for us to have three cars is definitely a good start. Maybe not as good as Andretti Autosport that has five. Five different drivers and five different engineers with information can get a little daunting and overwhelming.

**Q. All three of your cars are in the top 10, which is fantastic.**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, no, you got Mikhail, who is fearless on ovals. You have Oriol, who is incredibly experienced, a huge mentor to me in my rookie season when we were teammates. It's been a good combination so far.

**Q. What do you equate this moment as being for you? What does it mean as a whole, if you can answer that?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I think it means and shows there was never doubt in my mind or the team's mind that we'd be back. To come here and do this the way that we did I think really puts a firm stamp on it and closes that chapter, and now we can look forward. Hopefully in a couple days we've got an even cooler story to tell.

**Q. Having recovered from an accident like yours last year, how much does that teach you about yourself mentally and particularly maybe about the human spirit in general?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Well, for sure, I mean, you learn a lot about a lot of things. You have a lot of time to reflect, a lot of time to look inwards. I would say that I learned a lot about myself in that time. The power of the human mind is pretty incredible.

It's tough to describe, tough to put into words unless you've been through something like that. I always considered myself to be a driven person, a motivated person. But given the situation where the thing that you know the best on earth, the only thing you've done with your life really is almost being taken away from you, it definitely motivates you to work harder and get back to where you want to be to continue doing what you do.

THE MODERATOR: Seeing as we have no further questions for James, we will thank him for his time today, wish him the best of luck this weekend in the Indianapolis 500.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Thank you so much. Thanks to everyone for calling in.