

IndyCar Media Conference

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Mikhail Aleshin Sebastien Bourdais Scott Dixon

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with today's Verizon IndyCar Series media availability. We are joined by three of the drivers competing this weekend, but also three drivers that competed in the marathon 24 Hours of Le Mans last weekend.

Sebastien, we will start with you as the class winner of your group. Winning in your hometown, that had to be a completely amazing experience. Tell us about your emotions as the race came to a conclusion.

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Yeah, it was a heck of a race, for sure. Just to be part of that program for Chip Ganassi Racing, being in the car, to be on top of that podium, really it was a great effort. Four cars there, four cars at the end. For me, this has been a long time coming, just trying to chase this one for quite some time.

Just a lot of emotions. Probably quite a few left over. But just an awesome feeling, and very privileged to share that with a great group of guys. Obviously now it's in the books, so it's going to remain there. It's quite special for me to have been able to achieve that with my teammates, Joe and Dirk.

THE MODERATOR: Mikhail, you were also competing in that race, finished seventh overall. You missed a few things because of our rain delay in Texas. Talk about how that affected your weekend.

MIKHAIL ALESHIN: Didn't miss much. Because I still had the practice before qualifying. Was enough for me. I was happy because I missed some of it because there's just so much testing sometimes. You just need to stay a lot of time there.

The timing was good and I was happy to get there in time. So, yeah, I mean, the weekend was going well. The team had a good shape during all the distance. We had some technical issues in our car in the middle, but still managed to finish the race. Be seventh, not too bad result.

THE MODERATOR: Scott, also a great finish for you, being part of the winning team. Also with a familiar face, Ryan Briscoe with you. What was the experience like for you as part of Chip Ganassi Racing?

SCOTT DIXON: I don't know, for me, it was definitely very special. It's a hell of an event. It's kind of like the European version of the Indy 500, just the sheer size and the atmosphere. The atmosphere, it was crazy. It was a lot of fun to be a part of. For me, for the first trip there, it was eyes wide open and try to take in as much as possible.

Far and away enjoyed the parade. The parade is definitely on another level, with alcohol mixed. Made it pretty interesting (laughter).

I don't know. Just really happy obviously for Sebastien. He's run there many years and come close many times. To get that victory, those guys did it in style. The car was pretty fast and made no mistakes the whole race.

Also stokes for Chip. To win all these marquee events, to go and win for Ford his first trip to Le Mans is pretty impressive. What he's achieved in his career already, it's already (indiscernible) compared to some of the guys he's been compared against.

Just really excited to be part of the project. Ford got their storybook ending they were looking for. Just happy for everybody. I was excited to take part in it. Hopefully our schedules work out to be a part of it next year.

THE MODERATOR: Those marquee events that you mentioned. Chip Ganassi became the only owner in history to win the Indy 500, the Daytona 500, Brickyard 400, Rolex 24 at Daytona, 12 Hours of Sebring, and Le Mans 24 Hours.

Switching gears a little bit. We're here at Road America. You all were on track this morning. Sebastien, the most recent race winner, what were your thoughts getting back on track today?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: A little surprised to be honest. We had a really good test back in October. I

really enjoyed my Hydroxycut machine with Chevrolet there. When we came back this morning, it was off. We were definitely struggling a little bit. We seemed to be hurting the tires pretty badly.

We got some work to do. We'll see how we can bounce back. But it was not expected that way, for sure.

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

Q. (No microphone.)

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Well, we came testing here in October. It was basically the Mid-Ohio tire, which we knew, were pretty familiar with. I think everybody enjoys it pretty much on the road course. They decided they wanted to go to a thin gauge tire just because of blister issues. These long duration corners.

But when you go to a thin gauge tire, then you don't have much farther to wear before you get to a bad spot on the tire. It's always that balancing between too much rubber, not enough rubber.

Firestone feels that it's a better compromise to maybe finish a bit thinner on the tire than blistering it. It's definitely tough to get reads. Basically when you start losing enough rubber, then you can't sustain the heat in the tire. Balance becomes very difficult to manage.

Everybody is going to go through it and it's fine. But definitely on the test session, it's a bit difficult to get the change, everything you're trying to achieve.

Q. (No microphone.)

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Well, I think there is no arguing that this paddock is filled with very talented drivers. Obviously Scott has been at the top of the charts here in IndyCar, showing every time he steps in anything else, you know... The level of competition from IndyCar, how good drivers are around here.

Will has mostly an international background, as well. We've been around, have got some experience. I don't think it's unexpected.

Obviously every time you get signed up for these kind of events, basically recognizes you're up for the job. After that, you don't want to look stupid and make a fool of yourself. But I think there's a reason why we end up in the positions we end up here, and that's because the level here is strong, and there's no arguing that.

SCOTT DIXON: Can I echo that?

I think the depth of the field we have in the Verizon IndyCar Series is like no other. It's extremely close. A

lot of great talent from all around.

I think, as kind of Sebastien said, anybody that has driven up against the best drivers in the world, other formulas, as well, have found their way here now.

I think we were lucky also to be involved in the Ford project. Sebastien obviously had raced at Le Mans many times before, he had that experience. For me, that part of it felt a little bit different. A little bit uneasy I think for the first day at Le Mans. Apart from that, I don't know, it's just the way it worked out.

Q. (No microphone.)

SCOTT DIXON: That was me waiting on Bourdais (laughter).

Q. This has been quite the stretch for you. Does it take a toll at all?

SCOTT DIXON: Monday at the Glen was a little bit of an eye-opener. Just going from Le Mans straight to Watkins. The speed of the car there no with the reseal is pretty impressive. That definitely woke me up pretty quickly. I slept well that night.

Q. (No microphone.)

SCOTT DIXON: It was fine. Got together for a couple days. I think with the racing schedule, it actually helps you click back into the time zones pretty easy.

Q. (No microphone.)

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: I wouldn't call it tire issue. There's no issue. It's just a different equation, so you just have to deal with it.

We didn't test last week, so that was just unexpected from the test in October.

But there's no issue. Don't quote me saying that Firestone has an issue on the tire. It's just a different tire and you just have to change things around.

Go ahead and make a nasty comment if you want to.

Q. (No microphone.)

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: It was very different. Obviously the first time in the car, the great thing is I think Scott (indiscernible) straightaway, so he had some dry running. I got in the car, it started drizzling. Oh, great, that's awesome. I'm on slick tires and it's starting to drizzle on the back straight.

I have no idea what this car is like here. I got some distant memories from the track now because it changed a little bit. Four years ago was the last time.

The second stint is on wet tires. It's really wet in one

part, dry on the other. That's a tough position here. But, you know, I think all in all we got not even like 10 laps in the dry before I got in the race.

When I got out on the first stint, Scott had already been in the car. He was right on my butt. I better get my stuff together.

It was pretty intense straightaway, for sure. It was a bit weird, for sure, especially in the corners, with the GT, which was like 300 kilos heavier. You definitely really need to hit the reset button and not behave like you were in the prototype.

MIKHAIL ALESHIN: It was difficult with you guys up there all the time, all the 24 hours. Like, Not again (laughter)!

Q. (No microphone.)

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Yeah, personally, the only difference really is the weight. The biggest thing. The performance of the steel brakes back in the Champ Car days where we had two pads on each side, front and rear, it was really high performance. Just obviously the only thing is that wear. The pedal was going longer, and you needed to change that two or three times in the weekend. Now with the carbon brakes, you have a different thing.

We've been struggling, I think everybody knows that, with brakes. There's been a test lately. It's not black and white. You'd like to think that throwing carbon brakes would be smooth and easy and everything, but it's not so easy. We do have that change that around. Yeah, you shouldn't have to change brakes, really unless something goes wrong, you're not for a couple races really.

Q. (No microphone.)

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: I don't think overheating is a big issue here. The straights are so long. It's more of a problem on the street courses where you just go very short straights, brake and brake and brake again, with a lot of aero on the car, so the wind deflects the stuff.

That's the biggest problem here. It should be pretty easy on the brakes.

Q. (No microphone.)

SCOTT DIXON: Well, it was definitely different because I think we had a different tire coming back here. The car felt substantially different for me.

Plus, you know, some of the teammates, my teammates, had tested here. They find different things, and you kind of go reevaluate to see whether they work for yourself.

Yeah, I would say we didn't exactly hit the ground running. We had definitely some problems balance-wise and some brake issues and things perhaps.

Yeah, you know, I think for us, there was no separation from when we tested here six or eight months ago to even running a different tire, so, yeah, there were a lot of things that were different.

I think if you'd run here last week, you obviously would hope to have hit the ground running a little bit better than what we did.

Q. (No microphone.)

MIKHAIL ALESHIN: Well, definitely I'm very happy to be back. That was my plans. I was thinking about this all year last year. It happened. Very happy to be here. Thanks to Sam and the racing crew that supports me.

Yeah, it's a great series, definitely, one of the best series in case of drivers because it's very competitive. Really cool tracks. I love it.

I just haven't been on this track. It's my first session was today.

Q. (No microphone.)

MIKHAIL ALESHIN: Well, a little bit of everything. The main job was developing this prototype that I've been racing in Le Mans just now. That was my main job. I did all the things you said. Some fun definitely.

Q. (No microphone.)

MIKHAIL ALESHIN: Well, it's not so good as some years ago. But I still practice a little bit.

Q. (No microphone.)

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: I think everybody is (indiscernible) for sure. The track temp and the (indiscernible) which is only going to get worse. It's definitely having a big impact on this place. The pavement is not the newest, so I think it gets affected a little bit more than some of the other places sometimes.

When I went back out there, it was like, Whoa, why is it sliding so much? It was one of those where it was pretty sketchy.

As the track is rubbering up, as well, it's getting a little better. So hopefully we make some improvements on that.

Q. (No microphone.)

SCOTT DIXON: Right now I'd probably have to see if Chip wants to run a car. That seems to be how it goes. If he's running something, then I might get a shot at it.

I'd like to do the 12 Hour Bathurst, which is run in

February, at some point, and then do the Bathurst 1000 later on. Right now I don't see that as an option.