

IndyCar Media Conference

Friday July 15, 2016

Helio Castroneves James Hinchcliffe Simon Pagenaud Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by Helio Castroneves, who finished second fastest overall in today's two practice sessions.

Helio, an adventurous and exciting day. Take us through some of the things you experienced on track.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, definitely it's always great to come back here. Verizon IndyCar Series, always happy to be back, at least the competitors are happy. The crowd is great. The fans are awesome.

This year we're a little bit different. We're inside the cover. It's funny, because we don't know what's going on outside, if the weather is sun or raining. They told me it was raining. I was, Really? It obviously doesn't look like it.

Very good to be back here in Toronto. With the new changes on the track, it's just like a new track. You got to learn. You got to try new things. No question, we just start all over again. I guess tomorrow is going to continue going faster.

Great for the Pennzoil Chevrolet. Seems to be very good in this session. We learned a lot from the first one. I'm glad that we're able to share information with my teammates, which worked very well for me.

THE MODERATOR: You're a veteran. You've had to go from an oval to a street course before. Going from Iowa Speedway here to the streets of Toronto, what kind of challenges does that present?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: It's almost the same, believe it or not, because Iowa is so physically demanding because of the G force, the aero package is very similar to what we're using right now. But it's just different.

Obviously here with the patch we have in the middle of the corners, it's so slippery, especially the first practice. We're talking about 63.0, now we're going 61.9. It

shows how a lot of grip and speed you gain from one session to another.

The toughest part is for the mechanics. It takes about half a day to 16 hours to convert the cars from ovals to street course. No question, everyone, but certainly Team Penske, is doing a phenomenal job again.

THE MODERATOR: If I read my notes correctly, you have won pole here once before. We are qualifying tomorrow. What can we expect out of that session?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I believe it's 16 years ago that I had the pole position.

THE MODERATOR: I didn't want to bring it up.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: My memory is still pretty good (laughter). Unfortunately the first lap wasn't very good, but I still remember that, too.

Yeah, I really enjoy the place. We succeed once, even though it was a long time ago. I haven't come back here from 2002 to 2008 or something like that. It was great to be back. We need to keep continue working as a series, obviously, but in the end of the day the fans are what matters, and they are here and they're happy to be here.

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

Q. There is some discussion about the tightness of turn 11. Two guys hit the wall during the IndyCar practice. Several cars in the sports series. Are you happy with that? Would you like to see them open it up a bit?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: If I have a say, I would make some change, for sure. The main thing is IndyCar, they always adapt, especially the competitors, the drivers, they always adapt whatever circumstances.

At the least, we don't have a railroad in the middle of the tracks, like we did in the past. That I have to admit was a little bit too extreme.

It's a challenge for everyone. It's difficult. Certainly, yes, if you ask me, if you have the power to change, I would like to make a little bit better. In the end of the day, you have to go with what you have.

Q. If you could make the call, what change would you make?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: For that specifically, for me the pits are very tough. Where I'm stopping, it's crooked, I don't see people coming. I have to rely on the radio sometimes. It's a little bit difficult because people have different perceptions.

The racetrack, it will be tough to have a restart side-by-side. However, it might be good so you don't have a pile of cars in turn one crash. You're going to have a little bit of separation.

There is a pro and a con. I would say I would make the walls a little bit wider. If we have to remove the light poles, to make it a little bit wider, I definitely would do that.

Q. You said restarts. You're talking about the start of the race, two-by-two?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yes.

Q. Do you think you can get two or three rows lined up before you take the green?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: It will be tight. It will be very, very close. We're going to squeeze out there. I believe first two rows at the least we're going to be able to make it. But I think there will be a struggle for three or four rows.

Q. How do you get the most out of the tires on this track, knowing that the grip is not predictable?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Every track has characteristics. You can name it, any track. Detroit was one track the people say it's very bumpy. Long Beach, long straightaway, but also concrete. When there's a lot of cars running, there is a lot of grip. Here, patch in the middle of the corner, which makes it difficult for the drivers and the engineers to set up the car.

I feel when you have people running, you put a lot of rubber, a lot of grip. There is not much you can do. You want to feel that's the right direction. When you put new tires on, the car responds.

For example, this afternoon for me was a simple example of that. It was very difficult with old tires. But new ones on, the car was very good.

Tomorrow is going to be another tricky situation because we are running with the black tires. When we put the reds on, it changes again. Some cars go bad, some cars go good. Wish my Pennzoil Chevrolet keeps the same way or a little bit better.

THE MODERATOR: Helio, thank you very much.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Simon Pagenaud and James Hinchcliffe.

Simon finished fastest overall in both practice sessions today. What worked well for you?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Everything (laughter).

SIMON PAGENAUD: Everything.

It's been a fun day. I love this place here. First of all, the city is so amazing. There's so much activity. It's great to see. And the track itself has changed. I like it better. So I'm happy. I do like it better. I know it's not the case for everybody, but I do, so...

I think it's one of these years where you're having luck all the time.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Did Roger buy into this race or something (laughter)?

SIMON PAGENAUD: So the PPG car was fast, good. We made some adjustments for practice two. It actually went better than we expected. We're on a good pace this weekend. Certainly I think we're pretty set with the racecar, now we need to make some adjustments for qualifying. But we're pretty close.

It's great when you're having one of these weekends and everything flows really well. Having a great time.

THE MODERATOR: James, you finished fifth fastest overall today. What can we expect going into qualifying tomorrow? What did you learn from today?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Where the walls are, where the new walls are.

No, obviously it's a pretty big learning process for everybody out there. One-third of the lap roughly is completely different than it has been for as long as I've been racing here. It's definitely very challenging. They didn't make it easier, that's for sure.

Simon likes it better, which is good for him (laughter). I think it presents a tremendous challenge for the engineers. Really tricky sections in terms of concrete patches, blind corners, tight corners.

Qualifying, it's going to be very difficult to find the maximum lap around here. You have to be very committed. What's funny, in certain corners where the grip level is low, super committed is going to be like 30

miles an hour. Positioning the car just right is going to be so key. Even though you're going slower, the amount of precision is going to be just as much as a fast, grippy corner.

You're going to see some guys get it right and some guys get it very wrong. That's what makes it fun.

THE MODERATOR: All of that aside, how great does it feel to be home in Toronto?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I say year and year again, this is Christmas for me in July. This year has been no different, without even the start of last week, before Iowa, get some promo going, media stuff going. Busy all week.

The support here has always been incredible. It's great to be in the hometown for a little while, meet a lot of the Canadian fans again. See the fans again, a lot of people coming out again. It's awesome. I'm very lucky to be in that position.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. (Question regarding turn 9, 10, 11 complex with fans.)

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I think it's great. With Fan Friday, having the place open to everybody, the weather looks great for the whole weekend which is a huge thing for these events. We have had not necessarily the most ideal weather conditions the last two years. It's time for us to have another good, traditional, sweaty, hot, humid, gross Toronto July weekend for Indy. Looks like that is on the card.

I hope that encourages a lot of people to come out. There's a lot of rubber on the track, a lot of series running. One of the benefits of the new layout is it gets more people in that section, in front of the pits. Hopefully we can fill those grandstands on Sunday.

Q. Simon, what about this new configuration leads you to like it more when it's made a lot of your counterparts cranky?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I'm curious on this one (laughter).

SIMON PAGENAUD: I like the fact that turn 10 is off camber. It's probably the only place where you have a corner off camber. All of a sudden you really have to think about it. Okay, how am I going to make this corner? I'm not used to this. We usually go in an oval where it's banked the right way. Mid-Ohio some like that, too. But it's quite new.

I like changes. I may be different to most, but I like changes. I like slippery places because you really

have to place your car the right way, like James pointed out.

Yeah, I like that you have to dance with the car. You have to be inches precise. The last corner, you saw it, if you're not inches precise, you're going to hit the wall. It's going to be a big one. I like that risk/reward kind of situation.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I see what you're saying. Turn 10 is kind of cool.

Q. Hinch, I walked out and saw a lot of fans wearing your stuff, particularly a lot of kids. Do you feel any pressure coming out of that?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, I mean, there's pressure every weekend we get into an IndyCar. There's always a lot of people watching everything you do on track. There's always that pressure.

Coming home, I've always said that the pressure that you put on yourself as a competitor, as an athlete, is far greater I think than any external pressure that can be put on you.

There's definitely more tension when you come home, no doubt about it. More Hinch T-shirts, which is awesome, especially seeing them on kids. We need the young fans coming out. It's great to see that.

The pressure I put on myself week in and week out is kind of the same everywhere. I definitely do feel very proud that I do get to represent this country. There's only one Canadian in the series at the moment. To carry that banner is something you lose a little bit of sleep on Sunday night if it doesn't go well.

At the end of the day, like I said, we're trying to win every single race. It's heightened emotions, a bad day feels worse, but a good day feels way better. Hopefully tomorrow and Sunday are good days and it all feels pretty good.

Q. James, what changes did you make between the first run this morning and this afternoon where you moved into fifth?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: We had a bunch of issues this morning. We had some brake issues, some calibration issues on the engine. Normal kind of Friday first practice stuff. The brake thing caught us off guard, which was a big thing. Turn one, three, eight, a lot of time to be lost in the brake zone. That was obviously a big part of the change.

Mikhail and I swapped notes after P1. I took some things off his car, he took some off mine. Both cars were running well in that second session. Good to see.

It's super tough to get a lap around here. I'm sure there's a lot of guys that didn't get a good run at the end of the session. We'll keep working on it and hopefully we can at least stay at that end of it tomorrow.

Q. Simon, your home country of France with the attack, what's going through your mind today?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, it's a really tough place to comment. Obviously it's really painful. I'm far away from home. I'd like to be there to just feel the pain and be there with my country and my friends.

But it's just very unfortunate. There's not much I can comment on. The atrocity of the act is incredible, especially on Bastille Day. It's just a moment that's very special.

I always remember as a kid, Bastille Day was the day we used to go, just like you 4th of July -- in America, sorry.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: July 1st here.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I used to go watch the fireworks with my parents. It's always a day where everybody gathered together and just have a good time. So very sore heart today. Unfortunately you have to keep going and pray for the victims.

Q. Dixon says you got to move the wall back because it took away a passing opportunity in eight.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I never passed in eight.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Used to be able to. Scott Dixon can do anything (laughter).

Q. If a couple guys think because 11 is so difficult to get right that maybe you can get a run on somebody going into one, still you have three. As tight as the course has become, maybe still a couple places, in your opinion, to pass?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, I mean, three's the same. Three's probably the highest percentage passing corner on street courses I think that we run on. You can pass on the inside, pass on the outside. It's awesome.

Turn one, like you said, that was always a good passing place. It was tricky to get through 11 behind a car. I haven't done it now in the new configuration. It's a bit slower, trickier. I think it's a little bit easier to screw up than it was, which could potentially lead to more passing into turn one. So that is not a bad thing.

(Indiscernible) eight was silly. I don't know why we did that, why we let that happen. No reason to take the curve away in eight on the apex. It massively slowed down the corner, took away the opportunity for racing. It wasn't the best opportunity, but it was an opportunity for sure.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I would second that. I would just say I never passed in eight.

I think 11 is better for passing because, yeah, it's so hard to get right that there will be a speed differentiation. If the guy behind you manage to get it right, on 'push to pass', it could have more of an effect.

Restarts, I also think it's going to be a very tricky corner, very tricky section on cold tires. There will be a lot of action in turn one now. So I think it's a plus.

Q. Hinch, what are your thoughts on the pit lane complex?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Why are you so fixated on pit lane? It's okay (laughter).

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: It's very unique. I mean, yeah, yup. It's very unique certainly. Ultimately we made do with what we had to work with. I can't fault the promoters at all for what we had to do in pit lane there. Some pit boxes are definitely worse than others in terms of angles getting in, in terms of the smorgasbord of patches and surfaces and unevenness that are in them. It kind of is what it is.

I think the move to slow down pit lane a little bit wasn't a terrible one. I inadvertently kind of got not a terrible box qualifying than I got in the last one because I have a relatively easy in compared to some of these guys that are especially in the right hand part of the corner, Rossi, Bourdais. That's going to be tricky. If we have open pits under caution situation, that's going to be an interesting situation, for sure.

Yeah, I mean, Long Beach is a curved pit lane that sits on an angle. Cars fall over off the jacks. It is what it is. We make it work.

Q. What's your favorite part of the circuit?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I tell you what, 9 to 11 is just so fun.

Yeah, I mean, I love blasting down the front straight into turn one, the city, the Prince's Gate, the skyline. I'm nerdy and emotional like that. It's cool for me. I used to look at that scene through a chain linked fence as a kid. Now getting to see it, it's pretty cool.

Turn three, some of the passing opportunities into there. Some of the best passes I've pulled off in my

career were in turn three. Some of the coolest ones I saw as a fan were in turn three. Every part of this track has memories for me.

THE MODERATOR: IndyCar did put out a bulletin that pit lane speeds have been decreased to 40 miles an hour.

Q. How great does it feel to be back with your colleagues? That's a huge part of what you do. You live with these guys pretty much.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: First and foremost, I felt more support from this paddock than anywhere. We are a family. We all look out for each other. There's so much love and support from everyone in this paddock. It was cool by the second half of last year to be at least traveling to the races, giving these guys a hard time from pit wall, seeing them in autograph sessions.

To be back in the show, banging the wheels with them, it's great. It's what we do this for. It is like a big family of crazy. I was out there today following Conor. Brief moment, out lap, I kind of laughed to myself, I can't believe him and I get to do this. I watch him picking his nose playing XBOX at my house. They give us IndyCars. It's unbelievable. We're so lucky. Every single person in this paddock is so lucky.

It's such a good group of people. We have a lot of great friendships, a lot of great relationships throughout the paddock. It's awesome to be able to still be here and to be part of that.

Q. When you lose someone from your extended family, Simon, does it feel like there's someone missing?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Did you miss me, Simon?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I miss you every day. Lucky we get to talk a lot (laughter).

Can you explain the question.

Q. When people get injured, there's one less familiar face around.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, it's really tough, tough times. We've experienced this recently unfortunately with Justin. It was a tough time. It still is a tough time. Every race, there's not a moment I don't think about him.

But that's what we do. If he was here, he would still race. He would race. It's just unfortunately the human body is not meant to travel this fast and we're trying to do it. We know the risk. But we have such a good time living this life to the fullest. At the end of the day, like he just said, we're living the dream.

If something was to happen, I think we all would agree that's what we wanted to do. So that's what I think we agree with and that's what we go for.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, thank you very much. Good luck tomorrow.