

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Simon Pagenaud

Scott Dixon

Oliver Askew

Press Conference



forced us to pit a little early, which ended up helping us, I think. We jumped a lot of cars on that next stint, and that's when we found ourselves running in the top 5 with Pato. Just an overall super strong day for the team.

Q. Could you give us your perspective on what happened on the restart that got waved off? Colton Herta apparently was unaware that it was waved off? Were you aware? And apparently Pato went early. Can you give us your perspective on what happened?

OLIVER ASKEW: I don't think -- well -- yeah, I can't really speak for Pato. It didn't seem like he went early. I don't know why it was waved off. I thought it was waved off because there was contact. I didn't know it got waved off for (indiscernible) waved off. But yeah, I haven't seen the incident, so I can't really comment on it. I was told in my ear that it was waved off right away.

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, everybody, to our video news conference with the podium finishers from tonight's race. We're joined by the third-place finisher Oliver Askew of Arrow McLaren SP. Oliver finishes third. It's his career best finish in the NTT INDYCAR Series. Oliver, took tires there late in the end and came through the field to score that podium and pass a lot of cars. Talk about the race tonight.

OLIVER ASKEW: Yeah, I don't think I've had so much fun in a race car on an oval, on any racetrack in my life. Arrow McLaren SP Chevrolet absolutely came to life since the track started to get a bit cooler and once the sun completely went down, and yeah, I just had so much fun out there. We were able to run the second lane about halfway through the race and I felt really good up there, as well.

Without that second yellow I thought that we would have been in really good shape for finishing one-two with Pato and I, and we'll try to do it tomorrow.

I kept asking my timing stand what position we were in, and they would never tell me, they just told me to just keep my head down once we put on that fresh set of tires in the last stint, and I found myself fighting in third place with Rossi, and it was just an absolute blast up there.

THE MODERATOR: You started pretty much mid-pack; how difficult was it to do qualifying and then start in the back and then kind of be patient and work your way until the car came in?

OLIVER ASKEW: Well, luckily qualifying doesn't mean so much, as we saw today, and tomorrow we're going to be starting in about the same spot. I was kind of worried the first stint didn't really go very well. We got stuck in one groove and kind of burnt off the right front tire, so that

THE MODERATOR: We've been joined by Scott Dixon. Scott, congratulations on your second-place finish. Did it appear to be a night where you could come back from the back of the field and come all the way to second?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, it was definitely pretty interesting. We had made some bad adjustments for qualifying, so it definitely took us -- with the impound race, it definitely took us some time to dial that back out, and I felt like as we kind of got lucky with some of those cautions and moved up, the car was actually pretty decent, especially on the long run. We maybe didn't have the pace on sort of the first 20 laps, but after that we seemed to be pretty good. But yeah, huge credit to the team. They did a great job with strategy, and obviously proud to be powered by Honda and HPD. They did a tremendous job. The (indiscernible) assembly helped us.

Q. Oliver, McLaren when they put this team together decided they were going to go with two young guys, yourself, the Indy Lights champion from last year, and Pato O'Ward, the champion from the year before. It really seems the two of you are both getting to the same level of progress on the racetrack. How do you view the progress and the way that the two young guys are working with this team and the fact that the strategy that the team put in choosing both of you seems to be paying off very well?

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OLIVER ASKEW: Yeah, I think it's such a good environment right now. Pato and I get along really, really well and we have a lot of experienced personnel on the team. We have Robert Wickens who has recent experience with this car, who I've been able to lean on quite a bit over the past couple races. The more seat time I get in this car, the more I understand the ins and outs of INDYCAR, the better I seem to be and the more confidence I have in the car. It was good to put Road America behind us. That was not a very good weekend for myself, and hopefully this can be the start of a good rest of the year.

Q. For Scott, both you and Simon had to start in the back of the pack, and you both made it all the way up to the front. Were you surprised at his fuel strategy he was able to do the rest of the way without pitting? Did you think he was going to have to pit? And also you made a run there going into Turn 1 for position and weren't able to pull it off.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I don't know, like I think the impound races when it goes like Texas and you roll off pretty good, which I thought our car in practice was quite good, and then we made some changes for qualifying, and there's one piece on the car that we knew we kind of needed to get rid of or we had to dial out and it took us a couple stops to help that. But obviously I think Simon and myself -- his car was probably a little bit better, especially at the start of the race. He was able to get around us, and then their strategy was slightly different than ours; I think they pitted a little bit earlier but still caught the yellows that we did. It's definitely tough, especially on these short tracks where if you do pit you're going to lose a couple laps. You've got to be pretty aggressive on going long. That really helped us last year and kept ourselves out of the hole there, as well.

You know, had a pretty good run on Simon. I probably should have gone in a bit deeper. I just didn't really -- yeah, I didn't pull that move off that well, and I think it was really my only opportunity. He seemed to be a little bit better for the last 10 laps. Sort of 40 to go, 30 to go, I thought our car was really strong, but huge congrats to him. They did a fantastic job, and it was good to see him in Victory Lane.

Q. Scott and Oliver, what was the physicality and how draining was that race, and what do you feel like is going to be most important being able to make sure you guys are ready to do this again tomorrow?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I didn't feel like it was too bad. I think the start of the race there was a little bit more heat you generate physically. These cars with this added

weight and the aero from the screen as you can see it's significantly slowing them down. So the loads are not as high as we're used to. I think as we progress with the current formula, I think we'll get some of that back, and Firestone are doing a tremendous job, as usual, with the safest tire on earth, and once we get some testing and some real-world environment stuff where we can actually test tires, I think we'll get some of the performance back to help this additional weight.

But yeah, I thought it was not too bad. I think Road America was -- for us it was really physical. Just depends on the carload. Our car was extremely loose at Road America, and when you have to catch it a lot, it gets a lot more physical.

Q. Scott, you touched on this a little bit already, but it certainly seemed like this track (indiscernible) where you start on trying to get up there toward the front. What are some of the important things that you have to do starting from the back to try and make up that round and have a night like you and like Simon did?

SCOTT DIXON: Well, I think the most important part is to not start at the back. It's kind of silly the position we put ourselves in, and it is what it is. I think we tried to work on the race car a little bit more. We made some changes that we didn't really know what they were going to do, and it kind of really hurt the car.

We'll have a good think tonight to try and make it a little more consistent. I think we made some good gains as far as what we did through the race. But yeah, we shouldn't be putting ourselves in a situation like this. There's no real clear way. I think what Sato did in pitting early I think was a really good plan; splitting the race into kind of three even distances was definitely a great key, I think. He kind of got hung out when the caution fell when it did, but it helped some of the others that were looking at a two-stop, so that helped us.

So it's a bit of a mixed bag. That's kind of what makes INDYCAR very difficult and sometimes not very fair. A lot of those guys that had great performances at the start of the race, it definitely hung them out.

THE MODERATOR: We'll welcome Simon into the call. It's Simon's 15th career win in INDYCAR, his first win of 2020 and his first win at Iowa Speedway. Simon's most recent win before tonight came at Toronto in 2019. Congratulations. You started 23rd, just the seventh guy to start 23rd or worse in an INDYCAR race and come all the way to win.

Q. Oliver, this is your first podium. Based on the



revised schedule would you have picked this soon or this track to get a podium?

OLIVER ASKEW: Well, I think this is the third podium in a row for Arrow McLaren SP here, so traditionally we've had really good cars and we knew that going in, but I kind of waited for the race to come to us. We made some good calls in the beginning of the race to jump a lot of traffic and ended up running one-two with Pato, which was awesome.

I think without that yellow, we would have been in better shape, but that second yellow we would have been in better shape. To be on the podium here, it's fantastic. My first podium on INDYCAR. Good to get that off my back and under my belt.

Yeah, looking forward for tomorrow. Probably one of the funnest races I've done in my life. I'm happy I'll be able to sleep in. I'm happy that these races aren't during the day because that would be pretty brutal physically. So yeah.

Q. Does this change your goals for the rest of the year? Does it reset everything and now the expectations are higher?

OLIVER ASKEW: No, I don't think so. The goal is for every weekend that we come across is just to do our best and execute, and that's what we did today. As long as we keep our heads down and keep executing, we should be in good shape in the future.

Q. Simon, did you think you needed to get by Alex Palou at the end there?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, that was really trouble, to be honest, at the end, the traffic. Alex was doing a great job with his car and I was really strong on the bottom with a charging Scott behind me. That's always kind of a stressful situation. But I also had to save some fuel to make it to the end. I used him to go fast on the straightaway, but at the end I was trying to press the issue a little bit and I found some things to try to get by, but when tires are used up, it's a lot more difficult. You're sliding around a lot more. Certainly not easy when you're the leader. I didn't want to throw away the race three laps to go, and I had a big moment three laps to go, so I was trying to force the issue. It worked out.

Q. Obviously it's the first race of the new scoop on the aeroscreen, so I was wondering how you found it in the cockpit and whether you think it's something that helped tonight and whether it'll help moving forward, as well.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, personally I thought this was an added layer of airflow into the cockpit. I thought it was

great handling as long as everybody runs it. Obviously as long as everybody runs it, you're not going to feel something different. It's my opinion the more air, the better. Obviously tonight was not too hot, so you're not supposed to be hot in the race car. It's under yellow that it gets actually the hottest, but if it was during the day, it would have been tougher. However, it's an improvement, and INDYCAR is really on it.

SCOTT DIXON: I think it was good sort of putting a bunch of sand in the car. I don't know, I've never been so dirty in my life. Yeah, we never really tried it off. I think only Felix maybe did and he thought there was a little more air, but I think any additional stuff, I think places like here, it's not really needed, but INDYCAR are doing a hell of a job to try and fix things on the run, which even to produce these things and make them in the fashion and the time frame that they're doing, they're doing a fantastic job. But I think it's kind of driver opinions, where you sit and which bents that you have and things like that, but I didn't think it was needed tonight.

OLIVER ASKEW: Yeah, I kind of echo what Scott said. I don't think I've ever been so dirty getting out of the car in my life, which means that it's been moving some air into the cockpit. I haven't done a back-to-back, so I can't really say if it's an improvement, but props to INDYCAR car for making the effort for sure.

Q. I don't know if you've had time to look at the Colton Herta crash yet with Rinus VeeKay or if you've seen the footage, but I wondered if you felt reassurance now we've got the aeroscreen in place; when you see crashes like that happening do you feel a bit more safe as a driver to know that safety device is there?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, personally that was my first thought. I saw two cars flying behind me pretty high. My first thought was thank God we've got the aeroscreen. Again, I've been in big favor of the aeroscreen for safety. Unfortunately being around what happened to Justin was really tough, really tough for everybody. Obviously being there and seeing it happen was extremely hard, so I'm so glad that INDYCAR is doing everything they can to be the pioneer into a new level of safety, and I welcome it.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I was right behind it. It was an unfortunate incident there. I think obviously Colton just didn't hear that they waved it off. But yeah, it was -- just to echo what Simon said. I think what INDYCAR have done with the aeroscreen, it's made it a lot safer, made INDYCAR a lot safer, made the sport a lot safer, and we've got to keep pushing, and it's great to see it working as well as it has for the season.

OLIVER ASKEW: Yeah, I haven't seen the incident, so I can't comment too much on it.

Q. Oliver, first career INDYCAR podium, looks like you and the team are really starting to find your legs out there. Could you take me through the last few laps trying to get past Rossi. And did I hear you, the team wasn't telling you your position towards the end?

OLIVER ASKEW: Yeah, I kept asking what position we were in, and I kept asking where third place was, and they just kept telling me to keep my head down. They knew that I would catch him eventually. They were just trying to keep me focused on the task at hand. Yeah, awesome day for the team for sure. I feel great. Now we just need to focus on tomorrow and try to get another couple places better.

Q. Trying to get past Rossi there towards the end, was that a bit of a challenge for you at all, trying to get past Rossi?

OLIVER ASKEW: No, I was on much fresher tires than him, and I think it was Sato that just got around him, so that put him in a bit of dirty air, and he lost some momentum. You know, we were catching him from a long ways back. I think we were good from the start of that last stint.

THE MODERATOR: Oliver, Scott, we appreciate your time. Congratulations on the podium finishes, and we'll see you tomorrow night, and good luck.

Q. Simon, starting 23rd there when your car just wouldn't cooperate there on the qualifying grid, can you kind of maybe tell us a little bit more about what actually happened there, and how does having to start in last there kind of change your mindset going into the start of the race?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, we had some sort of a turbo pressure issue, so the car wouldn't start, a problem that's really rare. Luckily we were able to fix it because we didn't get to qualify we could fix it thanks to INDYCAR because obviously the new schedule made it so you have the impound rules, but we were able to fix it per the regulation, and it is what it is. I'll tell you what, unfortunately it's an engine issue, but Chevy won the Indy. So what can you say? You have to be fortunate about the situation you're in sometimes, and sometimes there's going to be outside factors you can't control, but this team, as you see, is able to always bounce back, and I think that's the strength, and that's what's impressive to me.

Obviously definitely not the qualifying we wanted because I think we had a car for both poles, so tomorrow we're going to have, again, a lot of work to do, but actually starting at

the back allows you to learn really early on about lane usage, tire wear. So I think I started really aggressive and dialed it back a little bit afterwards, so that was a different approach to some of the races I've been starting at the front on ovals. Interesting for sure, but yeah, just very fortunate that my team had a great strategy, were able to lay down some fast laps in pit sequence and get to the front.

Q. Certainly it's been the case for you the last four races where you've been able to storm up to the front from toward the back, but why especially with this race and this track do you feel like starting position really wasn't a big factor, not only for you but for all the podium finishers tonight?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, I think tire deg, which is great for racing and a desire from Firestone to create better racing, the fact that we have added weight on the car creates tire degradation. So when you have tire degradation, the better cars show better on long runs, and then you've got good cars on short runs, and that creates a difference. So I think that's why the racing was so good, and that's why you saw people cycle from the back to the front and vice versa. But also pit sequence was big today. There was a big game to play there. I'm sure tomorrow a lot of people will catch up on it, but yeah, we were able to kind of play a very aggressive game on pit stops and pit sequence, and that just worked out better than anywhere else for sure.

But here when you put new tires on and you're doing obviously 19 seconds a lap and the others are doing 22 seconds a lap, that's three seconds gained. So if you can do several laps like that, it's a lot of time when it's only a 19-second lap.

Q. How early in the race did you realize you were riding a rocketship?

SIMON PAGENAUD: It's interesting because all of a sudden they said, you're the leader. I'm like, they've got it wrong, there's no way I'm the leader. I know we're fast, but I didn't think I passed everybody. I realized at the start we were really strong. I realized on long runs we were really strong, but we short pitted, and then I passed a lot of people during the pit sequence. So I didn't get to see the cars I passed, but all of a sudden they're telling me that (indiscernible) is for position, Josef is for position, I'm like, wow, we're right there in the mix, we're right there for the win, and that was early in the race, too. I think that was by lap 80. So pretty early on we were right back in it.

From there I just kept my head down really. I just kept pushing. I just kept attacking and I just kept listening to the

race car and what we needed to keep going. We didn't have to make any changes at the end. It was just a matter of being on the right tire at the right time. Glad it didn't go yellow at the end there, that would have thrown a big curve ball.

Q. And also your engineer Ben Bretzman said after the race that races like this when you're starting last and you know you have a good car, you just go for it. It makes the strategy that much more simple. Do you believe that it was like that tonight?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, yeah. We are in a situation this weekend where we've got nothing to lose. We're starting last. We've got a really good car. We've got to go for it. The only thing is I don't want to crash the car because it's a good car, you know.

That's the only thing in the back of my mind. You want to be there at the end to play for good position. Certainly did not expect, quite frankly, to win the race today, but I certainly put as much effort as I could to go get it. Yeah, it was certainly one of my best overall races, yeah, but INDYCAR will always top it.

Q. Are you going to do it again tomorrow night?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Hey, I never give up. If by now you don't know this, I'm going to go to bed, I'm going to rest, and then tomorrow morning I'm going to put the knife between my teeth and I'm going from last to first.

Q. Simon, you mentioned all the dust; how disturbing was that, or was it only after they put a lot of speedy-dry down?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Listen, I'm struggling with heat in the car, so whatever INDYCAR is doing to provide airflow, I'm happy. I've driven on dirt; it doesn't bother me. I am dirty, yes; I understand what they're talking about. But to me it's more important to get some airflow.

Q. So you'll take the dirt over the air?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Absolutely, absolutely.

Q. Simon, obviously a great win for you and Penske, but some more struggles today with your car in qualifying and Will Power had a problem on his pit stop that resulted in his left front wheel coming off. Does your win today sort of show if Team Penske can put all this stuff that has plagued you guys the first four weeks behind you, you have a chance at winning every week? Do you have any thoughts on the frustrations there about why Penske has sort of had

these uncharacteristic problems on execution?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, it's an interesting question. I think it's a very unprecedented time. I think everybody is having to adjust massively like we are right now doing this videoconference.

I think for the team it's a big adjustment. We used to work a certain way. We used to meet at the shop. I haven't been to the shop since St. Pete, for example. You know, I used to go there every Monday and sit down with my engineer, with my crew and give them a pep talk and so forth. Team Penske is being very, very cautious on the guidelines of COVID-19. They take it very seriously. We have 550 people on the race team. It would be quite dramatic if we were to have the virus spread within the shop, so they're taking a huge amount of precautions, and rightly so. I'm obviously a hundred percent behind. It requires us to change our method.

Does it have anything to do with what's been happening? I think it's just INDYCAR racing in general. There's a lot of action. The weekends are very compact. Obviously what happened today to us was one problem -- I don't even remember having a mechanical problem in my career at Team Penske. At the end of the day, like I said earlier, you've got to be fortunate about what you have and who you drive for, and we'll bounce back from this and we'll recover, so that's what we do.

Q. Do you guys still feel like -- Dixon finishes second again tonight. You make a little bit of progress and are chipping away, but is he still pulling away?

SIMON PAGENAUD: He's a strong man. Dixon when he gets in this position is when he's at his best. We've got to find a way to make him trip. But I'll tell you what, this is what's fun about competition. You want to beat the best, and he's certainly on a roll. His team found the right setups at the beginning of the season. It doesn't mean it's going to be the case every day; he qualified 17th today. Obviously he raced really well, but he always does that.

But there will be better days for us and worse days for him. We just have to capitalize when he has bad days, as long as his bad days are not second. But we can't control it. If he does an excellent job, then good for him, but we've just got to do everything we can to execute, like I said, and stay up front.

Q. Last time we spoke, you had gone from 20th to second. This time last to first. Does this mean you won't qualify from here on out?

SIMON PAGENAUD: That's funny. No, I love qualifying.



That's the thing. It's one of my favorite exercises. It's so much fun to be able to put it together on that one lap, and honestly I got the pole here last year, I got the pole in 2016, as well. I was looking forward to try to get two poles here in one weekend.

We certainly had the car for it. But at the end of the day, like I said, it's racing. Sometimes there are mechanical issues. We didn't crash out of the race. We scored maximum points. Can't be mad at that. Can't be mad at anything. Can't be mad at Chevy at all. These things happen, and I'm 100 percent behind everybody. I make mistakes, too; it's just -- but that was not a mistake, that was a simple mechanical failure. But like I said, I don't remember having had a mechanical failure in my six years with Penske, so it's okay. We bounced back, and tomorrow we'll try to do the same.

Q. Talking about tomorrow, looking at the track, it's extremely bumpy, it's very hot, especially in the cockpit for you guys. How do you recover from a race like this to be ready for tomorrow?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yes, that's a hot topic, and it's not a play on words actually. It's a hot topic. I've personally done a lot of research on the body, heat and how to treat the athlete the best way to recover, to prepare. I can't tell you all my secrets because I don't want the drivers to use my -- what I think I have an edge on, but there's definitely been a lot of research done trying to get a little bit of an advantage. I don't know if I do, but I know that originally I'm someone that's very sensitive to heat, and so far it's not bothering me, so I think we're doing a good job.

But very happy we've got more air coming into the cockpit now. Really want to thank INDYCAR for caring about the drivers' opinion after Indy. It was so hot, so difficult to be 100 percent the entire race.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, everyone, for joining us. Congratulations to Simon. Hopefully we will see you here tomorrow at the same time.

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