

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

Wednesday, August 12, 2020
Indianapolis, Indiana, USA



James Hinchcliffe

Andretti Autosport

Scott Dixon

Chip Ganassi Racing

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Ladies and gentlemen, we are joined by James Hinchcliffe, driver of the No. 29 Genesys Honda.

James, fastest on the board today. How does that feel?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Doesn't suck. I've been closer to the other end of the board a couple times here. This is definitely better.

Every time you come to the Speedway for that first day of practice, it's always so nerve-racking because quite honestly 98% of the speed your car has, raw pace that your car has, is determined before it ever turns a lap. It's how it's put together. It's how the pieces fit, the body fits, gearbox, all the tricks all the teams have to make these things go fast around this place.

When you roll off the truck and you don't feel like you have to find an extra miles an hour, mile and a half, it's a huge thing.

To be able to build six cars at this level, Andretti Autosport, all the cars were quick today, a huge testament to all the people at Andretti Autosport. It's nice to have the Genesys buggy up front.

Just day one, just practice, but it's definitely a nice way to start the week off.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions.

Q. You mentioned all these cars that Andretti brings. In the first couple races you've been in with Andretti so far this year, are there any pluses or drawbacks specifically that you've noticed with having so many cars, so many folks in the meeting room?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, I mean, certainly with all

the events pretty much up to this point, they've been truncated schedules, usually more sessions per day, which in theory should benefit a team with more cars. The problem is the time in between the sessions also goes down. You don't actually have the time to go through the data of all the other cars to really take advantage of that element.

You end up just kind of being six one-car teams to be honest. It's been a bit of a struggle, to be honest. Honestly with the format the way it is, we have a lot more time to go through the data, talk to everybody, have more thorough debriefs. Hopefully we can see some advantages this week heading into next weekend.

Q. Your time driving with the team as well as working in your role with NBC through the last four races, Andretti has had some bright spots, but we haven't seen them in the winner's circle. Do you have any understanding of why? Has it been a bit of a slow start from team Andretti? What have you seen out of these first couple months of the season?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, I mean, it's definitely been a little uncharacteristic. The cars haven't had the pace they've wanted at a lot of these races. Some issues, technical issues. Again, not something that we're used to seeing out of this organization.

It's been a challenging year for everybody just with the way the shops had to sort of come back to operation after the shutdown. Working in shifts, you're not there with all the same people at the same time. Now that the program has sort of opened up a little bit more, they're operating a little more normally. Luckily it looks like it's paying off here.

THE MODERATOR: We'll welcome in Scott Dixon, driver of the No. 9 PNC Bank Honda.

Scott, tell us how it was out there on the first day of practice.

SCOTT DIXON: It was great to get back on track, especially here in Indy. Obviously a lot of us have been waiting for quite a long time. Yeah, I think for us as a team, there's been a lot of changes in the off-season with personnel, then also just with development and things we've looked into. We have a long list of things to check



off. I think we could have really used a typical length of practice time, as many other teams could as well. Just trying to get through the list.

I think the car rolled off pretty well. Much easier to drive than maybe what we had last year. I think that showed. Yeah, it was just kind of going through the steps. We didn't really get as much running towards the end of the day. We had to come back to the garage to get something knocked out. Took a little longer than we expected.

All in all, great to be back on track. Great to see so many cars out there running. It was a lot of fun to be out there mixing it up.

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with questions.

Q. James, obviously you're with Andretti, but not a full-time driver there. How much time have you spent in the run-up here with the team on making the car fast?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, I mean, obviously we've tried to meet as often as possible, as appropriately as possible, following all rules obviously. Luckily I've had the opportunity to have a couple races under my belt coming in here.

This wasn't our first race of the year together. Eric and I have managed to start building that relationship a little bit. We just started discussing this race a few weeks ago, kind of what I'm used to doing, what they're used to doing, sort of melding those two histories together.

He's obviously a pro, kind of wearing two hats at TD and race engineer for me. It's awesome to watch him work. He's obviously got a ton of experience and a ton of success. I'm very lucky to have him on my car.

Q. Scott, have you scoped out the closest Taco Bell now that your favorite one is closed?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, as I was told many of times after turning left, I should have turned right, go to the one closer to the 465 there. I know that well and have been there many times, so I'm in good times.

Q. Scott, the Aeroscreen, you said after the first practice it almost kind of felt normal. What is it about that and the improvements that have been made? Is it just a matter of you guys have gotten used to it by now?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think some of it is probably just the miles we've run on it. I was kind of more alluding to at

the test we did here back in September I think in traffic it kind of got a lot looser than we experienced in the past. That seemed to be more of a standout. The takeaway was just figuring that was the difference.

Honestly running in traffic today, I think the cars, at least my car, felt more normal as you got closer, especially two and four today, trying to finish the corner was a little tougher than what we had at the test in that scenario. That was kind of my reference there.

But, yeah, I think it seems to pull up pretty effective. I think still four, five cars back is going to be pretty tough. I think it's still going to be the typical track position race we've seen the last few years. Restarts are going to be important, things like that. That's kind of what I meant by feeling a little bit more normal.

Q. One day of practice has been eliminated. Why does it make it seem like it's much more intense for what the teams have to do? Generally in May we lose a day or an afternoon session with rain. It seems like there's a lot more urgency this year with one less day of practice.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think with the kind of hours a little bit, the day missing, plus I think a lot of teams, we haven't had a whole lot of testing this year, so there's a lot of other things we have that you can run. The tire situation is pretty flush, so you're not trying to manage that as much as you did in the past. I think it's kind of a mix of different things.

I think in the last few years we've been pretty lucky with the weather. I think it could have been a lot worse as we've seen in previous years with a day or two rained out. There was even some lulls today, kind of surprised. After the first kickoff 30 minutes, it got pretty quiet. Later in the afternoon, too.

There's still those lulls, but I think we should expect definitely the next few days to be pretty racy out there.

Q. With Michael Cannon as your engineer, has it given you a different approach?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Cannon is different in many ways (laughter). He's a lot of fun to work with.

I think he is a different set of eyes, for sure. The process is totally different. For me, it's been fun. OChris Simmons on the car stand. There's a mix-up across there.

It's definitely interesting I think coming to a lot of these places for the first time and just trying to attack it a different way. It's refreshing for one. Two, I think the combination

with him and a lot of other people coming from the GT program, the depth team has had, it's nice to have some added depth to it because we were running pretty thin there on the INDYCAR side with the GT program.

Q. I know today is not unlike a test day in some regards, the way it feels in the track. Since it is the Indy 500 and you're used to spectators being here, what did it feel like that no one was here?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: It felt different. You kind of nailed it with saying it felt like a test day. I was having that conversation with a couple of the guys. It just kind of felt like a full on, very full on full series test day.

Knowing that there's way fewer people than there would normally be at this point in the week, thinking ahead to Fast Friday, qualifying weekend, Carb Day, normally you see a steady escalation of people at the track each day. Just knowing you're not going to see that, this is the view we're going to have until the end of the race, it's a bit weird, a bit surreal. We certainly miss having spectators here in the stands.

We still get to go put on a good show for them. Hopefully everybody tunes in and watches on NBC.

SCOTT DIXON: It was very easy getting into the circuit today. It was very easy to go to the restroom. I didn't need to remember my Sharpie at all. There were definitely a whole lot of differences.

As Hinch said, it's very strange, very weird. That's what makes this place, the fans. We miss them greatly. But I think race day, that's where the difference is going to be. Typically walking out of Gasoline Alley, that feel that you have coming out and hearing all those conversations, the atmosphere is crazy. We won't have the buildup throughout the week. Definitely will be a big miss this year as far as not feeling the fans there.

Q. James, your opinion of the Aeroscreen, how it felt in traffic? What can we expect from the race from what you've seen today?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Honestly initial thoughts are quite good. Kind of like Scott said, it felt fairly normal. You're still getting used to the lack of kind of wind noise, the difference in where the air sort of hits you, how you feel it. In terms of the car, the handling, handling in traffic, it was pretty similar. It didn't do anything kind of unpredictable or freaky.

It was kind of a pleasant I don't want to say surprise, but I'm glad we didn't get surprised, have something weird

jump in.

As far as the quality of the racing, it's still early days. Like Scott said, once you're kind of fourth, fifth back in line, it starts getting a lot trickier. The track got a decent amount hotter this afternoon when everybody was out there doing a group run. It's still day one. We still have a lot of rubber to lay down before we get to the race. Hopefully that will help.

If we have a nice cool, cloudy day on race day, no reason we can't have a great show.

Q. Scott, how did you feel the day had gone for Ganassi?

SCOTT DIXON: Pretty good. I think on our program, probably ran a little bit smoother than the other two. I know Marcus was struggling earlier in the day, but turned things around later, felt a lot more comfortable. I feel a lot more comfortable than last year just straight out of the box with how the car drives, especially in traffic. I think Felix kind of felt the same situation.

It's probably a little easier for us to read just because it's the same team, and the difference would be a lot different for us with setup changes as opposed to Marcus coming in and coming from a totally different team, not knowing what we had.

Yeah, I think it went pretty good. I hope the progression I think over the next couple days between the three of us will be a little more smooth. I think there's definitely been some separation on that side of things. We'll see how that goes.

We haven't had a whole lot of time to go through it yet. We'll see how that goes.

Q. I wanted to ask about the draft effect with the screen. Do you get the impression it's punching a bigger hole? Are your cars being drawn up to the one in front as much as they were a year ago or two years ago? How is it on the straights? Getting a big suck effect, if that doesn't sound rude?

SCOTT DIXON: Good job there, mate (laughter).

I don't know. For me, like, the big suck effect was much better at Texas. But I think it's hard on days like this, too, because there is a lot of people kind of in mixed configurations. You do see occasionally someone out front that's running quite quick, but they've got a smaller wicker or you can see they're trimmed out a little further on the rear wing. We did see quite a few different aero

configurations.

I think definitely for the first three cars you feel that a little more. Again, I think as you move further through the pack, it just depletes a little bit more. I think it is there, especially the car out front is pretty much a sitting duck right now.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: To mimic what he was saying there, there were a couple times I felt like the runs were maybe a little bit strong, that effect was a little bit stronger than what we've had in the last couple years. That is one of the complaints we have had, that you get a good run off the corner, really close to a guy, and just not quite pull up all the way.

Had a few today that felt like we were pretty decent. Unfortunately the guy was also in a four-car draft so I wasn't able to get around him. It was nice to at least get that feeling.

Like Scott said, the guy up front is almost going to be the slowest car on track compared to the next couple behind him.

Q. Hinch, it's day one, but how confident are you now topping the times going into the rest of the week?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I mean, it's always nice to have a smooth day. It's only day one in practice. Practice doesn't mean a whole ton. But that said, obviously everybody on the Genesys car and everybody at Andretti Autosport has done an incredible job preparing not just the 29 but all these cars.

I think rolling off the truck and having a bunch of cars run smooth, we didn't have any small little problems, weren't chasing any weird handling gremlins, it was a pretty smooth day.

Regardless of pace, if you have a smooth day like that, it's always a nice way to start the week and gives you a little bit of confidence. But the pace at this point is not super relevant, but definitely nice to know you're not sitting there trying to figure out how you're going to claw back.

Q. Scott, obviously you've got Marcus in the car alongside you this year. What do you think he brings to Indy in terms of his experience from last year?

SCOTT DIXON: I think it's the same as kind of Felix. They've done the race. I think that always adds. Obviously Marcus came from a different team, so there's his view of how they achieved or attacked the 500. It could be stupid things of how you do pit crews, tones, anything like that. It's just fresh eyes.

The biggest thing I noticed when Felix came, Felix was a rookie here, but he had probably raced more cars, definitely more cars than I have in different parts of the world, probably knew more than most of the field. There's always little bits that each team does differently. I find even with Wayne Taylor, when I went to the Aston deal in Bathurst.

He brings a lot, has a lot of knowledge. He was strong in the race last year, too. Actually both cars. It definitely adds, it's a third car, which is big too, especially at this place.

Q. James, you're probably used to the full schedule by now, but how have you filled the time up when you're not able to make starts?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: When I'm not able to make starts, like not racing?

Q. Yes.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Well, I'm working for NBC, so that's been keeping me busy. In between that, I managed to make it back to Canada a few times. My wife was working up there a little bit, so we did that.

Other than that, man, it's been finishing little things around the house, a lot of the same stories as everybody else. Certainly happy that this one was one on our schedule and could be back in the racecar this week.

Q. With such lack of track time, how important is it going to be to talk with your other teammates and gather data along with being in the car?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I think any time that you can rely on teammates in a situation like this, it's advantageous. Especially when we've lost track time, it's funny, we lost track time... We still have 20 like 20 times more hours on track than we do any other track. We still feel like we're in this mad rush to get it all done.

Certainly when you can kind of take a list of test items, thing that you wanted to try, be it mechanical things, aero things, if you can split that workload over multiple cars, you can obviously get a lot more done in a way.

My engineer made the comment today that as a group, what we got through just in today, that was an entire Tuesday for one car. Just our car got an entire Tuesday's worth of work. We've been trying to plan these out efficiently. The more we can get every car on the team to operate like that, for sure it's going to be a small advantage

for us.

SCOTT DIXON: Totally agree with James. The other thing, too, to factor in is there's not many things to adjust. The cars are all pretty similar. I remember the time when back in the day you would come here for two weeks of practice and you would have different wings, all kinds of different engines, exhausts. The list would be so deep you would progress through it.

I think it's still plenty of time. May be a little easier for some teams than others. Ultimately I think we have a ton of track time.

Q. James, from a personal standpoint how big a day was this for you? It's only opening day, but still to be back in a racecar, especially with Andretti Autosport for the Indianapolis 500, this is pretty much what your whole season has been built around.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, it really is. From the team side, from my side, from Genesys side, this is the one we obviously were looking forward to the most. Not to knock Texas or the GP, but this is obviously the granddaddy.

My experience in the past year with this team has always been fantastic. To be able to come back here again with them, kind of pick up where we left off. We started on the front row my last year here with Andretti Autosport. Hopefully we have a car we can compete in the Fast Nine this year, try to have another good one.

It's just always nice coming here with these guys. They do a great job, like I said, preparing these cars. Even as they said, whether it's full-time or part-time cars, it never seems to affect the performance. We've seen the Bonus Jonas as I like to call the sixth car here at Andretti Autosport. We've seen Conor run well in it. We've seen this car be very competitive. It's nice to see that once again they're not cutting any corners on that extra ride. Like I said, hopefully we can go ahead with another cool chapter of our 500 history here.

Q. Do you feel like what you do this year can solidify a full-time ride for you next season?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Never hurts. A strong result in the 500 is an important thing. Being known as someone that can compete well here is going to make you an asset to a race team and sponsors as well.

We go out and try to perform well in every race. We go out and try to benefit our team in every race. This one's no different. We'll take the same approach we've been taking. If it goes well, yeah, hopefully it plays into our favor for

next year.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, everyone, for your questions. Thanks to Scott Dixon and James Hinchcliffe for joining us today.

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