

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

Friday, August 14, 2020
Indianapolis, Indiana, USA



Chip Ganassi

Team Owner, Chip Ganassi Racing

Scott Dixon

Chip Ganassi Racing

Marcus Ericsson

Chip Ganassi Racing

Felix Rosenqvist

Chip Ganassi Racing

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good morning, everybody. Welcome from the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. We're joined by Chip Ganassi Racing, team owner Chip Ganassi, driver Scott Dixon, Marcus Ericsson and Felix Rosenqvist.

Chip, you know you bring your team in every Fast Friday. This is a little different than it normally is. Just your thoughts on the Indianapolis 500 here in 2020, a different time here in August.

CHIP GANASSI: I mean, obviously we've all caught ourselves thinking it's May. But, I mean, look, the track is still the same. How you approach the race is still the same. It's so unfortunate we don't have fans here to celebrate this great thing with us.

But my hat's off to the ownership of the Speedway and the way they've been handling this odd season. But, I mean, when it comes right down to it, whether it's 2020 or COVID pandemics, it's still the same. You still have to do the same things when it comes to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway in terms of the car setup, in terms of how you approach the race, in terms of how you approach these practice days and qualifying, the race itself. We're looking forward to it. It's a little bit of normalcy in a somewhat odd year. We're happy to be here.

I had dinner last night with the three drivers. I think they've all got their heads in the right place for the event. Looking forward to it like we do any other Indianapolis 500.

THE MODERATOR: The driver of the No. 9 PNC Bank Honda, Scott Dixon, you've shown a lot of speed the first two days. What have you learned about your car over the first two days of practice?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, it's been definitely interesting. Definitely echoing what Chip said about the approach here, it's no different. A lot of things are different in 2020, we're all coming to the reality of a new normal, definitely very different. But excited to be back at the track.

To Roger, his team, everybody involved to get this going, we know there were a lot of tough decisions that needed to be made.

Yeah, I think the No. 9 rolled off fairly strong. I think there were lots of changes for us in the off-season. The car was a lot different than how we started Indianapolis last year. It's nice to come in with some different options. Some have worked, some haven't.

I don't think you can really take too much from speeds and times that are thrown up on the board from the last two days. I think today will definitely be a different shift in speeds, people trying to run by themselves.

Ultimately it's been good. We've had some obstacles to overcome, but ultimately I feel pretty comfortable at the moment.

THE MODERATOR: Marcus, obviously Scott has won three races, Felix has won a race at Road America. The Indianapolis 500 wouldn't be a bad thing to win, right?

MARCUS ERICSSON: That sounds like a good plan (laughter).

It has shown how strong we have been as a team, starting off with three straight wins, and Felix as well winning. We've had a really good year as a team.

For me, as well, I've been strong, in the top 10 every race. Five out of the six races I scored top-10 results. We've had a good car all the way through. Obviously now we coming to the big one, the 500. Yeah, I'm looking for mixing it up, right up in front.

We have the cars and the drivers to do that.



THE MODERATOR: Felix, you showed a lot of pace at Texas, which although is not a very similar track in terms of layout, it shows you have a lot of speed. Having a guy like Dario Franchitti in your corner, what kind of advice does he give you as you prepare for your second Indy 500?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, Texas was definitely a breakthrough for me personally and I think my INDYCAR career. We have a lot of ovals, they weren't my strong side last year. Feels good to just be able to run in front. Obviously we didn't have the result in the end there, which was really unfortunate. That was a really strong race for us.

Yeah, Dario has been the guy I mainly talk to during the weekends, especially on the ovals, the way you want to learn all the small details, get quicker and quicker. I'm not taking shortcuts. I think that's the important thing here at IMS, you cannot really take shortcuts to becoming quick. You have to know why you make changes to the car and your driving. That's why Dario has been really good support for me.

Yeah, I think, as Marcus and Scott said, we have really good cars right now. I think we have the right people on the team. Yeah, just going to be interesting to see what happens here in the next couple days.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for our guests.

Q. Chip, how excited have you been with the start of your season in terms of the performance of your three drivers? What do you think they can bring into the 500 for next weekend?

CHIP GANASSI: Obviously we've had a really fast start to the season. It's unfortunate that we showed up in St. Petersburg there all ready to go, only to be thwarted on Saturday morning when we're getting ready for practice. It was unfortunate.

Of course, having gone through everything in April or May, really having gone through nothing because we all went home, I was very pleased with the drivers and the people on the team, how they stayed focused throughout that shutdown period of April and May when we had the severe shutdown.

It was warming in my heart to see how everyone stayed focused and how we approached and came out of the blocks. Obviously with Scott and Felix winning like that, probably off to our fastest start we've had since 1996, I think. So, yeah, pretty happy about that obviously.

That's in the past. We're focused now on this weekend and next weekend. We kind of just try to take it one day at a time, do the best we can every day. If you do the best you can every single day, the long-term will take care of itself.

You want to have your eye on the horizon, but at the same time in this business you got to focus on today and focus on what we're doing here today. That's what's great about having these guys as drivers, great about having the team players we do on the rest of the team, whether it's in management or the people on the shop floor. Everybody really pulled together in an otherwise, you know, what could be a difficult year. It's really satisfying to see how everybody stayed focused and put the team before maybe their own personal wants and needs. It's really shown in the results, I think.

Q. Felix and Marcus, obviously both wrapped up a lot of laps over the last couple days, but not that headline time. A time in the tow is not of vital importance. How are you feeling after those two days with your car?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I think the lap times aren't really important at the moment. I think we've seen some really strong car speed pretty far down the order, 25 plus. I don't think it's anything to see there really.

I think personally I've been struggling a little bit getting close to other cars in traffic. I think I'm not the only one, though. We don't see a lot of overtaking going on at the moment. I think some cars are definitely stronger than others. It's definitely, like, 20 or so cars that can't really get around others.

Yeah, you kind of have to take it one step at a time. Now we shift focus a little bit to qualifying, get some practice before the race. I think I need to make some steps there, for sure. I have two teammates that have been looking a bit stronger. I think overall we have a good package, so pretty optimistic for sure.

MARCUS ERICSSON: From my side, I think it's been a good first two days. I saw yesterday I've done the most laps than anyone with 252 laps. That's been good I think from my side. We've been focusing a lot on traffic running, being good in the packs. We made some good progress there I think on my car. I felt pretty happy yesterday in the end there with how we were running in the packs. I was pretty comfortable close up to other cars.

I think we are in a good place. Let's see today when we focus a bit more on qualifying what the car does then. But, yeah, I was pretty happy with the progress we made over the first two days. It makes me, yeah, feel confident for

this weekend and obviously for the next one going into the race.

Q. Chip, the leadership of the championship this year, obviously we've had that change of management with Penske taking over, then they've had to deal with COVID in the first year of ownership, which is a massive challenge. They're looking at making difficult decisions for the next car. What has your opinion been of how they've steered the ship through the current times really? Have you been happy with it?

CHIP GANASSI: Obviously. I think the entire paddock or the entire ownership group, I should say, is probably very happy with how Roger's come in and approached the season. Obviously he's had to make some very difficult decisions. But, I mean, I don't think they're in this for one or two years. It's a generational thing. When you take that view of it, I don't think anybody could be happier with how they've approached it.

Just being around the Speedway, it looks different to me from the air. You fly over it coming into the airport, it just looks different from the air. It looks better. It's typical Roger. Everything is done in a first-class manner. Really, really couldn't be happier.

Q. Felix, I don't know if you remember, but last year at Laguna Seca I had a talk with you about feeling comfortable on the ovals. Last year we talked about how the incident at the Indy 500 during practice kind of scared you a little bit more than the Pocono incident. Are you feeling any differently now with the Aeroscreen? Now that you have two practices behind you, are you feeling a little bit more confident or have your feelings changed?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I think being on the ovals, it's always difficult. I think what you mentioned before, you never really want to make any shortcuts in going up to the speed. If you want to, you can always add five turns of front wing and just go flat out and see if it works. That's going to be a lot of work for everyone if that's your approach. You kind of want to know every step of the way how does the car respond, how do you respond, do you play together nicely with the car.

I think with the Aeroscreen, I think you do feel a lot safer. Incidents like Pocono last year, that was a scary ride. If we would have had an Aeroscreen then, that would have made you feel a lot safer. Nothing happened because the cars are really safe as they are. But I think definitely you couldn't really be in a safer environment right now than in an INDYCAR with the new Aeroscreen. Yeah, that's just a gain for everyone.

Obviously it's brought challenges in terms of setting up the car with it being heavier and so. That's also an opportunity for our engineers and for the drivers to bring an advantage. I think it's been a very interesting season with the Aeroscreen so far for sure.

Q. Scott, I know it's an altered schedule, but you're off to arguably the best start of your career since 2008. That was a year in which you won the Indy 500. To what do you attribute this hot start of yours? With the fastest time in practice yesterday, how confident are you you can keep this momentum going in the 500 next weekend?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think a lot of it, Chip touched on it, was the personnel and the people, the drivers, everybody staying so motivated during the downtime. I was disappointed, could have been nice to have one of those three wins that we had up front for myself to be St. Pete, a track I've never been able to stand on the top step.

I don't know. I think there was a lot of structure through the downtime, a lot of focus. There's been a lot of focus during the off-season before we even got to pre-season testing, a lot of people moved around the 9 car, we added a third car. We have a lot of depth coming from the Ford GT program.

In this sport, it's never one thing. It's a multitude of many. I think everything was executed well. When we finally got the green light to go, all three cars were super strong, everybody kind of knew what they needed to do. That was it.

Teamwork makes the dream work, man.

Q. Chip, talk about the challenges you have faced as an owner navigating business and running your race teams, not just in INDYCAR but across all the major leagues during this COVID-19 pandemic.

CHIP GANASSI: Yeah, it's been a challenge. I mean, you start off in terms of the shutdown, we were all scrambling to figure out how long it was going to be, what was on the other side of it, are you even going to have a business on the other side of it. There was a question if we were going to have any races at some point. All those sort of unknowns...

I can tell you, I had a lot of sleepless nights. We're still not what I would call completely out of the woods. My hat's off to the people at INDYCAR, the people at NASCAR for dealing with these government officials or local municipalities, county governments, state governments, getting them all lined up for the return of sports.

At the same time you have that sort of going on in the business going forward, then on the other side it's the same old thing. You have your business on one side and you have the sponsors on the other. They're not having an easy time of it either. It's a challenge. They've obviously made commitments to the team. We're trying to give them an honest return on their investment. There's always that question. We want to give them the biggest bang for the buck.

But fortunately most of the sponsors have hung in there with us. They understand it's a difficult time. It's through no fault of the teams to be in the position that we're all in. Fortunately they've hung in there with us. That's the thing about having great partners.

But there is that not really knowing next month, next quarter, next year. There's a lot more unanswered questions than there are answered ones still.

Q. Chip, Roger's leadership, how he has helped navigate you guys, get you to this Indy 500, what has the communication process been like from team owners to Roger and his team? I was told you have been able to have a lot of input, kept apprised of how all this was going on. Anything specifically that Roger looked to the owners, for the 500 specifically, to get input, where you feel you have been able to contribute?

CHIP GANASSI: I don't want to get into the business of the ownership of the teams, how we interact with Roger.

I will tell you that it's been probably the best communication that we've ever had with any ownership group in any series I've ever been in. I think that's because Roger started as a team owner. He understands the questions you have as a team owner.

Four or five times now we've had an email that said, We need to have a quick owners meeting here, this afternoon, tomorrow morning. You have a call-in, it's all organized.

It's really good because he's kind of letting us know when he knows about certain things. He'll say, Hey, this is what I know, this is what we're doing. What do you think? Anybody have any questions?

I don't know that there's been any huge difference of opinion really from the ownership to how Roger feels. I think it's more or less a welcomed thing to be asked the question. He'll say, Hey, this is what I've decided, I hope you all agree. Does anybody have any questions?

It's been pretty good. I don't want to get into any specifics. The communication is great. Like I said, I don't think the Speedway or the series could be in any better hands right now.

Q. You've said you have often gotten phone calls or emails saying that you need to have a call. Have you not ever felt like you were kept in the dark or were unsure of the direction where things were going?

CHIP GANASSI: No, never.

Q. Is there a heightened sense of urgency today to get the car sorted out so you can qualify up front since it sounds like it's going to be a track position race?

SCOTT DIXON: Definitely for recent history, it's been a track position race. I think Indianapolis tends to be. Probably Dario was kind of the last time you could come through the field with strategy and pit stops and things like that. I think there's always a lot of focus on having a car that qualifies well.

I think we maybe didn't focus on it enough last year. Also timings and our draw were pretty bad for us in the heat of the day. Yeah, I think we've got a big focus on us today and then obviously for tomorrow's preparation. Bigger change today especially with the amount of boost that we do add. We'll see a much bigger delta difference in performance today of going from 130 to the road course boost. I think that will be interesting for a lot of people.

I think our process this year and the development that we've done in the off-season trying to make sure we try to do the right steps as a group, we have more cars now, I think should hopefully help with that.

MARCUS ERICSSON: I think from my side, there's not a lot to add. I agree with Scott there. It's going to be important with qualifying. It is quite tough to pass. I think it will be quite tough to pass on race day. Still, it's a long race, so there will still be opportunities for sure.

Yeah, definitely today is going to be an important day to prepare ourselves, feeling good going into tomorrow, qualifying day.

Like Scott said, the biggest unknown is the extra boost, what that's going to do for the cars, the handling of the cars, see if you can keep the speed up for the four laps. That's going to be the big challenge, I think.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I think the formula today, I think the guy who will win the race is probably good in qualifying and race trim. The depth of the field, it's just so high. You can't

really get away with having a bad qualifying any more or a bad racecar.

It's definitely like a heightened tension for every day, I'd say. If you sort of slack on any area these days, you're going to fall behind very quickly. So, yeah, I think the pressure is on everyone. We just really focused all the time. Every lap you learn something. That's what it's all about here, is maximizing all the track time you have.

THE MODERATOR: We thank the drivers and Chip Ganassi for their time.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports