

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Scott McLaughlin

Team Penske

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good morning, everybody. Welcome to today's NTT INDYCAR Series media news conference. We're joined by the driver of the No. 3 Shell V-Power NiTRO+ Chevrolet for Team Penske, also the three-time Australian Supercars champion, Scott McLaughlin.

Scott, welcome into the call. Welcome to the INDYCAR Series.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: G'day, Arni. Thanks very much, mate. It's all a bit weird when you're saying it like that. I'm just used to Shell V-Power Racing. Now I'm adding the NiTRO on the end of it. A little bit weird but very excited.

THE MODERATOR: It's been a pretty eventful week for you. Last week you were at Mount Panorama getting ready for the Great Race, the Bathurst 1000. You have tested the car now at a track that you've probably never seen. How excited are you for your INDYCAR debut?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Very excited. I think it's a great opportunity. I obviously never thought I'd get a chance this year due to the nature of the beast with COVID, all that sort of stuff.

I've driven the car before, which gives me a little bit more confidence heading into St. Pete, that I sort of know what to expect from a car perspective. Never been on a street track in an INDYCAR. I know it's very bumpy. The feeling inside the car with the bumps and stuff, it's going to be a lot different.

I've got a lot to learn, but I'm excited for what's ahead. Excited to see what everyone is like, meet some of the media, meet some of the fans, see how the schedule goes like on the weekend. I'm really excited, really excited.

THE MODERATOR: A few years ago you came to Indianapolis to be a guest of Mr. Penske at the Indy 500. When you came to that race, did you think that INDYCAR was ever an option for you, being a guy who has raced

with a roof over your head for most of your career?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I've always been an INDYCAR fan. I said that from the start. I've always been a Scott Dixon fan due to the Kiwi connection. It's a bit weird now, I have to work out who I'm going for now that I'm at Team Penske.

Look, it's certainly been a transition that has happened pretty fast. I know I probably initially didn't think that Roger and Tim would think I'd be ready for an INDYCAR, sort of consider me, just because of my touring car roots, having a roof over my head.

They put the proposition to me about a year and a half now. I have haven't looked back since. I've always been interested in it. I love the Indy 500, watch it all the time. Back in Australia it's a massive thing. The connection with Will and Scott Down Under is big.

For me, it was always a cool thing to be a part of, but never thought I could be because I've been in a touring car for most of my career.

THE MODERATOR: You did three tests this winter. Seems like it was years ago, but it was in 2020. It's been quite a while since the COTA test where you placed third on the time sheets. With all that's been going on with COVID and travel restrictions, being in Australia in the Supercars bubble, what have you been able to do to prepare yourself for single seaters?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I've been training a lot. I definitely lost some weight just to be a little bit lighter for the INDYCAR. Weight is obviously a big thing. All year my body clock is going crazy because I've been watching INDYCAR in Australia at sort of 3 a.m., 4 a.m. our time.

It's been good to get to know how some guys race, how the teams work, how the pit stops and the cautions work, just little things you can pick up with the coverage. The coverage that NBC does is amazing, the way that INDYCAR gets it to Australia is so cool. I've been able to, yeah, really enjoy that part.

From a driving perspective, at the Indy 500 I sort of was listening in to Helio's radio. They are my crew guys, the 3

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car. They are all of my pit crew, my engineers. They're all very similar. It was nice to have an idea and an introduction to how everyone talks, gets through the race weekend.

THE MODERATOR: What kind of expectations do you have for the weekend?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: It's a hard one. Like, I just want to do every lap I can, do every pit stop I can. It's a massive learning thing. I'll go there, I'll drive the car as fast as I can within my comfort level, which my comfort level will be a lot lower than some.

Look, yeah, I'm fully expecting this will be the toughest challenge of my career, but I'm looking forward to it.

THE MODERATOR: We have quite a few media on the line. We'll take questions.

Q. You said you listened to Helio's radio during the 500. How did you have that hookup?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: It's amazing technology now. I had basically the Microsoft Teams program. I couldn't talk obviously. I just had the communication between the team to Helio, again the strategists.

That was a cool, cool thing for me to understand, not only just how they talk to each other, but also understand the race more. I think I've watched the Indy 500 for a long time, but probably haven't gone behind the scenes like that, fuel codes, lots of stuff. Still got a lot to learn, but it was a nice introduction.

Q. Your schedule this past week, you had a big race on the weekend. What was your travel like?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, it's been pretty wild. I did the race on Sunday in Australia, Saturday your time. I basically jumped on a plane straightaway. Bathurst is about two hours west of Sydney. I flew quickly to Sydney, spent the night in Sydney, then flew 10:30 a.m. Monday morning to America, to California, then California to Charlotte. That was Monday night.

I went straight to the simulator that night. I did basically a four- or five-hour session on the simulator. It was probably the best thing for my jet lag. I feel amazing now because I stayed up. Went back to the simulator on Tuesday, plus seeing the guys, a little bit of a seat fit here and there.

The last couple days, Wednesday and Thursday, it's just been seeing everyone, getting acquainted with the team a bit more. Everyone has sort of taken a couple days off

before St. Pete. Myself and my wife, we've sort of just been having a look around, hanging out, staying safe. Now we head to St. Pete tonight.

Q. Are you tired?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Thankfully I'm good. I had a great sleep last night. I was probably a little bit tired yesterday. You get to about one or two and it starts hitting you. I was feeling pretty good. I feel pretty good now. Had one of my best sleeps. That was good.

Q. What interests you about INDYCAR? Why do you want to do this?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: For me it's one of the most competitive series if not the most competitive series in the world. You look at the closeness, how different the winners can be up and down the field. It's an all-around package. You can race on road courses, ovals.

For me it's a fresh start with being an open-wheeler, very different to what I've had before. I guess, yeah, it's a different experience. If I've got the opportunity to be able to do it, I've got to grab it with both hands.

Q. Have you accomplished everything that you can accomplish?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: In Australia, yeah, for sure. I've done everything I wanted to achieve. I wanted to win at Bathurst and a championship. Thankfully I won three championships and one Bathurst. I moved my way up the ranks in terms of the wins and stuff like that, poles. I've done everything I wanted to achieve. If it did come to the point where I was moving on from Supercars, I would be satisfied.

At the same time that series leaves you wanting more, as well, especially when you have a race like I did at the weekend at Bathurst. It wasn't my best race. It's one of those races that you love so much but hate just as much as well because it's such a wild card. It leaves you wanting more.

Q. Roger Penske was on the NASCAR channel a couple nights ago, talked about your debut. He described this more like it's almost less a tryout and more a confirmation of whether you want to do INDYCAR. He said it's about you deciding if you want to do this full-time, the team will make a decision over the next 30 days about that. Can you explain your perspective on that? Do you feel like this is more about feeling out if this is what you want to do next year and beyond?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, for me, yeah, for sure. I think it's an opportunity to learn and understand what goes into it. COTA was good in some ways where I understood the car, I understood how to sort of get some time out of the car, out of the race car.

When you're doing one lap by yourself, it's a lot easier than when you're put with 23 other drivers heading down to turn one. I'm fully expecting a new challenge when I get into the racing side of things with in-and-out laps, pit stops, all that sort of stuff.

I think there's still a lot of things that I haven't come across that I need to learn and need to understand before I actually make a decision, as a team.

Like I said, this is an opportunity. It's something that I'm just going to go in like a sponge, soak everything up, see what comes out of it. I'm pretty confident that I'm going to like the series, I'm going to like the cars, I'm going to like everything. There wouldn't be a reason why I wouldn't be here.

It's cool that I'm able to have that support from Roger, the team, Tim, to allow me to be able -- I'm 27 years old, try to achieve stuff overseas, accomplish dreams. To have that support, it's a pretty cool thing for a person who drives for someone.

Q. Josef Newgarden said if you finished top 10, that would be a great result. If you finished top five, that would be amazing. If you were to do that Sunday, are we talking about you being in the INDYCAR Series next year?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think if I finish top 10, I'll be doing cartwheels, going crazy (laughter).

I think, look, it depends on what goes on. I'm fully expecting a tough battle. I might have a great, great experience running last. I don't know. It's not going to change how I feel or whatever. I've got a lot to learn. I'm fully expecting I could be last.

At the end of the day, as long as I get a good feel for the category, a good feel for the cars, we'll be all right.

Q. Scott Dixon was saying it's almost unheard of that somebody could come from where you came, other side of the world, to here. Do you feel that way, you're pinching yourself a little bit?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, look, it's a dream come true. As a young person, you join the sport or you join the sport

as a hobby with your mum and dad. Thankfully I was lucky to turn it into a profession Down Under. I achieved a lot of my dreams, like I said, winning Bathurst, winning a championship.

Then to have the opportunity to drive with a world class organization that's got so many opportunities elsewhere to further my career... When I initially signed with Roger, that was a part of my thought process, was I wanted to potentially expand the horizon if I wanted to.

I've always been a person once I have ticked a box, I want to go to another spot and tick another box and whatever. Never want to stop and be content.

Like I said, this is the biggest challenge of my career. Yeah, I can't believe I'm here, especially with COVID right now. Seriously, looking forward to meeting a lot of people, yourselves, like I said, the fans, other drivers, getting to know them not just through the computer screen like I was with the INDYCAR Series on iRacing. It was a bit different.

It's certainly a very proud moment for me, my family. My family are a bit funny because they're getting up at 4 a.m. to watch me race this week. It's a bit different. It's going to be cool. It's going to be very cool.

Q. Your mentality from a competition standpoint. Coming from Supercars one weekend straight into an INDYCAR, how much of a challenge is that for you? Are you the kind of driver that as long as you're in a race car you're really just fine?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, it's a bit of both. I'm not going to lie, it's a big challenge. There's a lot of different things I have to learn. Even on the simulator Monday, Tuesday, I had a couple bad habits and stuff, not trusting the aerodynamics of the race car, something you really can't do in a Supercar.

Yeah, I'll literally race a wheel barrel if I can. I don't care. I'll race anything. It's one of those deals where, yeah, I've certainly got a lot to learn. It's a challenge.

Even coming to St. Pete on a street circuit, the car will handle a lot different than what I'm used to over bumps and stuff. A Supercar, you do a Supercross jump, no drama, you wouldn't even feel it. In regards to the INDYCAR, it's the complete opposite.

Certainly got a lot to learn. I'll race anything, like I said. Just adapt to how I go.

Q. You said in preparation for this you've lost some weight. What is your training regimen? How much

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weight did you shed getting ready for this?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I was a bit fat for Supercars anyway. I needed to lose some weight regardless, if it was an INDYCAR deal or not.

I worked pretty hard. I started a little diet, intermittent fasting. I really found a benefit out of that. Certainly shed a lot of kilos. See, kilos, I'm not talking pounds at the moment.

For me, a lot of high-intensity training, weights, but high repetition. A lot of cardio. Yeah, just trying to gear me up. The INDYCAR is very strenuous with no power steering, a few other things. That's a bit I had to learn, beef up my shoulders a bit more.

For me, I need to be competitive when I come here. I want to be competitive, especially when I get to St. Pete. For me to be competitive, I needed to lose some weight, get my weight down. I didn't want to be one of the heavier guys. Definitely still going to be because I've always been a bit bigger, but definitely better than it was.

Q. You talked you always looked up to Scott Dixon. Your perspective on what it means to you to be able to race against him this weekend as he's going for a sixth championship, which is crazy.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, the guy is unbelievable. He doesn't get enough credit in New Zealand either. New Zealand is full of rugby. Motorsports takes a bit of a backseat.

What he's done, even with five championships, to be going for his sixth is phenomenal. Very excited. I can't explain at COTA at the test the way the pit lane order worked. Scott was actually behind me, his pit box was right behind me. Rolling out on one of the sessions there, he passed me on the out lap because obviously I was a bit slower. It was surreal.

Yeah, I have a tremendous amount of respect for him. I have a tremendous amount of respect for a lot of the drivers. Scottie has always been someone that in New Zealand is just an icon. What he's done with Indy 500s, now five-time champion, going for his sixth. To be racing him and still be in his era is pretty cool. Probably personally a cool moment for me.

Q. You said you were happy to be here especially during COVID. Did you have any restrictions you had to go through to get here from Australia?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, Australia is a bit more strict

in regards to traveling. I had to apply for an exemption to leave the country. I left because of work. I made sure that I got that. Karly, my wife, thankfully fell on that, too.

Yeah, it wasn't too bad, but it was enough that we couldn't book the flights till we got a travel exemption. That all happened quickly because my calendar came out in Australia and said Bathurst was my last race. Gave us sort of enough time to prepare this car for the race, get some partners onboard in Shell-V, NiTRO+. Yeah, it's been pretty (indiscernible) but we're here now.

Q. Was the exemption to get out of Australia, not to get into the U.S.?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, to get out of Australia. I have an ESTA just to get into America. Normal travel visa. Yeah, Australia, the travel exemption.

Q. You're a pretty self-confident guy, but is there an intimidation factor as well? I think Mark Donohue was the last guy to make his INDYCAR debut for Team Penske. I'm not trying to pile on the pressure there.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: No dramas (laughter). He went all right, didn't he?

Q. Yes, he did. We were at COTA for the test. You said you'd drive a wheel barrel if it had the Team Penske logo on the side. Do you think that does ramp up the pressure, Team Penske, he has to perform well straightaway? Is that intimidating for you?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think I'd be lying if I said I wasn't feeling some pressure, but it's probably from myself more than anything. I'm pretty hard on myself in regards to where I'm at in terms even on the simulator. I was a little bit slower than the guys. Most people would be pretty happy still where I was, but I wasn't. I wanted to be closer than I was, which wasn't far.

Yeah, there's probably I wouldn't say intimidation but there's an unknown there. I'm excited to see how I fare in a racing situation because I haven't had that before. Like I said, it's going to be a lot different.

But I trust my ability. I trust what I can do in a race car. I trust the process that Team Penske have put me on. I wouldn't be here if I didn't think I was ready and they wanted me to do it. That gives me already a lot of confidence in the process, what goes on.

Yeah, probably the only thing I'm just getting used to is dealing with the media, dealing with other things in the team. It's a lot bigger than what I'm used to. That other

stuff has probably been the harder part.

Q. Tell me a little bit about whether you've chatted to Scott and Will so far this week. Who will be your race engineer?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: No, I think I've texted Scottie, obviously seen Will a couple times in the shop the last little bit. Not a huge amount. I've sort of been just working with my guys a little bit.

My engineer would be Jonathan Diuguid, Helio's engineer. The guy calling my strategy is John Bouslog. It's going to be a team full of experience, worked with Helio for a long time, someone I can really feed off of.

In terms of talking to Scottie and Will, they've been really cool. I spoke to Rossi and Hinch, Conor Daly. Conor Daly, we play video games together, so it was pretty funny. I have a little bit of a relationship there.

Yeah, I have to say everyone has been really nice. Even when I went to COTA, it was a very welcoming feel within the drivers. They seemed all like really nice, cool people. Obviously they're competitors, we all want to beat each other. At the same time credit to them for welcoming a new person to the series. Yeah, just saying hello, whatever. It's quite easy not to. It's been good.

Q. You're an attacking type of driver, lap of the gods, lap of the century. How many cars are you going to pass on the first lap on St. Pete? How many do you aim to pass?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I just don't want to rip a corner off. Let's just say that. Get through, keep my front wing on, don't piss off anyone. As long as I get out of here with no enemy, I'll be happy (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Appreciate everyone's participation. Scott, we thank you for your time this morning and wish you the best of luck this weekend at St. Petersburg.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Thanks guys. Thanks for coming on.

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