

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Scott Dixon

Chip Ganassi Racing
Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We have our 2020 NTT INDYCAR Series champion who has joined us, Scott Dixon. It is his sixth title. He beat Josef by 537 points to 521 points. Another fun fact for everyone is that he is the first 40-year-old since 1993 when Nigel Mansell won the championship. With being 40 years old, 3 months, and 3 days, he beat A.J. Foyt for a sixth title who was 40 years old, 8 months, and 23 days. That's a lot to take in there, but congratulations, Scott. Wonderful day for you. Tell us how you're feeling right now with your title.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, thank you so much. It was definitely stressful I guess four, five, six weeks. I think at one stage we had about a 117-point lead. It definitely started to dwindle away.

I could see some concern on Chip's face and some others. I don't know what they were so worried about (smiling). We just had a smooth day. That's all we had to do. Obviously the hardest thing about today was just the restarts. The pace car speed was pretty slow. It was hard to build temperature. That's the only thing I was really worried about, getting collected or making a small mistake. Seemed most of the others did.

I've got to thank everybody at Chip Ganassi Racing for such a tremendous season. Normally we start off a bit slow but we came out of the gate strong as a team on the first four, which was huge. Had many a podium throughout the season. Just so happy for everybody, our partners, PNC, NTT, Huski Chocolate, everybody that's involved. NTT, so proud of them, to pull up and be such a big part of our series.

I'm over the moon. Six sounds a lot better than five, so I'm definitely over the moon.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions from the media.

Q. We all know this hasn't been your best track,

haven't won here before. What was it like having something like this to celebrate here in St. Pete?

SCOTT DIXON: Totally right. That's what I was thinking. We've led races here, are we going to have another bad luck situation. I was really bummed in qualifying because I felt like the car had speed. We just couldn't turn it on quick enough. We had brake problems all day. Once I hit this morning on track, the car was just fantastic once we pledged every part on the car that was to the brakes.

I love this track. I love obviously what Kim and Kevin do here, the mayor, everybody embraces the race here. It makes a huge difference. It feels really cool to finally celebrate something here. We have a lot of memories here, some of them not so great. It's nice to be in this situation to celebrate, celebrate it with loved ones, my family here today, the girls. The team and crew probably later. That's what it's all about. For me it's just the people that make this possible. This journey that we've been on for so long now, 19 years with this team, this is a great way to top it off.

THE MODERATOR: It is the 13th Chip Ganassi Racing championship, two of the last three have been with you. We'll continue with questions.

Q. When you're in a position like you were in today, you played it very smart by basically shadowing Josef Newgarden. Was that pretty much the strategy you formulated before the race?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, we were going to stretch the windows, the Honda engine was just getting such good fuel mileage. I think they were pitting short a little bit just to try to catch that caution that they needed to, or at least one that wasn't going to ruin both of our days.

We did talk about if I saw Josef pit, should I follow him. The team were like, We'll monitor it and we can call you in. As you saw, he'd pit, the next stop we'd go in. It's a bit tense for that lap, because a caution can happen, especially when it's so aggressive with people coming in and out of the pits. We saw plenty of mistakes made coming out of the pits onto the track. That cost guys that were doing very well today.

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It was a pretty hairy race. The pace car speed, it was pretty slow. It was very hard to build the tire temp. I've never used first gear so much on this track in my life. You usually normally just use it for pit lane. A lot of restarts in first gear. It was very sketchy, really was a position for myself to make many mistakes today.

Q. How nervous were you on restarts, not so much that you might make a mistake, but somebody around you would?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, we definitely had some great people around me I think. Askew for a lot of it, VeeKay, then Bourdais. I knew I could trust these people, they weren't going to throw it in. Some of the other guys can get a little bit aggressive. I definitely gave some others a little bit more room.

I think the closest situation I had was Harvey, he ran me basically to the wall. I had nowhere to go. We actually touched a little bit coming through six. Luckily enough it wasn't enough to damage the front wing. That was the most stressful part of the whole day. Once we got running, the pace was very good. We could just kind of maintain. The restarts were very sketchy.

Q. With three kids you can complete the collection, each one has a championship. How important was that for you?

SCOTT DIXON: It's definitely a bummer that Kit is not here. He doesn't travel super well. He's a busy boy that is definitely crawling everywhere now, pulling himself up. I'm sure in the next week or two he's going to be walking. He's only nine months and maybe a week or two. He's pretty full on.

It just gives us more fuel to try to come back and repeat, get another championship where he can be in the pictures.

Q. I have to say I realize the smart thing was to shadow Josef. If Josef had lapsed onto a three-stop strategy at any point, would you have done that as well? Yesterday you said the tires were holding on pretty well, that made it less likely you'd need a three-stop strategy. Would you have shadowed him to that extent?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think we would have. Definitely depending on the start, if we were in front, we were going to kind of delay it by a lap. Sometimes we were talking about dealing with situations if he does pit, I should just follow him into the pits because the team doesn't have enough time to call it.

We also had the other cars, then they would switch to a two, cover him if they needed to, back him up so he didn't have a clear run with clear air there.

We tried to cover it as a team I think very well with all the options and make sure that we could cover it. How that works out, half the time you're never sure. Once we saw they started on blacks, we knew they were really going to go hard for a two-stopper. That's the way it played out.

Probably the stint we struggled the most on was actually on reds, and it was only because we didn't have enough fronts on the car. It was basically like a dragster, had limited gear grip, I just couldn't turn it. We would have gone to that extent to cover them.

Q. If you had started nearer the front, do you think you had the car to win the race?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I do. We definitely had a major problem yesterday with the brakes. Normally we run 55 to 57%. I was having to run up to 63, 64% on the brake bias, still locking rears. We didn't know what to do between the practice session and qualifying. We changed a small part of the braking system, but it didn't do anything. Last night we changed everything for the warmup, it was like night and day.

I actually braked deeper into turn one with full tanks and used tires than I did in qualifying just because we were struggling so much. I was really happy with the car. We didn't run reds in the warmup so we didn't know how much the balance was going to shift. We probably could have put some front wing in for the start of it.

Q. A question about Chip actually. Any words of encouragement from him leading into the weekend or any words from him Saturday evening at all you could tell us about?

SCOTT DIXON: I think all of his meetings are pretty similar. It always ends with: Do the obvious things right.

He always goes into visualize yourself getting three, two, and one. Visualize yourself getting that checkered flag first. Visualize the pit stops going smoothly. He's always has great words of encouragement.

Honestly today I can't remember what he told me. I think he said before I got in the car, he just said, Don't worry, just do what you do. That's what we did today. We covered the bases we needed to. He's been such a big part of my life from when I joined that place in 2002. I've learnt so much through his leadership, him and Mike and everything that they've done.

The biggest thing with Chip is that he's with you through the tough times. You don't see that too often. He's the first guy when I destroyed two cars in four laps, he'd be the one that's there like, Man, are you okay? We'll get another car, don't worry about it. We'll get another car.

I'm like, No, I want to go home (smiling).

He's a team leader. You can see why he's been so successful.

Q. You talked a lot about the restarts, trying to get the tires into a good window to work with. I noticed you weren't conservative at all on the restarts. Take me through your strategy.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, what I noticed, especially early on, if you're too conservative, you got kind of marched offline, you were going to be in major trouble. We saw that a couple of times with Herta. I think Josef got into that situation, and a couple others, maybe Pato on one of the restarts. It was like ice.

I think the best restart was obviously when Josef had control of the field and we sped the cars up a little bit. Which I understand why the INDYCAR Series does it, sometimes to make sure we just don't let these laps fall away.

Trying to get brakes cooled, I struggled a lot with that on the race. We didn't run rear snorkels on the car because that pace you don't really need it. Once you slow down, there's no air getting into the rear brakes. My rear brakes were cooked the whole time, which makes it hard actually to build up temperature, one, in the brakes, but also to try to get that tire to come in. The pedal started to go long several times. We started to get into some pretty big red zones on the rear calipers, which then the pedal just wants to go to the bulkhead.

The strategy was to be confidently aggressive. I think we had to make sure we didn't let it slip. I think if you got caught offline, especially on some of those restarts, the train was going to come by. I was very lucky to be able to place the car where I needed to in some of those situations.

The one that raced us hardest was probably Harvey. That almost went a bit pear shaped, a bit the wrong way. Luckily we came out of it okay. Yeah, I think when you start to change the way you race, you fall into a lot of situations that don't go very nicely.

Q. I know with your awesome start, needing to just

kind of hold on and be conservative to clinch things today, how much did this whole season feel like a war filled with small battles, you had to conceptualize how to attack one at a time?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think it's weird. Like you see how championships go up and down. Honestly, as a team we didn't really change anything. Some people think a bit of complacency. I think you do start to overanalyze things a little bit. I think we had a bit of a curve ball I think at Mid-Ohio, which was tough for us. We think it was something that was out of our control in qualifying one and qualifying two was fine, I come to push the envelope too much and made mistake myself, which I try to pride myself on not making those mistakes, but I definitely made that mistake.

I think every season is full of ups and downs. It's the first time I've ever led a championship from start to finish. You do have some different pressures, where you have people saying, It's all done, it's sewn up. You don't want to fall into that situation, but then you start to believe some of those things. We've seen how quickly it transforms and how quickly it can change, especially with the likes of Team Penske and Josef. He's a two-time champion and a hell of a competitor.

Yeah, I guess every weekend is its own battle. It's very easy to slip into a bit of a rut. You lose a bit of confidence as a driver, the team loses a bit of confidence if there's been a mistake on pit road or strategy-wise. You have to snap out of it. That's the hardest thing to do.

I truly believe years like '04 and '05 where we were just sucking really bad, those are the years I learnt the most. It's all about the amazing people around all of us. We work well as a team. Even Dario and what he brings to the team, to help with Felix for my teammates, Marcus and Felix, it's been a huge year for all of us. It's really knowing how to manage those moments when you're pretty down.

Q. How tough was this week given these last couple weeks? You mentioned having to not only formulate your own plan for your car but also having to try to figure out a strategy to mirror or shadow another driver.

SCOTT DIXON: I think once we got out of Indy road course, the Harvest GP, that was when we could really understand what we needed to do. Obviously race one was a huge kick. We just wanted to stop the bleeding for race two. You don't want it to get too close.

Obviously today, look, both of us moved from I think Josef was 8 and I came from 11 to first and third. That's what

can happen. I could have been easily in a situation where on a restart you get knocked out, you go all the way to the back.

It's easy to kind of say, We're just doing the same thing. The team is analyzing obviously how the year's going and how it's coming down to the championship fight. But you feel super vulnerable like we did for the Harvest GP just on the black tires. We just had no pace. We couldn't figure it out. We didn't know why. That's the most horrible situation.

For us I think last year I had the best average of qualifying for the whole year for any driver. This year was horrendous for all three of us. There's definitely some areas for improvement.

I guess the short answer is you don't really know how to structure the championship apart from going to win every race every time you go to a weekend till you get to the last one, then you know what you need to manage.

Q. I've just got a message from your mum here. She's been texting me like no tomorrow. We know what your mum's like. Your mum and sister want to say they're extremely proud of you. Your mum said, I helped create you, which I'm sure you'd understand.

SCOTT DIXON: Pretty valid quote there, yeah (laughter).

Q. Your sisters have been going pretty goo-goo watching the race. Monday morning in New Zealand. You're one of the only drivers that's actually led a championship run from race one right through to this final race. All the different situations that you've been in over the years, what is it like being chased as opposed to being the chaser?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I don't know. I guess it's holiday in New Zealand, too, right? Everybody has the day off. Everybody can have a beer, which is cool. I'll definitely be speaking to mum a little bit later, and dad and my sisters.

Yeah, I don't know. I've never really done it before. When we had the runaway portion, we're like, This is great, this is great. When you start to see it dwindle... I've been part of those on the other side. I've been part of those situations I think with Helio, I think maybe 2013 we had a deficit of almost a hundred points or 83 I think, something I remember. And to claw it back and win it that way, it felt tremendous. The tiebreaker we had with Montoya in '15 was crazy as well.

I got to say it feels pretty nice to lead and know that you don't have to go through all these weird and crazy

scenarios to pull it off. You just got to have a clean race. But, yeah, there were definitely points through the year that you slip into issues like I did at Mid-Ohio, and came up short. You lose a boatload of points.

Again, it's nothing you change, nothing you do different. It's crazy. You see it from so many different sides. You're like, They're choking. Honestly you're doing nothing different.

Short answer, it feels great to lead from start to finish. Hope we can do it again next year.

Q. Obviously it's a team game. Those boys in the pit lane led by Blair, another New Zealander, what is it like for them in this situation? You get into the car, get into your race mode. Some of it's out of your control, some within your control. For them there's a lot of pressure in pit lane, isn't there?

SCOTT DIXON: There is. Those pressures come in different situations, especially when you come in under caution. Everybody is packed together. That's when things can go wrong really quickly.

I think for us today it was very smooth as always. They're the best on pit road year after year. Their record is almost untouched as far as pit road time, which that's why we have a lot of great championship fights, is because of them.

But yeah, I don't know, each person deals with it differently. Emma gets very stressed. She's the one that I'll wake up in the middle of the night on these weekends, it's 3:00 in the morning, she's on her phone texting people. I'm like, You need to go to bed, it's way too early.

You see that with some of the crew guys as well. Boys and girls. You can see it in their face, just their demeanor. That's what's so important because you see how much it means to them, how much it means to myself and everybody involved. That's what I think is so amazing about this team, is that everybody here gives 110% every day.

Q. You won this in the middle of the pandemic. It was a late start to the season. What was sort of the biggest challenge navigating through this?

SCOTT DIXON: There were so many. I feel bad in saying everybody -- there's people much worse off than myself. I feel extremely lucky and privileged to do what I do. I feel very lucky to be a part of the NTT INDYCAR Series.

To try to do what Roger did through this period of time and



run the Indianapolis 500 with no fans, it's definitely a year that none of us are ever going to forget. That's an obvious thing. Hopefully the majority of everybody have been safe and healthy. That's the main thing.

I think for me, I don't know, it's been very strange weekends. Things I think we have done will carry through. I remember going to Texas, we flew 6:00 in the morning. You're there all day, practice, qualifying, race, fly home at 2:00 in the morning. We were lucky enough to win that race. Celebrating in Victory Circle by yourself. So many bizarre ups and downs.

I truly feel so lucky to do what I do. I guess health is everything. As long as everybody that you can help or be in a situation to cater to, I think that's what this is about. That's what these moments are about.

Q. Did you have any trepidation about starting the season at all or were you ready to go when they said 'go'?

SCOTT DIXON: I think the problem was, right, nobody had been through something like this. Sometimes in some situations there was no right or wrong answer. I think we got here in March, everybody was here in the pits, everybody had done their prep. You should just run the race, no big deal. Then you see the severity of it.

I think the protocols is what really changed I think the formula for the year. We have a lot of thanks I think for NASCAR. They really paved the way. They laid out the protocols, how everything should be structured, how the testing should be done, how the pit crews and drivers, everybody should be separated, the travel protocols. A lot of effort went into that. A lot of people don't see it. I think that's what enabled us.

Then obviously to have somebody like Roger, I think the timing in a lot of ways with the purchase of the NTT INDYCAR Series and also the Speedway I think really pulled us through. I don't know in which direction it would have gone had it not been him at the helm.

Q. You've said it's a team effort this year, you don't like to attribute any one area being any more important than the other. If we break down the two key changes you made in the off-season, it was the staff coming in from the Ford GT program, also Mike Cannon as well. Can you talk about how important those two moves were in the off-season to the success you've had this year.

SCOTT DIXON: I think it was big. The Ford GT situation, I wouldn't say we lost, they just moved to a different program

through that four years. We went from two cars, three cars, four cars. We bounced around a little bit.

This year was the first year in the off-season we thought we had a lot of depth. All these teams have a lot of different programs, whether it's wind tunnels to shaker rigs to simulation, DIL, driver and loop simulations. You need a lot of manpower. A lot of our engineers, race engineers, were having to cover all those bases. They would leave a race, go straight to the simulation or the wind tunnel or whatever. It's very hard to juggle.

The biggest thing is just processing the information. This year it felt really good. I felt like we analyzed a lot at the start of the off-season to see where we faltered, what areas we really needed to improve on. Some of those we got right, some we didn't improve on. We got to try to understand why that is.

Cannon I think brought a totally different dynamic to the team. Once you're in the ecosystem, it's like when you have an Apple phone, a Mac, you try to move off to an android or PC, nobody can kind of work it for a while.

I think he brought in a lot of different views of basically saying why do you do this. A lot of questions, a lot of questioning yourself, what he had previously done for many years at different places.

Not to say that we weren't doing a good job, but it's nice to have a different perspective, get asked why a lot of times, whereas we would just keep going down that tunnel we were in.

Both of those I think attributes to a lot of performance in different areas. But there's still some shortcomings we need to really focus on.

Q. We had Josef earlier. He said he thought maybe he could have won six or seven races this year. He didn't want to take anything away from your title, was very quick to congratulate you. He said he felt he's had a lot of misfortune this year. How good do you think you've been driving-wise this year to beat Josef at the top of his game?

SCOTT DIXON: I think it was still average. I think we in some situations definitely worked well as a team, got the most out of it. I think qualifying across the board for all three of us was definitely a bit of a hindrance for us. One really big swing I think was our performance at Indy, which a lot of that you got to attribute to HPD and Honda as well. I think as a team that process was really good. I felt good in the car. It was one of those situations.

But, yeah, I think every year there's so many different situations that you could have been like, Yeah, we should have won that race, we could have turned it around. There's so many misses that I've had throughout my career that that's part of racing unfortunately. There's championships I've lost so closely. '09, '07, you thought were in the bag, they just weren't, just didn't go your way.

You do need luck. You need some of those years where the momentum is with you. A win is a win, man. You got to take it. This team definitely deserved it this year.

Q. Before this season started you said you felt adaptability was your main area of growth in this series since you started. Do you think your adaptability is what helped you this year when you had the Aeroscreen, a bizarre calendar, all that sort of stuff?

SCOTT DIXON: I think I heard most of that, adaptability throughout the season. The line is getting a bit weird.

Yeah, I think that's every year. Whether it's weather conditions to the situation with the Aeroscreen changing the balance of the car quite a lot, to the different tracks, different tires. It evolves all the time.

The hardest part is that we don't have a lot of testing these days. If you look at the races we go to, you maybe get 45 minutes to an hour practice, straight into the qualifying, then into the race. Definitely been one of those years where you need to roll off the track well or adapt very quickly. I think this team is very good at adapting. When you look at the different iterations, whether it's the engine programs to the aero kits to different chassis and things like that, that's when this team really does well and dominates.

I think not just me, but it's the tools and the people that I have around me that help me specifically with the racing, but the team as a whole I think is very good at adaptation.

Q. What is preparation for next year? When might preparation for next year start?

SCOTT DIXON: Sorry, you cut out there.

Q. What is preparation for next year going to look like?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, preparation starts actually this coming week. We start testing at the Speedway I think on Wednesday and Thursday. I think I'm just doing Thursday, then the following week we're at Barber Motorsports Park, having a week off, then straight into Laguna Seca test,

then a Sebring 12-hour week as well. It's definitely a busy time.

I'm not sure, I always question why we test so early. I'd rather test in February when we're getting ready for the season. Weather conditions, the window we have for being able to test, I think our blackout window starts maybe middle of February. Not a lot of tracks we can test at that situation with the team.

Our preparation will start obviously this week and next week with a lot of conversation, basically trying to figure out where we can make ourselves better. That's where it always starts. We're going to start analyzing the season on stats, qualifying situations, performance laps throughout the season.

You really got to dig deep I think now with the competition at the level it's at to really focus on what you need to beat in all these great teams and driver combinations.

It will start very quickly, very aggressively.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Scott, for joining us. Appreciate it. Congratulations.

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