

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Scott McLaughlin

Team Penske
Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Scott McLaughlin, driver of the No. 3 PPG Team Penske Chevrolet. Think about where you were a year ago today and where you are now. What is the expectation? What are the goals coming into this year?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Look, obviously last year took a turn for everyone. Yeah, my plan was obviously to do the Indy road course, get somewhat of a warmup, which my warmup was at St. Pete a week after my last race in the Supercar. It's been a whirlwind adventure. The last three months I've been here or so, it's been awesome to get acquainted with the team, get an understanding of INDYCAR racing, visit the Holy Grail in Indy at the Speedway there, do my ROP, which was fantastic. It's all sort of coming together.

I still have a hell of a lot to learn, but I'm really enjoying it. Awesome to have PPG onboard as a primary sponsor for us for 10 races, hopefully more to come with the rest of the races, too.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up to questions.

Q. Obviously there's a lot of unknowns this upcoming season for you. How much comfort do you have in the first few races you've been on those racetracks before?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, it's definitely nice to head to a track that you know. For me, heading to Sebring, for instance, just for the test, that was one of my first INDYCAR tests. To turn around there about a year later, actually get into it and know where everything goes, know some of the bumps, the curbs, dropoffs off the curbs, stuff like that, just little things you don't know when you turn up to a racetrack for the first time was invaluable.

I think for me right now, heading to Barber after testing there twice now, then St. Pete obviously racing there, it's a big thing for me in my first foray into INDYCAR racing. It's

not going to be like that all year obviously, so I really have to take that in my stride, try to accelerate my learning as much as I can in this period for sure.

Q. Obviously being new to INDYCAR, what has been the hardest thing for you to get used to? Is it the better braking, increased downforce? Where do you have to make improvements yet to be where you want to be?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: There's a lot of things I've got to get used to. For instance, even just driving a turbo car. I've never really done that before in Australia. For me, I'm learning boost levels, aero maps, trusting aero, aerodynamics through corners and stuff. It's taken me a little bit of time at Barber. Barber is quite difficult. I put Barber at the same commitment level that you need at Bathurst. It's very tough.

To build up and not make a mistake in that period, it's a tough thing there. I'm slowly getting used to what I want from the car, what I can ask for, what I can't ask for. That's just going to keep getting better and better throughout the season.

This year for me is a learning season. I've got time. I'm planning to be here for a long time, not a short time. Just got to make sure I get through this year, learn the tracks, learn the car, come back stronger, even better in 2022 as well.

Q. What do you think of this rookie class?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, what I think of it (laughter)? Well, I think it's phenomenal. I didn't think I'd be racing Jimmie Johnson, Romain Grosjean. It's crazy. Very exciting.

Someone put out a tweet, quite a good tweet, the rookie class where it's like three-time Supercar champion, seven-time NASCAR champion, then a guy who is a veteran of Formula 1 in their first season in INDYCAR. It just shows what INDYCAR is all about right now. It's exciting times for the category. I hope the fans relish it. I think it's awesome to have Romain and Jimmie be a part of it. They're two guys that have done so many things in world motorsport.



For me to be a part of it, I'm just proud to represent the brands, have PPG onboard, being able to try and have a good time in my first foray into American motorsport. I loved it when I came here and raced here once in 2013 back in the day with Supercars. To be here in my rookie season with those two guys, it's phenomenal. I'm really excited.

Q. You're the only one of the three running the full schedule, so I guess that gives you the edge. Is there any incentive to outperform them each week?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, for sure. I think it's not just them. I've got three other teammates that are very high caliber that I'd love to have a good shot at and try and beat on the occasion while I learn and get better.

Yeah, it's not just all about them for me. It's getting the best out of myself and my team. We'll get that. We'll get better and better as the season gets on. If not, hopefully come out of the gates really fast. I'm preparing like crazy. I'm looking at footage, data, trying to make sure I'm ready for round one and we can hit the ground running.

Q. What have you learnt from your race in St. Pete that you can bring forward going into the new season?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think for me it's learning the pit stops and stuff were very big for me. Like cold tires, hot tires coming in, cold tires going out. Obviously driving the red tire was a good little introduction for me. It's one thing that I probably struggled with at St. Pete was just getting the most out of that tire. Unfortunately we can't test on that. That's all going to be race miles on that tire to get used to it.

But, yeah, just understanding little things like how to get from the hotel to the track, where the pits are, what it's like. I didn't even realize I had a scooter when I got there to get from the pits. Stuff like that. It's learning not only on-track stuff but off-track stuff to make me comfortable, settle into the series quick.

I'm enjoying it so far. I'm really excited to head back to St. Pete. I love that race circuit, love the vibe there. Hopefully we can have an amount of fans that makes it really cool.

Q. Obviously we're going to Nashville this season for the first time. Is that going to be a benefit to you do you think, given all the drivers are going with a fresh kind of point of view? You're all going in as rookies for that race.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, I guess in some ways it's

nice to have that happen later on down the road. I think you're going to have your experienced guys that come up to speed on the track pretty quick. These days you got simulators as well. Everyone is probably going to have a simulator go on the track at one point beforehand and get used to the track and the limits there. Obviously you got to do it in real-time.

Yeah, look, it's probably one that I've probably circled, said that's probably one that I can be on the even terms in some ways for the first time this year. Yeah, I'll try and make it work.

Q. You mentioned this would be a little bit of a learning season. You also said you're paired with some high-caliber teammates, three guys who have been series champions, two guys who have won the Indy 500. What has the team told you about what are the expectations in terms of competing against Pagenaud, Power, Newgarden? Are you going to be okay if you don't beat those guys the first weeks?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: My competitive instincts, probably not going to be okay with it (smiling). I'm very competitive, but I'm realistic at the same time. I've got a lot to learn. Yeah, I'd love to try and beat them a few times throughout the season. I'm not putting off that I can't. I think if I feel the car and work with my engineer well enough and get better and better, there's no reason why we can't be at the same pace as those guys, if not better.

But I'm very lucky in that way. I'm trying to soak everything up like a sponge, learn their data, learn how they drive the car, what does Will do, what does Josef do, what does Simon do? They're three very different guys in terms of driving style. I got best of both worlds. I can pick sort of what I want to do, how I want to feel the car kind of thing.

Yeah, look, it is a learning year. I'm being realistic. I know it's going to take time. Those guys got experience. Everyone has experience here. I'd love to -- yeah, for sure, my competitive instinct will kick on at some point for sure.

Q. Those three guys being different in style, are you most similar to one of them so far? Can you even tell at this point?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: It's hard to tell. Look, you put Will Power in a cardboard box, he'd probably get pole. If you put Josef, he's just very bright. Simon, he likes the car secure. Yeah, I don't know. I'm still figuring that out right now. It's very interesting looking at the data. It's something that I haven't really had. I've only had one teammate in the past in Australia. It's nice to have three, really get an idea.



With Simona coming onboard, as well, for Team Penske at Indy there, it's going to be awesome to have her data as well, someone I've raced before in Supercars.

Q. Is there any chance you would be able to go back and run Bathurst later on in 2021?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: My plan is to go back and race that race. The problem being they've got quarantine periods in Australia, you have 14-day isolation in hotel rooms when you get there. With the calendar now with INDYCAR, Long Beach finishes basically two weeks before Bathurst. My quarantine would end by the time I get to Australia, two days, you lose a day going across, I think my quarantine ends the Monday after. Right now I can't do it unless something changes on their end. If it does change on their end, it's a possibility. I'm scheduled in to do it.

At the end of the day my main focus is here. If anything changed here, collided dates, something got pushed back, I don't know. We know what 2020 was like. My main objective is here. I'd give up the Bathurst opportunity obviously.

Q. Who is the team you are set to run with?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Sorry?

Q. Who is the team you're set to run with?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: My old team. Dick Johnson Racing. We did the old deal when it was all announced over here and stuff like that.

Q. The level of experience coming in here as a rookie, when you start a test, how significant is the progress that you see that you make from the start of the test till the end?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: It goes in peaks and troughs. Sometimes I feel like I'm making the headway and then one of the boys will go out and smash me by half a second.

I think for me it's just getting an understanding of the car, what I want from it. The last few test days, yeah, for sure I've made gains in that area in what we want. We've really had good debriefs post-Sebring and Barber to get an idea of where we want to go forward, where we want to start, especially for Barber, for the first race there.

Yeah, anytime I can get laps in the car, keep driving, learn what I have under me, what I want under me, is beneficial. But yeah, there's been times during test days it's been frustrating. Sort of don't know exactly what I want. Then

you find something, something clicks in your brain, then it all sort of comes back to you, gets going again.

But definitely the last test at Barber was the most comfortable I felt in the car. I felt really strong. Definitely a good platform for me to build on.

Q. I got to ask you this question. You're new to Team Penske. What did you think of the last lap of the Daytona 500?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: It was two hard racers going for a big victory. It's unfortunate. At Team Penske in the past we've always been told we can race as hard as we want but fair. They were both going for the same real estate. Certainly we know that the goal is not to make contact and stuff like that. Unfortunately that happened. But I'm sure they'll learn from it and move on together.

Q. Racers are racers. The culture at the track varies, but there's a basic template you understand. How has it been moving from one continent to another knowing you're going to be here pretty much for the full year? What is the biggest challenge for you?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think for me it's actually just knowing where to go. Little things like you wouldn't think about, but different airports, where do you put the rental cars up, where do you do all this sort of stuff (laughter). There's stuff you don't think about that's second nature in Australia that you've been there your whole life, Australia, New Zealand. To come over to this place where I've really only been here for holidays. I've gone to only one or two places, New York and a couple other places because my wife is from New York.

Yeah, it's been different. I'm going to learn a lot, learn a lot of America this year, get to see places I haven't been to and probably would never been to if I didn't race over here. It's exciting.

For instance, the fans and stuff, the fans at St. Pete were really nice. Everyone was really welcoming, coming up and wishing me good luck, welcoming me to the series. Very on the front foot with all that sort of stuff. It's pretty refreshing from that point of view, as well.

THE MODERATOR: Scott, everyone has loved your #scottlearnsamerica hashtag this year. The two I recall the most were the first time you went to Target, the first time you watched NFL Red Zone. Which one was cooler, Red Zone or going to Target?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: No, Red Zone by a mile. If you asked my wife, she probably enjoyed Target. She knew

what to expect. But I hate shopping. I enjoyed sitting on the couch at 1:00, much to the disgust of my wife (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: Panthers fan since you're in Carolina?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I am. My wife tried to get me to be a New York Jets fan. I was like, No way, they suck. I jumped on the Panthers bandwagon. Hopefully we pick up a good couple players here in the trade period and we get going. I managed to get to a game, as well. Small attendance figures, but very cool to get to my first NFL game. Saw Drew Brees play. I love American football, watched it for a long time. Best thing now is I don't have to watch it at six a.m., I can watch it at one p.m. with a beer in my hand. It's awesome.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for joining us.

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