

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Helio Castroneves

Meyer Shank Racing
Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We have Helio Castroneves, driver of the No. 06 Meyer Shank Racing Honda.

New home, back in the series. What is the outlook for this year?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: You know, going back two days ago we were testing at Laguna Seca. It was kind of interesting to see everyone kind of like sync, the synergy of the team, including the engineers, me knowing them, the engineers knowing the team. Everybody is new. I have to give big props to Mike Shank and Jim as well because they were able to put this program together and able to contract those incredible guys. I mean, we have like an amazing people.

Funny thing is I do remember most of them because they used to be in different teams, some in Ganassi, some in other places that I've just seen around the paddock. Now we're working together.

It was great. It was great to have that test. It was great to just start knowing everyone and introducing everyone else. Now I'm excited. I'm excited because there was a huge opportunity for the future with this amazing organization. Young team, young potential. Like I say, Mike is hands on, not only back on the stage but he likes to be together with everyone. That shows around the entire team.

It's a great team.

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

Q. I know you've said a lot of times that Penske Racing will always be a family. But in a lot of ways, how much has a change of scenery reinvigorated you?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Huge. Obviously when you spend 20-plus years in one place, it's a habit. They know what you like. I know what they like. So you kind of like follow that format.

Now there is more things to explore in all aspects. Again, Penske always been open mind, but we have obviously their process, but now with a different process and understanding this open mind with Shank Racing, it is really cool to understand. It going to take a little time. As I say, it's a process. But I'm excited. I'm ready for this challenge.

I believe hopefully all these years that I been with a great organization, we can make it also this together. I won't be the guy doing it, but together we can also make this incredible organization to the top as well.

Q. You get to run the big INDYCAR races plus the IMSA schedule. In a lot of ways do you feel like you have the best of both worlds at the moment?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Correction on the IMSA schedule. I just did Wayne Taylor, 24-Hour Daytona. As of right now, I don't have anything in IMSA. I only focus now with INDYCAR. Actually I'm doing SRX, if you guys know, this year for Tony Stewart. Other than that, I am not doing -- well, I haven't had any invitation with IMSA whether through Meyer Shank Racing or any other team.

Q. They didn't have you for the endurance races?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: No. Montoya I believe is going to be doing the long-distance races.

Q. You mentioned a little bit about your transition from Team Penske to Meyer Shank Racing. What are some of the differences in the team that you've experienced? Is there anything in particular that stands out to you that you really enjoyed about the fresh outlook of this new team?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, first of all, like I say, we had our first test in Laguna. It was actually fun. Mainly things was to getting myself adapt again to the INDYCAR. It was funny coming out of the corkscrew with the Acura, I was just step on it, the traction control would do all the rest of the work. First few laps, as soon as I went for my fast lap out there, I kind of like brain fade a little bit, went to the Acura mode and went full throttle. The car was like sideways. I was like, Easy boy, easy (laughing). It was a



very interesting scenario.

I enjoy the work very much. Mainly the guys have so much experience. Believe it or not, it's a new team, new guys, but it's like a pack of knowledge from each guy, from mechanic standpoint, engineering side actually from Andretti. It was very cool to have Dave and Mark, Brian with me first time working together. But it felt like we had worked before. We never worked, but it felt like that.

We really understand each other. I like that kind of situation. Look, everyone's literally introducing themselves, just like going to an office. Hey, how you doing, nice to meet you? Where is my table? Where do I go? So it's like that.

But it was in a way that somebody knew exactly what need to be done. For me, having that kind of attitude, nobody's expecting right away like a scenario that we got to do it this way. Everybody is taking their time, make sure everything is ready, especially with the car. In fact, the car that I tested, it was actually Jack Harvey's spare car. My car is still in the wind tunnel. You can see the team is doing everything they can when you come to the Indy 500, this car is going to be top-notch, the same level as any other car out there.

I'm glad and I like to be part of this. With Team Penske I knew it would be okay, so I wasn't worry about it. Now I'm part of it this development. That's really cool. I really enjoy this.

Q. On Jimmie Johnson's entrance into the series, you've been in open-wheel racing for more than two decades, raced against him in sports cars, what do you feel like he has in store? What do you think of his attempts to try to make this switch at 45?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: First of all, incredible. I can see that he's passionate about it. I believe he felt his time in NASCAR, probably it was time for him to move to something else. He decided to achieve this challenge. By the way, which is a huge challenge for someone entire life working with a heavier car, different type of car, and going to a very fast one, which is an INDYCAR.

First of all, I admire people like that because they like to challenge themselves and go for it. Second, I know Jimmie for a long time. He's a good friend of mine. I know how he feels because even I that have experience for so many years going back, it feels a little bit like overwhelm; so much to learn, so many things to do.

Once you're a champion like him, I don't feel that he's going to have any -- especially having the teammates he

has with Scott Dixon, that he can learn so much, it will definitely help.

Yeah, maybe one or a few races or tests that might be a little bit -- doesn't look the way probably he wants. But trust me, he will figure it out. For the beginning of the season, he'll be ready.

Q. Obviously you and Tony are back again part-time. This morning Pietro was announced taking the ovals. How good is it to have a younger Brazilian driver now?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Great question. Tony and I have been carrying the Brazilian flag for a long time, like all the Brazilians 25 years ago did, Gil de Ferran, André Ribeiro, Fittipaldi. We had so many. So for me, seeing Pietro coming into the series hopefully is an opportunity for him to show his talent, even if it's just a few races and the ovals only. Still we do have a new generation coming, not only as a Brazilian but a bunch of other new generations coming, making a very good statement.

We hope that Brazil one day will produce, like Pietro is probably a light at the end of the tunnel that people create interest again instead of going to stockcar in Brazil or trying at Formula 1, which there is no Brazilian at the moment, but trying to create that spark again like we used to have 20 years ago.

I think new the new broadcast in Brazil, people are going to be again excited. Tony and I will be able to show out there and succeed so that we can inspire the young generations to come back and keep it going.

Q. Is the door open if he has any questions? Would you be a mentor to him to help him get going?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Absolutely. One of the things even with my teammate Jack Harvey, look, I work with a lot of teammates. Again, I been around the block. I learn so much with Rick Mears. Rick never come to me and say, You got to do this or that. But he always make himself available. Every time we talk, it was like half an hour conversation, which was great. Especially me, I want to understand.

He was able to always with few words direct and guide me to the right way. If I can be that kind of assistance to not only Brazilian but any other young driver, I'm always open for it. I been there one day. 20-plus years ago I was one of the guys asking questions as well (smiling). I would never close the door to a young driver asking for information.

Q. I want to ask you, I already heard some drivers say

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about the driving styles, all this kind of things. I want to ask you, with all these recent jumps that you already have, what you can say that it's this little steps that you have to make in order to adjust and get back in the perfect shape that you need now?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: No, great question.

It's a process. I was just talking about coming out of the corkscrew with the traction control. Imagine driving for three years with that. You create some habits. You kind of have to relearn again and things like that, the weight of the car, the brakes, the position as well.

All of a sudden I'm back, even that I have my own seat from Penske, Penske was very generous to give my seat, so I'm kind of like adapting the car again. Always these little things believe it or not makes a huge difference.

For you to put everything, all the pieces together, you got to run. It's not only sit down and turn right and left because when you're static it's one way, when you're driving it's another thing. Those are details that believe it or not makes a difference. Even just a simple example, brake calipers or master cylinder, you got to try different ones, because evolution -- you can't only stay where you're comfortable, but you also got to adapt to things that is better in the future.

Those are the things that even that I was four years almost away from INDYCAR, it changed. Even that I'm an experienced driver, you need to have some sort of like laps around. I would love to have one more test in the road course to feel like, Okay, now I understand where I need to go. But it is what it is. We're going to have an open test very soon in April. It will be in the oval. At least that I know what I need to do.

Q. When you said you have to adapt a lot of things, you already have worked with Honda in the part of engines. Do you think this is also some similarities between IMSA engine or it's completely different?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: They're completely different, the restrictions in IMSA, plus the weight of the car, it's completely different. That's one of the things when I went to Laguna, I run that in November or late September, something like that, and we just test. I was fine with the track, but it was a completely different car. It was a lot of fun, don't get me wrong. As soon as I got on that throttle, man, it was so good. It was like, I live for this.

But any sort of like sport that you do, once you're riding a bicycle, might take a little few stumble, but once you get there and understand what you need to do, you'll be back

in the game.

Q. This year you're doing I think five INDYCAR races. With you not doing IMSA full-time, are you looking to get back into doing INDYCAR more, possibly working towards a full-time seat?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, that would be great, no question. It would be awesome to be part of more races, which accelerate the adaptation to the car. Yes, I would love to be a full season. That would be a no-brainer. To be not only ready, but to be competitive.

I am doing six races, not five. So, yeah, who knows what's going to happen. I'm always feel that we could do a little bit more, but I understand the process with Meyer Shank Racing. We'll just keep it going. We'll find ways.

Also IMSA. I had a great three years. It would be a waste of three years to just throw out all the experience that I learn there over the three years. As of right now, yes, if I can do more INDYCAR racing, it would be great.

Q. At this point that's your preference, to expand your INDYCAR presence again?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yes, yes.

Q. From your perspective, how much do you think Jimmie Johnson can learn from what he's doing in sports cars now compared to coming over to INDYCAR? You're the perfect person to ask because you have the experience of both, understand what's needed in most. How much can he pick up from the sports car side of things? Will that expedite his learning?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: A lot. For so many years he was adapting to one style of racing. Racing is racing, by the way. Don't misjudge that. No matter what kind of car you are, racing is racing.

However, because he's doing sports car, which is help him the transition from NASCAR to INDYCAR, that kind of, like, between, which is IMSA, it will help him tremendous understanding the braking point, understanding the racing rhythm is a little bit different because you're racing against so many series, so it's not going to be kind of like that. But for him to be with his teammates and sharing data on the same exactly car at the same time, it will no question prepare him better for adapting to the INDYCAR.

I do believe he's not only racing that, but he's also practicing different sort of open-wheel. Again, the rules of INDYCAR are not allowing to test much. That's very, very

difficult for a guy like him, a guy like me, but especially a rookie person as well. INDYCAR, it is a beast. It is not a toy. When you jump in, it can bite you.

I do feel that it's great to have him. It's just more time driving. For understanding what he needs to do in INDYCAR, that would be perfect. I wish I would be doing what he's doing.

THE MODERATOR: Helio, thanks again for the time. Glad to have you back more often this year. Wish you the best of luck.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Hope to see all you guys again.

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