

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Takuma Sato

Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing
Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Takuma Sato, two-time Indy 500 winner. Got the ring on?

TAKUMA SATO: Yes (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: Welcome. Give us an idea of your outlook for this season, what are the goals, expectations? How are things shaping up for 2021?

TAKUMA SATO: Just really excited to be back into the car. The new season very exciting. Obviously the last year, the worldwide challenging situation, we were so restricted. Hopefully we have more fans engaging this year, we see more fans anywhere basically we go, and we back in some of the track we miss last year, particularly for example like Barber Motorsports Park starting the season will be very exciting. Particularly we left there with very good memory back in 2019. So very exciting.

I think expectation is naturally just high. People really excited for our team and for ourselves, too. We have high expectation. Of course, we wanted to be more consistently competitive for entire season, but specifically for Indy 500 of course. I personally really look forward to back in Indy 500 as defending champion of course, and the team preparing as good as last year hopefully and we can compete in very, very high level.

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

Q. How is it going with your new engineer? How do you see that impact in the 500? Obviously you have kind of a new relationship to build there. You need to kind of bed in and get used to working with him. How do you expect that to play out this year?

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, absolutely. So new engineer obviously. It is challenging. Just the relation, building new relation. I have got another English engineer, which is always nice. Always I feel like back-home feeling. Matt has been very established in the sport. He's done a

tremendous experience.

Of course, he hasn't done much of the INDYCAR experience, but I think the team engineers are very supportive. We just done two or three actual test. So all the time we engaging more and more. We just understanding more.

But, of course, before we go to the racing, it's very limited things we can do. But I've got a really great feeling, and particularly for the 500, we'll see. We just don't know. But I think it's very challenging. I can support anything I have with experience. But as well, I think Matt will bringing something new win for our team. On top of table, we have new ideas. That is always interesting.

I think so far is really good feeling.

Q. They say once you're an Indy 500 champion, you sort of have made it, that's what you're identified as. Now that you're a two-time Indy 500 champion, I'm wondering if anything has changed, whether it be recognition or people think more of you?

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, I just simply appreciate all the support I'm getting, regardless in the States or in Japan. But, of course, it's more people recognized. The thing is this year, after '17, it's such a big win for Japan, too. I think the people has been motor racing fan, of course they following big-time. But the people who basically never heard about motor racing, now they know what is about. That's always a good thing. It's always exciting.

When I was finally able to back to Japan off-season after the season finished, I had literally just minute by minute, an entire winter just completely packed schedule because it was so busy, good busy. I feel so much support from there, too.

Yeah, one time is just amazing experience, but two times now just incredible. I'm very thankful to the people who supporting all the time.

Q. I don't know if you have any thoughts on the Olympics coming up, if you think it's going to happen, and how important it is for Japan.

TAKUMA SATO: We just all hope it's happening. Nothing I can do, to be honest. The worldwide of course is looking forward to the Olympic Games, regardless of the countries.

For us, of course it's been second Tokyo Olympic Games in summer. That is just absolutely wonderful. I know a lot of people, how can I say, putting so much energy last year. Hopefully this year everything is starting to calm down. Within a month we have to make a decision, I believe. Hopefully happening, and hopefully we can see lots of the world athletes competing in highest level.

Q. After your second Indy 500 victory, how were you received in Japan? Was there anything special that you were able to do this off-season back there? How do you feel adding another massive win to your résumé was received?

TAKUMA SATO: I feel really privileged, of course, and feel very fortunate to be here. Big thank you to everyone for supporting. Really just proud to be part of this family and organization. INDYCAR presents such an attractive, competitive racing all over the world. Japan now, of course we lost Indy Japan 10 years ago, but they still have a great fan base. Even if they have to watch in 3 a.m. to follow our series, it's like Monday morning, too. They are committed. They are loyal fans. I really appreciate it, all of the support.

Of course when I go back to Japan, the physical events has been really restricted. Compared to '17, I would say not even half of what we had in terms of just, let's say, the celebration was not possible. Of course not. Most of the stuff was online, fortunately or unfortunately. Fortunate side is everyone can join it, unfortunate side is you don't have atmosphere.

The world as it is, really you has to do that on that way. But other than that, receiving massive support. Of course, in terms of surprise, I think '17 was much bigger than that. I think 2020 win was really strong win, and the people after seeing '17, they really understand. We have two TV very specific program, two-hours program, just a national program, and they introduced that race and what's happening behind the scene, too. That was very attractive.

I hope to reach out to a lot of new fans, new generation what we need. Of course, NTT, mobile app, all this stuff, and technology is definitely helping for our growing the fan base.

Q. You've won each of the last three seasons at Rahal. The points have gotten better each year. What is it going to take to become champion this year?

TAKUMA SATO: Well, I think obviously the consistency is

the key. To consistently be competitive in this series, extremely hard. Because, of course, we have short ovals, superspeedway, street course and road course, as you know. The field is so tight, like anyone can win the race basically. That's a great part of the INDYCAR.

To be able to become I think the champion, as a team, as a driver, I think you needs to be on top of the game all the time. Well, let's say top five most of the race you need to be. If you have any opportunity to get on the podium, I think it's just a scoring point and consistency is a key. That's something we missed on the last few season. Also we achieved the single wins, which is extremely important, too.

This year we will all try to be as competitive as possible for entire season.

Q. How hard is it in INDYCAR with all the different types of courses to stay consistent and gain in areas but not lose on another track?

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, I think it's extremely challenging, I would say. I think anybody who participating in INDYCAR will realize and recognize how hard this series is.

But one side is very good. I think that's the name of the sport really. It's very competitive field, very competitive cars and drivers and teams. Very attractive, how we say, environment we have. I think it's all good thing.

Once again, to be competitive all the season, every single weekend is extremely tough, but you have to be there. Somebody will win the championship. I think it's nothing is impossible. All we need to do is try to focus on season, but focus on every weekend to be the best of our potential.

Q. Bobby said a couple years ago before they added you that you don't want to add a second car just to add a second car. It had to be an addition to Graham's car and bring something to the program. Do you feel as Penske and Ganassi has grown, does RLL need a third car to help information for you and Graham moving forward?

TAKUMA SATO: Well, I think it's beneficial to have multiple the teammates. I've been going through the experience with Andretti Autosport as you may know. Until then, the Foyt days was great, really like tight family feeling with A.J. and Larry. I loved that A.J. Foyt Racing team while I was there. But of course the teammates is always helping each other because we dividing the program for back-to-back. If you have two cars, if you have three cars, if you have five cars, with one session, you basically double the information.



It is definitely valuable. But equally the quality control, the build spec, and I think to manage all the data and the engineers, all the things, is also become more comprehensive, too. As long as you have enough environment and resource to help solve this matter of the huge data, I'd love to have more teammates. But that's something that the team make a decision. At the moment Graham and I working extremely close together to building the relationship and the consistency through the platform at Rahal become stronger and stronger.

Hopefully we can do the continue of this good job. But to be better, I think we need to expand for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Takuma, we'll let you get to your next station. Best of luck to you. Thanks for joining us.

TAKUMA SATO: Thank you, everyone. See you soon.

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