

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Max Chilton

Gallagher Carlin
Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome to Day 2 of our INDYCAR Content Days. Thank you, everybody, for being here yesterday. Our first guest, first driver, is Mr. Max Chilton, driver of the No. 59 Gallagher Carlin Chevrolet. Max is driving the road and street courses and the Indy 500, if I'm correct.

MAX CHILTON: Correct.

THE MODERATOR: Max, thanks for joining us. Appreciate it.

MAX CHILTON: Thank you for having me. I know it's early morning over in the States. Obviously the way the world is, it was a bit of a challenge for me to get out for the Content Day just on itself. Thankfully INDYCAR have allowed me to do this from home in the UK.

THE MODERATOR: What's the outlook for this year? How are things looking for you and for the team heading into 2021?

MAX CHILTON: Yeah, so it's really exciting to be back with Carlin. This is our fourth year. I know I say it every year, but I do think we've learnt a lot last year. Last year was a huge challenge, probably more challenging than our first year if I'm honest because it was our first year of just running as a single-car entry.

Also the way the world was, we got very little testing and everything logistically and organizational wise was a challenge. I think we've done a great job considering and we've done more of a development program over this winter than any of the other previous.

So I am confident that the car has improved. I'm also confident that I've improved in myself. I've taken on a sports psychologist, I have started doing weekly simulator sessions, changed my training a little bit, just to try and stir things up and see if it helps because there's just as much time in myself, the driver, as there is the team.

Hopefully those two things combined we can regularly get into the top 10 and hopefully once you are regularly in the top 10, you get the odd podium. It's just at the moment we've struggled to get those regular top 10s. We're looking forward to going into this year with a bit more confidence.

Q. What was it like last year, not only as a race driver but as a human, just to kind of cope with the ever-changing nature of the schedule and really of the world due to the pandemic?

MAX CHILTON: I think it's humankind in general, but obviously particularly sports, athletes. You have to be open to things constantly changing. You can't predict the future, so you have to adapt and learn to change your schedule at the last minute and just be prepared for whatever is around the corner.

I think everyone learnt last year, even in just general day life, that you didn't know what was coming from one month to the next.

I think INDYCAR did an amazing job. We only had a couple of months' delay and then we were back at it. It was a real shame not having the fans there last year, but it's really great to see we're going to have the fans back at Barber and then St. Pete, so that's a really good sign.

The INDYCAR interaction between the drivers is fantastic. Just watching Romain Grosjean's Instagram the last few weeks, he's really sort of enjoyed that open book that the drivers have which from where he came from is a little bit different. Yeah, hopefully he's enjoying that American side of just access all areas.

Q. I'm curious, you said the way the world is right now, it was difficult to get to the U.S. Could you not or was it just too many hoops to jump through for Content Days?

MAX CHILTON: We could have got there, obviously, because I'm going to get out there for the racing, but the challenges are just for one Content Day, I would have to get a negative test 72 hours before I fly, then I would have to obviously do the Content Day, then I would have to find a negative test before flying back to the UK, and then once



I've gotten back into the UK, I would then have to quarantine in my house for 10 days before leaving.

Training wise on the buildup to the season I didn't think it was worth it for a Content Day when I can do these Zoom calls and we can get the photos done at the track nearer the time. Thankfully INDYCAR were open to allowing that to happen.

Q. You mentioned you're seeing a sports psychologist. I presume that's new this year?

MAX CHILTON: It's new for this year as in the person that I'm using. I have used a sports psychologist for five or six years. I did have a year off, but I've changed the person now, and I'm getting on with them really well.

They've got a great proven track record. She also works with Jack Harvey, so I know Jack has made some good gains in the last couple of years.

It's nice to just have a different approach to it than I've had before. We'll see. A lot of it's about preparation. I've always known it's about preparation. We're doing more simulator sessions. I've now got a new engineer this year called Luke Mason. He was my strategist last year and he now hosts the simulator sessions. And he's actually a very keen sim racer himself. We can practice against each other, which I think is just practice and seat time.

Q. Is the sports psychologist mostly helping you with preparation, how you prepare yourself?

MAX CHILTON: Yeah, basically sports psychology, that is the main part of it. It's not necessarily going, You're the best and you're just going to go out and do better because let's face it, you're not going to go out and do better because you think you're better than you are.

It's all about getting fitter, better nutrition, about organizing your engineers to have more communication so you can then push the team forward more. And then by doing those things, the simulator sessions going better, the training going better, you then start to believe in yourself more, which then changes the on-track experience.

It's not very much like, Look into my eyes and you're the world's greatest. That's a very old-fashioned look at sports psychology.

Q. I wanted to follow up on that, as well. I was curious about the psychology aspect. Is it sort of just more -- makes you more efficient and more organized? Is that sort of the goal, what you're saying?

MAX CHILTON: Yeah. It also, when you've been in motorsport, I've been in it for 20 years and I'm not the first and I won't be the last to say you become a little bit complacent thinking you know what you need to do and you actually end up not doing what you not need to do because you've done it so many times before.

But you look at these young kids that have just started off in the series and they're doing everything to try and improve.

It happens just in everyday life. As you get older you become a little bit complacent. It's just checking in with what you should be doing compared to what you have been doing and moving forward.

I think we're now talking more communication-wise between myself and my engineer, and we're practicing more, which hopefully that leads us in a better stead going into the season.

Q. I know you said it tongue in cheek about it's not the look into my eyes thing, but I think when people think of psychology that's what they think of. Is there a little bit of a stigma in motorsports when drivers say they're doing this, and are more drivers doing it than we realize?

MAX CHILTON: I don't think it's talked about a lot. From what I've learnt and speaking to people, most drivers on the grid have a sports psychologist. I don't know why it's not more open, but I've always been open book about it.

Even when I was in F1 I remember doing -- we always on a Thursday did a press conference with five other drivers, and I mentioned that I did visualization. So when I was having like a massage before getting in the car, my masseuse, who was also my PT, would start a stopwatch and I would have to visualize a lap, then I would say 'stop' and look at the time and see how close we are.

Sometimes, not every time, regularly I was within the second, but sometimes I'd get it within the same tenth of a second that I'd then go out and qualify.

That stuff, that's what it's all about. Preparation is everything. But yeah, there's definitely other drivers on the grid using them for sure, and it's just part of being an athlete.

Q. About the team, it seemed like some big gains were made last year in some places like the season opener with Conor and the pole he had. Does it feel like the team maybe is on the cusp of maybe not graduating to first tier up front all the time, but maybe just taking

another step?

MAX CHILTON: Yeah, we've definitely improved the car. The short track car with Conor, we just seemed to hit the nail on the head and improved. We started to improve the road course, which I'm hoping obviously that's more of a schedule that we've got on top of, and also Indy. Indy means a lot to us.

We've learnt over the last six months looking back we did a vital mistake and went the wrong direction, and that's now explained everything why we struggled last year.

Hopefully again we can go into Indy knowing that we've learnt from our mistakes and we can qualify higher up. We know we've got a very smooth, slippery car and it's efficient, so we should have done better at Indy. But we've now worked out what we did wrong, and hopefully we've learnt from it.

Q. The level of progress that Carlin -- I know that when you and the team moved up to INDYCAR, there was some high hopes, expectations this was going to be a team for the future. How would you gauge the level of progress at this point? Are you on schedule, behind schedule, a lot of work to do? How would you gauge that?

MAX CHILTON: If I'm honest, I think we're behind where we wanted to be going into our fourth year. But there's a lot more hurdles, too, that you learn. It's like anything, there's always more to it than you originally planned.

We're up against teams like Ganassi, Penske, Andretti have been doing it for 25 to 50 years, and they do have a huge difference in budgets, and that's a huge part of the INDYCAR.

So I think with what we have and especially now being a single car, I think we do as good a job as anyone else at being a single-car entry. We're very focused on the things that we can improve with what we've got, and I think especially this winter that's something which hopefully we can prove to everyone in the opening races.

I wanted to be fighting for podiums, and we haven't been, but that doesn't mean we're not going to be. That's my outlook going into this year, and looking forward to it.

Q. When Trevor set up the shop in Florida, he thought it was a good recruiting tool to bring European mechanics and engineers over to the United States because Florida, nice place to live, all of that. Do you think that model has worked out, or do you still see where it might be advantageous to consider a move to

Indianapolis?

MAX CHILTON: No, I fully back that decision. We've got the youngest pit crew, probably engineering team, on the grid. Our pit stops time prove that. There's a lot of older generations still jumping over the wall, and we wouldn't have been able to do that if we didn't move the team to Florida. If we had it in Indianapolis we wouldn't have gotten the people over that we wanted.

I fully back the decision. It's a few extra miles for the truck drivers, but again, there's quite a few races in the South where it benefits us.

I think that decision was completely worthy. Some people might think otherwise, but I back Trevor's decision. And we got some great people over we probably wouldn't have been otherwise.

Q. You mentioned about a single-car team. Have there been any talks of bringing a second car out this year?

MAX CHILTON: There's a possibility of running another car at the Indy 500. We've definitely got another fantastic car built, ready to go, and we're in talks with some other people. But at the moment it's definitely a single-car entry for this year, and that's the focus. But we're ready if we have another person ready.

Q. For whoever it is to share the oval seat with you, is there somebody you have in mind, a driving style that you notice somebody likes that can help you out for the other races? I know it's completely different tracks, but anything that can help?

MAX CHILTON: Yeah, so obviously this year there's only three other races which I'm not doing. That's two at Texas and then Gateway. We've got quite a lot of interest in that seat so we're just trying to work out which route we go down.

I'm not part of that decision process. I purely focus on what I need to do, so that's between Trevor and the management. And I check in regularly to see how that's going, but I'm confident we'll get a good talent in the car for those few races.

Q. As a quick follow-up about your travel. Obviously the more condensed schedule. Are you commuting from overseas to here? After St. Pete I know there's Texas, the 500 stuff after that. Are you just going to stay in the States between that break?

MAX CHILTON: So the plan is to commute less, but I will still commute. Last year actually was unbelievably easy.



The planes were absolutely desolate going across the Atlantic. There was never more than 40 people on any of the crossings I did last year. We didn't need to take any negative tests in either direction.

This year is a lot more complicated, negative tests in either direction, and at the moment the UK has been in lockdown for over six months. Nothing is open, and we have to quarantine when we come back. I'm hoping that's lifted.

At the moment the U.S. isn't on the red list as we call it so I don't have to land and go into a hotel for 10 days, I can just quarantine at home for five days and then take a negative test. Again, that takes up a bit of my time. So we want to do that as few of times as possible.

I think I can do the whole season in five trips. If they put America on the quarantine list where I have to stay in a hotel, then I'll do a couple of long stretches. That's the plan.

Again, as I said earlier, the world is quickly changing. Hopefully the amount the UK and America are getting the vaccines out, they'll start to lift things soon after or soon before the Indy 500.

Q. Carlin obviously has a long history in the junior formulas. How important is it to see that team back in Indy Lights, and does that benefit the INDYCAR program down the road where you can bring people over and they get accustomed to racing in the U.S.?

MAX CHILTON: Yeah, I think that's a really good point. It's something we did really well at, and we closed down a couple of years ago. But the grid is looking great for Indy Lights. We've got a really good couple of drivers on board, and I do think that that could feed into the INDYCAR program, which maybe will mean we're not a single-car entry going forward. That would be nice. It would be nice to have a teammate.

I don't think it will affect the INDYCAR schedule. Colin Hale manages the teams and is super, super experienced and I'm sure he knows how to manage two teams. He did it perfectly fine when we first started, so it's definitely something we can do.

Q. Have you seen any benefits from being a one-car team last season, given with everything that was going on last year?

MAX CHILTON: I like your positive question. I never, ever get asked that. And yes, there are plenty of benefits by having a single-car team that some people aren't aware of.

You can very much -- the benefits of multiple-car teams or multiple cars is obviously you can file through some issues and go, Yep, that's the direction, let's go down there, and you've also got driver data overlays. So they're the benefits.

The downside is every time you add a car to a team they become less efficient. People's minds are split between two, three, four, five. When it starts just getting dangerous is where you can't focus on what needs to be done.

So with a single-car team, the setup is purely focused on what I want. And at the end of the day the best setup, even if it's the worst setup, is what I want. If I'm happy with it, that's when the driver will be the quickest. Everything is focused around myself, which is a benefit. Everything is super efficient.

Yes, you have to have technically more people employed than you would need to for two because you can't just split everything. That bit isn't perfect. But whenever there's a problem, it gets resolved I think really, really quick.

There's also other ways between engine manufacturers that you can look at data. So I've got data. It's not like I'm not looking at anyone else's data, so that helps. I've been a single car before, and it kind of works for me.

I know there's people on the grid that think it has its downsides, and for sure I know it has its downsides. But does it mean you can't do well? I disagree. I think you can definitely get some good results being a single-car team, especially with a team like Carlin that have great engineering behind it and they know how to extract the most out of the driver.

Q. We've had an addition of a lot of new rookies, including Helio Castroneves coming back with a new team, new car, new everything. Technically he's a rookie, too. How does that factor in to the way you might attack the track because even though Jimmie Johnson has been a great driver he doesn't have the background and experience that you have and come through the feeder series and so on? Also, Romain Grosjean. You have good drivers who have built credibility and now they're getting into the formula. How is this going to, say, address your approach to this track this season?

MAX CHILTON: Yeah, so it's a great question. Personally it won't change anything that I do. Sometimes I'm a little bit alarmed by sometimes a rookie comes in that I know has got a bit of a checkered background and they're always involved in accidents or they're a bit kamikaze when they go for a move that isn't there, especially INDYCAR racing

on ovals can be quite dangerous.

But the ones coming in this year are highly experienced. Helio, as you said, is not really a rookie. Romain is a fantastic driver. He wouldn't have lasted 10 years in Formula One if he wouldn't and he won the GP2 championship.

So yeah, it doesn't change anything. Jimmie Johnson has got some of the best race craft that has ever existed. NASCAR is all about race craft. For me it doesn't change anything. It's actually quite exciting.

I think INDYCAR is doing a fantastic job at the moment getting some big names in the series. I think that's so beneficial, and it's the last -- I call it the last pure single seater formula out there. Loud, fast, and whatever other word they use, it's definitely loud and fast. They're doing a great job of that.

I saw an article that Kobayashi is potentially looking at coming over, as well. I know me and Alex were the first, and then you've got Marcus that's come over, and now Romain. I think there's going to be more others. And especially European drivers, some of them are not big fans of the ovals like myself.

The more we reduce those oval races off the schedule, which we have done the last couple of years, naturally more people are coming over, which is what we're seeing.

I think we've got some great times ahead of us in the INDYCAR Series.

Q. I know that a lot of Europeans are not fans of ovals. In fact, even Will Power wasn't a fan of ovals, but once he broke through, he literally broke through, he became a champion and just a can't-lose type of driver. Of course he qualifies crazy. Have you ever given thought of maybe developing an expertise in ovals even though it's not, say, comfortable for you?

MAX CHILTON: I definitely gave it a good shot. I did it for -- it's the only race I've actually won in America was in Indy Lights on the oval. So I prepared in the best way possible doing Indy Lights. And then I gave it three or four years, a couple with Ganassi and a couple with Carlin, and we definitely -- I nearly won the Indy 500, the biggest race in the world. I led it for 50 laps, more than anyone else, and lost it with six laps to go.

I definitely think I've got the expertise skills to succeed on it. It's just for me it was a life choice. Did I really deep down enjoy it? No. I know for a fact, I wish I could name all the other drivers that agree with me, but I'm not going to

throw them under the bus.

Q. We already know who they are.

MAX CHILTON: Yeah, they're in a position where they can't do it. I was in a position where yes, I could do it, but then I was still putting myself out on the line. But I back myself for doing that, and I think I was being honest to myself and true.

I would have hate for something to happen and me not done something about it. I've done something about it. That's the way it is. I now really look forward to getting into a race car on the road and street courses, and yeah, I'm enjoying life more now.

Obviously the 500 is a different beast. It's a race in itself. The thing that makes me willing to still do the Indy 500, everyone treats it with respect. Everyone gets a whole week or two practice, and everyone builds up to it in the way that you should.

The ones that I didn't enjoy is when you got an hour's practice and then you had to go flat at night on qualifying and then race a couple hours later. It was just too kamikaze for me.

THE MODERATOR: Max, we appreciate your time. Thanks a lot for dialing in today, and we also wish you the best of luck this year, and we'll see you in Barber.

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