

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Marcus Ericsson

Chip Ganassi Racing
Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We have Marcus Ericsson, driver of the No. 8 Huski Chocolate Chip Ganassi Racing Honda.

Good morning. Thanks for joining us.

MARCUS ERICSSON: Good morning, everyone.

THE MODERATOR: We're talking between drivers, you had a deceptively strong season last year. Maybe not the results that really you deserved or showed. Do you feel like that set the foundation for a real breakout this year with Ganassi?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, I do believe so. I think last year, like you said, we had a very solid year. I had, I think, nine top 10s and a few other runs in the top 10 when I had the crash in Indy and so on. I think we were always in the mix, but we missed that highlight result, that podium or win that I think we should have had.

That's the goal for this year instead, to keep the consistency but pick that first INDYCAR Series win is a big target of mine going into this year.

THE MODERATOR: What was the difference last year? What helped you to take that step to consistency and to get to the point where podiums and wins are definitely a reality?

MARCUS ERICSSON: I think for me, coming from five years in Formula One, the first year was a very steep learning curve. It's a lot to get used to here in the INDYCAR Series and the cars and everything. So it was definitely a learning year.

Then last year changing teams, it took a bit of time to get used to that. Yeah, coming to a team like Chip Ganassi Racing was awesome, and to have a teammate like Scott Dixon to learn from, that obviously helped a lot, as well. And myself, as well, developing and understanding the series.

I was really happy with my consistency last year. Now we just need to get the peaks a bit higher.

Q. Is this going to be the year where you're going to win your first INDYCAR race?

MARCUS ERICSSON: That's the plan. It's a big target of mine. Like I said, last year I was pretty happy with the consistency, to be able to run in the top 10 pretty much everywhere. I'm really, really eager for that first win. It's something that's probably the biggest target of the year, to get that first win.

I feel like it's coming. It's building up to it. I think I showed that last year. But you need to make it happen, as well. This series and the field is so competitive, so it's not easy. You need to have a perfect day. That's definitely a goal.

Q. Looking at last year, I think probably you could agree that your biggest struggle was qualifying on street and road courses, which is kind of a little different considering your background. Is that something you focused on, on working on improving over the off-season, and do you know how you can improve?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, definitely. I think there's no question about it, that was the biggest problem we had last year, or I had last year, was the qualifying on road and street courses where we just qualified too far back. In the races we came strong, but it's too tough in a series like this to start mid-pack and be able to win.

That's been the biggest focus for us, for my team, and to be honest Chip Ganassi Racing as a whole. I think we felt as a team that we were struggling a bit with all our cars in qualifying on road and street courses.

That's been a big focus for the whole team, but also myself. I've been looking at myself to see what I can do to improve it, to try and understand the tires more. I think that was one of the things to try and switch on the tires better for qualifying. I think that was one of the big areas that we as a team and me as a driver were struggling a bit with.

It's been the biggest area of focus in the off-season, and I

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do believe we've made some progress there. We don't get the red tires often in testing but we've still done a lot of work on the primary tires in testing, and it feels like we've made some progress there.

So it's going to be very interesting to see when we get to Barber for the first race if we can start qualifying a bit higher up because I think if we can do that, win some podiums, it's on its way.

Q. NASCAR is not as big in Sweden, but Jimmie Johnson I think is pretty well known. With his experience coming over to you guys, I know it's quite different, the racing and the cars and so on, but can he teach you something also with all his experience even though he comes from a different field?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, definitely. I think first of all, it's a privilege to be a teammate with a living legend like Jimmie Johnson. And then on top of that obviously Scott Dixon. So it's two of the greatest drivers in American racing that I'm teammates with this year, which is pretty awesome.

I think I can definitely learn a lot of things from Jimmie. All his success, all his championships comes from the way he works, the way he is as a person, the way he interacts with the team, engineers and so on. Even if it's a different series, INDYCAR versus NASCAR, that still translates.

I definitely try to pick up things like that and try and see what I can learn from a guy like him. Jimmie is such a nice guy, as well, off the track.

Yeah, it feels like us as a team this year, we have such a nice mix of different drivers with different backgrounds and experiences. If we can get it all together, we're going to be a really strong team.

Q. You made such progress last year with oval tracks and everything, and you were so close so many times. What do you think is going to be the next step for you this season? What do you think you've improved even more?

MARCUS ERICSSON: I think like we had another question there, my qualifying on road and street courses has been a big focus. So that's where I want to improve the most because that's just going to help me.

I think my race craft last year was as strong as anyone, so I don't worry about that. I think if I can qualify up front, I'm sure I can score podiums and win. That's going to be a big focus.

Then also to get a breakthrough result on an oval. I think from the start when I got here to INDYCAR, I've been really happy on ovals, really felt like it's been suiting my driving style, and I really enjoyed it, but I haven't really had a big result yet. I had the fifth place in Gateway race one, which was a good result, but I feel like there is a lot more there to come. Yeah, I'm looking for a big result on one of the ovals for sure. Maybe the big one. That would be good.

Q. Another question on Jimmie. I know just kind of looking at it from a numbers perspective, I think back in November his first test with you guys at Barber he was about two-and-a-half seconds back of the fastest car on track that day. He's moved it I think he said down to around one second. It's maybe hard for us to entirely put into perspective everything that he's worked on and improved upon to make that gap up. What do you feel like you've seen from him over the last four months and the testing that you guys have done that has allowed him to begin to bridge this gap and get a little bit closer to the field in pursuit of his first INDYCAR season?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, I think first of all, it's a very big challenge for him coming from NASCAR to INDYCAR Series. It is very different cars, and I think Jimmie obviously understands that.

What I've been very impressed with with Jimmie is just his work ethic and how much he puts into it. It's not something that he just shows up at the track and try and go fast. He works really, really hard and prepares and tries to ask questions to all of us. Obviously with Dario, he works a lot with him, but also asking Scott, but also asking me and Alex for different things. I've been very impressed with that.

And like you said, his rate of improvement from the first test to last time out in Laguna when we were there a couple of weeks ago has been very impressive to see. It's going to be fun to follow that. It's a great addition to the team, no doubt about it.

Q. You and Alex, who we just talked to earlier, have both mentioned a desire to try and get out and get a win for CGR this year. I know those are certainly personal goals of yours, but do you feel any pressure, I don't know if it would be from Chip directly or being with Chip Ganassi Racing and everything that comes with that program, do you feel pressure to try to become that next race winner alongside Scott that the team has been looking for for years and years since Dario left his racing pursuits?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, for sure. I think driving for a

team like Chip Ganassi Racing you always have that pressure to deliver because you know you have a top-class equipment to do that, and you work with top-class people.

I feel that pressure, but I think it's a healthy pressure. It means that you have a good opportunity. I think that just helps you perform even more. At least that's how I work and how I -- yeah. So yeah, I think the pressure is there when you drive for a top team, and that's something that I enjoy.

Q. I often see you tweeting a lot about F1 and the current issues of F1. I want to know, you've obviously raced in F1, you're a full-time INDYCAR driver, if you can take one thing from INDYCAR and put it into F1 to make it better, what would you take?

MARCUS ERICSSON: I think selfishly from a driver perspective what makes INDYCAR so great is obviously the fact that all the cars are very similar. It's a one-spec series in that way. Two manufacturers is closely matched. For me that's the biggest thing with F1 is to try and even the playing field is the biggest challenge.

I know they have different manufacturers, so it's difficult to get that to, I guess, work. But I think they're trying to go in that direction. For me that's purely from a racing and from a driver's perspective, that's the big thing.

That's why I love INDYCAR so much, because we have that -- every morning on race day I tell you every driver that wakes up that morning, he knows he or she has a chance to win the race because that's INDYCAR. Everyone can win, and that's what I love about it.

Q. Obviously you're going into your second season with Ganassi. What have you learnt from last season that you can bring forward to this year, given that you're going up against the likes of Scott again but also you've got Tony coming in and obviously Jimmie, as well, but also you've got Alex in the team, too?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, I tried to learn as much as possible last year, being teammates with Scott. Obviously it's been very good for me and the way he works, the way he wants to set up the car, the way he thinks through a race weekend, not only about being fast in practice per se because he's thinking about the race all the time.

Also for me, second year with the same people, with my race engineer, Brad Goldberg, to work together for another year when we already know each other, he knows what I want from the car, that's going to be huge for us.

It's a lot of things that it's good when you go into a second

year together with a team and with a core group of people. That's what I'm really excited about, to see what we can do when we start with that experience.

Also we have to remember last year, even though I came to a top team in Chip Ganassi Racing, we also were a new team in the team. The 8 car didn't run the year before. So it was a learning curve for all of us on the 8 car during last year and it took a bit of time to get everything going. That's why it's really exciting for me to go into this year knowing that we have that experience with us.

I'm really excited to see what we can do together.

Q. It takes three to four wins to capture a championship, at least many believe that. Which tracks do you believe give you the best opportunity for wins?

MARCUS ERICSSON: So coming from a road background in Europe, the normal answer would say on a road course. But I actually feel like the ovals is -- I don't know, I have a feeling I'm going to get my first win on an oval. I don't know why. Let's see.

I wouldn't mind if I got my first win somewhere on a road course or a street course, obviously, but like I said, I'm looking for a big result on an oval because I think it's coming. Keep an eye out.

Q. Given the tracks you've run, given road course and street course, which one seems to be your favorite?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Ooh. Yeah, that's a good question. I liked Detroit when we were there. I had my first podium in INDYCAR there, so that was a fun track. Very intense and bumpy and a lot of character. I enjoyed that.

Barber, where we go for the first race of the year, is also a really cool track where you need to have a lot of commitment in the driving.

And then the ovals. Texas is going to be a lot of fun to have the double-header there. It's such an awesome racetrack. I'm looking forward to that, as well.

THE MODERATOR: Marcus, thanks for joining us today.

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