

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Scott Dixon

Chip Ganassi Racing
Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Scott Dixon, driver of the No. 9 PNC Bank Chip Ganassi Racing Honda, defending champ, six-time champ.

I heard through the vine this morning that you were asked to bring your six rings to media day and you had trouble finding them. Is that true?

SCOTT DIXON: A little bit. You know, when you think you know where things are but not totally specifically, I guess. So yeah, I kind of had a good rough idea where they were. I think the last time we did a championship ring thing was maybe Austin, but that was actually two championships ago. I think it was like '15 or '16 so I knew where those four were but I didn't know where the current two new ones from '18 and '20 were.

THE MODERATOR: So you don't wear them around the house and go, two for the thumbs?

SCOTT DIXON: No. I might start, though. They felt pretty good on today. I wouldn't be able to get the gloves on with them.

THE MODERATOR: Coming into the season, defending champ, led from wire to wire. Obviously we know what the goals are, to go for seven. How are things looking? How are you feeling, your expectations going into the season after testing and with some new faces on the team this year?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I guess last year was definitely I think a strange year for obvious reasons. I think for us, we were extremely lucky as a team in the NTT INDYCAR Series and obviously with Roger and the whole transition to make the season possible.

I think I speak for all the drivers and the teams that we're very privileged to be able to continue on with almost a 100 percent season and put on some typical INDYCAR fantastic racing.

It was challenging in many ways from the protocols to the travel to how the weekends were and compressed weekends. We've seen from many different formulas that may apply to some of the races we go to this year, a lot of two-day events, so that is going to change the dynamic a little bit, I think, especially for the rookies this year and people coming in.

Q. I wanted to ask you, obviously a lot of discussion today about Romain and Jimmie and Scott McLaughlin and all these new names coming in and the why behind that. And what some drivers have said is they feel like INDYCAR is a purer form of motorsports, it's considered a drivers' series. I've heard you say that before about INDYCAR. Would you agree that that's a reason that so many guys are coming from around the world to this series, and how would you define like purity of motorsport in INDYCAR?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think Jimmie's story is definitely different from Romain and McLaughlin. I think they've done very different things.

The craziest situation is obviously Jimmie. The task that he's taking on is probably, I think, the toughest transition from INDYCAR to formula in our sport. Huge respect for what he's doing. But you can see with looking at him closely, his work ethic and all that kind of stuff, he's giving it 110 percent, which is quite exceptional.

With the other two, I think McLaughlin, what did he win, three championships in Supercars? He's married to an American. I think he's always wanted to race in America. Transition with Penske I think was something that they spoke about for a little bit to see if there was going to be options. I think a lot of people thought that was going to be more of a NASCAR kind of situation.

It's fantastic to have him over here. It's pretty cool to have another Kiwi on the grid and expecting and hoping for big things for him this year and for many years to come.

I think Grosjean, I actually had dinner with him last night with Marcus Ericsson and Felix, too, and it's the same that I've seen with the IMSA side. It'll be fun to be in something with similar equipment and be able to race for wins is the



huge thing.

I think in general it's the competition, but it's the NTT INDYCAR Series, when you watch our races, they're so intense. There's so many different outcomes, so many different possibilities.

I think for a driver it's just being able to have pretty much the same equipment as everybody on the grid and having the possibility of winning the race that is pulling people in.

Plus all the other things of the cool tracks we go to, the different disciplines, short ovals, superspeedways. There's just so many appealing things about our series that I think you're seeing a lot of people trying to make the switch.

Q. Yesterday Jimmie was talking about how much he's been leaning on you and Dario in testing and in data. Do you have any favorite stories of working with Jimmie yet? How do you think you're helping him so far?

SCOTT DIXON: No, not so many crazy funny stories yet. I think you've got to remember, too, like we've only done three -- I think we've done three test days together, maybe two.

The biggest thing for him is just seeing the amount of information that he's getting at once. It's pretty overwhelming. Even for me it would be overwhelming and I'm kind of in that ecosystem. Even with him and I at some of the lunches, I'm like, Just focus on these two corners. Don't try and get the whole lap together. This is where you're missing the most, just try and simplify.

Once you start looking at the video and the data that we have, it can be pretty overwhelming, especially where he's coming from to not have any of that stuff to really access or look at.

Yeah, he definitely blows up your phone. There's a lot of text messages going back and forth, and he's not afraid to ask any question, which is good. He's been a good friend for many years, but to be able to work with him in the same environment has been really cool. He's a great person, as we all know, great family man, but definitely he's one of the greatest of all time in that discipline and got some crazy ambition, I think. To take on this task is pretty insane.

Q. He said that he's not sure if he can get 100 percent acclimated this year or maybe even next year. He said he's 60 percent of the way there. What do you make of that?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, like it's a long process. I think with

how competitive our field is, I think it's probably a second covers most of our races from the start to the finish, and even when you get to that middle pack you're maybe talking three or four-tenths.

The easiest way to put it is that he's been doing one sport for 20, 25 years. He kind of basically has to start, try and unlearn all that stuff and then learn a totally new process. These cars have become very tricky in different conditions. The tires are quite tricky to know ways around them. Then you do all your practice on the primary tire and then, okay, here's qualifying, you get a red tire.

There are races now that we do get the red tire for one run basically, or two if you want to use them a little bit more. There's a lot to take in. Most of the tracks he's not even going to drive around, especially the street courses, until we get there for the first time.

There's a lot of prep that you can try and do, but honestly it doesn't transfer in the real world when you get to that circuit. I've done thousands of laps on a sim for Long Beach, but when you get there it's a totally different situation.

I don't know, I think it's track time is the toughest thing in any category these days. In Europe they still have a lot of testing and things like that, but in America in any of these formulas now, you don't really get to test in too many categories.

Q. You show up in Indy Lights in '99, which was really part of CART, and then you come to CART in '01, win a race, and then you come to the current series in '03. Here you are a six-time champion. Can you recall any other time in your career where from top to bottom of the grid it's this stacked with talent?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think that talent is across not just drivers but teams, as well. I think that's what's really changed from the CART days, whether it's the manufacturer of the chassis was slightly better for a period of races and updates were coming quickly to three of the four engine manufacturers. There was always kind of a prime combination that would kind of dominate a season, as such. Then even in the earlier days of INDYCAR you had that with engine manufacturers and things like that.

I think with the current formula, the equality between the small team and big team, there is no small team anymore the way the rules play. There's not much that a big team can out-spend anybody on. It's just not that factor. So it really comes down to now the people, the people that you get to work with in the process of what you do, and then sometimes a bit of luck.

Yeah, I'd say the competition, I've never seen it so strong. I think when you look at it from a driver standpoint to a team standpoint and the options that you have, it's pretty packed, man.

Q. I know we've asked the Team Penske drivers their opinion on this, but I'll take a different run at it with you: What did you think of the end of the Daytona 500 and what would have happened if say you and Dario on the last lap had taken each other out when you were teammates?

SCOTT DIXON: I think we tried a couple of times but it never happened, luckily.

I don't know. You're racing, right, and you're racing for the win. Especially I think when you look at Daytona 500 or really any race, the chance of winning a race these days is really tough. You know, a win is a win, man. You've got to go for it and sometimes you have to step on the people you don't want to, unfortunately.

I think in my career I've been pretty lucky to not have to have or make decisions like that, at least not in racing.

Q. What was your reaction when you saw it happen right in front of your eyes?

SCOTT DIXON: Which one are we talking about here?

Q. Last lap Daytona 500 where the Penske guys wrecked each other.

SCOTT DIXON: I don't know, I feel like Cup is different. I feel like they kind of just -- they're single teams. They run under the same umbrella but they don't work tightly together maybe. Maybe I don't fully understand it from that aspect.

But I think that race, too, it's a very different kind of race. In our situation you couldn't do things like that and have the hopes of getting victory for yourself. It just wouldn't be possible.

I feel like their style of racing, especially for that race, it's kind of what you've got to do. So I think it's very different from what we do.

Q. You talked already a little bit about just how deep this field is, but particularly with the young drivers that we have and what we've seen out of them so far, do you feel like the strength of the youth in INDYCAR is as strong as it's ever been since you've been in the series?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think it's always been strong. The influx has always been very good. We definitely see some key drivers making some pretty big shifts in the last few years.

I think the rookie content of the last couple of years and this year is strong, as well. I think that influx has always been pretty good.

The current formula doesn't probably -- it's not very kind for rookies or people coming in, which is definitely a bit of a bummer, and that's even for me being a veteran of the sport. I think it would be nice to see more on-track participation and more testing and things like that.

I think it's what the sport is about. It's not just turning up and racing. But yeah, I think it's always -- INDYCAR has always been a very desirable career choice for young guys. But you're seeing people switching from a totally different series and winning, so to come here and have that desire.

I think it's as strong as ever. And the talent that you're getting is maybe the best that we've seen in the last 10 years or so.

Q. We've talked about the new drivers that are coming into the series and the talent that they bring and the excitement that they bring. Beyond that with the big things that INDYCAR is facing right now off the track, you have a TV contract that they're hoping to secure, potentially a third engine manufacturer. Both would be pretty major for the series going forward. I know you guys are so hyper-focused on preparing for on-track activities when you guys are in the off-season, but as you come into 2021 do you have any sense on how important this season as a whole is for the future of the series?

SCOTT DIXON: I think every year is extremely important. I think this season is totally different coming off the back of a pandemic. I think it's changed a lot of things that we do for all of us, how we do the process, some good, some bad, some that will stick around and I think some that everyone is pretty happy to try and reverse them.

I think for the strength of the sport, it's in a good position. If you're negotiating right now I think the content and what NTT INDYCAR Series as a whole I think is pretty special. You see that from things that even the drivers that are switching (indiscernible) and even sponsors that are coming into the sport.

I think also that coupled with Roger not only knowing



people but also probably having a little bit of leverage in some instances I think is a very good position for a lot of people to be in.

For me it's a good place for the series to be in, for it to grow and significantly grow, as I think it deserves.

Q. Seven seems to be the lucky number recently: Tom Brady, seven Super Bowls, Lewis Hamilton, seven F1 championships. You have six INDYCAR championships. Your thoughts on ever equaling Foyt for seven, being placed in this No. 7 club?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, it would be amazing. Seven sounds a lot better than six, so why not? I've never been able to repeat, so that's goal number one, is to go back-to-back.

It's always tough. I think even to win the last two out of three has been pretty exceptional for our team, and it's been fantastic for PNC and welcoming them to the sport and onboard the 9.

I don't know, you've got to take it step by step. It's easy to come in and say, Yeah, we're going to repeat, we want to repeat, we want to win a seventh championship. But trying to secure that is something totally different.

To me it would mean everything to me to be able to do that. I think even to get the sixth was -- in the current landscape is extremely tough and very difficult to do. Very proud of that. The obvious goal is to add to that. That will be what we're trying to do.

Q. You're not showing any signs of slowing down at 40 years old. You're still just as quick as ever. How long do you think you can kind of keep doing this?

SCOTT DIXON: You know, I don't think you can ever really put a time scale on it or an age or anything like that. I think everybody is pretty unique and pretty different.

If anything, I think we've seen the longevity, not just in our sport but across sports in general. There's so many different ways, whether it's the mental game or training or anything like that.

The thing I love about the INDYCAR Series is that it's not really a constant -- well, it is a constant. It's constantly changing, whether it's the track venues to the style of the car or updates like the aeroscreen for safety and things like that that do change the challenge of what we have at hand for a driver or for the engineering group, as well.

I don't know, I think it probably comes down to when you're

not enjoying it. I love the sport more than anything at the moment. I feel very lucky, I feel very privileged to be able to do what I do and especially with the group of people that I get to work with. Probably the most inspiring part of it is when you walk through the doors at Chip Ganassi Racing, the competition level or the competitiveness that you feel in that environment, it's pretty intense. I think that's definitely one that drives me.

And then you look at the competitiveness of the field is insane. The will of wanting to try and win and then keep that winning situation, it tugs at you pretty hard. I don't know. I guess the short answer is I have no idea.

Q. Would you ever do the swap like Jimmie has done? Maybe go to NASCAR when you're kind of through with INDYCAR?

SCOTT DIXON: Probably not. I think I would go down the sports car road before I would go to Cup. I would still love to try it, NASCAR. I've tried a few times with Chip and kind of booked it and then it didn't and then he said I would have to pay for it if I crashed it. So then, that's kind of where it's been left.

The transition I think is just so tough these days, and with no track testing in both formulas, it's almost impossible. That's how intense I think Jimmie's season is going to be, is just the short amount of time just trying to get up to speed is going to be pretty brutal.

He's the man for doing it.

Q. Obviously from the outside, last year's championship looked pretty dang impressive, but you did identify one or two issues like cooking a tire during qualifying at Mid-Ohio I think it was, and then there are other times you said you found it really tough to follow. You were still fast but the car wasn't a pleasure to drive let's say. Have you rectified those issues to the best of your knowledge from what you've gleaned during testing?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think we've found some better understanding of maybe the process of -- it was kind of weird, I think '19 we maybe had the best average of the field for qualifying position, and then '20 was a pretty rough year, especially for road course I think for our team as a whole. Street course was okay, ovals were pretty good, with the exception I think of Iowa where we had a problem.

We have some ideas. I think the problem that we've faced I think in recent years is when you do this testing, especially in winter months, the tracks are very cold and the conditions are extremely different to what you get to.

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And what at least we've found is that the tires are quite sensitive even just to ambient conditions or UV on the track.

You think you have a process, but we probably won't understand it until we get into a few races and see if we can rectify it. Personally I think there's definitely some things I needed to change and apply differently, which I'm pretty cognizant of that and have tried to apply that I think to some of our testing thus far, even though we've only had two or three days.

It'll be a season-long process, I think, trying to get to that point and knowing if we can fix it.

Q. Those things that you've done, I realize you can't give too much away here, but at the end of the day are they a change in driving style or the way you warm your tires up on an out-lap?

SCOTT DIXON: I think it's a bit of both to be honest. The preparation that we do as a team setup-wise, I think, and definitely some driving style things that I think I need to adjust. With the teammates it's been really interesting. Like a lot of those things take a lot of time to try and analyze. You're doing a lot of data mining to make sure you can find specific things and then you've got to test whether those actually really apply. And the addition of Alex and his driving style has been quite different, so even that at some low grip circuits has been really interesting to kind of focus on what works and what's different, whether it's a bit of what Marcus and I do or what he does. Having teammates is always key to try and understand and try and dig deep into how you can change and better yourself for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Scott, we wish you the best of luck and we'll see you in Barber.

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