

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Tuesday, May 18, 2021

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

### Will Power

### Juan Pablo Montoya

### Ryan Hunter-Reay

### Takuma Sato

#### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. On behalf of everyone at Penske Entertainment and management at Indianapolis Motor Speedway, welcome to the world's greatest race course. Wrapping up day one today, which started early with practice. We had a little rain delay midway and then wrapped it up quickly this afternoon with some 35 cars out on the two-and-a-half-mile oval.

A couple of Indy 500 champions joining us here this afternoon. We expect to hear from Ryan Hunter-Reay, I believe, as well, and Takuma Sato, the two-time and reigning Indy 500 champion again here momentarily. Let's get started with two-time Indy 500 champion Juan Pablo Montoya, and Will Power, who topped the speed chart this afternoon with a lap at 226.470 miles an hour. Juan, it looks like you're ready. This is a nice little bounce-back after the weekend you had GP weekend on the road course.

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: Yeah, it was kind of expected to be honest. At the end of the race, we were actually pretty decent on lap time and everything, but it's hard when you go into qualifying and you've done I think eight timed laps or something or 10 timed laps. We knew qualifying was going to be difficult and race was going to be difficult, but we did everything we needed to do with the pit stops, the fuel saving, work under pressure with the engineers.

I mean, I think it was a really efficient weekend for the mechanics, as well. They didn't have a lot of time to make all the changes.

I'm really proud of everybody, Arrow McLaren, Speed. So it's pretty good.



I think our car, I don't know, it's weird because my reference is the old car before, all the halo and all this, and it feels pretty bad, but if you look at when I run with everybody, it seems pretty good.

THE MODERATOR: I remember even when you left here after the open test you felt pretty good about things.

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: Yeah, and when we started here I felt a lot happier then. I felt like we really gained a lot and had really good ideas, and this morning the track was really grippy. It was cool. It's hard when it's so cool because you can fool yourself a little bit. Overall it's okay. I'm pretty happy. Got to wait and see what it brings.

THE MODERATOR: Will, just recap your day today and the rain delay and all of that, but 226.4, P1 here on day one.

WILL POWER: Yeah, so obviously not much, just big tow, as simple as that, trying to catch that train. But as far as stuck in traffic I felt pretty good just running with two or three cars in front. Felt more comfortable than I have for a while.

That was promising, and yeah, I think cooler conditions can make everything feel pretty good. I think when the heat comes it'll certainly change everything and become harder to follow.

I think adding that downforce is certainly going to help the racing. I think you're going to have one of the old style races where the front three are just swapping positions constantly because you can follow so close now. I think, yeah, it's good for the fans.

THE MODERATOR: That begs the question did the aero changes make a difference? So far so good? Do you like what you see out there?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I think they needed that after last year's race and they added it all to the flow so that makes it much better in traffic. Yeah, so far it feels really good.

**Q. I'm wondering how important is it to know this place and to understand what it's about? Is that an invaluable amount of experience?**



JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: Yeah.

WILL POWER: Yeah, I think so. I've had so much time around here, you know the cars -- having worked with Juan and Helio before, these guys were very, very good because of experience, so they know how to get the car right and know where to put it and not get themselves in trouble. I feel like I'm at that stage now.

But yeah, you understand very well.

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: Yeah, it's interesting because as you get more experience you really know what you're looking at on the car, as Will said, but sometimes when you don't know enough, it's good, as well, especially because we drive this -- the way these cars drive at the moment.

I don't know, like if you look at Pato, for example, he's comfortable with a car that is like really, really neutral. I mean, we can handle it, but for me is the question can you do it 200 laps.

The way I look at it is like, I'm going to complain as much as I can until race day and then I'll do the best I can with what I have. That's all you can do.

**Q. Look at Pato; these guys are coming in here, everybody is saying look at the young guys, but does this particular race benefit guys like you?**

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: At the end of the day you look at how many young guys have won the 500 the last few years. I think that answers the question. I mean, do they have a shot? For sure, no question. I think Pato and Herta and all those kids, they've got a lot of talent and everything. Felix, as well. At the end of the day you've got to run the 200 laps and see what happens at the end of it.

First of all, you've got to make it to 200, you know? So we'll see. To tell you the truth, it's tough. It looks like the forecast is going to get hotter this week and next week, so that's going to make it even harder. I don't know, they say that it's better now with the new improved aero kit and everything to follow people, but I still find it pretty difficult to be honest.

You know when you have one car it's not an issue or two cars you can travel and pass, but when you're behind five, six cars, it's like, good luck.

WILL POWER: No, I feel the same. Once you get back in that train -- it's always been that way. It's just so hard in all that dirty air. Yeah, that's the game. It's kind of hard in practice to understand, too, because you've got people

checking up, you've got guys coming out on different fuel loads and new tires and old tires, so you don't know where people are setup-wise or tire-wise.

You honestly don't get a very good idea until race day how it will truly race.

**Q. Juan, last week was a little bit more difficult. Today it seemed like you hadn't missed a day. How did it feel?**

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: Honestly last week was what we expected. What do you expect, you haven't been in the car three years. We did an afternoon in Laguna that is really no reference to this, and I got in the car and you try to do the best you can. Like if you look at my pace in the first practice I was only six-tenths of Pato and Felix. I felt pretty good after one session. The second session was a disaster; we made some changes, and I hated the car, couldn't really be comfortable at all. Next you're qualifying, next you're racing. Warmup was pretty good, and we started the race with the same car, and it wouldn't turn. We don't understand why, and we kind of made some changes during the race, and at the end my pace was decent. But by then, who cares.

But for me, as I said earlier, it's really important because we pushed the guys to make a lot of changes. The car was always right, the car was always on time. We didn't miss a beat. And I think that's really important. The pit stops were good. Couldn't hope for a lot more.

It's very easy to do pit stops when there's no pressure, but in a race situation it makes it a little bit more interesting for everybody, including myself, so it was good.

Honestly it made a huge difference. I got in the car today and I didn't even think about it. That's basically the reason of those painful days was today.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously also joined here by Takuma Sato, the reigning and two-time Indy 500 champion and another former Indy champion, NTT INDYCAR SERIES champion in Ryan Hunter-Reay. Ryan, second quick today; feel good about it? A little momentum to start the week for you?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, it was nice. The car was good today. Just got through a checklist, kind of usual first-day stuff. Yeah, got a good lap.

Thought it was going to be good enough, but Will had to put me there. Yeah, that was a pretty good practice lap. We usually don't focus on that type of stuff, we just kind of fell into it and rolled with it, but car seemed good in traffic,

good start, but these conditions are really nice right now, and the heat is coming later in the week, so it's going to get a lot harder for all of us. Setups are probably going to change, as well.

THE MODERATOR: They're talking about heat indexes around 90 degrees this week.

Takuma, third quick for you. Difficult to come up with a no-tow lap when you had 35 cars out there at the same time.

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, I think it was a pretty good day, obviously repeat what Ryan has said. It's a lot of checkup lesson, and we've done a single lap by yourself, sweet, ride height, wings and et cetera, et cetera, and then a bunch of the group running at the end. So very productive day. Yeah, it's a good day, but like he was saying, it's a cooler day today. It's going to be different than the race day for sure.

THE MODERATOR: I'm curious as you sit here, the three of you, all Indy champs, you're looking at Montoya's return. Did you think you'd seen the end of Juan Pablo Montoya at Indianapolis Motor Speedway?

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: I thought I did.

WILL POWER: Yeah, I mean, I thought it would be smart for your team to employ you. You've got a pretty good record around this joint.

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: Honestly the only reason I came back is because I think they got the potential to give me a winning car, and RP didn't let me run the last few years. It's the truth. He always -- the last two years before this, I said I'm pretty sure he's going to say no, but if you want to call, go ahead, and he called and it was like, nah, not happening.

THE MODERATOR: When all four of you look, there are nine former Indy 500 champions involved in this field. The record is 10 back in '92. This is a pretty stacked field looking at this. You talk about the competition, how much more difficult it seems to be this year. That's certainly relevant when it comes to this year's Indianapolis 500.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, absolutely, it's a thick field, tough to pass.

WILL POWER: It would be hard -- how many cars have we got, 35, 36?

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: I wish it was hard.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: You wish it was hard?

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: Freaking impossible.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Oh, okay, going beyond that.

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: Oh, my God. And you've really got to be patient enough for somebody to screw up to make the passes much easier.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Trip over each other, yeah.

WILL POWER: I was saying actually qualifying would be tough at the back 10 or 12 cars because I think everyone is so close. You've seen a lot --

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: I think the track will make a huge difference on your performance.

THE MODERATOR: The bigger the better on Saturday.

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: Normally, yeah.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: If it was like today where you have overcast all day, it's not as big of an issue, but...

**Q. Same question for Ryan and Takuma that I asked the other two, a little bit different. So much talk about all the kids coming in here, the younger drivers. End of the day today it's three Indy 500 winners at the top of the speed chart. How much does experience and knowing this track and this race matter?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Well first of all, I think there's obviously a lot of talent in the field and a lot of new talent coming up and deserving race winners, but I think this place definitely pays tribute to the veterans that have experience. Not necessarily doing a fast lap, but over 500 miles and setting up for all those potential passes and things like that and putting yourself in a position for the fight at the end, I think that's where the experience comes into play.

But I have no doubt they'll all be there very strong and challenging for the race win. We'll see. That's the great thing about INDYCAR right now is you have no idea who's going to win, right, any given weekend.

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, as tight a field as today, anyone can have an opportunity to pull the win. In a good team, if you have a good team and a good environment, in fact even a new driver, you have three days for the good practice, Fast Friday, take a test of the speed and then can be on front row.

Yeah, if you look at the J.R. for his first year, he almost made it in Turn 4, until Turn 4.

This race anything can happen, and I'm sure with the new guys and new talent that people with a good team now I think everybody is equal opportunity.

Having said that, experiences only help for any circumstance.

**Q. Ryan, I'm sure this is not the start of the season that you would like. Back here at a familiar place, a place that you're successful at, I'm wondering what sort of mindset you're in and what this race can mean for you and your season.**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, absolutely. Could be a turning point in the season. Just last week at the Indy GP we had really good speed. Started a little bit too far back, but had good speed and then we tripped over ourselves on strategy the last stop, and that kept us from finishing sixth or seventh.

But yeah, starting two at the back of Texas gave me a lot of practice in traffic for this week, so I'm looking forward to seeing less cars ahead hopefully for the 500.

But yeah, this is definitely a huge opportunity for us to make the rest of the season a different story.

**Q. Are you feeling at all like I've got to step it up here?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: No. I mean, there's been positive moments to it, but like I said, at Texas, one qualifying session gets pushed back and we start two races from the back at a track that's notoriously impossible to pass out of. It's just been one of those deals we haven't been able to get out of that starting gate.

It's Indy. Everybody feels that sense of pressure, but you just take it day by day. That's another thing experience does for you. Your head doesn't get spun out of control anymore, at least when you've won here and you've had experience going through the different steps of the week and the race running and the practice and the qualifying, Q sims and things like that. No, this is good. Feel right at home.

**Q. Obviously two Chevy, two Honda guys up here. Have you gotten a read as to how the engines are performing relative to each other?**

WILL POWER: Yeah, no, not really. I think they're pretty even just based on today. If you're following Honda, they're a little better if they checked up to get up to speed.

But yeah, we won't know until qualifying. Obviously that's a different boost level. Then again, Carb Day is a race engine. I think it's all so close now that it's almost coming down to how you prepare the car.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: We had the same opinion about you guys. We thought the Chevys got up a little bit better.

**Q. Juan, you've been in various formulas around here. How do you feel it compares?**

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: I think -- I don't know, it's hard to tell. I was telling Will that it seems like they recover a little better than us off the corners, but if anything I would say probably at the moment what we're showing and what they're showing, they seem to be a little better at -- we're a little better at the end of the straight. Until they really put those race engines in and everybody really shows everything -- it's hard to tell because you might be doing a long run and somebody comes out and looks really good and they've got 10 laps less on their tires. Unless you got on the same lap and you take the beating of the whatever laps you want to run, 20, 25 laps, then you really don't know where you stand.

TAKUMA SATO: Well, I don't know. Today is just a practice. Yeah, I don't know. Depending on just the schedule for the aeros and now it's possible the strikes and everything is so much option you can choose. I don't know.

**Q. Ryan, you had mentioned about conditions being vital. How does someone with a lot of experience acclimate to these conditions with the 500 being much different?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, I think you have to look at the forecast and kind of keep things in perspective. On a day like this you kind of put that in the notebook as, okay, we can pull this back out if conditions are similar to this two weeks out from now when we go racing, or a week and a half, whatever it is. But it looks very much like this weekend where what we did today is going to have nothing to do with qualifying and the grip that we're going to lose coming up.

When the track temp gets up over about 110, 115, things go upside down in a hurry and you've got to start looking for grip that you may not find. Yeah, these conditions are pretty fat today.

**Q. Is this one of those things where experience or inexperience comes into play or is everybody trying to adjust?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, I think it comes in when you're thinking big picture and what lies ahead and how you go about your work process and checking those boxes off. Yeah, experience absolutely helps around here, wind directions ambient temp, track temp, all these things go into -- guys that are experienced take all that stuff into consideration and apply it as it needs be.

**Q. Ryan, you won from 24th position, I believe --**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: 19th.

**Q. Will was up front. Juan was dropped all the way back to 33rd the year he won it in 2015 and Takuma won it last year from starting pretty close to the front. Why is it so important where you qualify here this weekend?**

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: Aeroscreen.

WILL POWER: Yeah, I think last year was evident if you didn't start at the front you didn't have a chance. It might be a little bit better this year.

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: Yeah, I think they improved the car, but if you look at the guys when you run in a pack, the top three guys, as Will said earlier, they can pass each other and you look really racy. You drop to sixth or seventh and you're like praying for dear life.

**Q. Also for Juan and Takuma, you two along with Helio are the only multiple winners in the field, and it just shows how tough it is to win this race. How big would it be for each of you to become a three-time winner this year?**

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: I think it would be cool. I think we've got a good shot at it. I think it's exciting. I think having Pato and Felix as teammates is really cool. I think everybody at Arrow McLaren has been doing a really nice job. It's a great atmosphere to work with, and they have good cars. They won Texas. They really showed they have fast cars. Even when we unloaded today they looked really strong. I don't know, we'll see. It's a long week ahead. There's many ways you can screw it up, so try to avoid most of them.

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, basically starting from the -- it's best to just control the race. That's really important. I mean, obviously the important thing is just the last stint, but to get to there, better to be -- the back row compared to the front row. So qualifying really matters. So many unpredictable things happening and really nice to see nine of the past winners at the same race. It's good for fans.

First of all, really today, the fans are waiting, and that's great. You can see lots of smiles, and finally the fans are back here. That's what's the most important for the coming two weeks, and we'll see 140,000 people come to the Gasoline Alley and that's the energy we want to feel. In the end some of us will win, but we don't know. We'll see.

**Q. Takuma, you're the only one eligible for the Borg-Warner rollover and that would be worth ¥41 million to you. What would it be like to add that extra amount to your check?**

TAKUMA SATO: Well, sounds good. I know media and fans all speculate as to something that happen, if something like that happened that would be good for us, but we never know. We just focus on doing our job and then the result will come.

**Q. Last year you finished first and third, you got three of the top four in your team this year. How much extra confidence does that give you going into the month of May?**

TAKUMA SATO: Just a few -- a little bit comfortable to come back to the IMS all the time and knowing that the team is doing a great job. Having said that, all the team have caught it basically, and as you can see today, very competitive, very tight field. No one can leave the field at all.

I think that's what we expect in the race, and yeah, last two seasons been very fortunate that we had a very good result. Let's hope we just continue that momentum, but these things are just out of our control, so we don't know.

As I said, we just need to focus our job and get really good qualifying, top nine, and then have a strong race car. Then time will tell us.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks so much, guys, for your patience and coming over and saying hi to everybody. Nice way to kick things off here in the 2021 Indy 500.

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