

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Marcus Ericsson

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Marcus Ericsson, winner of the Big Machine Music City Grand Prix.

Everybody here is trying to figure out how you held onto the reds.

MARCUS ERICSSON: Me, too. I'm trying to figure out how I won the race after being up in the sky, thinking my race was over. Yeah, I can't believe it (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: You got some air on that.

MARCUS ERICSSON: Got some good airtime. I feel sorry for Seb. Thought they were going. One of those incidents.

I thought my race over there. Then we had to repair the car. I got a stop-and-go. We were dead last. It was all about trying to recover. I think the car got some damage, as well, from that flight. There was definitely some damage on the car.

I thought I would try and recover as many positions as possible and have a solid, what, top 15 was sort of my game plan after that incident. Then, yeah, the team did a great job with the strategy. Pit stops were great. There were so many incidents. For sure there was a little luck there, as well, no doubt about that.

But we delivered when we had to. In the end I think when Colton was behind me and I had to do a really big fuel number to get us to the finish line and still keep him behind, that was one of the toughest challenges of my career. I'm very proud that I could keep him behind and keep the pace up. That won me the race.

He was pushing really hard, as we could see. He's been the fastest guy all weekend.

Then obviously as the race was, with all the incidents, it was going to be another red flag, so it was not going to be an easy finish. But, yeah, I was really happy to finish it off there and have another win. So much things going on

today. I'm still trying to figure out how I ended here.

I think the bottom line was that we were really fast. We were fast. When we got some free air, we were fast. We were fast getting by people, doing the fuel numbers needed. Got the tires to stay underneath us.

We've been fast all weekend. I think I've been top six every session. Unfortunately in qualifying yesterday I touched the wall in Q1, broke the suspension. That's why we started further back. I think we should have been in the Fast 6.

INDYCAR, anything can happen. It's been like that over the years. Once again today it shows that you can never give up, you have to keep pushing all the time, keep believing. If you have a strong team like I have, anything's possible.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. At the bridge, you seemed to pull away from Colton a little bit. Were you using 'push to pass' at the bridge or were you getting better traction?

MARCUS ERICSSON: No, because I was doing a fuel number, I was trying to be as slow as I could in the corners, then focus on the corners leading out on the bridges. I didn't use any 'push to pass' for most of the race, so I had quite a bit of 'push to pass'.

Like I said, I focused a lot on them two corners leading up to the straights, always did a quick push on the 'push to pass' to get a good pull out of the corner as we knew that was the most efficient.

I still had to do a lot of lifting in the end of the race. It was always crucial to get out of turn three and eight, that's what I needed to keep him behind.

Q. What was your confidence level heading into the weekend knowing what you had done a few weeks prior at Mid-Ohio?

MARCUS ERICSSON: I think the last month since the 500, I've scored the most points of anyone. We know we have a good thing going. We've been very strong in the



races. Going into this weekend I was feeling very confident. I think I showed that in the practice sessions. We were right up there.

Obviously very disappointing yesterday with the qualifying and the incident I had there because that put us on the back foot for today. But still went into the race with a good sort of feeling. I thought top eight or even a top six was possible. That was sort of my mindset.

Obviously it was a crazy race, so happened a lot of other things. But, yeah, a lot of confidence going into the end of year now. We are sort of in the hunt, as well, in the championship. I don't know, I haven't seen the latest after today.

Yeah, it's looking good. Just trying to continue to work hard and continue to put all the hard work with the engineers and with the team, try again next weekend.

Q. When you came in for repairs, you obviously changed the front wing. Were there any other repairs done?

MARCUS ERICSSON: No, only the front wing. We got some damage on the right front suspension, on the floor, some other parts of the car. There was some small damage still on the car. I could feel like in the left-hand corners the car was better than in the right-hand corners because of the hit on the right-hand side.

After I got the damage on the front wing, when I tried to make my way back to the pits, at one point the front wing got underneath the front tires and I went into the wall at turn six and kind of bent the right front. I thought I had to stop. Somehow the wing came to the front again and I got steering and I could continue.

At one point I see the sky, I think the car is in half, then the wing goes underneath my front tires, I hit the wall. Just everything going on.

Then, yeah, somehow things worked out in our favor.

Q. Was the team telling you to try to get back around to the pits?

MARCUS ERICSSON: They were trying to tell me. They told me to try and get back obviously. It's tough because I saw the front wing was flipping around. If the wing gets underneath the front tires, you cannot steer the car, like happened to me in six. The rest of the lap I managed to get back.

I could see it flying around, hitting the suspension, all these

things I knew was not going to be good. But at that point I was just trying to get back, not to get a lap behind. We managed.

But then we got a stop-and-go and all that stuff when we restarted. I started the race after the incident in last, then got a stop-and-go to get even further back. Then, yeah, we managed to climb all the way up.

Q. Race officials said they're prepared to make some changes, tweaks and things, for next year if they were necessary. Course could be something they change. Would you just as soon they leave it the way it is?

MARCUS ERICSSON: I think the track is really cool to drive. It is very tough because it's bumpy, different surfaces. It's a difficult track to drive as we've seen all weekend.

But I like that challenge. I think it takes the best out of us drivers to try and figure out all these bumps, figure out where to place the car. So I like that challenge.

I think the four through eight section is a little bit on the slow side. Maybe there they could open it up, make it a little bit wider or a little bit higher speed. That could maybe help.

But personally, I won today, so I think we can keep it this way (laughter). But, yeah, I think it's been a lot of fun. I've been speaking to a lot of other drivers. I think everyone has been impressed with how much fun the track is because when we saw the layout, it was a bit like, I'm not sure how much fun this will actually be because it didn't look that exciting on the layout. When we actually got here, I thought it was a lot more fun to drive than I expected. There was a lot more elevation from what I expected from what I seen before.

It's so cool going over the bridge and back. I think it's such a cool thing. The TV shots of that, it's just really impressive.

Q. When were you aware that Colton had hit the wall?

MARCUS ERICSSON: He was putting a lot of pressure on me. At one point I think he did a mistake in nine as well because he suddenly was two seconds off. They kept telling me a higher fuel number all the time. I was like, Oh, my God. I was having to save more and more fuel all the time. Colton was right up my gearbox.

He did a mistake, dropped like two seconds. I got a bit of breathing room. I saw again he got close to that gap again. Obviously I saw the caution come out. They told

me it was Colton. I didn't know it was Colton until there was caution.

Q. You're trying to conserve fuel at the end, and your teammate has tires that have 50 laps on it. Did you figure he wasn't going to be able to make up the time?

MARCUS ERICSSON: To be honest, I didn't know he had 50 laps on the tires. I knew he was on blacks. I knew I had an advantage because I was on reds. I didn't know they were that old.

But the thing is, even if Scott was on wet tires, he would still be difficult to keep behind because he's such a good driver. It's never easy to have Scott Dixon behind. But I knew also he wouldn't do anything silly. I knew if I did all my things right, I would win the race. So I was just focusing on that.

Q. When you landed...

MARCUS ERICSSON: I was seeing the sky. When I hit the ground, I felt that one. I didn't say that, but I'm really sorry for Seb there. I got caught out. I thought everyone was going, and I went. I think someone in front of Seb braked, and he braked. I just didn't have time to react. I was really sorry for seeing him going out of the race that way. I'm really sorry for that.

Q. (No microphone.)

MARCUS ERICSSON: It feels amazing. I think it backs up what I said, that that was probably the best performance of my career to keep him behind for that long. When he pulled off behind me, I was thinking this is not going to work. We've seen all weekend how fast he's been. I'm thinking, I'm not going to be able to hold him back.

I just went into my myself and tried to focus on where can I save most fuel where he cannot attack me, where can I push to make sure I stay ahead. I was really trying to just use all my experience to try and figure out how I was going to keep this guy behind. I was really proud of doing that.

I think he definitely deserved to be on the podium, so I feel bad for him crashing. But that also showed he was pushing to the limit as well to try to get that victory. Yeah, that was, like I said, one of my best performances to keep that.

Q. You said in victory circle that this proves anything can happen in INDYCAR. What makes this series so wild?

MARCUS ERICSSON: I don't know. I think the cars we

have, it's definitely a difficult car to drive. I think that makes it really fun races because the races are tough because they are long and you have tire wear, you have different strategies with the fueling, refueling, and the car is never planted to the ground. You always need to fight the car in some way with understeer, oversteer. I think that really makes it a series that's tough and never straightforward. You always need to, like, push to the limit.

Especially since I came here over the three seasons I've been here, the amount of talent that has come into the series as well is just unbelievable. I said before the season I think it's like 20 guys that can win on a good day in INDYCAR. I don't think there's any other series in the world that can say that. I think that shows as well that one day you win, the next day you can be P20 if you don't get it together.

I think that's super cool. Also the fact that we go to all these different types of tracks like today, Indy road course the next weekend, Gateway the week after, that just adds to it because you as a driver and the teams need to be so flexible and so good on so many different areas which for me makes it the best series.

Q. You don't have anything nailed down yet for 2022. Two victories now, fifth in points, does this help your case?

MARCUS ERICSSON: You would think so, right?

No, I mean, it's no secret I want to stay with Chip Ganassi Racing. When I came here a year and a half ago, we created a new team within the team. I was the new guy that came with some INDYCAR experience, but came mainly from the GT program. It took time for us to sort of get going last year. We gelled straightaway. We worked really, really hard. I have a great relationship with my engineer Brad Goldberg, the rest of my crew, a core group that really works well together.

My biggest wish is to continue here in the 8 car, continue in this program for many years to come because I think we've shown, especially the last month or so, that we can definitely be up there and compete against the best. Yeah, I want to see where that can get us.

Yeah, nothing is done yet. Hopefully Chip took notice today.

Q. (No microphone.)

MARCUS ERICSSON: I think the whole last stint, I knew it was going to be big fuel numbers. I thought the tires held on well. I was on the red tire for a long time after my



incident in the start. I didn't feel like they were wearing that much, especially if you were looking after the rears.

I wasn't concerned about the tire wear really. I knew I could keep them underneath me. That's one of my biggest strengths, is to sort of conserve tires. So that was not a concern. The biggest concern for me was the fuel number.

We knew a certain fuel number was possible to hit without losing that much pace. But the number they were asking me was like, Oh, man, that's too much saving. I had to figure it out and I did. That was good.

I think Firestone picked good compounds this weekend and it made for a great race.

Q. As the dust sort of settles here, you are in with a chance to battle for this title. How do you handle having to fight two other Chip Ganassi Racing teammates for this championship?

MARCUS ERICSSON: I think it's a great thing. Chip Ganassi Racing is such a great organization, and I think this year the team we have with me and Scott and Alex and Jimmie and also T.K., there's such a good atmosphere between us. Even though we are all fighting each other, we always do it fair, and we always help each other.

We are very open. I think that's why we are three cars in the top five, is because we help each other become better. That's a great thing.

We're going to keep doing that. We're going to keep fighting each other, but keep doing it in a fair way. It's like Chip says, if we win 1-2-3, we take points from our competitors. That's the way we're going to try and keep doing.

Q. Does the information sharing start to be shut off from each other as this thing gets closer to winding down? Do you still share stuff?

MARCUS ERICSSON: I guess we'll see now (smiling).

No, to be honest, I don't think so. Like I said, we want to be 1-2-3 and 4 if possible. That's the mentality that we have. We going to try and push as we've done all year because that's been so successful, the way we have been trying different things on different cars in a race weekend, taking information from each other, helping each other to make sure we have the best possible race cars.

When it comes out on the track, we're allowed to race each other. But we want to be able to get the best possible results. The only way to do that is by working together.

Q. Could you talk a little bit through what happened from the stop-go until the lap 31 caution where you took the lead. What transpired there for you to be able to close the gap?

MARCUS ERICSSON: I'm trying to figure it out myself.

After the stop-and-go, I came out, I couldn't see a single car. I was, what, 20 seconds behind the last car. I just tried to put down lap times. I think we were as fast as the leaders at that point. So I definitely had the pace in the car, sort of quickly caught up the pack. When I caught the pack, I overtook a couple of cars I think. I think it was a caution. At that caution I overtook another couple of cars.

Then I think there was another caution where there was the big crash in turn 11. I managed to just like go through that without getting hold up. I think that took away like five or six cars that was ahead of me. That really put me up in a good position. I think it was P12 or something then when it was the red flag. Then I knew we were in a very good spot.

From then on, it was all about trying, yeah, not do any mistakes and be focused and hoping that this strategy would work out.

Q. Do you think it helped being in Nashville where you're running high ride height on the car, that the damage you received wasn't so impactful as it could have been at some other tracks?

MARCUS ERICSSON: I think definitely on a street course it's better to have damage on a street course than on an oval or a road course. Definitely that way.

Like I said, I don't think it was that much damage. It was on the right front suspension, but not a lot. There was some on the floor that I could see after the race, which is pretty incredible. I was flying quite high in the air. I thought the car was going to break in half. Yeah, it shows that these INDYCARS are pretty strong machines.

Q. You won both your races on street courses this season. What do you put that down to? Your experience within Formula 1? The circuit layout here is similar to Monaco.

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, I don't know. I always liked street courses throughout my career. I had pole position in Macau and the lap record there for almost 10 years. It's always been something I've enjoyed, the challenge, trying to be close to the wall, push the limits.

My best result before my Detroit win was in Detroit two years prior when I had that podium, the second-place finish. It's definitely been good for me here in INDYCAR, the street courses.

I really enjoy that challenge I think, sort of the way a street course pushes the drivers to the limit, no margin for error. I think that's something that I love.

Q. What is it about the street circuits like this one that are similar to Monaco that suit your driving style? Can you credit that to your win today or do you think there was a little bit of luck there?

MARCUS ERICSSON: There was definitely some luck there, no doubt about that. But I think even when you have some luck on your side, you still need to deliver and be fast to win an INDYCAR race.

We needed some luck today, but we also delivered on pit lane with the strategy, with the race car, and I delivered under pressure when I needed. There was a lot of things going on. But a win is a win, so I'll take it.

Q. Is this the most fun you've had driving or racing in your career? Can you think of another time before INDYCAR where you've had this much fun racing?

MARCUS ERICSSON: It's probably the most fun I've had, yeah. To be fighting up front, to be winning races on this level, it's amazing. To finally show after all the tough years in F1, being a back marker in small teams, people thinking you're not good enough, so on, to be able to come here and show what I can do, just show that I can deliver, show that I can win races, run up front, it means a lot to me.

It's been a long time, a lot of tough days to get me here. So I'm really enjoying this year so far to finally show what I can do.

Q. (No microphone.)

MARCUS ERICSSON: It's a great honor to be the first winner of this Music City Grand Prix.

To go back to your question, I think all of us, all the drivers, we have been so happy to be here. It's been such a cool event. It's been such a fun weekend to see the whole town coming together, to see the atmosphere, to see all the things happening throughout the weekend, to see all the fans. It's been just a tremendous event.

The track going through downtown, it's been so cool to race on. I think for INDYCAR as a series, I think I said to some people, to grow and get even more fans and new

fans, it's events like this that makes a difference because it's such a cool event.

For anyone, even if you're not a diehard motorsports fan, if you were here this weekend you had a good time. I really think this was a great thing for INDYCAR. I'm very proud to be the first winner. I hope we come back for many, many years to come.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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