

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Sunday, September 26, 2021

Scott McLaughlin

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: What a 2021 NTT INDYCAR SERIES season. Wrapping up not only the year, but obviously the Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach.

Congratulations to our 2021 NTT INDYCAR SERIES Rookie of the Year. In the end it was a 33-point advantage over Romain Grosjean as Scott McLaughlin got it done.

Overall your thoughts about the day and perhaps more importantly winning the Rookie of the Year.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, I think you get one shot to win this. It's a proud moment regardless to win it. My ultimate goal was potentially top 12, top 10 in the championship. You always strive for more. To win the Rookie of the Year, it will sit with me forever and no one can ever take it away from me.

Today we took a little bit of a punt just with the strategy at the start, staying out. Would have worked out if there wasn't another quick yellow. Unfortunately there was. We pitted obviously. It put us back to sort of 22, 23. After that it was all just about trying to make the most of what we had. We moved our way forward all the way to 11th.

Overall towards the end of the season, since probably St. Louis, potentially before that, I felt like I've had a good stranglehold on the car. I've come in leaps and bounds in terms of my confidence with the care. It really sets me up well for 2022.

Qualifying is skill my Achilles' heel right now, with the different compounds, getting used to that tire-wise. I'm happy. I had a year that's had its ups and downs, overperformed, under performed, had a podium, close to having some semi-good results at the Indy 500. I've really enjoyed it.

Proud of this year because it could have gone one of two ways. It's been a big challenge for me and my wife to come back across here, order a couch, took four weeks to get a couch, then you sit on bean bags for a while, testing, doing a lot of different things. It's been a lot of things off

and on the track and just really proud to get through it with some success at the end of it.

THE MODERATOR: You can't test at a place like Long Beach or the street courses. Last year I remember a chilly Indianapolis Motor Speedway, your first opportunity to run in a car. It's been quite a transition for you this year.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, if I think back to that point, where I was when I was then, to where I am now, confidence levels, how I feel in the car, it's completely different. This is my first ever open-wheel championship. The only thing I've driven is two races in a Formula Ford. This is a different kettle of fish, probably the most competitive series in the world. To compete with these guys, girls, Simona, at the Indy 500 is a privilege.

I've really enjoyed it. It's made me better. I certainly feel like I'm a better racing driver even though I'm finishing the solidly finishing in the back edge of the 12. But I feel better and I'm excited for what's ahead.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions.

Q. Can you comment on the excitement around the young talent in INDYCAR.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, I think it's exciting for the category. You look at Alex, who just won the championship. Big congrats to him. A second-year guy just made it all happen and the most of his opportunity at Ganassi. Pato and Rinus. Both won this year. Pato nearly won the championship. It's exciting. Colton obviously winning today.

INDYCAR is in such a good set right now, it's getting ready to go. I'm excited for these young guys to come through. I certainly believe that someone like Pato or Colton, they're good enough for Formula 1. They're good enough to take it to the very top. I'm not saying this isn't it, but I think you'd be hard-pressed to find them wanting to leave.

INDYCAR is so good right now, it's such a good category. I can't see it getting any smaller. It's just going to get bigger and bigger. The fan base as well. I think that's exciting.



Q. Where did you finish in the championship in the end? 12th?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think. I think around there. I really don't know.

Q. What would you say is a realistic target for next year or are you just thinking in terms of wins or podiums?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think top 10 in the championship, for sure, I need to be pushing there, getting results in the top 10. I think we've got that merit. I think we took a few risks on strategy the last few races because of where we were in the championship, we had nothing to lose.

Next year, would we have taken that yellow at the start? Probably. Then we probably would have been a lot further up. But it's exciting where I am and, like, where I feel. I certainly believe in my mind that I can be right there in that top eight, really be contesting for wins and podiums more regularly.

I've still got a lot to learn. I think this year, being able to go back to all these tracks that I learnt, I feel, yeah, it's going to feel amazing.

Q. A massive focus at Penske on the 500. On the other hand there's nowhere in the world where second place means less, right?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Maybe Bathurst (laughter).

Q. Would you say, given your performance this year at the 500, a victory there is on the cards?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Oh, I'm going next year to Indy with the idea of winning. I'm going to be in a car that can win the race. I know I'm quick there. I know I'm quick on ovals. I feel like I've got a handle on it. It's just a matter of having a good month, building up to it. Dotting my Is, crossing my Ts, not speeding in pit lane. That really hampered me. I think we were on for a top five.

I feel like this whole rookie thing could have been sealed a lot longer if I could have finished where I was going to finish at the Indy 500. I was infatuated with the Bathurst 1000 before I won it. Now I'm infatuated with the Indy 500. With my wife, I'll watch old Indy 500s on tele, YouTube videos, watch anything at the end of the day. I just will be infatuated with it until I go good there and get a result. Certainly I want to get there next year.

THE MODERATOR: 14th overall in the championship this year.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Oh, damn it. Must have been close.

THE MODERATOR: Yes.

Q. Is there one memory that stands out from this year?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think you have to go back to Texas, following Scottie there. I certainly didn't think I'd be in that position. I thought we could have been easily top five. To be battling for the win almost, really chasing him till the end, that was a good feeling.

I think also starting my first Indy 500, there's nothing better. Rolling out and seeing all the fans. Every driver in the intro room was saying, Wait till you see it next year when it's full. I can't wait. What I saw, 50% or whatever it was, it's going to be off the chain. I'm really excited for that.

Q. Out of all these tracks, they were all new this year, is there one that really stood out as a track you felt comfortable at and enjoyed? How has life been in the U.S. by comparison to living down this way?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: To be honest, I really enjoyed Laguna Seca. I felt really comfortable there. Felt like we had a really good car. Out of all the street tracks, I feel like this one's probably my favorite. Out of the ovals, obviously Indianapolis was probably my favorite obviously just for obvious reasons.

In terms of living in America, it's just a whole lot bigger. New Zealand, it's a beautiful place, but the amount of people and things you can do here, I think no disrespect to the Americans, I feel like they take for granted what they have here. It's such an amazing country. I feel privileged to live here. I feel privileged to have the opportunity to potentially go a Green Card and permanent residency. I also feel privileged to have a passport in New Zealand to go home whenever I want. Miss my home terribly. Miss my mom and dad. They haven't seen me in the INDYCAR in the flesh yet. It's been on the box, watching on TV. They're my biggest fans. I can't wait for them to be at the Indy 500 next year.

Q. What can you take from this season to go forward into next year to come out with a better result?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Like I've said, I need to get qualifying sorted and understand the tire. The hardest thing for me here is I've been so used in the super car extracting qualifying, you only had one lap to do it basically. The peak of the tire, you learnt that quite quickly,

how to get it to its peak early enough in the lap to do a really good lap time over one lap.

Here the laps -- your fastest lap sometimes happens on lap two, three, potentially lap four. Trying to get the tire to come on at the very perfect, right time is very difficult and hard to understand or explain.

But that will be certainly what I work on in the off-season, trying to understand. But I think I've slowly got it. It's just the guys that have got it sorted, the guys that have been around for many years, even guys like Romain who have been on different compounds for a long time, they've got it sorted. I have to work hard to make it to that point.

If I can get qualifying sorted, I feel like I'm as good as many people in the race.

Q. What was it that attracted you to INDYCAR?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: The opportunity to race for Team Penske, probably the most world famous team, one of the most world famous teams in the sport of motorsports. To drive for Roger in INDYCAR is pretty special. To then race at tracks like this, race the Indy 500, events that I've watched since I was a little kid, that's certainly special.

It's just, yeah, an opportunity to try something completely different. I have so many bad habits from my super car days that have hampered me this year, so I think that's why I've gone good on the oval because I've never been on an oval before, so I've got no bad habits.

The road course stuff, it's just completely different. I don't have a roof over my head anymore. I've got a windscreen, but it's different. I have open-wheels. I'm not banging doors any more. I can't bang doors because if I do that, I'm going to be in a lot of trouble. It's a lot of hard work trying to understand, trying to portray that to the media and the public. I've enjoyed the transition, feel like I've done an okay job.

Q. If I'm not mistaken, I believe you are the very first Rookie of the Year winner from Team Penske, probably the only thing they didn't win in INDYCAR yet. What did you feel about racing for Team Penske in your first season?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think it just shows that Roger doesn't really employ rookies (smiling).

I feel privileged to be in that position. But I also feel a bit vulnerable. Look, it's a proud moment. Like I said, you get one chance to win this Rookie of the Year. I was lucky to win Rookie of the Year at Indy, Rookie of the Year this year

in the championship. Any time you're winning for Roger in any way, shape or form he's happy. Yeah, hopefully it's just a little bit of job security (smiling).

Q. You got your best result of the year in second place at Texas on an oval. Was it a surprise to you? What do you feel is your comfort level on these tracks now?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: If we had qualifying and I was able to qualify, I feel like we could have qualified in the top five. I felt really strong on the ovals, like I said. Especially at Texas. I was a bit bummed not to qualify that race. Then we started 15. That's where it was a surprise because I was just surprised. We made our way through, had really good speed on the in and out laps. I don't really know what to expect on the in and out laps. One of my first times heading into pit road at speed because it had rained over practice, qualifying and stuff.

It was one of those things where I just trusted my instincts, trusted my talent, my feelings. It worked really good. So the minute after that, I was like, Well, if I can maximize that, I can be better and better. I started overdriving. I sort of am back to where I felt at Texas, where I'm letting it all happen, enjoying it.

Yeah, that was definitely a pivotal moment for me this year, something I really enjoyed.

Q. After racing in touring cars in Australia and New Zealand for many years, is this what you expected or were there some things that surprised you?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: No, no, there was certainly -- I think how hard it's been to extract the speed on the red and the black tire in qualifying. I found it easier to do it in practice because you have I guess an unlimited amount of laps. If you make a mistake, you can get away with it. In qualifying you simply can't. The battles are so close, so tight, you can't afford to make any mistakes.

I'm surprised with the competitiveness of the category, I think everyone has. This year it's been crazy close, you just can't make mistakes. That's why we go racing. We take the risks to get faster and faster and I feel good.

Q. Do Supercars have a Rookie of the Year title? I assume you won it in 2013?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, they do. It's called the Mike Kable Young Gun Award, unfortunately named after a guy that passed away. I won that, which was pretty special, too. I guess you can say I've won in all the categories I competed in, which is nice.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations. You're a rookie no longer.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Thank God.

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