

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Callum Ilott

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Congratulations on coming back. We were hopeful. I suppose you were, as well.

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah. Obviously after the first weekend that I did at the end of last year, it was confirmed that I would do the other two that were finishing the season, and then confirming that I'd be racing full-time for this season.

Q. What kind of expectations do you have? It's still a lot of things that will be challenging, but you have a lot of room to grow, as well, in this sport.

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, I think it's a great opportunity, number one, for me, but as a team I think we've put in a lot of effort over the winter to try and achieve as much as possible basically going into the season.

Overall it's very exciting to be part of Juncos Hollinger Racing full-time, but I think we can really capitalize on it given the variety of racetracks that we go to, even the ovals. I haven't experienced it yet, but I'm sure we can do a great job.

Yeah, I'm looking forward to it. I think we can hit the ground running at St. Pete and do a good job.

Q. Have you been based in Indianapolis here of late?

CALLUM ILOTT: The last two days, yes. I've moved in, so I've got an apartment. I'm ready to go. I just need to go back to do my visa and then come back out.

Q. What changes have been made to the organization?

CALLUM ILOTT: We've had a lot. I think from the ground up really. Only a couple of guys have stayed from the three races that we did. It was very last minute what we did at the end of last year. We've had a lot of changes, a lot of new people, a lot of investment in infrastructure from the end of last year, and I think given the preparations that we've been able to do and without the rush of the races from last year, I think we can do an amazing job.

Yeah, it's a big change, but a lot of preparation, a lot going into it.

Q. How important were those three races you got to do last year? Were there any specific things you learned from that?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, most, to be honest, it was just the little things. Overall I think it was really crucial from a driver point of view, it was crucial to learn the car, learn the championship and the experience, and then to integrate with the team, but also from the team's point of view, I think to get three races in a row, the improvements that I saw behind the scenes through those three races was incredible, and the improvements even from those three races to the tests that we did at the end of the year in Sebring, yeah, it was phenomenal.

I think we can do a good job going into the beginning of the season, but from my side, it was just to get used to the car. It's a different beast to what I'm used to in Europe. Very, very -- I would say almost rally-esque kind of feeling, sliding through the corners, a lot of power under the foot. But really enjoyable car, really enjoyable race, and you've got some very competitive guys and teams in this championship.

Not easy, but a lot of little things that I had to put together and a few things you do differently over here than in Europe, but no, it's definitely enjoyable.

Q. We've heard that you're on a gap year of sorts with the Ferrari Academy. Is there any sort of -- are you leaning one direction versus the other, staying here versus going back into that after next year, or is it really just wait and see?

CALLUM ILOTT: The way I would look at it for myself is -- actually it was just being open, which is how I've always treated everything. My last year I was doing the testing reserve stuff in F1 with Ferrari and Alfa Romeo. I was racing in GTs, I experienced Le Mans, and then I ended up coming here at the end of the year.

For me that was like an experimentation. At the end of chose to come to INDYCAR because I enjoy it, but for me,



given the potential of this championship and the hybrid coming in next year, I really see a big growth of this championship.

Honestly, I'm just looking forward to it and going to try and enjoy it, and honestly, if it really works for me and I'm enjoying it, I'm really happy to stay out here. You can see with Scott, with Will Power, there's a long career that you can build out here and a very good one, as well. I'm open to everything, and honestly, I hope it goes that direction because it's a good lifestyle here.

Q. After your three races last year until now, how have you trained for the season off track and in the simulator? How have you prepared for the start of 2022?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, it's a bit of different environment. Obviously I can actually now use the home simulator with iRacing and stuff to kind of learn the tracks. That was what I did at the end of the winter.

Yeah, I haven't had access to shall we say a big simulator yet. We will during the season hopefully. But from my side, physically, obviously you've always got to keep good physical shape. A bit different to the F1 style because that was just purely neck. It's not as necessary here, but the arms and the shoulders is quite important. You're always hustling this car. The races are long, so it's not easy.

Then I think the biggest thing was actually just taking some time off. With how the world is at the moment, traveling is quite stressful, it's not easy. It was just nice to spend a couple weeks with my family and relax a little bit before I get shuffled out here and live life here.

Q. Is it still a daunting prospect, the idea of tackling an INDYCAR season in the last year of the current spec and doing it as a single car, as part of a single-car team, or are you looking forward to that?

CALLUM ILOTT: Honestly, I'm looking forward to it. Yeah, for sure it's not easy. We've got some very experienced teams here with a lot of history. But that's the part for me, coming in with a new team, one car, I think at the end of the day we're really going to be underdogs in this championship. With every result that we achieve, I think that's more impressive than most.

I think, yeah, it's tough. It's not going to be easy. A lot of effort has been put behind it, and yeah, of course like you said, it is the last year of this current spec car, so have a lot more development in the car, but yeah, like I said, with every result that we get, it's even more impressive.

I'm hoping that with my history we can develop the car quite quickly, and hopefully I can learn and show my speed as quickly as possible, as well.

Yeah, it's a bit daunting and it's a bit of a risk, but at the end of the day what do we achieve without risks?

Q. Do you think there's any prospect of you gaining a teammate at some point during the season to help progress?

CALLUM ILOTT: I don't want to say on behalf of Ricardo and Brad too much, but I think there's a possibility that for the 500 maybe we will get an extra guy.

I don't know. At the moment the focus is on me, which is good. It doesn't make it easy because obviously it's difficult to progress as a rookie on your own in this championship, but yeah, if we get an extra guy, it's great for me to be able to learn. If we don't, that's what I've got to deal with, and every weekend is a new one.

Q. You've had a lot of success and shown a lot of speed at Macau. With all the street courses in this championship, is that an attractive thing for you to come over here knowing that you've had success on street courses before?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, I think it makes it a bit easier for me as a driver to have the confidence to go into them. I have to say that your street circuits here -- well, even your road courses here are bumpier than most of the street circuits in Europe. To go to a street circuit here, yeah, it's a bit different, and that's where the experience and the technicality comes in, which the guys who have been here have got it, but we get enough practice to kind of get a feeling for it and dial it in.

Yeah, I'm excited. It's never easy. But you've just got to attack it and hope for the best.

Q. How much testing are you hoping to get in before St. Pete? And how close was the team to forming a partnership with Carlin?

CALLUM ILOTT: So to answer the first question, I hope as much as possible, but I think it's going to be two days, which is one more than most. I think obviously with the weather it's quite limited where you can go, so I think both days will probably be Sebring. But yeah, we'll try and dial it in as much as possible and make the most out of that.

In terms of the Carlin partnerships, I believe we've acquired a few people and some of the technical stuff, but the extent of it I do not know. I just have the environment that I have,

and I'm excited to work with people who have been in INDYCAR, and yeah, make the most out of it.

Q. You raced last year in GT racing, especially in the GT World Challenge. How did that help you to improve your driving skills as a single-seater driver?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, it's an interesting one. I think the GT stuff obviously is quite different, but at the end of the day it's still a car. The most valuable things I learned from the GT racing was the consistency along an endurance stint, shall we say, so during Le Mans you're doing three hours in the car at a time through the night, so trying to keep that consistency, and obviously adapting to a different type of car, different weight distribution, actually weight in total is double the weight of a single-seater. So yeah, I think that was quite important to get used to and show that I can almost drive any car that you put me in.

So the GT World Challenge, a tough championship, very competitive, lots of different manufacturers, and also the cars itself, there are cars which are just quick in a straight line, some that are just quick in a corner, and you have to kind of learn and adapt around that, and then of course you're driving with amateur gentleman drivers which can be a little bit tricky sometimes.

Yeah, to diversify a little bit my skills, and then going into Le Mans, which was the GTE, so without ABS, different tires and that, that was my first full 24-hour race, and it was really exciting. We got third in the category.

I think if I could, I would return to do it again.

Q. That's my second question. Obviously this year you're concentrated on INDYCAR, but do you think that you could return to sports car racing, maybe to prototypes in the coming hybrid car era?

CALLUM ILOTT: Honestly I'm open to a lot of things. I want to push for this INDYCAR experience as much as possible and to make it last because at the end of the day it's a very, very good career, as I said earlier.

But the sports car stuff you can see that guys are having a go in that DPi, IMSA and doing the dual championship. It's open, I think, and I would be open for it.

To go back to Europe, though, obviously you kind of have to commit to it. Yeah, like I said, I'm open to everything, but I want to do the thing that I enjoy the most and I get the most value from in that sense.

Q. Last year you raced in the IGTC at Indianapolis. Obviously it didn't end well but you had a good chance

to win that eight-hour race. How did that race help you to get to know better the Indy road course circuit?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, okay, it didn't end well, but we were leading, and yeah, showing what we could do. Yeah, it was a bit unfortunate, but these things happen.

Q. It was last hour you were leading --

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, 52 minutes to go or something out of the eight hours. Yeah, it was a bit of a shame. Yeah, you live and learn.

To get an experience for that car and that track, yeah, it was slightly different because I believe the INDYCAR that year was going through the chicane, the fast chicane and then that got taken up by the NASCAR race where they had that big shunt.

It was great to get the experience of it and to race there. I think we have -- do we have one or two races on the road course with INDYCAR?

Q. Two.

CALLUM ILOTT: So yeah, it's an important one for me to get right and to get the experience level.

Yeah, eight hours racing on that circuit was valuable. Any time I can get on the American circuits is good, so I was thankful to do that race. Obviously it didn't end well, but it was good experience.

Q. Ferrari said this year that you are on a gap year; what does that actually mean, and how does the FDA plan to support you during your year away in America?

CALLUM ILOTT: I think to answer the last part, there is no support in the sense that it's a gap year.

The way I would describe it, it's difficult because, yeah, it's an open-ended question even from my side. It means whatever I want it to mean in that sense. At the end of the year if I want to stay out here, I can stay out here. If I want to look at options back in Europe, I can look at options back in Europe. If there's an option in F1, I can continue with that.

Yeah, with FDA, they've obviously supported me the last four years, and given this route in America I can continue that on my own. To be honest, I can't exactly answer your question because it is just open-ended. This gap year means that I'm out here on my own and I'm just going to treat it that way in that sense.



Q. Many of your older Formula 2 colleagues are now switching to INDYCAR because of the lack of opportunities in Formula 1. Do you see INDYCAR becoming an alternative home for drivers who may have the talent to get into Formula 1 but don't necessarily have the budget to get one of those 20 seats?

CALLUM ILOTT: I think this is one of the questions lately that probably some of the fans are wondering about. Yeah, I don't want to say that it's an F1 rejection site because it's not in that sense. F1 is a very interesting environment as it stands and not a simple one to get into.

Yeah, so to lead on to that, I would just say that this championship is stacked full of very, very impressive drivers, and I think that's the way it works. A lot of people would say for me that I had the potential to go to Formula 1, and for the last two years I did fight for that, but unfortunately it doesn't quite work because it's a bit more than just how good you are. It's more, yeah, shall we say commercial in some senses.

Here is a great opportunity, and a lot of drivers love the single seater. The racing is great. Seeing the smile on Romain's face from a lot of the races, coming from F1, 10 years in the sport, it shows that I think -- this is what I was talking about the potential of this championship earlier. I honestly think this championship in its own way should be better. The competition, the fact that anyone can almost win these races no matter what the team, and you don't get that in Formula 1.

Yeah, I would love for the championship to just expand on that and achieve as much as possible.

Yeah, to answer your question, I think I had a lot of younger drivers approach me asking about Indy and the experience out here, is it worth it, is it -- like I said, there's a lot of opportunities out here. There is interest. Drivers from Europe are very good. That's not to say we're not very good. But also I think there is competition from all angles, and it's harder and harder to get a seat now as some people are finding out.

Q. How has it been working with Ricardo so far? Is there any particular thing that has caught your attention related to his way of work?

CALLUM ILOTT: Ricardo is amazing. He's crazy but amazing. He's a beautiful character, and he just is ultra committed to make it work. He doesn't stop, and no is not an answer.

I think that is -- it gives that passion across everyone, me

to the mechanics to the people working behind the scenes. From that enthusiasm I think he inspires a lot of people to go around him, and the story that he's had, coming from obviously over from Argentina, sleeping on workshop floors and just starting with a single go-kart going to a full-time INDYCAR team, it's incredible.

His passion is what drives the team, and obviously got Brad Hollinger involved who has supplied an immense amount of investment and support.

Yeah, I'm honestly really excited to work with him, and let's see what we can do because I'm sure we can achieve a lot with that kind of enthusiasm.

Q. Also, you tested at Sebring last month. Ricardo told me that it was all ready with a new group of engineers. In this learning process, has it been difficult in terms of communication, sharing the data with them?

CALLUM ILOTT: No. I mean, Sebring went really well. It was a good opportunity to try a lot of new things. Again, a big improvement off of what we had in the three races that we did.

I think the three races was tough because that was very last minute and pulling a lot of people together for those races was not easy. So yeah, to go with a package with people who have had time to integrate in that, honestly it's always a bit of a discovery process to integrate and learn with new people, but we're all very motivated, and it is working well so far.

Q. I just want to know your opinion because you were a title contender in Formula 2 in 2020 and you were also the last year in GT and you were with Ferrari, and Christian Lundgaard also a Formula 2 driver that now is in Indy Lights and the champion Oscar Piastrri doesn't have a seat in Formula 1. What do you think is happening with the young talent that doesn't have the opportunity to show his potential in Formula 1?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, it's an interesting one. It's hard for me to say if something has changed from. In from stories in past I believe similar things have happened in the sense of young guys didn't make it and you always believe that's not going to happen to you, and at the end of the day life is like that.

But with Oscar it's a bit different in the sense that there wasn't availability for the support package that he had for this year, so I wasn't surprised in that sense. What would be a surprise is if at the end of this year he didn't have a seat for the following year because you can have a year

off, as we've seen with many drivers, but if he doesn't get one at the end of the year, I'd be very surprised, and that would be an injustice to junior formula and the single seater ladder that we have.

But in terms of the backlog of junior drivers, there's 20 seats, and most of them are filled by the guys who have proven and earned that seat for a long time, and at the end of the day it's expensive. It's expensive for the teams. It's expensive for the sponsors. You've got to fit into that package, and yeah, unfortunately it doesn't always work.

It's an individual sport in the way it works, and unfortunately for the young guys -- for me, it was a very lonely discovery process of that's how the world works. There are lots of injustices in the world, but yeah, I think that's one of the smaller problems that are facing the world, I think.

I'm focusing on myself. INDYCAR is a new start for me and a great opportunity, so yeah, that's the way I want to look at it, and I think to be fair for me, I will have hopefully a very good career out here.

Q. As a newcomer what's your thought on the INDYCAR formula because earlier today we had a six-time champion basically say that with all the reiterations and things that have been done to the current car and the extra weight that it's turned into more of a junior formula type car than a pinnacle machine. By comparison to what you've been in, how do you view the current INDYCAR?

CALLUM ILOTT: I could spend a while answering this. Look, I don't think speed is the deciding factor of what is a good formula. I think at the end of the day the racing and the level of competition is what is important.

The fact that almost anyone can win one of these races is important. The fact that you can come through the field is important. That's what makes it a spectacle.

When you start to add downforce and start to make these cars as quick as possible, it can ruin the racing. You can get almost a very one-sided result, as we've seen in Formula 1, which some people enjoy. Most people don't.

Maybe from the driving side it becomes quite rough around the edges, sliding it around, which makes it very individual to what some of the other stuff I've driven.

Yeah, it's hard to say. It just depends on what direction you go. If you want it to be faster because it should be in terms of the number one racing series out here, yeah, honestly I don't know. It requires a bit of thought as to

what people want. I would say for some drivers, it's very physically challenging. Long races -- yeah, I don't look at it as a junior formula.

I do have a -- I can tell some things from it are quite similar to the Formula 2 in a base chassis feeling and the steering feeling, but then because of the Firestone tires and the power that you have, it turns out to be quite different.

I might be wrong. Maybe we can make it a bit faster. I think with the hybrid system it should speed things up a little bit. But yeah, it's an open question and something that maybe we should debate at some point anyway.

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