

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Saturday, February 26, 2022

**Scott McLaughlin**

**Will Power**

**Romain Grosjean**

Press Conference



the lap record, I was like, oh, okay. Yeah, I didn't know that. That shows how far these cars and engines have come. They're pretty fas.

**Q. The Team Penske performance, you guys got the front row lockout and I think Josef was ninth, an encouraging start for you guys?**

WILL POWER: Yeah, definitely. We had a bad year last year, so certainly came into this season determined but with a lot of work behind that, a lot of work and understanding. When you have a struggle, a year of struggle, you always come back and have a pretty close look at what you were missing.

That's kind of what we turned up with here. Missed out on qualifying last year, so I was very determined to make it to the Fast Six was the first thing. Well, make it to the Fast 12, honestly, and then the Six. So we got there, just one short of pole, man.

Poles keep eluding me down to this last like five that I need. After that I don't care about pole.

**Q. You just want 67?**

WILL POWER: No, I want 68. 68, yeah. I know it'll be tough. A lot of good guys.

**Q. Scott only made the Fast Six once all last season. Was that surprising to you, and to see his performance today and the lap he put together, is that what you were expecting from him as a rookie last year?**

WILL POWER: I mean, man, the experience he had in the series down there in Australia, he's had a number of years at a very high level as a professional. He knows how to put it together. It's just a matter of him getting used to this car which he has now, and yeah, I'm expecting him to be a contender for the season.

THE MODERATOR: Also joined by the driver of the No. 28 DHL Honda, Romain Grosjean will start fifth in tomorrow's Grand Prix of St. Petersburg. And fresh off celebrating career pole No. 1, welcome in the driver of the Dex Imaging Team Penske Chevrolet, Scott McLaughlin.

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started here this afternoon after qualifying earlier today, getting set for the Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg tomorrow presented by RP Funding. Joined now by Will Power, who picks up his 12th front-row start here on the Streets of St. Petersburg, also now the new track record holder at 59.3466 around this 1.8-mile layout. Not pole position for you, Will, but it's a Team Penske front row. How special is that to kick off the season?

WILL POWER: Well, it's just much better than last year. Last year was P20, so here's to starting further up the front and hopefully the first corner is good. Many names went through my head who were behind me then. I'm like, there's some potential for a bit of mayhem there.

THE MODERATOR: Well, if it's your teammate you might have a little discussion beforehand?

WILL POWER: Well, he's beside me. He's gone. He's good. It's the dudes behind you you've got to worry about.

THE MODERATOR: Talk about overall your day today. Happy with it?

WILL POWER: I was very happy up until the last run. I was like P1, P1, P1, P2. But it was good. Like honestly, I feel like I got the most out of the session. I guess there's not much I could have done. What I could have done in the last one was to fuel for just one lap and may have had a shot. But yeah, like I said, starting way ahead of last year at this track.

**Q. The speeds today with so many guys being under a minute, did everybody come in here expecting it was going to be the case? Is there any reason for it?**

WILL POWER: No, I was surprised actually. I didn't even know what they did last year, and when they said that was



A couple questions for you guys. First of all, Scott, congratulations. A year and a half after making your NTT INDYCAR Series debut here, you come back a year and a half later and pick up your first career pole. How thrilling for you?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: It's amazing. I don't know what other words. Pretty speechless. It's something that you know you can do, but sometimes -- obviously in Australia we had a lot of success with poles and wins and all that sort of stuff and you know you can do it, but you have a hard year like '21 where it just didn't click and there was a few things where you just didn't put it together, but you know the speed is there. It's all about taking pressure off yourself and just focusing on what you need to do, and that's what we did today.

Really working well with my new engineer, Ben Bretzman, who's been fantastic for me. Jonathan Diuguid, who I used to work with, he basically helped me to this moment. He was the one engineer I worked with to this point, and Ben has picked me up and just polished me off a little bit there. I feel good.

Yeah, it's one. Hopefully I'd like to have more, but at the end of the day, it's qualifying, and tomorrow is the big day, so we'll see what we've got.

THE MODERATOR: Your previous best start was fifth at the GMR Grand Prix on the Road Course at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. It is INDYCAR Series pole No. 285 now for the Captain, Team Penske.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: This guy next to me has taken a few of those. Yeah, I'll try and help him add to those and maybe we'll get 300.

THE MODERATOR: Also we welcome Romain Grosjean. Interesting day for you. All told, are you happy with P5?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yes. You cannot be disappointed with a P5. Obviously after yesterday we were hoping for a little bit more, being in Scott's seat, but I think I said last year a few times that I was very impressed with Scott jumping from the V-8 Supercars to the INDYCAR, and it's proven today that I wasn't that wrong. Very happy that Scott is on pole.

Yeah, for me definitely qualifying -- it was the first time I was going to use those new reds after a bit of a story in practice two. I think happy to be fifth but just think like we can still unlock a little bit of potential in the car to go faster.

**Q. Will, the red tires clearly have a nice peak. They've got a lot of speed in them for a little bit of time. How**

**long are they going to last?**

WILL POWER: Yeah, it's a good question because no one has done more than two laps on them. We heat cycled them and did another one or two laps. Yeah, that will be an interesting story tomorrow because I don't even think in warmup you'll be able to tell because the condition will be so cool and good, you won't get a feel for is it going to go off or not.

**Q. Do you like it when you get that big delta from red to black?**

WILL POWER: Yeah, I do. I think it's good. Yeah, I like that.

**Q. Grosjean, talk about the recovery a little bit more from this morning not going quite like what you would want it to.**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, I mean, it was quite a bit of work for the boys to put the car back together. We had a couple of dampers that we wanted to try this morning that didn't happen. I think we've agreed to disagree with Takuma on what happened, so that's okay. Yeah, being fifth -- I think as a whole team we've got third, Colton; fifth, myself; sixth, Simon, so we're pretty good. We're pretty good.

But Penske was very strong today. Good to see. I think it's going to be a nice fight, and we're ready for it.

**Q. Considering the impact with Takuma, were you surprised that they were able to fix that car? When you initially made that, it looked pretty bad.**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, but I did aim for the middle of the car so I knew there would be as little damage as possible. My hands took a little bit of -- yeah, fun. But it's okay. It's not too painful when I drive, so it's fine for the race.

**Q. It is just bruising from the steering wheel moving around?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, don't really know. Don't really want to know. They weren't pretty anyway, so it's okay.

**Q. Will, when it comes to Scott, do you think that we kind of poked the bear there and that we're going to see him a lot more winning these poles?**

WILL POWER: No, I think it's a one-off thing. He falls off a cliff now. (Laughter.)



SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Bring it on.

WILL POWER: No, it's not surprising. You saw it in practice last year. He just had a few issues in qualifying getting through the rounds a couple times. But the potential was there.

He's been at a very high level in a very competitive series for quite a few years, so he knows the game. He knows the game well. He knows the car now. You really expect him to be there every time.

**Q. Scott, how important would it be to get all three of you up there fighting for wins and a championship?**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I mean, you guys asked me if I needed to step up for these two, and I feel like I've really worked hard over the off-season to make sure I was ready to go. It is important, and I'm right there, and it's important that I push these guys because it's only going to make them better and it's only going to make me better, as well, as a team. Yeah, pumped to be able to put it together. As Will said, struggled to get through some of the rounds last year, but I feel good.

**Q. Romain, despite the brush with the wall or the hit or whatever you want to call it, do you believe you have a race-winning car for tomorrow?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I think we're pretty good on the blacks. As everyone said, the reds are going to be quite interesting tomorrow, so it's going to be most of the time on the blacks. I think we've got a good car.

WILL POWER: Which to start off?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Which to start on, yeah. That's going to be the question. But yeah, I think we've got a good car. We've been working well. It's been quite nice and easy to get the lap time out of it. Should be good.

**Q. Scott, what do you put this performance down to in terms of your development and where you are in terms of the team and the car?**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think it's just a lot of putting things -- like put it together this time. I feel like, like Will said, we showed some speed last year and I was just getting better and better as the car went on. I think rolling out with a car that suited me from the get-go was important.

We worked very hard on this track with the simulator, and thankfully this simulator has been fantastic for that, and

getting me to a great baseline setup that I've really only touched a little bit here and there just tweaking it trying to figure out what was right.

I know what I'm driving out there and I'm able to just punch out the laps and find the time within myself, which is exactly what I did in that Q3 lap. I put together a lap that I had worked on the whole session and didn't quite get it right; looked at a bit of Will's data, looked at a bit of Josef's and just put it together. Didn't panic. And I guess experience. You can't buy experience. I'm certainly feeling really comfortable now in the series and in the car.

**Q. For yourself, Romain, obviously you've moved to a full-time seat with Andretti Autosport. How beneficial is that to you going forward for the rest of the season?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Well, I think it's just a great team to be in. I'm got very fast teammates, so as Scott says, we need to push each other to go faster. Obviously if I'm racing full-time it's to have a go at a championship eventually, this year, next year, I don't know. But yeah, that's why I'm here, and, you know, days like this, fifth is pretty good. Tomorrow we need to make sure we score some good points and we improve and get better race after race.

**Q. Scott, the pole lap you were best known for before today was at Bathurst a couple of years ago. Could you compare and contrast how tense that lap was to how tense this lap was, the commitment differences between that lap and this lap?**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, this is a minute shorter. That's about it, because man, the intensity is crazy. Honestly, the way you've got to extract the speed out of both cars is pretty full on, and at Bathurst you're right up against the wall.

I guess one thing I've learnt as well as I've got used to these open wheel is my proximity of the walls, and I'm used to slamming the walls with my doors and whacking the mirrors off. I can't do that, and I've done it plenty of times in INDYCAR and didn't come off too good. Didn't do it today and it worked out good.

**Q. Scott, we just talked about it with Chris, you had a bit of a different strategy there in qualification, a one-lap kind of shootout, kind of Bathurst style. Tell me about that.**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: We wanted to stay on the red tire purely because I didn't want to change between blacks and reds. I'm still getting up to speed with the confidence going from compound to compound, so I guess I felt like it was

more important for me to roll out on the same set regardless. We knew that our first set that we ran in Q1 we were going to save for last because we only did one lap on it, so it was all about just using the oldest set, do a lap, feel it out. I only did like a 60.5, then I come out and slap the 59.4 or whatever it was.

I knew I could do it; it was just a matter of just feeling what the track was like in that Q3 and then it was like I had tires up my sleeve to do that.

**Q. Romain, in your NBC interview you said that the race marshals could have done a better job with the flags; could you elaborate on that? You felt they could have cleared the traffic a little bit better? Was that what you were saying?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Well, there was just no flags on the track, and I think we should have flags when these cars are that slow to corner. Yeah, that's all. I just think if I had known there were like four cars -- because you cannot see. I know there was one on the left, one on the right. That's all I knew. I didn't know there were some in front.

If there's only one, the guy should accelerate. Obviously there were more, but I think just a white flag to tell us that, and I just think you shouldn't be driving that slow on the racing line, that's all.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Sorry, but I think that the alternate start-finish line, I probably don't agree with it. I think it should just be the start-finish line. I said that before; it happened at Portland a couple times, and I caught Grosjean -- Romain in a peculiar spot. I feel like coming around a blind corner, everyone is trying to get a lap started. That's the only point we can really start our lap to get a good run. It does choke up there and it's just -- you don't see. Unless we get a flag, you don't see.

I'm probably a big fan of probably moving the line depending on what track we go to. That's just my personal opinion.

**Q. They do that at Long Beach, I think, or somewhere else?**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I don't know.

THE MODERATOR: We have an alternate at Long Beach, as well.

**Q. Scott, for you, you joked about it that you haven't started an INDYCAR race before and usually you're behind guys braking. Now you're leading them and you said, I don't want to be an idiot and overshoot it.**

**How long has it been since -- you're an accomplished guy. I know you did a lot in Supercars, but are you going to go back and watch video? Are you going to talk to people? How do you get yourself in the frame of mind that I am starting this race?**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think it's 12 years since I led a rolling startaway because of go-karting. It's a standing start in Supercars. Yeah, just hopefully I'm not an idiot. I'll come out of 2 and I'll be all right.

WILL POWER: Just keep the throttle down.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Don't speed when you do that, though.

**Q. Just for Will, just to go on to the traffic situation, is there anything INDYCAR could do to help with traffic in these tight tracks for qualifying?**

WILL POWER: I mean, we're splitting the field, so everyone should be able to get a clean lap. It's up to the guys to sort it out. You know when you're leaving the pits in a line of cars that you're going to have to give the guy a gap. I just think it's ridiculous when some of these guys go out and try to pass the line of cars that are all trying to get their gap to start the lap.

Practice you've got the whole field, so you've got to try to sort it out. Sometimes it's a bit rough, but that's just the way it is. We don't run on the longest tracks here. We have some short street courses, and yeah, it's a game. Not much you can do about it. The only way you can fix that stuff is have less cars. But I don't think anyone wants to split practice up.

**Q. When you saw or heard that Scott grabbed pole, what did you think? Were you surprised?**

WILL POWER: Very surprised.

Well, no, I wasn't actually. Honestly if you saw what he did in practice and then throughout qualifying, it's clearly going to be kind of a battle -- you have three people there, Herta, myself and Scott. Yep, it was a good lap, man. I don't think there's much left in that.

**Q. Scott, you've kind of touched on it a bit, but jumping on to the reds, just how committed were you and was there any close calls during that pole lap?**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: The pole lap was pretty good, but probably leading up to that lap. I knew I had the speed in the car just to get through to like Q3 and Q2, so it was about learning in those laps trying to figure out where I

could get better and get worse. Whatever. My words are all jumbled.

Got to Q3 and felt like I could nail that, and yeah, it felt pretty good. I feel a lot more comfortable with the red tire now, and certainly feel like we can certainly have a good go moving forward in the season.

**Q. Romain, apologies if you've already touched on this, but did you talk to Takuma about the practice incident?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, we did. We agreed to disagree, so that's fine.

**Q. Wanted to ask Will if he knows where -- I think it's 12 hundredths we're missing. They said on INDYCAR Radio that you got a bit sideways at Turn 9. Or did everyone get sideways at Turn 9?**

WILL POWER: Yeah, 9, that's where on my first lap I lost time is out of 9. I probably lost a tenth down the back straight.

Yeah, apart from that it was a pretty good lap. That's the only place where I overcharged the entry a little bit and didn't get the ideal exit. Yeah.

**Q. Scott, obviously massive congratulations on fulfilling the potential you showed last year. Do you feel that the Chevy is more drivable than it was last year, and do you think this also helps you feel more comfortable, especially on street tracks?**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, I think it's been an absolute massive step forward Chevy is taking with our drivability in particular, and it's a lot of hard work from them and working with all the teams. So certainly feel a lot better, and we're definitely some of the microsectors that we were slower in over the last couple of years were really good, and the drivability there is a lot nicer. To be honest, it's starting to come into my liking a little bit not having to -- yeah, I'm not going to go into too much detail because there's a Honda guy sitting next to me, but I feel a lot better, and certainly, I think, Will would say the same.

**Q. Scott, can you kind of talk us through what you and Ben worked on over the off-season as you guys sort of attempted to learn each other and see where you can grow coming into St. Pete?**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Me and Ben sat down, we had like a three-, four-hour meeting, and we worked -- we looked at every track throughout the year, and we looked at all my notes and the trends of my qualifying cars because I've

always been reasonably quick in practice, and then we sort of just slowly worked on, all right, well maybe when we go qualifying we're either adding too much front wing or we're doing a few things that maybe we should just relax on going into qualifying. Then we went to the simulator, and thankfully Chevy has been working very hard on the simulator and got that very close, too, which has been fantastic, and I was able to really knuckle down along with Will and Josef, good baseline setup for this weekend and for the street courses and road courses, and that paid dividends when we went to that test. I felt like I had a really good baseline car, and then when I rocked up here at St. Pete, I felt really, really strong, and we have hardly touched the car since it's rolled off the truck.

We've played with things. We've experimented with things and we experimented with things even in that qualifying session, but we somehow always come back to what we rolled out with, and that's just been a lot of hard work between the two of us, and my performance engineer Malcolm Finch.

Yeah, very proud. Just iron out a few creases and working on where we can get better, and that's what motorsport is all about and that's why I enjoy it so much.

**Q. Knowing what he accomplished with Simon, what was your level of excitement whenever you guys figured out that he was going to be your race engineer, and where did you think he could help you improve the most?**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I've known Ben for a long time now. He was actually the first guy that I've come over from Australia and worked on the simulator with to see if INDYCAR was somewhere that I wanted to go.

So we play a lot of golf together, so I was very excited to hang out and take this partnership into more of a business professional level, and yeah, look, what he's done with Simon is a testament to those two and the 12-year partnership that they had.

I think he's really invigorated with me, a new partnership, and we're certainly working together well, and I'm excited for that.

Jonathan Diuguid who I had, like I said, big props to him. He was the guy that really got me up to speed, and then it was all about just polishing me off. Yep, feel okay, just got to keep this going.

**Q. When was that when you first met Ben and came over and did the simulator? Do you know what year that was?**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: 2019.

THE MODERATOR: Great way to start the weekend.  
Congratulations, Scott McLaughlin, Will Power, Romain  
Grosjean. Thanks, guys.

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