

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Sunday, March 20, 2022

Jimmie Johnson

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Obviously joined by seven-time winner here at Texas Motor Speedway, making his oval debut in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES, Jimmie Johnson coming home sixth.

Could you have wanted a little bit more there or are you happy with this?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Yeah, yes, absolutely I'm happy. With a couple to go I was in fifth. We were worried about fuel. We had an issue with the telemetry, didn't know how much fuel I've had to save. I got a panicked fuel number. I could tell by the seriousness in their voice it was serious. I couldn't brace for Scott and try to hold onto fifth.

What a two-day adventure this has been. To be able to get enough laps in the race, to feel the tires from start to finish, green flag stops, being in dirty air, just how uncomfortable and treacherous that is. All of those little mistakes and little moments gave me a sense of the car and helped me feel really how to drive this car, how to create speed.

Second half of the race I started working my way forward in that final stint, had a very competitive car. Wished that I had maybe started the race a little further forward. I think I could have finished a little further forward.

THE MODERATOR: Did you feel like you got stronger as the race went on, if you had another 50 laps...

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Another 50 would have been awesome. I would have really, really enjoyed that.

Not only did I grow and improve, but through my growth I've been able to give better feedback to the team. Eric made some amazing adjustments to the car, really put it into its window for that last stint. It really showed.

THE MODERATOR: Now you know why Tony Kanaan likes Eric so much.

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Totally get it.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. You had a clear view of the accident with Helio. What did you see? What was your experience like that helped you get through that situation?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Three-wide here in a Cup car has never turned out well. What's different is how quickly you get a run in an INDYCAR. It's tempting to take that momentum and try to make a pass.

Unfortunately it happened so quick and things kind of funnel down at the end of the back straightaway, there's just not enough room, especially for the clean lane.

When I saw them three-wide past the halfway point of the back straightaway, I knew it wasn't going to turn out, get out of the gas.

I'm trying to learn the crash dynamics, if you will. Cup cars, sometimes they come back down in front of you. Today I was around the two crashes. The car quickly initially went away. I'm getting used to that.

For a split second with the three of them, I wasn't sure if one was going to come down a little earlier, across the front of my car. They all stayed high thankfully for my situation.

Q. After you finish this today, do you think this begins Jimmie Mania for the Indy 500?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: I'm not against that. Let's go (smiling).

Q. Just the confidence level it gives you going into the month of May at the Speedway. Different type of track, but still you've been successful there, too.

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Yeah, I have. I think today just showed what the 48 car is capable of. We all know what the Chip Ganassi cars are capable of. I just haven't been fast enough on the street and road courses to put the car in that window and get results.

To be here on a track I know, an environment that I know, I was able to provide and do that for the team. I feel very

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excited about it, very encouraged about the remaining oval races that are on the books.

I know I'm going to have a great car. We'll see how it goes.

Q. Of the big names you passed on the track today, which one was the hardest, gave you a moment like I passed Scott Dixon?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: That was it. I passed Scott Dixon. Probably to his disappointment, to my excitement. He did get a better hand when it was all said and done. When I caught that group and caught the 9 car, I had to look two or three times to make sure really it was the 9 car, not another car with a blue back half. Yeah, I have caught Scott Dixon, this is good.

Q. You get the congratulations from Marcus. Scott came up to you and complained about how he should have won the race. That camaraderie you have there. Felt like you were one of the guys again back up at the front. How did that feel?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: I mean, it feels good for all of my own reasons of the journey I've been on. It definitely feels good to be complimented by the other drivers, my teammates. The greeting I had from Eric Cowdin, seeing Chip on pit lane, that feels really, really good.

It's honestly the icing on top of the cake. The cake is I know what I did behind the wheel today, the growth I've had in the race car. That's the part I'm savoring the most right now.

I do enjoy the congratulations from others, but I'm almost speechless myself, just kind of savoring it and taking it in.

Q. Do you feel a little bit of validation for this move, for trying this for fun, for doing this, what's really been kind of experimental?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: In some respects there's validation, in other respects there's relief, in another respect there's just plain old I like to go racing. It's a bit of everything.

I honestly don't have anything to prove to anyone. I'm truly doing this because I want to race cars and I want to race in the INDYCAR SERIES.

Of course I'm a competitor, of course I knew that I should run better on ovals, and was able to do that this weekend. That feels good. I don't have some axe to grind. I don't have a point to prove. I'm just going racing. I'm just purely happy I had a great day in the race car.

Q. They came on the radio after you finished and they said, Now let's go win the Indy 500. Are we talking about this now?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: You guys are welcome to. Absolutely.

I feel like that's an aggressive statement, for sure. But why not? Why can't we? The 500 is a special race. We've seen favorites win. We've seen the race won by strategy, first-time winners, a variety of different things that have taken place.

Helio is like ages older than me and he won last year. Really, anything's possible. Building off today, if I had a poor running today or didn't feel the car, get a sense of the car, I would think the hill to climb during the month of May would be much steeper. Learning what I did today, I'm going to start at such a better spot.

If the race was 50 laps longer, I think I would have finished further forward. If I started 10th, the way the track played out, my result would have been better than a sixth.

Why not? Let's dream big.

Q. (No microphone.)

JIMMIE JOHNSON: I hadn't thought about that until now.

No, I really don't have any regrets. It's been a great journey. No regrets at all.

Q. (No microphone.)

JIMMIE JOHNSON: I hope he's older than me. I just said that to try to make you laugh. Three months? Yeah, I'm September. Four months. God, he's so old (laughter). Brazilian birth certificate.

Q. Now that you've got your confidence back, you've made a lot of improvement this weekend, do you think that's going to help you run the road courses a little bit better?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: I think going this fast and being on the ragged edge in a car, the repetitions of being on the ragged edge of the car, will carry over. Chip has been saying it all along. I've kind of doubted it. The radius of the turns are so different, the speeds are so different.

There's something I experienced in my career when I got into a faster vehicle, faster dirt bike, when I got back to my primary speed vehicle, it slowed things down for me, easier

to feel and sense it.

I am hopeful and curious. We have a test session coming up on the Indy road course soon. We'll see how it goes. I hope it does slow things down for me, gives me more comfort on the ragged edge so I can go faster on the street and road courses.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Jimmie.

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Turned out really well. Thank you, everyone, for your support. On to the next one.

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