

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Chip Ganassi

Alex Palou

Marcus Ericsson

Tony Kanaan

Jimmie Johnson

Scott Dixon

Press Conference



questions. Chip, certainly a full group this year for you; five entries for the 500. How smooth really has it been this week, and based on the numbers, you've got five pretty good shots at winning the race a week from Sunday, don't you.

CHIP GANASSI: Yes, thanks. So far it's been pretty trouble free. Of course that could change in the next 10 minutes, so we want to be careful.

These guys are obviously all professionals. They know what they're doing. They've won races. They've won championships. They know what it takes and where we're at right now. We've been here before. We're obviously looking forward to tomorrow and Sunday. We're looking forward to next Sunday. But we really haven't accomplished much yet in terms of our ultimate goal.

We're just kind of going through all the steps you need to go through right now and making solid steps, I think.

THE MODERATOR: Mike, if ever there was a year where you needed a team concept, this is it. You look at the wins and titles amongst these five, what has your experience been like so far this week and month?

MIKE HULL: It's been fantastic. You know, if you look at the 12 hours of track time that we had, maybe less than that, 10 hours of track time that we had available to us to this point, we probably achieved on track maybe 25 percent of that.

So if you kind of look at the ratio, I think that's where everybody is at, but we've had -- we've got great race cars for the race. The wind is up today. The boost is going up. So we'll find out what qualifying is all about.

I like -- Chip made a statement to somebody at a high level when we were racing kind of a big race called Le Mans a few years ago, and they said, oh, this is really great. We're going to try to win the race.

And he said, yeah, but you have to realize that a thousand things can go wrong and only one thing can go right. That's exactly what Indianapolis is all about. It's getting everything right. That's what these guys do well.

THE MODERATOR: We welcome the full group from Chip Ganassi Racing, the 14-time NTT INDYCAR Series champions, four-time Indianapolis 500 winners. Joining us this morning, full group. Going for his fifth Indy 500 as a car owner on the far right, we say good morning to Chip Ganassi. Thanks for coming this morning.

He's a longtime managing director, we welcome come in Mike Hull. Good morning to you.

He's the 2013 winner of the Indianapolis 500, in his 21st appearance in this great race, driving the No. 1, the American Legion Honda, it's Tony Kanaan. Good morning.

Driving the No. 8 Huski Chocolate Honda, good morning to Marcus Ericsson.

Making his 20th appearance in the Indy 500, the 2008 champion, driver of the No. 9 PNC Bank Honda, Scott Dixon.

He's the reigning NTT INDYCAR Series car champion, driver of the No. 10 NTT DATA Honda, it's Alex Palou.

And he's listed as a rookie when it comes to this race. He's still chuckling about that. Driving the No. 48 Carvana Honda, we say good morning to Jimmie Johnson.

Let's start with Chip and Mike before we open it up for



THE MODERATOR: Chip, look at the monitors we have up here. This is the 40th anniversary of your first Indy 500. A rookie back in 1982.

CHIP GANASSI: Look at that hair.

THE MODERATOR: It's hard to believe it's been 40 years. What do you remember about your experiences then and maybe how it shapes you today?

CHIP GANASSI: Yes, well, I mean, I just remember I graduated from Duquesne University, and I was out here the following -- I had my last class actually during one week, and then that weekend I was here for opening weekend, and then I missed commencement because I was qualifying here at Indy.

Yeah, quite a long time ago, but obviously a great time to start my career.

I put out a tweet yesterday that they had -- it was the 40th anniversary of Gordon Smiley and his terrible accident, and I got my start in the team I was with because Gordon Smiley stepped out of that car and went to drive for -- I got to drive for Jack Rhodes. Gordon Smiley stepped out of that car and went to drive for Lindsey Hopkins I think is who that was. I'm not 100 percent sure.

I spoke to Gordon about that. I owe you a big thanks, man; you go to that team made an opportunity for me. He said, oh, no problem. Sadly a couple days later he was dead. It was a little different time then.

Yeah, but I remember obviously qualifying my first fastest rookie that year in 1982. It was a great rookie class with Bobby Rahal and Danny Sullivan and some other guys, Hector Rebaque and Herm Johnson, a really good rookie class. Really had a great time in Indianapolis that year I remember.

Obviously the hoopla at the start there in 1982 with Kevin and AJ and Mario, yeah. Quite an experience.

THE MODERATOR: Rookie class of guys who have gone on to do some pretty special things, as you have, as well. Let's open it up for questions.

Q. Anyone that wants to answer this, drivers, Mike, or Chip, we've got a little bit of change-up in the qualifying format this weekend going from if you were to be in the fast -- if you were to be running Sunday to be running two, potentially three times. I know your guys' car when you're doing these four laps are just really on the knife's edge, and I'm curious to know from some different perspectives, do you guys enjoy

doing this another time? Is it just more stressful? I'm sure maybe drivers and Chip and Mike have some different perspectives. For anyone that wants to answer.

SCOTT DIXON: Well, I think it's enjoying when it goes well. Yeah, it is stressful for sure. The difficult thing for us that we normally have is that the temperature of the car is so critical that most of the time we don't even run the morning practice.

So the first time you roll and go into Turn 1 flat at 240 miles an hour you're not really sure what the balance is going to be like.

It just puts an emphasis on preparation, making sure that you're comfortable, and that's easier said than done, especially when the conditions can change a lot.

But I think for the fans it's fantastic. You're going to get to see a lot of cars running. I think the way the qualifying is going to run this year is going to be quite different because there's no bumping in the left lane and the right lane is going to function totally different, as well.

A lot of cars running and should be pretty exciting. Especially with Sunday and how the temperature is going to be, as well, and how it cools off.

Q. Tony, we've seen some kind of intense conversations with you and the guys in between practice sessions, and you kind of leading that conversation. Number one, what's it been like for you to take on that leadership role? But number two, what do you kind of see the direction of that taking in?

TONY KANAAN: I didn't take anything. I just talk too much. That's why it looks like I'm taking the lead. That's how it is.

As a team we've been brainstorming together and trying to work together and use the advantage of the lineup that we have.

I know yesterday Jimmie, Dixon, and I were there in pit lane talking a little bit more about -- it's weird to tell Jimmie sometimes in an oval what needs to be done. But we're just really working together for one goal.

Chip gave us the opportunity to be here with the best cars in the field. Mike is running the show for us, and we have one goal: Put five cars in the Fast Six and go win the race on Sunday. That's what we're here for.

Q. Jimmie, we've heard you talking this week, you



know the oval and we know that you know the oval, but what has this new learning process in this car been like over these couple, three days that you've had a full practice?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: It's definitely different, but I feel like the more seat time I get, the more I gain confidence in myself and understanding the car and then certainly understanding changes. I've had a few aha moments where I think adjustments have crossed over from what I would do with a Cup car here setup-wise to the INDYCAR.

I'm still very new to it all, but gaining experience and gaining confidence in what I'm feeling, gaining confidence in what I'm looking for, and gaining confidence in the adjustments we're making on the car.

Q. Chip, regarding Jimmie's progress here, what has impressed you most about his couple of full days here as his speeds have gone up pretty consistently?

CHIP GANASSI: Yeah, just a nice consistent -- you don't like to see these kind of things. His is just a nice curve of improvement. I think more importantly, just a nice -- you can tell by talking to Jimmie at the end of the day or whatever that he seems to be very comfortable in the car and no surprises.

So I think that's the best any car owner could ask for is, when you're talking to your drivers at the end of the day they're not amped up or nervous or talking in a high tone of voice or talking real quickly or down and out or something. They seem very comfortable and calm.

Q. Are you speaking from past experience there, Chip?

CHIP GANASSI: I've been known to speak at yes, some high levels.

Q. Chip, it feels like every time this team has something that may cause adversity in any way, shape, or form you seem to come back stronger from it, whether you're expanding into different championships or taking on a new car or whatever that may be. Is there any reason that you can put your finger on or anything that this organization does particularly well that allows you to kind of combat that adversity?

CHIP GANASSI: I think that's Mike's department. He says it best. He said, look, everybody come to work and try to do the best they can today and let's worry about tomorrow. Let's just try to do the best job we can today.

That's sort of the attitude we've taken. If that answers it.

Q. How much will the dynamic of qualifying change on Saturday? I probably won't be seeing both lanes used like we did when there were more than 33 cars. What can we expect to see on Saturday?

CHIP GANASSI: Rain. The way I look at it, I expect to see rain. (Laughter.)

Q. But if we do have qualifying, how will you guys approach it?

TONY KANAAN: Well, I think it's quite simple, to be honest. The goal is to put five cars in the top 12, and you do whatever it takes to do that until the gun goes off.

Obviously we're going to draw tonight and we're going to take one attempt and then we're going to talk about it. I think that's the strategy. We want to have all the cars ready for Sunday.

Q. For Jimmie, in your Brickyard days, for the better part of most of them, this would still draw a really big crowd for the Brickyard 400. You won four of them. It kind of created a special atmosphere in the beginning. What do you expect next Sunday when you walk out here and perform in front of the most people you've ever raced in front of in your life?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Yeah, I'm so excited for that moment and opportunity. Last year I was here working for NBC -- and of course I've been in the Brickyard 400 and understand the energy and excitement -- but there was just something different for the Indy 500, and it was only a partial crowd because of COVID, obviously.

I could feel the special energy last year, and I can only guess what that's going to be like this year.

The moment for me is going to be hearing Back Home Again in Indiana. Just as a fan watching it I always thought that was such an amazing moment that gave me the goosebumps watching it, and I can't believe I'll be out there on the front stretch getting ready to step into a car when I hear it.

Q. Scott, I was looking back at last year's Fast Friday and you were pretty vocal and some other drivers were frustrated about being able to get a clear four lap mock run because there were such speed disparities and slower traffic. Have there been discussions about that heading into today, about how to manage that better?

SCOTT DIXON: No, I think it'll be the same. The hard part

is depending on where the drivers go, whether they duck in -- especially the tricky part is Turn 1 and if they take the apron or not.

But that can be tough in many ways if somebody is coming out of the pits or just knowing they can't pop down and they're stopped in the middle of the track. I think there was quite a few near misses last year, and it's tough.

I think today we'll see because the conditions aren't super ideal with the wind how many people actually do make aggressive runs. Might be a little bit different today just because of the forecast and the weather.

But yeah, it's not fun. If you're going into a corner at over 240 miles an hour and somebody is trying to cool their car off at 100, you've got to make some pretty quick decisions.

Q. Is there any way to address it really?

SCOTT DIXON: Not really. I think people can be more understanding of what's coming. It's pretty hard work for the spotters and the drivers trying to keep up with those closing speeds. It's aggressive. Sometimes you just make a mistake and hopefully nothing comes of it.

Q. For Jimmie, I know we're early in the process here, but have you noticed any sort of different reception from fans here, being here for your first Indy 500 buildup or anything like that? Are you expecting if you do well over the weekend, are you expecting the attention to grow a lot?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Yeah, I think I've been well received and I've had quite a few fans come up to me and say they've never been to an INDYCAR race before and this is their first experience, so that makes me happy knowing we're bringing more fans to this awesome sport.

But man, I hope that the actions on track create a lot of excitement. I hope to be fast. I hope to be a contender in all this, and whatever wave of excitement that comes with it, I welcome it.

Q. I know you've been kind of commuting to Charlotte, but the motor home lot here versus the motor home lot in NASCAR, do you have any comparison how it might be different?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Out of the 19 years of being a Cup driver I never stepped out of my motor home and looked around with caution and concern, and I've done that every day I've been here. It is a different world. (Laughter.)

Q. TK, do you have a take on that?

TONY KANAAN: I'm always going to get blamed for it. It doesn't matter what happens. I've been taking it easy this month. I'm trying to change that.

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Has anyone considered that Conor Daly bamboozled himself?

TONY KANAAN: To get the attention? Probably.

JIMMIE JOHNSON: They keep telling me that that stuff in the hot tub, kids play with it, and I can't think of a bigger kid out there, so...

Q. Mike and Scott and Chip, what is the most important things that Marcus brings to the team, and how do you look at his development in becoming a contender for the Indy 500?

SCOTT DIXON: I think it's been excellent, his progression, across all forms that we have in INDYCAR racing. It's never easy to step in for your first year, and as Chip said before and even with Jimmie's progression, it's great to see the progression that he has made and the contribution that all the drivers make to the team. I think that's been exceptional and he's done a hell of a job.

MIKE HULL: Yeah, I think to answer your question, thanks for being here from Sweden, by the way. That's really cool.

I think the difference, what we have in Marcus is a driver who has immense ability and talent and a lot of experience, and he knows how to win. That's what's in common with the people that you see up here.

But I think what happens at least at Chip Ganassi Racing if not the other INDYCAR teams, I don't know the other INDYCAR teams in this way, but we're very unselfish, and we really work hard for these drivers as well as the team members to be totally unselfish about what they do.

And I think for drivers like Marcus, that's hard to understand at the very beginning, that he can actually find out what the other drivers are doing, that they're in this together.

Indianapolis is the pinnacle of that. If you're unselfish with each other, the greed that normally is associated with individual people, drivers, team members, owners, and so on, goes out the window.

Once Marcus got over that and understanding that he could actually be totally equal, that he could get all the information that he needed, and there was massive resource that was available to all the drivers, in this case

five of them, the comfort level increased.

We have a terrific driver here. I hope that -- I don't want to say this in front of the other drivers, but I hope he wins the race, because he represents us quite well.

Q. Marcus, do you agree with Mike? Was there a process after Formula 1? And also, how is it different coming here a fourth time, becoming a veteran here?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Not a veteran compared to these guys. No, it feels good. Like Mike says, we are a very strong and open team. We work together as a big team, and that's one of the biggest strengths with Chip Ganassi Racing, and that's helped me develop a lot, to be able to learn from my teammates. It's been huge. This year to have five cars and five such strong cars, it's been really good so far.

Going into this year for me personally, like I said, my fourth year, I feel like I have that experience to know what I need from the car, which I maybe didn't have previous years as much. It's definitely a place where experience pays off.

But I'm very excited about this year. I think we can really run up front, and like TK said, we want to have all five cars qualifying up front and running up front because I think we have the ability to do that. If we can be up there, I think we have a very good shot at getting one of us to Victory Lane.

Q. Alex, as the reigning champion coming back for this great race and obviously what you went through last year, what you learned from, what's the outlook heading into certainly qualifying and the race a week from Sunday? A little different than maybe what it was a year ago?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, absolutely. A year of experience here makes a big difference, and also 2021 was my first time finishing this race. I didn't finish it in my first attempt.

Yeah, got to battle until the end this race. We had a really fast car. We missed it just by this much. Cannot wait to try and do it again. We have really five cars that can contend for this race, and I think we've all been really happy with how the car handles in traffic and stuff. We just want to keep improving that and see if we can make it next Sunday.

Q. How often do you analyze the race last year, or have you?

ALEX PALOU: I did a lot, but it's not like I repeat that race every time.

I think I did everything I knew how to do at that moment. It was my first time leading an oval race. It was not easy, but yeah, learned a lot from that. Hopefully we have the opportunity to try and improve that this year.

Q. Jimmie, we caught up with your dad up on the Turn 3 spotter stand yesterday. What has the dynamic been like and him being here? Perhaps he's enjoying this experience as much or more than you are this week.

JIMMIE JOHNSON: We'll go with more. That's my dad. He loves to smile and have a great time. To be able to work with him over the last couple of years, he's helped spot on the Rolex program, the 24 Hours of Daytona. Did again this year, and when we need a second spotter, he comes in. It's great having him around.

He's the reason I was introduced to racing and started racing, so any day that I have with him at the racetrack is really special.

Q. He mentioned a couple times being star struck out here when he sees AJ and Rick, Mario, these guys walking around here. Have you sensed that, as well?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Without a doubt. I'm sure you've heard the stories, but growing up we just knew of INDYCAR. NASCAR was so far away. My grandfather was a huge Foyt fan. So absolutely he's star struck, and I get it. I've been that way myself.

Q. Dixie, what's the impact for you and as a team for losing a day the other day because of the weather? Does that change how you adapt to things today, or do you just suck it up and get on with it?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, it's the same for everybody. In some ways it may help a better prepared team. I think we've got good cars, so I think less track time can be beneficial sometimes. But for us we've got so many things we want to try, and especially with more cars. We've been able to split up a lot of things.

If somebody finds something, then you want to try it, and if you don't get that time on track, that makes it difficult.

Ultimately it's the same for everyone, so you've just got to get on with it.

Q. Chip, how special is it for yourself personally to have Jimmie in the Indy 500 program?

CHIP GANASSI: Yeah, unquestionably it's a good thing for our team. I've said it before, anytime you can bring a seven-time champion of anything into your team it's going

to lift your team up.

I think when Jimmie came into our team in '21 we were the champions in '20, and he lifted our team, even though we were the champions.

I think for me, it's been a very, very positive experience, and I look forward to continuing it.

Q. Jimmie, how does an INDYCAR line around the Brickyard differ from a Cup line?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: It's slightly different. These cars have so much more turning potential that you can turn in a little earlier and kind of hold the apex a little longer.

I'd say the biggest difference is what you do with your feet. In a Cup car you're definitely out of the gas and even dragging some brake into Turn 1.

You don't do that until you're going to pit lane here in the INDYCAR. What your feet do is much more different than the line.

Q. For any of the drivers that have run the Indy 500 before. I know the past couple of years have been unique in terms of limited capacity at the speedway. Did you notice a difference between say 135,000 fans and 300,000 fans, and what are you looking forward to most about seeing the speedway at full capacity here in a couple of weeks?

TONY KANAAN: I think the past three years -- this is the third year, but experienced everything. No fans was actually pretty sad. I remember seeing the grid and there was no noise, there was nothing. It didn't even feel like a race.

Last year it was a little bit better, and this year we can feel it. Like the past three years we walked out the garage without planning that you need extra time because fans are out there, and I think that's what we're here for. That's why we do this. That's why we keep coming back.

I can't wait. You can feel the buzz in the city, as well, living here the past four years. It's back to normal, which is awesome.

I personally appreciate a lot more than before. Not that I didn't, but it's different, and I'm enjoying it a lot. Hopefully everybody will have a good time, we'll put a good show for the fans, and one of us will win the race.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much for being up here. Have a great weekend, and certainly good luck in

the race a week from Sunday.

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