

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Scott Dixon

Alex Palou

Rinus VeeKay

Press Conference



crazy. For the team to see that and for it to pay off is huge.

I knew the pole was guaranteed for our team, but, of course, I wanted it over Alex, and I think Cannon, huge credit to him. After yesterday we did a couple of things that we shouldn't have done, and the knock-on effect really affected us yesterday. I guess lucky with the weather, and that had us in that Fast 12 for us to continue on today. Big thank you to everybody on the team.

Step one, but doesn't guarantee you anything. Obviously, it's a huge privilege to start on the pole, and congratulations to everybody on the PNC Bank No. 9 crew.

THE MODERATOR: What kind of changes did you make from the top 12 to the Firestone Fast 6 to the car?

SCOTT DIXON: Not a lot. For us the biggest affect lately has been the ambient conditions. From the first run I was glad to get out of that car because I nearly crashed in turn two on the last lap and had to get out of and went for the brake as well. Luckily, we were covered and able to still have a great speed and top actually of the first 12. I knew once we had a clean run, we were going to have tremendous speed. I can't go into details of what we changed because it made us go faster.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously, joined as well by Rinus VeeKay, drives the No. 21 machine for Ed Carpenter Racing. Alex Palou drives the No. 10 NTT Data Honda for Chip Ganassi Racing.

Just some opening thoughts, and I'll begin with this. So many accolades coming with today's qualifying run, but we can confirm that this is also the quickest front row in Indianapolis 500 history with a four-lap average amongst the three at 233.643 miles an hour. That just edges out the 96 front row at 233.233 miles an hour. Pretty fast, right? Congratulations.

Let's start with Alex, who is going to have a quick chat. Rinus, we'll start with you. You're the one paying attention. Just your thoughts on being back in the front row. Obviously, a second front row for you in the Indianapolis 500.

RINUS VEEKAY: Very proud to be in the front row again.

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, everybody. Wrapping up qualifying for the 106th running of the Indianapolis 500 presented by Gainbridge. Again, Scott Dixon, Alex Palou, and Rinus VeeKay make up the front row.

We welcome the driver of the No. 9 PNC Bank Honda. The aforementioned Scott Dixon. I'm just going to throw some numbers out here for you. These are just incredible.

Fifth career Indy 500 pole, which, of course, is second only to Rick Mears. Back-to-back poles as well. First time that's happened since Ed Carpenter did it in 2013 and 2014. Four-lap average, 234.046. That is the fastest pole run in the history of this great race, Indianapolis 500. Not the quickest. A guy named Arie Luyendyk did it on day number two. Just shy. Of course, that was back in 1996.

Chip Ganassi Racing's first 1-2 start since Dixie and the late great Dan Wheldon did it back in 2008. Dixon first back-to-back, as mentioned, since Ed Carpenter, and sixth different pole winner now for the NTT INDYCAR SERIES season. It just goes on and on. Have you had a chance to take in what you just did at this great facility.

SCOTT DIXON: I think it was huge, but not just for the 9-car. I think for Chip and his whole group. Huge credit to every single person on the team. That was definitely a feat.

Five cars in the Fast 12; four in the Fast 6. Every team owner would dream of that situation, and I think without the hiccup that Jimmie had, it would have been all of us in there. Kudos to Chip and everybody on the team. Kudos to Honda and HPD.

The amount of effort that goes into qualifying alone is kind of mind-boggling. I think even for us that are in the team and in this kind of community just how much goes into it is



Haven't qualified worse than fourth in my three qualifying attempts at the 500, so very proud of that, especially at my age.

Yeah, I think as a team, we maximized everything we had. We made all the right decisions, and I had the best car I've had in qualifying weekends during the Fast 6 qualifying, so that shows how on point we were today. The car was fast.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, what were the nerves like watching Scott go out and perhaps try to knock you off the pole, which obviously he ended up doing. Obviously, great finish for the team, though, as well.

ALEX PALOU: There was not a lot of nerves. I knew he was going to get it. Everybody knew. He is the man here. It was like, okay. To be honest, Chip Ganassi Racing team had a great job having five cars in the Fast 12, four in the Fast 6.

My car was really good. I think my best car was doing Fast 6, so I was super comfortable. I think I did everything I had. I kind of wish that Scott, knowing that he had already four pole laps here, he could have gave me one, but he doesn't share much. We'll try and get it next year.

THE MODERATOR: You've got to change that. You're the series champion. Can't do you something about that? Let's open it up for questions in person.

Q. One of the things, which Dave kind of alluded to, but I was wondering with the way the weather was changing because it was definitely getting colder certainly standing in pit lane, was there the temptation to do things to the car between the run for the 12 and the run for the 6?

SCOTT DIXON: I think we kind of always try to manage that and monitor it, to be honest, and we have a program I think we kind of follow with the current conditions. It's been pretty spot on.

I think all of us knew that from the first run to the second run it was going to get easier, so you could be more aggressive. The first run we were already super aggressive, so we didn't want to overstep it and then we kind of just waited to see what the 10-car did and then we trimmed out a little bit more than he did. That was it.

This year I think has been tricky just because of the sealant and how black it is, so the sunlight has really affected kind of qualifying more than what we've had in the past. I think this morning especially when it was cloudy keeping the track temp down really makes the car drive a lot nicer, and as we got later in the day, that helped.

Q. Then the second part of that: Waiting to be the last runner out on the track because of how you went through the 12 phase, do you feel the pressure more by having to wait until the end, or is it better to go maybe where Alex went or where Rinus went?

SCOTT DIXON: It kind of depends. You kind of are just seeing where the numbers are. When I saw the numbers that were run, I knew that our first run, even though we had a big hiccup on the last lap, really brought our average down quite a bit. Probably two or three tenths.

I knew we still had a pretty high 33 in the car in that configuration. And knowing what Alex had done and what we were going to do, I think we knew we had a pretty big number. It was just such a fine line of it being comfortable and nice to drive to it just completely taking off.

Huge credit to all the drivers the last couple of days because everybody has taken big risks, and the track is really tough to read, and sometimes you nail it, and sometimes you don't. It makes it fun when you get it right.

Q. Scott, your hands were shaking after your first run or maybe that was a little bit of -- were they really shaking?

SCOTT DIXON: I was just trying to do what Cannon is always doing. Cannon is always like this. He makes me shake.

I was pumped up after that first run because it was not easy. I was just happy to get it back to the pits.

Q. So, obviously, the speeds are very fast for everyone. All six of you were among the fastest. Even Kanaan's slowest lap would have been eighth fastest. Knowing what the speeds are and knowing how fast you're going and knowing how on the line it was, seeing Jimmie's run, how do you guys do that?

SCOTT DIXON: I don't know. I think that's kind of what we all secretly thrive on, right? It's more about getting it right, obviously, that when you don't, but to live on that edge is an amazing feeling, and when you do nail it, there are a lot of moving parts. It's never one person.

I was lucky enough to drive that car. Kanaan did a hell of a job in setting it up and all the crew people. It's just a huge knock-on effect. To be able to carry that across the line in the fashion that we did, that's what it's all about. Days like these are amazing. I think, yeah, that's why everybody does it. It's just being competitive. You want to win, and you want to beat the competition.

Q. The other two.

RINUS VEEKAY: Can you repeat the question one time?

Q. How do you go out there and go 233, 234 miles an hour?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, I was actually pretty nervous for today. I knew there was, well, many people counted on me to go for the pole position, so we were very fast yesterday. Of course, a bit lucky with the draw and driving in cold conditions, but, yeah, having to go two times today was not ideal.

The first run just, like Scott's, was very much on the limit. I could stay flat, but turn four was, yeah, very close to disaster, but stayed flat. Then we changed the car. Took some downforce out for the Fast 6 and really matched the balance of how I liked it. I was more comfortable in my Fast 6 run than my Fast 12 run.

Q. Alex.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I agree with Scott. That's what we like. The feeling of finishing a lap you. Not one lap because you know you still have three more, and it's like, oh, I don't know. The breath you get when you finish one lap and it's good, that just makes you do it again and again and again. When you do a good run, it feels just insane. It's tough to describe.

It doesn't feel good when things go bad, like it did last year, but it's also easier when you have a fast car like we did now. Yeah, the competition, I would say, trying to be faster than somebody else when we are in those limits, like we are putting everything to the limit. The driver, the car, everything. It's fun.

Q. One more for Rinus. How do you break through that gaggle of Ganassi guys and win the race?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, try to count on my experience that I got in Texas and in the race here last year. Of course, I was very pumped leading the race last year, and I think the second or third lap, but it really only counts at lap 200, so really I think we have to make sure we stay out of trouble, stay in the top five always, and yeah, just make sure we save some cars for the end.

Q. Scott, most of the drivers were talking about how difficult it was to qualify this weekend. I know you don't look a lot at stats yet, but was this one of your more rewarding poles you've had of your career so far with it as challenging as this weekend was?

SCOTT DIXON: I think they're all rewarding. I think if you look at the different configurations that those have all been done, and for me each one demanded a different thing. I think, again, the pole run is such a team effort and so much work goes into it, as I alluded to before. It's so cool to see all of that work that's been done for the last sort of is 11 or 12 months pay off. I know it's not the race win. It's not any of that, but the effort that goes into just trying to get the pole is huge.

Yeah, today, I don't know, I would say that was probably one of the fastest runs I've ever done, so that's cool. I think you think more about the ones that you didn't get, unfortunately.

Q. I think it was Tuesday. Days are all running together now. You were talking about how it's a reset, the 500 would be. How much does a pole do for the team kind of moving forward? Like an old basketball term. You have to see the ball go in, and it changes everything. Do you feel like the pole can do that for your team?

SCOTT DIXON: Not just the pole, but the effort of the whole group. Pumps you up for at least this week. Hopefully we're this happy come next Sunday as well, and one of us is lucky enough to be drinking milk. Then that's job well done. Yeah, it's some bragging rights I guess for a few days, but that's all this means, man.

Q. Scott, could you hopefully address this situation. When you see 234 flash up on your dash or you hear it in your ears, is there an adrenaline rush involved? How do you keep everything calm in that situation? You know you have to do three more just like that. Just take us inside the cockpit on one of these ridiculous runs, and what is it like?

SCOTT DIXON: The first number does mean a lot. When I think we had a 234.7 or something. When I saw that I was, like, okay, this is going to be a good run. Then because of the sequencing you have to do now with so many changes of buttons and switches and controls and weight jacker and roll bars, you are busy, so you are consumed. Gone are the days in the early years where you would kind of just try to hit your apexes and enjoy the speed that you had.

There's a lot going on, and if you miss one part of the sequence, it will take you out of it, so it's stressful. But that first number is definitely -- that's what you want to see. It makes the rest of it go a little bit easier.

Q. Real quickly, for Rinus and Alex. When you see



those numbers pop up for him and you are sitting there, because you're not racing against each other. He is out there running; you guys are watching. What is it like, I guess, to know you can't go back out there and do it again?

RINUS VEEKAY: It's unique about Indy 500 qualifying. I think really after my run and knowing Scott wasn't going to go out, I expected him to improve my time. And, yeah, seeing his first lap, I knew it was going to be very, very hard for him to actually make a mistake and finish and qualify behind me.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I agree. I guess it would be different if there was another driver behind, but when it's Scott Dixon, maybe you are a bit more scared. So obviously, seeing that number, it was amazing. I thought my four laps run were fast, but we were not fast enough, so, yeah, it's okay.

Q. For all three of you: There were two eight-minute "work periods" with a two pray lap in between. How much were you able to adjust your cars from the first run to the second run to fine-tune them that much more to the Nth-degree?

RINUS VEEKAY: I think we made some minor changes. Really some balance changes, but nothing crazy on the car. We knew what we had was pretty good. We didn't have to step too far away from what we had, so we basically tried to straighten out the balance a little bit, and that's exactly what we've done.

SCOTT DIXON: Just minor changes for us as well, and honestly, I think the bigger changes were more on the practice we had this morning. We're 12 cars, and not all of them running at once. You actually got a lot of productive track time out there, so for us especially on the 9 side I think that was a big session for us to be a part of. But as far as the Fast 12 to 6 and all that jazz, it was pretty fine adjustments.

ALEX PALOU: Me too. I think on the 10-car we just changed a bit of downforce to try and risk it a bit more for the Fast 6. It was limited what we could do on the cars. We had the list. You could change a little but, but obviously, if you are in the Fast 6, it means you have a pretty good car.

Q. Scott, being your fifth pole, you are now one away from Rick Mears' record here with six. You have mentioned earlier that there were frustrations about the two pole that is you didn't get. Is that frustration even elevated because now you're at five?

SCOTT DIXON: No, I would much rather have the three more victories he has than I do. That's plain and simple. A pole is fantastic and, again, it is a privilege, but everybody wants to win, man.

Q. Dixon, I want to ask you about 234. Can you share a bit how it was feeling inside the car?

SCOTT DIXON: When I saw the 234.7, I was excited. I don't think I gave a little scream or anything, but I was excited and happy. Again, it's just you're so focused on what you've got to hit. The one lap doesn't really mean much. It's all about the four-lap average.

As we've seen the last couple of days, the first two can be pretty easy, and then the real fine line comes down to lap three and four. I guess that's the hard part is that you know it's going to be getting a lot harder opposed to easier, but when you do see that first number, again, it feels good.

Q. (Speaking Spanish).

ALEX PALOU: (Speaking Spanish).

Q. I have one question for Rinus. If you could for the benefit of the assembled media, could you pronounce your full name and the name of your hometown?

RINUS VEEKAY: So my full name is Rinus van Kalmthout, and the name of my hometown is Hoofddorp.

THE MODERATOR: That might be the easiest question of the month. Well done.

RINUS VEEKAY: I knew that just from when I could talk.

Q. Scott, can you pronounce your name? No. (Laughing). I wanted to ask, how much did you consult with Cannon before you went out? I remember one time Chris was telling me he made a change to trim you out, and you recognized it was kind of like a bit thin, and he said, 'you can handle it.' I wonder if Cannon took the same approach.

SCOTT DIXON: I prefer not to know. I just ask him to be fast and that it will stick. I guess he short-changed me on the first run because it didn't really stick, but he works super hard. I know he wants to win more than anything.

Yeah, we don't really discuss it too much. He has a lot more tools. I'll tell him how the balance is and what I felt and how I feel like the run could be improved, but he is very good here. Very good in a qualifying configuration and race as well, but the team has a very good format, and he definitely nailed it.

Q. Looking forward seven days, throughout this last week, everyone has just been saying, 'God, those Ganassi cars like ominously fast in race trim.' How confident were you that you were also going to be faster in qualifying trim?

SCOTT DIXON: I guess it's kind of an unknown. We feel like the competition has definitely brought some speed this year and not just here at the speedway, but at the road courses, too. It's been pretty impressive. You know, the delta that they've brought this year.

I guess the easy answer is you don't really know. You hope for the best. It looked like yesterday that they were pretty even, actually, and today I think the others have caught up a little bit to what we had last year and the year before.

You know what it comes down to now is race ability and how the cars are. I think the Ganassi cars are strong, but so are these guys. So is Rinus. So is Ed. So is Conor. The Penskes are very strong. The Andrettis through portions of the day looked very strong. It's tight, man. The competition is just so damn tough in INDYCAR right now.

Q. For Scott and Alex: Alex, I think if I remember right, you were starting last of the Ganassi cars in the Fast 12, and then both of you had some teammates behind you to be able to learn off of. How much are you guys talking to your teammates in a situation like this when they're going before you and how much are you guys changing before you guys are able to go back out and make your run?

ALEX PALOU: A lot. We obviously know what everybody is running, and we all share what we are feeling and how the balance was. I think that's what makes us stronger. I think if we would just hide everything, we wouldn't be with six cars in the Fast 12 or four cars in the Fast 6.

Yeah, we were sharing everything. That's what I was a bit scared as well when Scott was behind me, but it was good. That's why I think I'm in the front row today.

SCOTT DIXON: It's open book. I think everybody does a good job of that, and you have to buy in. You have to be willing to share, and I think that's always been the environment since, well, 20 years ago since I joined this team.

Some drivers were not always the easiest on it, but I think the environment in the last ten years has been very open like that. Yeah, I think everybody -- I kind of asked a little bit just going through the sequence of the Fast 6 of what

the 1-car had done, what the 8 had done after they had left and gone out. You don't want to share too much because it's on the radio as well. People are scanning and things like that.

Yeah, everybody is sharing. We kind of have a program that constantly updates each stand of the changes that are going on as well.

Q. For both of you, one more question. Alex, I know this is just your second 500 with Chip. Scott, I know you have been doing it for 20 years. When you have five cars that we've all been talking about all week that look really strong in race trim, five cars that also are starting really close up to the top, does it increase the importance or maybe the level of urgency to try to be able to get someone in this group to be able to break through for Chip this next weekend?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, we had really strong cars on traffic conditions. I was actually happier with my car on race trim than I was at the beginning on qualifying trim. Maybe because we didn't get to run a lot on Friday, but it's a long race, man. It's a long race.

I remember last year I was almost nowhere in the first two runs, and then at the end we were up there. You need to nail everything, every single lap. The strategy, every single pass, every pit stop.

Yeah, it is target is to get through the first pit stop and then the second and then until the end and try and be at the front like first two places I would say for the last ten. We try and do everything we can to get us in that position.

SCOTT DIXON: For Chip it gives him better odds, right? The hard part is you have seen kind of the horror stories I think of when teams have expanded. Even when we were a two-car team, things obviously flow a lot easier just because there's less people, and there's not as much to manage. That was a huge feat. I think up until this point he has five great cars that have a shot at winning this race, so it's good odds.

Q. The format of having to do two four-lap runs in basically less than two hours to win the pole, it seemed like that was somewhat born of there being 33 cars and no bumping, but now that you guys have done it, even if they had more than 33 cars, should they keep this kind of format?

RINUS VEEKAY: I think it's around even. Everything has its positive and negative sides, but I think it definitely brings more excitement, especially when there's no bump day, but I think for the drivers it's more nerve-wracking. If I could

choose, I would go back to fast lane qualifying.

SCOTT DIXON: I would prefer to watch the bumping as long as I'm not in it because that's always a great show. You're not going through the ups and downs of what today was. I don't know. For us from the first run to the second run I knew it was hopefully going to get easier just because of weather conditions, but there was always the -- if you have a problem or if the weather doesn't get better, so I hope it worked for the fans. It sounds like there was a really good response. I think that's what it's all tailored for. If it's good like that, then we should continue to do it.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I agree. For the driver that has to do it once to get into the Fast 12, then another one to get into the Fast 6, it's tough. Once you are in the Fast 6, you are putting everything on the edge. If it works like today, it's fun, but when you are going too far, it's not. Yeah, I'm not against it, but it's tough for a driver, I think.

Q. Then one more for Scott. You alluded to it immediately in your interview. You said this is stage one. We're starting in the right spot. We haven't had a good record in keeping it in the right spot. I know this is pole No. 5; second all-time. It's a big deal, but is there a sense that, hey, I've been here before, and I have one win. I'm not even thinking about the fact that we're starting first?

SCOTT DIXON: It's all about the win, man. It's all about the win. Again, it's a privilege to be on the pole. This is damn hard to do for many reasons and for everybody on the team. Trust me, everybody feels very good about this situation, but not as good as I felt when I won in 2008, so I want that feeling again.

All 33 drivers want that feeling, and some have had it before, and the unfortunate part of that is it makes you want it that much more again.

Q. Scott, how much confidence does this give you into going the race next weekend, not just that you're starting from the front, but obviously, that you have been there so many times before, that you have the experience, but also that you have kind of four other drivers in the field kind of backing up in that regard at the start?

SCOTT DIXON: I wish they were just backing me up, but that's not the case. I'm sure before lap one is over Palou will be trying to pass me.

Again, it's a great effort. It gives Chip better odds. Every driver on our team wants to win this race. It's good confidence, but, again, it doesn't guarantee you everything,

and having been in this position a few times, you really understand that. You've got to make sure you just keep working hard and keep knocking on that door, and for me I hope at some stage it opens up again.

Q. In terms of having the extra car -- kind of five cars with the 500 this year, is that more of an advantage or a disadvantage in terms of the data pool?

SCOTT DIXON: I think it's been an advantage. I think everybody's input has been really good. I think there was a couple of personnel issues earlier in the week that hopefully get ironed out a bit just with different travel and things going on.

Again, I think from the results and what we've seen so far everybody on this group has done a tremendous job, but it's a lot of people coming from different -- from the extreme east side and from the -- side. It's a big effort.

Q. Obviously, got a question for the young man from the village in the Netherlands. Rinus, second front row start in a row. Your third time in the Fast 9. Is there anything you learned from the first two times in terms of process and mental prep to get yourself ready and in the zone for today and those very important qualifying runs?

RINUS VEEKAY: I think I definitely have learned from my past two qualifying runs in the previous years. Of course, I have kind of done this before, and I have had a very sketchy moment last year in 2021.

It's not going to be easy to qualify high up the order, so you've got to be at the edge, and sometimes people go over the edge to find the sweet spot. I think I felt really comfortable finding that sweet spot. I was never this encouraging of a team to go further on trimming, and I think confidence-wise it definitely felt very cool in the car.

Q. (Speaking Dutch).

RINUS VEEKAY: (Speaking Dutch).

Q. (Speaking Spanish).

ALEX PALOU: (Speaking Spanish).

Q. The second one, I just heard that Scott said that it's not too much important, the pole. Why don't you share with Alex if you feel it's more the feel for the winning?

SCOTT DIXON: I feel like the pole is very important. I never said it wasn't important. It's a big effort. Again, lots goes into it, so no, I feel privileged to be on the pole. I'm

sure these guys would rather be here.

Yeah, again, the goal is to win the race. That's why we're all here is to win the race, but we won the first race to the pole. Guarantees you nothing for next week.

THE MODERATOR: We'll wrap things up. I'll throw out one more stat for everyone. We've been crunching the numbers. Based on the 32 qualifying speeds this year, this is also the fastest field in Indianapolis 500 history. Just eclipsing last year's speed. This year's speed average 231.023 miles an hour. Last year was 230.294.

A little bit of history this weekend at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Congratulations to the fastest front row in 500 history. Scott Dixon, Alex Palou, and Rinus VeeKay.

Thanks, everyone.

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