

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Sunday, July 3, 2022

Hunter McElrea

Matthew Brabham

Linus Lundqvist

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Thanks for joining us today, wrapping up Indy lights at Mid-Ohio, another stop in the 2022 Indy Lights presented by Cooper Tires championship. Obviously Hunter McElrea winning today with his first career win. It was Matthew Brabham finishing second.

We'll begin our post-race press conference with the points leader and the driver of the No. 26 HMD Motorsports with Dale Coyne Racing, from Stockholm, Sweden, Linus Lundqvist.

Hunter McElrea also joins us, as well, from Andretti Autosport, driver of the No. 27 Machine, picking up first career win, third first-time winner this season, fifth different winner in eight races in the 2022 campaign. He is the 11th driver with a win now in all three series leading up to the NTT INDYCAR Series. Matthew Brabham will join us momentarily.

Let's begin with Hunter. Congratulations. Finally got her done.

HUNTER McELREA: Thank you, yeah, understatement. Yeah, really overdue, but at the end of the day I'm just really relieved and happy. Yeah, if anything obviously after St. Pete where we kind of threw away a win like that, honestly it was a little bit mentally tough because I was probably trying too hard, making lots of mistakes after that, just pushing for it, wanting it too bad, kind of middle of the season I was like, okay, halfway point, didn't really go the way I wanted so I'm just going to have fun driving my car. It worked okay this weekend.

I'll just see what Iowa brings, but just really relieved, and yeah, I'm going to enjoy it.

THE MODERATOR: You were obviously able to get a big gap there, and then full course caution came out. What were your thoughts at that point and did you think you'd

have your hands full?

HUNTER McELREA: Yeah, I think I had like a seven-second lead at that point so I was confident that I was going to drive away still. What I wasn't expecting was how bad I was in the first two laps of the restart. I had some pickup on my tires or what, but I was loosey-goosey there, and Brabham had a bit of a sniff, and then once they kind of cleaned up it was just business back to where I was before.

I was really happy for a one-two for the team. Matt has been really fast all weekend, as well, and obviously Linus is always at the front.

Yeah, it was good to see Matt in second. Obviously got a little screwed in qualifying with a little turbo issue yesterday, so to be honest I probably think he deserved to be there, as well. Yeah, it was a good one-two for the team.

THE MODERATOR: Also joined by the driver of the No. 83 Machine for Andretti Autosport, from Boca Raton, Florida, Matthew Brabham. For Matty Brabs, it's the third podium of the season, seventh of his career, now third in points and 96 behind Linus Lundqvist who will be here in a second. Just your thoughts; we talked about the field bunching up on the full course caution. Did you think you'd have something for your teammate?

MATTHEW BRABHAM: Yeah, I think it just equalized in terms of like the tire because we were all just sliding around, and so obviously Hunter had the edge on me and all the other parts of the race, but that one particular point in time I was like, oh, maybe I've got something. But I was also on the Push-to-Pass a lot and the tow, so that helped. I got close but I didn't really have enough to challenge him. Obviously he deserved to win and he was able to -- had that slight bit of edge of pace on me.

I was happy with second. That was the best I could have done with what I had, and especially from where I was starting, fourth, it's hard to pass here, so I was surprised to come out in second and on the first couple laps.

THE MODERATOR: Linus Lundqvist again extends his overall points championship, now 87 over Sting Ray Robb,



the sixth podium of the season, 17th of his Lights career now. Another podium, getting the points, which is crucial when it comes to the championship. Just your thoughts on the day today.

LINUS LUNDQVIST: Yeah, a little bit mixed to be honest. I think we knew going into this weekend Andretti was going to be strong. It's been probably our weakest place out of all the tracks we go to so we knew we were in for a challenge.

Roller coaster weekend because we thought we had something figured out and then we went into practice one and we were like, oh, no, this is completely wrong. So we had to sort of revert back and back trace a little bit, so to be able to put out a P2 lap in qualify was a little bit of a surprise and I think that's sort of what saved us this weekend.

I think we saw in the race, obviously I made a mistake and Brabham got by, but I don't think that we were fast enough either way. So to walk away with a podium at Mid-Ohio feels pretty good. Bonus, as well, to have our championship lead extended. But there's still six races to go, and we want more wins. That's what we're here for.

We'll see. Looking forward to Iowa. Going to be good to be back on an oval.

THE MODERATOR: I was going to ask you about the opening laps giving up the spot but then you had your hands full with Benjamin, as well.

LINUS LUNDQVIST: Yeah, that's for sure. The car was a little bit of a handful to drive, especially in the beginning the first couple laps. I think I went off like three or four times in Turn 1. It was definitely tricky for us out there, but just happy to get it back at least in a podium position, and I think we made some progress at least in qualify. We'll have to think about what we could have done differently in the race, but obviously we'll sort of tick this off the box, get away with a podium and championship lead extended, like I said, and now we'll just take one race at a time.

THE MODERATOR: Hunter and Matthew, when you come to a track where there's a history of success with the team here, does that give you an advantage or do you go down that road of overthinking some things or setups or what exactly?

HUNTER McELREA: I think if you look the last few years pretty -- obviously I think you smoked everyone on the wet here at the end of last year, but typically in a normal condition in the dry, Andretti is pretty dominant here. You saw Oliver won, Kyle won, was pretty dominant. I feel like I

was able to do that this weekend. I was a little bit like, they tested here, so maybe they'll be stronger; we didn't test. But I was kind of shocked how fast it was, how easily it was.

It's just one of those weekends. These weekends don't happen every weekend. We came into Detroit, had nothing for him. I would have fenced it trying to win. This weekend he didn't have anything for us, so it's just how it goes when you've got drivers of this level. It doesn't take too much -- a tenth, two-tenths of a second, it seems huge but it's really not a lot.

Yeah, I think just this weekend it was obviously Andretti territory, and one-two kind of shows it still is.

THE MODERATOR: Do you agree, Matthew? Does it give you a little confidence heading to a track like this?

MATTHEW BRABHAM: I don't know if I feel confident because, I mean, we're confident that we're going to be fast, but we're like oh, we're not going to do a test day and they all did the test day, so we were like, oh, man, maybe we're going to be out to lunch. But I think the test day hurt them more than anything.

I think you guys like found a whole bunch of stuff on the test day and showed up here and were like, oh, none of this works, whereas we just rolled out what we did last year, and it just seemed to take straight away.

At first I was thinking, oh, man, this test day, we're missing out big time, but I think in the end it actually -- because we didn't show up for the test day we were way better off for the race weekend. Sometimes it goes like that. I think the track changes with rubber and obviously I did the Trans Am race last weekend, and we were doing 45 laps on Pirelli tires just rubbering in the track with cars that are like are like 800, 900 horsepower and they're heavy and spinning off every corner. I was like, yeah, the track is going to be different when we come to the race weekend this weekend.

THE MODERATOR: Sometimes you can overthink it or go down a road maybe you don't want to when you come to a test or something like that.

MATTHEW BRABHAM: Yeah, I don't know if it's overthinking, I think it's just more like you test but you're finding stuff and you're getting excited and you're like, oh, man, is this going to work on a race weekend, and it just doesn't.

Q. You mentioned Iowa, the oval coming up. You guys were all there for a test in the last 10 days or so.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Just some general thoughts about going to Iowa Speedway and getting on an oval for the first time this year.

LINUS LUNDQVIST: Exciting. My second ever oval, so it's going to be interesting. Very different to Gateway that we did last year. Obviously super bumpy. Sometimes like you can run a high line and hopefully get some real racing because around Gateway it's super tough to pass. I'm excited for it. I think it's going to be close. Obviously Andretti was pretty fast at the test.

But I think we can come up and bring a fight to them. It's going to be fun either way.

So yeah, just excited. It's going to be nice, and another track to the experience and see how it is. Yeah, it's going to be cool.

HUNTER McELREA: I think me and this guy ended up one-two at Iowa, in the afternoon anyway. Yeah, I loved it. It was my first oval in the Lights car, first oval for Andretti. Typically driving on an oval for Andretti is not the worst thing in the world.

Yeah, it's going to be a new experience. I haven't driven an oval which is like that close to flat really. It's always been lifts and stuff. I've really enjoyed it, and obviously we have a strong package.

I think being such a short lap, lap traffic is definitely going to come into play, and it's not the easiest to pass with the dirty air.

I think we have a strong package heading there, but it's not like we have -- I don't think we're going to have the advantage we had this weekend anyway.

I think it's going to be really close, and everyone is going to have to their bring A game, that's for sure.

Q. Matt, you're an old hat at oval, so this is no big deal for you.

MATTHEW BRABHAM: Yeah, I love Iowa. Iowa is the first place I drove an INDYCAR, so that kind of was like my big eye-opening experience. Everything after that has felt kind of weak.

No, we were really good in the test, and I felt like I was probably one of the strongest cars in traffic, at least at the end. I think as Hunter said, it's going to play a big factor. We're really trying to beat these HMD guys on the oval because they were really strong --

LINUS LUNDQVIST: Malukas won last year. He beat Kyle --

MATTHEW BRABHAM: Yeah, we're not super confident about that one, but we'll go to the test. But as you said, tests mean nothing.

HUNTER McELREA: I'm waiting for the bonus check for the test.

Q. Hunter, as you may know, the Elite Academy camp week just ended in New Zealand today. Some six years ago you were a part of that camp. What can you say to the class of 2022 today after your big drive here at Mid-Ohio?

HUNTER McELREA: Yeah, it's crazy. It doesn't seem that long ago, six years. Now I understand when my dad and mom were like, it makes me feel old, because I was just racing Formula 4 just some big, skinny, lanky kid. I still am a big, skinny, lanky kid, but --

MATTHEW BRABHAM: Six years ago I was in Indy Lights. I'm still here.

HUNTER McELREA: He's still here. But no, it's cool. I learnt a lot. That was really exciting for me. I think I was 15 at the time I did that.

Had a lot of big dreams and ambitions and hoped to go overseas and race in America, so yeah, just all those guys who are in there, keep working hard. Obviously I think pretty much every New Zealander that's been selected in that academy and gone through has gone on to big things.

Yeah, keep working hard and put what you learnt from the academy to use, and yeah. It's good.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports