

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Jimmie Johnson

Marcus Ericsson

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Jimmie Johnson. Congratulations. Career-best fifth-place finish in your second, first full season in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES.

Your thoughts about that pass, ironically enough on your teammate fighting for a championship.

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean, what ifs and such. But I was setting that move up on the 9 car 20 to go, and I jumped the cushion down in one and two, got in the marbles. Marcus was able to get by.

I finally found sufficient track where there was grip in it. Awkward set of lines. Worked out in one, two, three and four to get it done. I had it just figured out. I was catching Dixon, overcooked it into one. Once I caught Marcus, I had a good rhythm, knew where to place the car, was able to get by him.

We did have a couple side-by-side battles. I was trying to be cautious along the inside and not overcook it on the bottom. It just wasn't paying off. I had to use the line I was chasing Dixon and pulled it off.

THE MODERATOR: You ran the high line probably more than anyone else. Why did it work for you?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: I think there's just some experience I have that's carried over. I'm so happy to finally have some experience transfer from stockcars to INDYCARs. Just knowing where to run on the track at different times.

Yesterday early in the race there was some clean spots on the track that people were afraid to get up there, tiptoe along the edge. That was just something I was comfortable with doing.

It honestly reminded me a lot of running at Bristol, the way you just got to run right at the edge of the marbles, tip-toeing around that. And if you're willing to get up that extra six or eight inches, it would pay off.

Yesterday some other cars figured it out. They ran it off. Then today any time I caught someone, the driver would make that defensive move, take that spot. If they gave me a turn, ran the middle, I assume the spotter talked them into moving up. Next turn they were up higher. Really found some different lines.

I think we had a little better handling car today. Made some adjustments overnight. Made us able to drive through the field.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Can you recall another time in your career where you've had this much fun on a short track?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean, new tires in an INDYCAR around here reminds me of Bristol. You just drive above and beyond what your brain tells you the car can do. Here later in a run, tires fall off. Reminds me of maybe like Darlington in a Cup car which both are two of my favorite tracks to drive.

Throughout a tire run here, in the beginning of a run, the way the car hammers the ground, the way it drives, the way I was running my line, it was much like Bristol. Bristol is so much fun to drive on.

It's hard to say it's the most fun I had. Yesterday the element of surprise I had on everyone, even proving to myself that I can race with these guys, there was some shock and awe that went with that that was quite humorous, I thought.

Q. You talk about not just finding different lines but setting up multiple corners, setting up a move. Is that a skill that comes from NASCAR in particular rather than just choosing a line, but actually setting it up?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Yeah, I think so. On an oval you have that repetition, you get into a cadence of watching the driver in front of you, understanding if they're inconsistent or if their car is inconsistent, what circumstances that puts them in, how you might be able to take advantage of it.

You kind of build a cadence and rhythm of who you're



stalking. I found that to be very common here. Not so much at Indy. Texas, it didn't feel that way. You're going so fast, timing your run was more important than kind of stalking someone and working different lines.

So here, this is the closest experience that I would say crosses over to NASCAR that I've had.

Q. Your engineer told me earlier this year that physics remain the same of getting around the oval. Stockcar or INDYCAR, it's just the momentum and the speed is different. Is it the physics you understand as well as anybody in this series about what it takes to be successful on an oval?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Yeah, I think so. I mean, I feel like again here is the closest to a NASCAR experience. Texas I felt like I understood the timing of a run, I had the courage to try the second lane where others didn't. Indy, I'm still scratching my head over the race at Indy, how to pass there. That was such a struggle for me.

Here I would agree with that. The other tracks, they were very unique skill sets to drive on those tracks. They were kind of foreign for me.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously joined also by the NTT INDYCAR SERIES points leader, leaving another race as the one that is leading the way, Marcus Ericsson after a sixth-place finish.

I'm assuming you guys are talking about the pass late stages. Marcus, from your aspect, what did you see?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, you know, he has a couple of more oval races than me under his belt (smiling). I think that's what I was thinking when he was battling me. All the time I was trying to sort of make him go in my dirty air. Every time I looked in my mirror, he was inside, out, inside, out. Oh, my God. Step behind me, please, dirty air (laughter).

No, it was really fun. I knew that it would be a clean fight and a hard fight. I think that's what we did for pretty much a long time there. He went up in the gray there once. I got the position back. Let's go again.

No, he was just a bit too strong for me today. In the end of the race I was struggling with my car, I had too much oversteer. Couldn't really hold on.

But I'm happy with our day, our weekend. Two top-eight finishes. Still in the championship lead. Coming into this weekend, even though not saying it, we were a bit worried because we knew that Penske is very strong here. We

haven't been very strong here in the past.

Yeah, with that in mind I'm really happy with my race today.

THE MODERATOR: The pass did cost you two points in the championship. Maybe somebody needs to buy somebody dinner. Have you thought about that at all?

MARCUS ERICSSON: No. It's racing. It's racing. He was stronger than me today. He deserved the top-five finish. I'll take P6, live to fight another day.

Q. Jimmie, can you talk about your maturation from the first time you stepped into an INDYCAR to this weekend.

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Yeah, I'm understanding how these cars reward aggression, the confidence it takes to having yourself and the car that's going to stick. The faster you go, the more downforce these cars create. It takes a lot of energy to turn these tires on and make them perform like they need to.

I just think I've been on the soft side of this since I've ever sat in a car. The ovals feel more natural to me and I'm able to find my confidence, push the car, have the downforce and the tire work for me.

But the street and road courses, I'm making gains. Unfortunately they're not as obvious as what you can see here on the ovals. But I continue to make gains.

Just enjoying driving these little rocket ships around. It's a lot of fun. Every time I climb out, I just shake my head how hard you can drive these cars, the speed you can carry, the aggression you can drive with. They're really fun cars to drive.

THE MODERATOR: This is the beauty of short-track racing, you got to work the car a little bit. A quicker track, a little movement, you may have lost the car completely. You can work your car around a place like this, can't you?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: I was saying that to somebody outside. When I think of steering wheel inputs, where you use your feet, these cars are so pointy and react so quickly, I've been very delicate with the car.

But here the inputs that you drive the car with were much like a stockcar. You just wrestle the thing around, force the steering wheel to it, jump on the gas and go. It really reminded me of a Cup car and the aggression.

Maybe subconsciously I've learned something, learned something I can apply to the street and road courses.

THE MODERATOR: Going back to the IMS road course, your third race. Marcus, you've been there many times. The string continues, very busy stretch, but I know you have a positive outlook going into the IMS road course on Saturday.

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah. Last time I raced there, it was a pretty good day for me. I'm looking forward to it even though it's a road course now. Even on the road course we had the fourth-place finish there. That was what kick-started our month of May.

I'm really excited about it. Like I said, I think this was our worst track on the calendar. I think the rest of the year we should be really strong everywhere. If the worst track of the calendar means we're finishing four, five, six today, that's pretty good, shows how strong Chip Ganassi Racing is as an organization. Yeah, I'm excited about next week and the rest of the championship.

Q. Jimmie, Rusty designed this track to be like Richmond. Is this the closest thing? Did he do a good job of making it replicate Richmond?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Yeah, he did. I talked to him years ago when he was involved in designing it. Turn three at Richmond is such a tricky corner because it's so flat, the way the transition kind of ramps up, puts banking into the track makes it really awkward and tough to get into that corner.

The way the back straightaway has banking, the way you can climb up the hill into turn two. After all these years, I finally have a chance to drive on this track. I commend him and his racing eye the way he was able to build multiple lanes here. A very racy track and a lot of fun to drive.

Q. Jimmie, did you feel there was anything in particular that having a doubleheader you felt more confident or comfortable doing?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Yeah, I felt like from my perspective my confidence in the tools inside the car and what they did yesterday, the weight jacker, give it 10 laps, a little bit more, same with the bars, higher pressure wing. At one point Eric asked me yesterday if I wanted wing.

I'm like, I don't know, do I?

If I give you some wing, do you want a half or full turn?

I'm like, I don't know, you pick.

So today I was much more confident in the adjustments we

made. The closer you get to the front, the more important the small adjustments are.

Q. (Question about Josef and the points lead.)

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, I guess. I mean, we can only focus on ourselves. Of course you don't want anyone to have mechanical failure that takes you out of the race, but that's part of racing, right? You have to finish to get the points.

He was very strong this weekend. I'm sure they're going to be very disappointed with that. But we're not going to apologize for it. We're going to take the points on offer.

It's a team effort. Chip Ganassi Racing is doing a tremendous job. It's going to be tight all the way down. We're five or six, whatever, cars now, or drivers, quite close in the championship. But we're still leading. We're in a good spot, in the best spot going ahead with five to go. I'm looking forward to it.

Q. Do you feel like you have to win one of these last five races?

MARCUS ERICSSON: I think I probably need to win at least one more race. That's sort of my mindset. But at the same time, I think we have the best consistency in the field so we just need to keep doing that. If we keep being consistent, inside the top 10, even since the month of May I think we've been in the top eight every race.

We need to be there all the time, then we have some strong tracks coming up, try and grab a win or two would be nice to try and close up the championship.

But it's going to be tough. We just need to maximize every weekend, yeah. That's the name of the game, right?

Q. Jimmie, seems like whenever you go back to a track, you pick up where you left off, the learning curve is less steep than before.

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Yeah, I think so. The last few times at Indy I've had new personal bests on a road course. Excited to go back. Feel like I basically live in Indy now after all my trips there each week to drive sim, the month of May. Next weekend will be fun. I know I have a lot of friends that will like to come see the INDYCAR paddock.

Q. Marcus, yesterday Will said he believes that you are the best racer in the series. Maybe you don't get the credit that you deserve. Someone like Will, that's a significant statement.

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, I did read that. It was very nice of him. It means a lot because he's one of the best INDYCAR drivers in the last, what, 20 years, whatever he's been here, one of the fastest. Yeah, that means a lot to me obviously.

But I think as well, we've been obviously very strong. I worked extremely hard to put myself in a position where I can be running up front and fight for the championship. It's nice to see that hard work -- reward for that hard work.

Again, it's a team effort. I've had incredible support with my core group of people, my engineer Brad, Michael O'Gara on the strategy, all the other people that have been with me since I came to Ganassi. That stability helped me build my confidence and be where I am today.

Yeah, coming back to what you said, it means a lot to hear that from someone like Will.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Marcus.

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