

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Helio Castroneves

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Great to see everyone. Crazy to think that we've reached the final oval of the season as the NTT INDYCAR SERIES heads to World Wide Technology Raceway for Saturday night's race.

Helio Castroneves knows his way around an oval or two. 16 of his 31 career victories have come on ovals, including a 2003 win at World Wide Technology Raceway. In his six starts there he's never finished outside of the top 10. He drives the No. 06 AutoNation Sirius XM Meyer Shank Racing Honda.

Thanks for doing this, Helio.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Thanks, Dave, for the introduction. Very nice. I really appreciate that. Thanks, everyone, to be here. This is absolutely awesome.

Looking forward to go back to St. Louis. Oh, my God. I remember my last win there, no information on my dash, to be honest. Absolutely blanked. Sounds like technology sometime help, but that particular day technology did not do nothing for me. I was able to finish with a first place, which is great.

Looking forward to go back again after four years. Yeah, always enjoyed that place.

THE MODERATOR: As mentioned, a lot of success on the ovals. Where does World Wide Technology Raceway rank? You won that one old school, didn't you?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Totally. I remember even the up-shifting, the lights wasn't working. I had to do everything by timing. Literally was old school.

But the place is very challenging. I do remember a special turn one, dictates the entire lap because of the shape of the circuit. No, it's exciting. Last time I've been there not driving, obviously I notice how many people still going, still enjoying. It's big props to the promoters to be able to captivate and capitalize on the entire people. Great that the community is all behind. Really important to have

promoters like that.

THE MODERATOR: Great fans in St. Louis always.

I know this season has been kind of a mixed bag of results, but going back to a place where you know and you had success in the past, this race team is capable of replicating that, how important is that going into a weekend like this?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: It's always good to be in a place that you don't have to work as hard. However, it is different. Remember I did notice a big difference in the short oval in Iowa, places that in several years you not even touched the brakes. Now actually it's completely different. You're driving like a road course.

I'm sure it won't be different in St. Louis. So have to adapt to those circumstances, see how it goes. But certainly it change a lot. With the aeroscreen, the way the downforce compared to 2017 that I drove, it changed a lot. When you have very, very few practice, it becomes challenging.

The good news is we have a good team, Meyer Shank Racing is always pushing. Partnership with Andretti Autosport. Always helps us to guide us in some directions.

Yeah, so looking forward to a good weekend.

THE MODERATOR: Let's go ahead and open it up for questions.

Q. As we get to this part of the season, I hate to ask this of you to start off, but we start talking about drivers when they get into their early to mid 40s, how many more years will they have racing. How about for you? Have you started thinking about how many years you're going to continue doing it full-time?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Well, this is something that comes natural. You can't put a number on it. I feel obviously I wouldn't believe myself if I don't feel that I have not only the potential, the dedication, and I know I can do the results, and the team and people behind. So the reason I'm still going for it is because I believe in all these aspects. I'm going to keep moving forward until I get the result.



Obviously you get to a point that you got to realize. As of right now, I don't feel that in my gut. I feel I have a lot left in the tank. The number is just an age. As I said, it's about understanding, especially with this new car, even for a veteran, experienced guy like myself, the car changed. When you don't have practice and things like that, it's become very challenge.

I feel this is great that we spend this year working very, very hard. I have three races over, so we want to finish in a great note. All the data we are collecting, keep pushing for the rest of the season.

Q. I'll throw you a curve ball here. NASCAR obviously has Kyle Busch, before that they had Dale Earnhardt. People would call them the villain of the series. People love 'em or hate 'em. INDYCAR used to have Paul Tracy. Today INDYCAR didn't have a 'villain' driver. Does INDYCAR need a villain? You're the nice guy. Everybody loves you. Would the series be good to have a villain driver?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Should we call Paul Tracy back (laughter)?

I don't know. We talk about Grosjean has been kind of like rough these days, right? Yeah, I don't know. Joke aside. Obviously Grosjean is a good guy, being sort of like a teammate. I have no issues with that.

It depends. We can't copy other series, right? It just needs to be natural, the personality of the person. Needs someone if they want to take that role. Not only to embrace it, but own it, too. Whatever you do, you're going to have consequences.

At this point I think the series is competitive enough to show how challenging it is to be competitive. The whole entire group, the whole entire group of drivers and teams, are extremely tight. Yeah, that's why it's hard to pick one guy all the time to be maybe a good guy or bad guy.

Q. Now that we're down to three races left to the season, looking back from the start to now, are you happy with the season or is there a little bit left?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: No, it's not. I didn't expect how difficult it was. We are make some changes internally to make sure these last three races, we continue to improve.

As I mentioned before, this aeroscreen literally throw a curve ball, to find a sweet spot, taking longer than I expected for myself to adapt and to understand what the car needs.

We always like one side or another. We're never able to find it. You see good drivers, guys that used to be in the series longer, able to have those inconsistencies, as well.

But we pushing. I feel like we could be better. But remember, it's the first full-time season that I'm in. Certainly we're preparing for bigger things in the future.

Q. I notice your three best results this season were tracks you ran last year. Now that you have a full season this year, does that up your mindset for next year, top 10s, top fives, a couple wins?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Absolutely. Absolutely. Detroit for example this year we had a great opportunity. Unfortunately there was a mechanical issue. Nothing wrong with the team or mechanics, they did a great job. It's just something that broke. We were like, Really, now?

But we feel St. Louis is a place that could work. Iowa was another place we felt we could be very strong. Unfortunately making huge mistakes and misunderstanding on the penalties. Yeah, so we just keep pushing. That's one thing I will never stop, is pushing. Whether it's on the racetrack, qualifying, or doing the pit stops, I'm just going to giving it at all.

Q. It seems like it's been a challenging season. Does it make it more rewarding as results come?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Look, I just going to put this way. When you start a company, I learned a little bit with Roger in the place, sometimes you're making a dealership, first year you lose money. It's pretty much like this in the racing team.

Sometimes you put a team together, even the team has experience or sharing information with another group, it takes time to follow the process, to put everything in place. Some people coming and going. So it takes time.

You just got to trust the process. I'm confident that we will get our deserved result. And hopefully this weekend we'll break through.

Q. There will be a lot of people that will wonder, trying to find that sweet spot. Surely it's easier when there's six drivers working together, or seven. What are the upsides and downsides to having such a big team? You would think a six-car outfit would be able to squeeze more out of these abbreviated practice sessions.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I'm sorry. Can you repeat that again?

Q. Because you're part of a two-car team, part of a four-car team, you'd think trying to find the sweet spot of these cars would be easier if there's six cars all pulling data together.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Right.

Q. What are the upsides and downsides of being part of such a big operation?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: When you have, for example, say Colton and Alex, they been in the team for quite some time with Andretti, you see the ups and downs that they go through. All the system developed by these two guys, their style. I'll be honest, Colton and Alex are kind of like the opposite.

I did familiarize a little more, since Alex and I drove together with IMSA sports car a few years ago, I feel more comfortable driving what he does. In the same time, you tends to follow who is going faster. That's where good thing because you have a reference; bad thing sometimes it don't suit you.

Having Simon, for example, in our side, what happen is he brings another information and it becomes a little bit confusing. So to find the identity and the sweet spot, as I mentioned before, when you don't have a lot of practice, becomes very, very challenging.

Sometimes it's difficult to teach an old dog a new trick, right? You just got to really keep pushing and trying and find that sweet spot.

But I have confidence enough, particularly Andretti not been particular this year that strong, they're showing great potential towards the end of the season, which is great. Some things we share, but sometimes we're just not able to get what they have.

They've been very transparent, which is great. But we also need to do our own part. That's where I came with the situation about a dealership, new dealership. Everything is different for a team, first time a two-car car operation for Meyer Shank Racing. Simon is doing a great job. My guys, 06, incredible. All new guys compared to last year. A lot of people might not know that. All new group. We're all synchronized, as well.

It's frustrating sometimes, but we have belief and trust in each other that we can make the result that we deserve.

Q. I wanted to ask about Detroit. Was it satisfying, the old dogs could teach the new dogs new tricks?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Absolutely. That shows how we can do it. When you hit the right things, that's how we did it in Detroit. We know we can do it. That was a perfect execution from Meyer Shank Racing. We're looking to do other one like that. Unfortunately sometimes racing is so competitive that it's so hard to mimic the same thing.

Q. You've been on both sides of the scenario. When it gets to this part of the championship season, in this instance you're not necessarily in the championship battle, do you become more aware of those that are and what they're up to on track, or do you just go about business as normal?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Look, the way I do it is just keep pushing. I don't trying to look what's happening outside or around us. I just go doing what I need to do: put my helmet on, try to beat whoever is in front of me, try to have the best performance as possible.

Yeah, that's the way I see it. That's the way I drive myself.

Q. Really just in relation to other drivers around you that are in the championship battle, racing room, that sort of thing.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: No, I had a situation in Nashville, for example, I was trying to get my lap back. Unfortunately Josef, I'm not sure what they're doing there, they didn't stop. End up not able to get that lap. I was pushing as much as I could.

But I don't want to be the person as well to jeopardize any results. I noticed that Dixon and somebody else was behind much faster so I just let them by. But I'll drive my own race. If we're competitive, in the same lap, battling for position, it's ready to go.

Q. I guess things are looking good towards Drive For Five, the sequel next year?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: We're still working on the small details. For sure I'm excited for the future ahead.

Q. I wanted to check, you got asked about your future with Meyer Shank. You are working on a contract, but it's not done yet?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: We're finalizing some small details. I have to say when we announce -- soon we going to be announcing something. Hopefully we'll be able to clear a lot of things that people are asking sometimes.

Q. Kimi Raikkonen is going to run the NASCAR race

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

this weekend. Justin Marks was talking about it. He said he has talked with you, but has to get through Kimi first. Do you feel that deal is still alive possibly?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: That's the transparency that Justin told me. I understand. You got to remember, they're pulling a lot of people to make this project works. They got to make sure that it works right.

After Kimi, then we going to probably start the conversation again. Really looking forward to fulfill that dream to be at Daytona 500.

Q. You're really good at Gateway. Some other guys are good at Gateway. The championship is pretty tight. Who do you like in this championship race?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Look, certainly Team Penske has been doing very well in Gateway. I wouldn't bet against them, to be honest. And I understand what they do is extremely well-done. Yeah, it's going to be interesting.

I don't have a favorite, to be honest, because obviously I like all of them: Will, Josef, Marcus Ericsson, and Dixon is back on the game. Probably Pato still I believe has a chance.

Very much open for those guys. Yeah, whoever make less mistakes, that's one is going to be the winner.

THE MODERATOR: How about Dixon, cost himself all those points at Indy 500, fought his way back, six points out of the championship?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: It's just a testament that veterans still know what they need to do. He's one of the good old boys. We fought lots together. I have no doubt, now he's showing the experience, it's still very much valuable in a series that's so competitive. And the team. Don't get me wrong. He's been with the same team so long, same people, same engineers, remember that helps a lot. When it comes to details, that's why INDYCAR is so incredible, because details definitely makes a huge difference.

Q. I've been curious about those difficulties that can appear with age, driving such difficult cars like INDYCAR. Did you notice some difficulty, physically speaking, in these last years?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: No. It's interesting, because of the weight of the aeroscreen, certainly it change a little bit the weight of the steering wheel. I used to run with different type of caster, for example, system that everyone use in the race car. You can actually change that.

Adjusting that, there was no issues.

Certainly the beginning of the season, because I was racing with IMSA for the last three years, it changed. It changed the style, the quickness, it changed the position.

As I mentioned before, you guys sometimes talking about age. It's not about age but it's how long you get used to. Because I was getting used to with one car for three years and getting better and better, now change it again, it takes a little setback for that.

But we were able to adjust those little things. I have to say, Bailey and I have been together for over 20 years. He knows exactly what I need to do. Yes, we're human beings, our bodies are getting older. Our body doesn't recoup as fast as before. Those over 40, 45, understand what I'm talking about.

At the end of the day it's smart you practice and train to prepare yourself for the race. That's where we're able to do all this and I haven't had any issues at all this year.

Q. What are those moments experience can be more valuable than anything? How can you show it on track?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: A perfect example was actually last week in Nashville. Everybody was get anxious, put their nose where it's not supposed to do. Look at the carnage we had. How many cars ended up getting into the wall?

I remember, I was right there with Dixon. Unfortunately I was a lap down because of the situation. There was a traffic jam, we end up getting caught in one of those situations.

It's just you know that sometimes the risk won't take much reward unless it's necessary. I noticed that this year a lot in different situations in racing.

But as of now, we keep pushing, we keep working. But experience definitely goes over any time a young guy or someone sometimes just taking chances.

Q. This is your first year you made the entirely with Meyer Shank since the 24 Hours of Daytona. What lesson you and Meyer Shank have learned since the beginning of this year until this moment as the 2022 INDYCAR season is coming to end?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: We know what we learned, we understand each other that we have the same goals, which is winning obviously. We're passionate about this sport.

The result of the Daytona 24 Hour this year, I knew the car very well. Simon also be part of Team Penske, a third driver, understood the car very well. And Tom and Oliver, even that they are getting there, were able to connect extremely well and able to execute.

Because of that, we knew there was progress. Today IMSA and Meyer Shank Racing is challenging for the championship. Hopefully I'll be able to be there to help them out and get this championship.

That showed that INDYCAR, we able to do that. But when you building two-car team, this is the first time we have it, it takes time, it takes a process, understanding each other. We working extremely hard.

We feel these last three races we going to finish on a high note and get the result that we deserve because the team has worked very, very hard, not only from the 06 car, but also from the 60 car. We feel we going to get reward from that.

THE MODERATOR: We'll head to Asher. Asher, go ahead.

Q. With only three races left this season and you being full-time, do you feel like it just started or it was a long season?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Great question, Asher. No question, it feels like we're in the process of a long, long ride for sure. We have average results. However, the hard work was like a championship work. The entire MSR has been doing exactly like that, in and out, non-stop. We feel that we deserve a good result because of the work that it's going.

However, we know this championship is very, very challenging. That's why details makes a big difference. Hopefully now till the end of the season, we want to finish on a high note, especially going to St. Louis that not only myself but Simon really, really liked.

Yeah, hopefully we can score a lot of points for that.

Q. What are your plans for next season? Do you plan to stay at MSR or go somewhere else?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: We're working together. I really enjoy my time with Mike and Jim. They gave me a great opportunity. We were able to win the Indy 500 for the fourth time last year, which is incredible memories.

Would be fit and appropriate to continue moving forward to

get the number five, which we know we can do it. So looking forward to it. Hopefully we can make that happen.

THE MODERATOR: Brings up a good point. As difficult as some of this has been this year, you look around, see some familiar faces, you have Simon in the other car, if there are two people you want to go through something like this, learning curve, improve a team, Simon is a guy you want to be hooked to the hip with, right?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: No question, Dave. We work together so well in the past. We still working well together. Having someone that didn't have any breaks during the season, came fresh from Team Penske last year, joined the team, the result that he captivated the Indy GP, second place, shows when it throws a little curve ball during the races, we can make things happen.

As I mentioned before, this car has been for a long time with the same scenario. When you start having big teams development, that's why it's so competitive. When you have big teams, they are slowly progress to develop, but the other ones start catching up. We are in the same trend as well.

We look forward to keep it going. It's been a long season for everyone. However, we feel we can have the result that we all deserve.

THE MODERATOR: We will let you go. Thank you so much for doing this, four-time.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Appreciate that, guys.

THE MODERATOR: We'll see you in St. Louis.

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