

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Friday, August 19, 2022

Scott Dixon

Marcus Ericsson

Jimmie Johnson

Alex Palou

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We welcome the drivers from Chip Ganassi Racing, three drivers in the top five in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES points standings, and Jimmie Johnson coming off a top five at Iowa Speedway.

Scott Dixon, just six points out of the championship lead.

Marcus Ericsson, the reigning Indy 500 champion, third in points.

Alex Palou, the reigning INDYCAR SERIES champion, currently fifth in points.

And making his INDYCAR Worldwide Technology Raceway debut, I think you were here for a couple Busch races back in the day, way before the other guys were born, Jimmie Johnson.

Coming back to World Wide Technology Raceway, hard to believe this is the final oval of the season in 2022.

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Excited to be here for my first time in an INDYCAR. Chatting on the way in with a couple people, I do remember my first race here in I think '98 in the 59 Busch car. I do not remember being here two other times in the Herzog 92 car, which is kind of weird.

I was in an argument with my social media team: I've only raced here once.

We have these stats that show you have been here three times.

Excited to go here in an INDYCAR. I've tested here in our Cup car just before they repaved it, working on some oval stuff. I'm excited to be back after driving the sim, try it in an INDYCAR, because it's a totally different experience in

here.

Q. (No microphone.)

JIMMIE JOHNSON: I remember the 59 car because myself, Ryan Newman and Adam Petty were all fighting for that seat. Adam Petty was sitting in the stands watching me. We're literally fighting for this ride. I have more memories of that experience than the other two.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, excited to be here. I think our race last year, especially Alex and I, ended pretty shortly.

The car has been good here in the past. We just need to make sure we have a smooth weekend, stay out of trouble. I think performance-wise we should be okay.

The sad part is, as you said, the last oval for the season. Hopefully we can get some more ovals on the schedule in coming seasons.

Looking forward to it, hopefully a good result for all of us.

THE MODERATOR: Marcus, your progression on the ovals is pretty outstanding the last couple years. Pretty good to be back on an oval?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, I'm really happy to be back on an oval. We've had good progression on the ovals over the years. Especially this year has been really strong for us for me personally, but also as a team we've been really, really strong everywhere we've gone.

Looking forward to this one being we should have good cars here. Looking back, Scott has won here two years ago I think, so that was good. I being strong here in general as well, I feel like.

It's a track that coming from Europe, I felt like this was the first oval that you sort of got your head around. It was the oval that was most like a road course in a way.

Yeah, I've been pretty happy around this place, so looking forward to have a strong result on Saturday night.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, bouncing back, good momentum after Nashville. Ready to go again?



ALEX PALOU: Yeah, Nashville was good finishing on the podium again. Last year here wasn't ideal for us. I think we had strong cars and we were running quite okay through the race. So hopefully we can have a cleaner race and finish the race up front, keep fighting for the championship.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions.

Q. The last month we've been to some tracks where promoters have been very aggressive and active. We've seen the payoff with big crowds. How do you feel about that? Alexander Rossi was in here earlier and said they were almost providing a template for other promoters to follow.

JIMMIE JOHNSON: It is great to see for all the obvious reasons. It's my first time to Iowa, first time here with an INDYCAR. From afar watching that, I've known this race has always had a lot of excitement around it. The group promoting it and sponsoring it has always worked very hard.

From a different perspective, I'll hand it over to Scott.

The thing that I really appreciate about the INDYCAR SERIES and the culture here, people within the sport, its promoters, drivers, teams, everybody generally wants to grow the sport and is putting everything that they can in to grow it.

I didn't feel like my last few years in NASCAR was that way. I felt like there was a lot of finger pointing, not participating in helping grow the sport, more rock throwing than anything, pointing fingers at who is doing it wrong. Here it feels like everybody is trying to grow the sport and do it right.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think it's important. It's very important. Having been part of the series for a little bit now, it's great to see enthusiasm. I think what Hy-Vee did was tremendous. Huge congrats to them. It showed that it worked. Got a lot of people back out. Hopefully we can do that at some new venues coming quickly here, even if it's something like Kentucky, Milwaukee, which is important for the heritage of what INDYCAR racing is.

It shows that, as I said, it can be done. Hopefully they continue to.

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, no, I agree with my teammates here. I think from a driver perspective as well, it means a lot to see a lot of fans in the stands, see the atmosphere on the racetrack, before the race, after the

race. I think it does make a big difference for the series itself.

We've had some good races lately. I think the series as a whole has a very good trajectory at the moment. We need to keep that going. Hopefully producing a good race on Saturday would help that going forward as well.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I agree to everything they said.

I think it's good that some promoters like in Iowa, we had a great show, they did a lot of activities around the race. Same with Nashville last year and this year.

Hopefully everybody continues to compete with themselves from track to track. It just makes INDYCAR bigger and better.

Q. Jimmie and Scott, there's been talk about reconfiguring Texas Motor Speedway. What have you heard about that or what would you like to see done?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: I think they should just put it back to the way it was from my standpoint. In all my years in Cup, it was the best mile-and-a-half, especially once it aged, from my perspective.

Based on my previous experience in NASCAR, I think just put it back.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, 100%, back to where it was. I think we've also spoken about whatever they had at Long Beach on that Friday, whatever that sealant was, should be the second lane at Texas.

Q. Alex, you got wrecked here last year. Fortunately for you it did not ruin your championship. How do you guys look at everyone else out there? Are you hopeful they're careful around the championship contenders? Do you make notes of who to race differently?

ALEX PALOU: With the experience I got last year. I would not race, to be honest, if I was not fighting for the championship, I would not race the championship contenders just because they are risking something and you're not if you're not a championship contender.

Yeah, I don't expect people to treat us differently. The good thing is there's so many cars that are still in the fight for this championship that everybody's going to race the same way.

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, I think last weekend showed that. People were very aggressive out there. I think I got hit five times in that race. I think other guys did, as well. It

was pretty rough out there.

But I think as a driver, you know who you're racing, you sort of take into account who you're racing, something you have to keep in mind.

At the end of the day you need to race your race, you have to be as far up as possible. I think that's the mindset you have to have. I don't expect anyone to give me advantages out there. You need to be hard and tough out on track.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think you've just got to race your own race, treat it like another race. Don't think about the championship too much. We still have three to go. Anything can happen.

It's very tight at the moment, which is great for the series, great for the championship fight. But, yeah, I don't think you can overanalyze stuff too much.

Q. Post race Nashville, Twitter was as exciting as the race. Marcus, you said you talked to Romain after. How did that go?

MARCUS ERICSSON: It went well. Yeah, no, it was good to talk to him after. I felt like he had been maybe a bit overaggressive with me. We talked about that.

When Alex passed me, I don't think he did actually anything wrong in that situation particularly. But obviously had been a few incidents over the season. Yeah, like you said, some drama, people were talking about some things after the race. It's good for the sport, at the end of the day.

It's frustrating for me to get taken out at the end of the race. That was tough for me because if I finished in the top five or six, I would be leading the championship again.

It is frustrating, but that's racing. We bounce back this weekend.

Q. Jimmie, do you come here thinking: I can win?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: I want to. I don't know if it's fair to think that until I get out on the track, get an understanding of it.

I think when I look at my oval performances, if there are multiple lanes, I seem to run well. Indy is a single-file track, I wasn't able to pass and use my experience like I had hoped to.

Last year's race looked like there were about 10 or 15 laps where there were a couple lanes, then it quickly went to

single file. Until I get out there, it's hard to say.

Q. When it comes to you three working over these last three races, you've said you don't want to withhold any information or you're not maybe treating each other any differently, does that come out of an idea that the biggest goal among the team is to just to try to get Chip another title and you do whatever you can to kind of help this team and hope it's you in the end?

SCOTT DIXON: I think it's treat each race weekend as another race weekend and do your best as a group and as a team.

I think the only time that changes if you're out of it or you're out of a race, then I'll do what I can to help the team.

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, I agree with Scott there. We need to race hard here. It's great for the team that we have three of us right there at the top of the championship fighting for it. I think that's something that we should be proud of as an organization.

But, yeah, it doesn't really change anything for me. We work really well together, all four of us here, we help each other try to set up the cars before the race. We have a really good relationship going. I think that's one of the reasons why we've been so strong for the last two years, being this group of drivers.

Just going to keep doing that and make sure one of us wins the championship.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I think we got here by racing our own races and doing the best we can each weekend. If we start changing that, helping each other on track, we could lose this championship.

Yeah, I think until we are out, some other cars are out, I think we need to keep on doing what we've been doing this year.

Q. Alex, I think I remember a quote from Nashville with you talking about this race, maybe not sounding quite as confident about actually being able to race for a win, shooting for a podium that you might be at some other tracks. What do you feel is a realistic goal? What are you shooting for to feel like you're still in this fight?

ALEX PALOU: I mean, I've been okay in some oval races. Let's say Indy, it's something that suits my driving style. I am understanding a bit more the other ovals. Then we go to Iowa, race one I was quite confident, race two I was nowhere. We're just trying to find a way.



I don't know, we want to win. Like, I'm not going to go out thinking that a top 10 is good. Thinking realistically, it's obviously not my best chance to win a race this year.

I'll do the best I can. I'll try to improve as much as possible during both practices, which is good for me, then try to get the best result possible in the race, allow us to keep fighting on the last two races.

We cannot give up any position here.

Q. Jimmie, as you're continuing to work towards figuring out what next year is going to look like for you, have you given any thought or has there been any talk about potentially just running the ovals or are you focused on a full season schedule right now?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: We're just still working to put our program together. Wish I had some updates. I like to get things done pretty early in a season.

I don't know. In my mind I've been looking more to a full season. Certainly that will still be the objective at this point.

Q. Scott said he's been here a little bit. You said something about Kentucky or Milwaukee. As Hoosiers, we would like to see the Kentucky race come back. Are there any ovals in particular that you would like to come back to?

SCOTT DIXON: I don't know. Kentucky was always fun. It was quite a demanding circuit, but always played well for INDYCAR racing. Richmond, I know we were pretty close to being back there, apart from the situation with COVID.

I just think we need to get back to more ovals, which I think everybody can definitely agree on that. It's just picking the right ones, picking the right partnerships that do exactly what they've done in Iowa or here in St. Louis.

Q. Jimmie, I've been saying that your career and Scott's career have paralleled each other, what you meant to your sport in NASCAR, his sport in INDYCAR. There were years where you both won championships at the same time. How do you summarize what it's like to be with Scott now and compare how your careers have kind of followed the same path at the same time?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Yeah, I think Scott and I, before me working as a teammate, being at CGR, we always had mutual respect for one another, what we were accomplishing. Did seem like we were doing a lot of the stuff at the same time.

Through friends and certainly the media impression, it seemed like to a certain extent or personalities and approach...

(Loss of audio.)

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