

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Wednesday, September 7, 2022

Tim Cindric

Mike Hull

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: This weekend, Championship Weekend for the NTT INDYCAR SERIES, the Run to the Championship culminates at historic WeatherTech Raceway at Laguna Seca. The championship comes down to the season finale with now five drivers still mathematically eligible at the Firestone Grand Prix of Monterey.

Our guests today know a thing or two about what it takes to win an INDYCAR SERIES championship. Tim Cindric, the long time president of Team Penske, he'll be keeping a close eye on the three contenders they have, Will Power, Josef Newgarden, Scott McLaughlin, as Team Penske goes for their 17th INDYCAR SERIES championship.

Tim, thank you for joining us here this afternoon.

Mike Hull, as well, the managing director at Chip Ganassi Racing. He'll be keeping a close eye on his two contenders, Scott Dixon and Marcus Ericsson.

Mike, thank you as well.

Tim, let's begin with you. It's one thing to have one driver battle for the championship. This weekend you've got three. How does that make things any more hectic? Are the engineering meetings longer? How do you manage an opportunity like this?

TIM CINDRIC: Well, I think when you look at it, obviously we've all been fortunate enough during the year to put ourselves in this position.

There's an obvious one out in front, 20 points ahead. I think the most realistic chance we have depending on how things go for the day, when you look at Scott, that's a mathematical situation. I think you have to go into the weekend knowing that that exists but preparing for the weekend as if you would that race in any other way.

I think there's races that we would all like to have back

again. That's the way it works at the end of the year. When you think about it, the double points at Indianapolis, if you look at Mike's team and our team, aside from Marcus Ericsson, I think all four of the other drivers would love to have Indianapolis to do over again. With double points, that type of thing, you look at it, the ones that are truly contending for the championship, the favorites relative to the points, I think all of them would like to have the Indy 500 over again. There's races we would say we'd like to do that again.

That's part of the championship. There's only going to be one champion. For us, Sunday will decide.

THE MODERATOR: Mike, a question for you. Scott is only down 20 points after making a big comeback. Even the drive at Portland, gained 13 spots in the field. He's very much in the hunt. Throw in Marcus, a model of consistency. What do you make of the season your team has had to get yourself in this kind of position?

MIKE HULL: Well, I think the simple answer is that we just never give up, number one. You can't just take that attitude without having resource in great race drivers. We had three race drivers, frankly, that have had a chance for the championship here. Now it's down to two of ours.

We're excited to be in this position, particularly racing on the same racetrack and in the same race as Penske Racing. When I went to work for Chip in 1990, '92, a long time ago, we just wanted to be in a position like we're in today. That's what we work toward.

I would just say personally that Roger Penske for me was very instrumental in my career when I was a young guy working in INDYCAR racing. He helped me a lot. He went out of his way to give me advice, give me direction, really create stabilization for me, was a bit of an outlaw. He really helped me a lot.

I'm really happy that I have a chance to race at Laguna Seca personally as well as professionally with our team. We're looking forward to Sunday. We never count ourselves out. We just work on today. That's what this is all about.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.



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Q. Tim, Scott for the second time has said how surprised he was that there was no team orders last week at Portland. What went into that decision? I bet Will would like to be up 30 points instead of 20.

TIM CINDRIC: I think there's probably a little mental game going on between those two guys. I think if you focus on last week, you're not focused on this week.

I think from our standpoint focusing on this week is really it. Yeah, it's always a tough decision from a team standpoint when you're leading points, not the one leading the race, whatever else. I think we've been pretty consistent on that front.

Like I said, I think there's more of a mental game happening there between those two trying to figure out how to worry about last week instead of worrying about this week.

Q. The championship is going to come down to winner of one of two organizations. It's teammates battling each other, but also each organization is trying to win a championship. How is everyone expected to race over the course of the weekend and Sunday?

MIKE HULL: I'll try to take that. I know Tim is scared of that answer (smiling).

TIM CINDRIC: No, I didn't know who she was addressing that to.

I think we've raced long enough together to know how to handle it.

MIKE HULL: First of all, let's face it, the pat answer is 'professionally'. But the real answer is 'integrity'. Who wins here is INDYCAR. We win a championship, either of us win a championship, we win the right to continue to race for championships, let's face it.

With the success that INDYCAR is having this year with the absolute strength that's created in growth, they're going to win. They win for lots of reasons.

It comes down to the quality teams racing with quality drivers. I think that's a testament to how far the series has come in a very short period of time with its ownership and with the direction that its ownership is creating.

We're happy to be part of it.

TIM CINDRIC: I think Mike handled most of it there. When

you look at it, each one of those drivers is trying to race for a championship of their own name. At the same time they realize the way in which they race each other. Whether it's for the Indy 500 or championship, what have you, they're going to go out and race. The one that executes the best I think will be the one that wins the championship.

Q. Tim, a NASCAR question. The fires in the cars, it seems to be a Ford issue, are you familiar at all? Do you know anything? What's being done about it?

TIM CINDRIC: You're right, this is really an INDYCAR program, so I'm not really going to address that today.

I would advise that somebody put together what the actual issues were because I've had those discussions. I certainly don't see it as a Ford-particular problem. Somebody needs to look at what ones existed and what were the reasons for that, as we have. I think you'll see a different thing.

Q. Mike, how impressed have you been this season with the competitiveness of all three of your guys, but Jimmie as well?

MIKE HULL: Well, you certainly never know exactly what's going to happen. You work really, really hard pre-season, off-season, getting ready for the future season to try to be the best you can be.

I don't remember who the sports person was that said you really don't find about the fight until you get hit the first time in the face.

THE MODERATOR: Mike Tyson said that (laughter).

MIKE HULL: Yeah. Probably be worth Google-ing his 25 greatest quotes.

I don't know. I'm just proud, frankly, of result. But you always are holding your breath until the results start to come based on how hard you work during the winter.

Really excited we have had three chances to win a championship all year. Equally excited about Jimmie Johnson, what he's achieved as a race driver, how hard he works, what he's brought to our team.

People from the outside might think who Jimmie Johnson is, they might have an understanding of who he is. But, man, on the inside, this guy is the real deal. He is such a teammate. He was very instrumental in helping Alex last year win a championship. He truly was.

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the championship overall on Sunday, he has his fingerprints all over it. It means so much to have a seven-time champion driving for us.

Q. Tim, obviously Scott McLaughlin has been extremely competitive this season. How impressed have you been with his transition to INDYCAR?

TIM CINDRIC: Yeah, obviously he's taken on INDYCAR. Really for him it was a bit of a risk to say, Hey, let's jump over and do INDYCAR. I think he probably had more confidence in doing something with the roof over his head. But he was certainly attracted to racing in America and really hadn't considered too much about INDYCAR until we talked to him about how he thought that transition might go.

I think I said before that I had a pretty good conversation with Dario because I think he made a similar type of transition just to see if we were crazy. I felt like after spending so much time with him in Australia that he had the ingredients really to drive any kind of race car and be successful. Kind of the one unknown for him more than anything else was what's oval racing going to be like. Oval racing was something he never experienced.

When I look really at the way in which he's approached the ovals, I guess that controlled aggression that you have to have for the ovals, you combine that with inexperience, I think some of that showed at Indy the past couple years.

At the same time he's been right there at the forefront, certainly competitive, knocking on the door at every one of them. Really that's the one that was kind of an unknown in my mind as far as how he would adapt, not in terms of talent, but his confidence level.

He reached that confidence level pretty quickly. I think everybody has really seen what we saw in him when he won the three Supercar titles for us.

Q. Tim, I wanted to know if one of the reasons why you didn't issue team orders last Sunday was because they would have left Josef 30 points down, as well as Dixon, and therefore all your eggs would be in one basket at Laguna Seca?

TIM CINDRIC: That was never a consideration. That wasn't really the consideration there. I think when you have a driver out there winning the race, it's a much more difficult situation. Had the driver or whatever thought that was the right thing to do, he would have probably figured out a way to do that himself.

Certainly different in terms of a win and having the ability to mathematically be part of that championship. I know that

was important to Scott, as well.

From all-the-eggs-in-one-basket perspective, or Will versus Josef, no, certainly not. Not one of the considerations there.

Q. You didn't get anxious when you saw Dixon moved up to third place? I thought that would have been the cue to swap McLaughlin and Power around.

TIM CINDRIC: If we have another restart, Dixon passes both of them, then how do you feel?

Q. I would then switch Power and McLaughlin around, for sure. Mike, does Marcus know that he has to play wing man this weekend if at all possible for Scott?

MIKE HULL: It's odd to me. Tim and I have been in conversations like this with someone like you as a moderator on these calls before, being lucky enough to be in this position.

We shouldn't discount the rest of the drivers that are in this field. So if neither of us are running for the win and we're just running to figure out who's going to win the championship, we're each going to need an MIT mathematician to help us.

To answer your question, I think we just have to race the racetrack and see what happens here. It still comes down to that.

It's a very simple thing: we just race cars. That's what we do. We race to the best of our ability. We do that as a team.

For Marcus to help Scott, I think Marcus first needs to help Marcus. If that helps Scott, it helps Scott. And vice versa, if Scott needs to help Marcus on Sunday, he'll do that. That goes for the other two people on our team, which are Alex and Jimmie.

I'm sure that Tim looks at it exactly the same way.

We race the racetrack and we try to help each other as much as we can. I thought Tim's answer was spot on to you earlier about how you can't manipulate the outcome, how you let the outcome manipulate it for you.

I like the fact that he has a lot of confidence in Scott if there's another restart (laughter). The way Scott got himself in front there, it would have been terrific if that would have happened, but it didn't.

Now going to Laguna Seca, we're going to try to win a



championship.

Q. Alex, given his situation, one foot out the door, is he prepared to play the team role or surely he's going to want the win to close out his year?

MIKE HULL: I don't know where Alex's feet are. But he's a teammate. He's always raced as a teammate at Chip Ganassi Racing. My expectation is that's the way he'll race on Sunday. I think wherever he races, whether it's with us next year or someone else...

I've been advised not to comment on Alex. But I would simply say the experience with Alex has been fantastic. Personally I have so much respect for driver talent. He separates himself from many people that he'll race against or will race against next because of the ability that he has. It's very, very special.

On top of that, he supports and helps his teammates. I would expect nothing less on Sunday.

Q. Historically this track has been a difficult track to pass the leader. We've seen drivers hit the right setup, start on the pole, lead every lap, win the race. Herta has been pretty dominant here. All of those factors, would you say that Saturday's qualifying will be extra important compared to a normal INDYCAR race?

TIM CINDRIC: You directing that to any one of us?

Q. Both of you.

TIM CINDRIC: I mean, obviously, qualifying in the last race is certainly paramount relative to the others, your starting spot, what have you.

You're right, Herta has been pretty dominant here. In some ways I hope he's dominant again because the difference between winning and second, obviously 10 points different. From where we sit you kind of want other teams in the mix.

But like us, Andretti chose to go test at Portland, whereas Mike's team obviously went to Laguna to test. I think we're going to be on the back foot a little bit on Friday relative to the teams that have already tested there.

The qualifying position and kind of how you approach the race a lot of times has to do with where you start the race. Without a doubt, when there's a championship on the line, you take all those things into consideration with how Sunday's going to go. For sure it is important, more important than the other events.

Q. Mike, if you could weigh in on that, please?

MIKE HULL: Certainly.

Yeah, there's no doubt that Laguna Seca is a low-grip place. I don't know if there's going to be a difference, but maybe one subtle different is the race is starting two or three hours earlier than normal. The way that the wind blows, offshore versus onshore, it affects the way the car operates pretty significantly during the day. I think that will play out. Maybe that will have a subtle impact on the result of the race.

But, yes, in terms of qualifying at Laguna Seca, man, that's a big, big denominator in terms of the results. Let's just see where it goes.

Q. You pretty much know every year, some years we'll see some top teams at Andretti Autosport in the mix, this year we've seen the emergence of Arrow McLaren SP. They were involved in the championship the last couple of years. Now it's coming down to Penske versus Ganassi. It's almost like it always seems to be the right way to finish the season, the two best teams in the history of the sport out there fighting for the championship. What is the dynamic like between the two of you? You're fierce competitors but I sense utmost respect from both of you for the other team.

TIM CINDRIC: I think I would agree with certainly that. I think Mike and I have raced each other for so long, as have some of the drivers we have. When you look at Will and Dixon, the battles they've had over the years.

When you look at the two owners, really what they've meant to INDYCAR racing across the board, the sponsors that they've brought into the series, the influence that they've had, the fact that both of us have multiple cars that are capable of winning this championship throughout the year, so forth, yeah, it's the same old same old, but it's different.

I think we're all competitive enough to where it's about tomorrow and less about yesterday in terms of what you want to achieve. It's not only for the driver or for the owner or what have you, but for the people that work on those teams. They look at it as their championship as well.

There's different levels of euphoria, right, whether you're the owner or the driver of the car, the one pitting the car, the one that happened to put together the upright spec at the shop. All those people have a vested interest in what goes on this weekend.

I think that's where the level of respect goes up the most

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because everybody understands that it's not really just about a driver or it's just about a team owner, but it's about all the other ones that go into that.

We're sitting there with Honda and Chevrolet fighting each other as well. You've got the pride that goes into that, the individuals that promote those teams. There's a lot on the line.

Q. Mike?

MIKE HULL: First of all, I think Tim hit on it. It's absolutely correct. It starts at the top. It starts with the two owners and the mutual respect that they have, the personal and professional respect they have for each other. It's a big deal. It's game on with respect.

I've grown to like this. I've grown to like the fact that Mr. Penske's team has a 20-year jump on Chip Ganassi's team in terms of building it. I like what Tim Cindric does. I like how he respects the process. I think he nailed it when he talked about the drivers because both owners understand that without great drivers, you can't have great results.

Great results come from building up that process within. All those people in the building, as Tim mentioned, everybody that you see at the racetrack, the multiple entries.

What we've discovered in INDYCAR racing now as we've gone forward with it, the more the cars have become spec race cars, the more entries you need to have with detail. That detail then gives you the opportunity to do what we're doing here. It's still having a chance with multiple entries to race for a championship.

Hard to see where INDYCAR is going, but it's going in the right direction because of it. I enjoy the intensity that it's going to have on Sunday.

Q. Because of what's at stake here, the respect level, the rivalry, is it a situation where the two of you can be friendly but you can't really be friends until maybe your careers are over?

MIKE HULL: My career is closer than Tim's into being over, I'll say that (smiling).

TIM CINDRIC: If we don't win on Sunday, Mike, I might call you for a job (laughter).

MIKE HULL: Or vice versa. Maybe I'll think about a second career.

Tim and I had a go at each other a few years at Edmonton.

That taught me something. It taught me that I was too intense. Since that time I've learned that the respect comes in the results.

Tim, I hope I don't have to call you up. I've got your number. I hope you don't see a call from me Sunday afternoon at 4:00 (smiling).

I'm just thankful and looking forward to this thing. I never thought I'd be lucky enough to be in a position to be able to say that.

I know you're the same. You grew up around motor racing. I did, too, in different decades. We're now in the same decade together and this is a lot of fun.

Q. Tim?

TIM CINDRIC: Yeah, no, without a doubt. I think we're both fortunate to never really have had a real job to speak of. Motorsports has been our life. You live it and you see the different people that it affects in different ways.

From my aspect, yeah, it's important and it's on the forefront of everybody's minds now. But there's also bigger things to achieve.

Like Mike said, I never really felt like I'd ever be in this position. My father built engines for the back marker teams throughout his career. I was used to rooting for the ones that were racing 20th to 15th. If they finished 10th, it was like they won the race that day.

When somebody talks about what I've been able to, I guess, experience or be part of, it's beyond my expectations or beyond my wildest dreams to even be in the same room with Roger Penske as I saw all the things transpire in the '70s and '80s, to then be sitting there helping him trying to achieve I guess an extension of his legacy, doing it against the quality of teams and drivers that we have in the series, it's pretty cool.

Q. Mike, when it comes to this championship, Marcus was leading for a while, now you've seen Marcus drop back, Scott has come to the forefront. Was it a challenge at all this season to manage, call those drivers? How have you been able to get them all to work together?

MIKE HULL: I think we actually managed four. We have three that came down to it for a while, now it's two.

The pat answer, which is the correct answer frankly, is we have people that manage the process. They do a really good job. We've been really fortunate that our culture has

allowed that to happen.

The consistency of management creates result. In motor racing people say you got to be able to manage change. No. Change is a given. You have to be able to forecast change quicker than everybody else. That change comes every day during a race season. It doesn't come at the end of the season, it doesn't come in the off-season, in the pre-season. It comes during your operational mode all year long, which includes the race season.

The managers that we have, the group of engineers that we have that lead the process, the people in our building, all of that, they work together. That creates what the drivers want to have, but then it's up to them as quarterbacks to make it happen.

I can't say my job is easy or our job at Chip Ganassi Racing is easy, but it's easier because of all of that.

Q. You said INDYCAR has seen some tremendous growth. Is there one thing for you that stands out the most that says this series is on the right path?

MIKE HULL: Yeah, Roger Penske frankly. You know what, I don't know if my numbers are correct, but I think he owned 90% of CART and Mr. Patrick owned 10% at the time.

Roger Penske has already gone through this already. He understands what is important. He understands the constituency and partnership, the teamwork that's involved with everybody that we see at the racetrack and everybody that we don't see at the racetrack.

He understands how important visibility is on network. He understands where you need to go next. He understands time zone racing. He understands all the things that it takes.

He's created the stability that we need for growth. I have a great degree of respect for that because I've gone through it once, now I'm going through it again. I'm lucky enough generationally to have seen it now twice in my lifetime. A lot of people a lot younger than we are on this call are experiencing it for the first time. They're saying, Oh, my God, what a great awakening that we're seeing. They're absolutely right in seeing it and recognizing it.

I think it's a great wagon to be in. Let's get onboard and ride this thing because it has a lot of potential.

Q. Tim, you have three drivers in contention. Drivers at times can be pretty singular focused. How have you been able to get everyone to come together, work

together?

TIM CINDRIC: I think they've been successful enough to understand that the shoe's going to be on the other foot at some point in time. Roger stresses not only in a racing team but within his other companies that if the team is successful, you're successful.

That's going to play out for different individuals in different ways, especially when you're the driver. That also has to do with the inner competition between teams. Like I said, there's a different euphoria if you work on the 2 car team and they win versus if you work on the 12 car team and they win, what have you.

There's a little bit of that competition in between. Then you have the sponsors obviously that you have responsibilities to.

When it comes to team orders, that type of thing, people forget that you have other obligations to other people aside from yourself. You have obligations to the driver, to your sponsors, to their families and all the rest on down the line. Those aren't very obvious things, especially when you're talking about whether someone wins a race or doesn't win a race.

There's all kinds of different considerations on that front. But we make a choice to have three cars in which we feel like, to start the season or start each race, should have the tools to compete for the win and should have the talent to compete for the win.

We've never really had a program where we've looked at any of our series. I'm very fortunate to sit in that position because I understand from a business perspective it's not always possible to have three top-level drivers, not having to buy a ride, what have you, within your fleet supporting the business model.

It's something that I take a huge amount of I guess appreciation for not being in that position, but at the same time it's almost easier if you have an A and a B driver to balance those things because it's understood in the beginning what their different roles are.

It's a difficult balance, but I think that they work together, the three of them do, as well as any other three drivers. At the same time we call it the red mist, kind of gets in the way on the racetrack sometimes. I can't say that anybody's perfect on that front. Everybody is competitive to a certain degree.

Yeah, I think with a successful team, these guys are going to drive together for a while, so they have to kind of figure it

out themselves some days, too. No different than at Iowa, those guys had to race each other really hard, but they had to race each other fair. Both of them put each other in the fence in Iowa toward the end. Nobody's happy.

There's a certain amount of responsibility the drivers have to the team, as well.

Q. Four of the top five pit crews this season belong to you guys. What is your philosophy with finding the right balance, right crew, to get the job done the way they have this season? How important is it to a team? Are these the true unsung heroes of each weekend?

MIKE HULL: Thanks for the question. I think it's a great question.

Yes, it does spotlight the people that actually have their hands on the product. All of us work really, really hard to have people that are physically and mentally fit, prepared to do pit stops.

It's funny, since I look after the 9 car on the race weekend, we'll talk about the strategy for the race. If it's a two-stop race, three-stop race, four-stop race, whatever it is, I'll simply say, Hey, guys, we have three stops today. How much time is that?

They'll go, Oh, that's 18 seconds. Three stops, six seconds apiece.

All we're asking for is six seconds of your time three times today. That's all you have to do.

But it's a lot more than that. They put their heart and soul into getting the car prepared, then put their heart and soul into going over the wall, the people behind the wall that support them. If it's six over the wall, it's 12 people that do that stop.

We don't have people who fly in just to do pit stops. We have people who work on the car physically all day long, then what they do is go over the wall.

I think it truly is a team sport. If they're fast enough to be the fastest in the pits, they certainly pound their chests among themselves. It's really cool they get to do that still in INDYCAR racing. That's always been part of INDYCAR racing and I hope it always stays that way.

Q. Tim, your thoughts on the group you've assembled?

TIM CINDRIC: It's always a difficult balance. The more cars you have, the harder it is to equip all those cars with

capable pit crews. It kind of goes back to the different challenges and balances there.

The fact that most of the overall people in INDYCAR are also the ones that put their heart and soul into building those cars makes it a bit unique, especially relative to NASCAR.

The design of the pit stops with what INDYCAR has put together really plays into that well because at the end of the day really everybody is stationary with the exception of the outside rear tire changer, the only one that moves more than a couple steps during a pit stop. That allows them to continue to do that.

It's not so much based on what age they are, in some ways not even their physical fitness. Sometimes it's more of a mental fitness or muscle motion training, if you will.

At the end of the day when you're trying to differentiate yourselves, I think Mike touched on it earlier with what essentially are race cars that we all have access to, engines that are all randomly distributed throughout the series, the human factor, whether it be the driver, the decisions that are made, or the pit stops, how you execute those, really become as important or more important than the physical parts on the cars themselves because it's a matter of the decisions and the decision processes that are made.

There's certainly a lot of pride in pit lane in terms of what they are. But every team takes a different approach with how their pit crews are put together, whether it's a so-called All-Star team within the people that you have or you try and put together multiple teams that are all A level.

I think both of our groups have been able to achieve that. I think there's a certain amount of pride in being able to put pit crews out there that are all capable of winning races on all your cars. It's certainly a challenge that I think a lot of people don't see how difficult that is to be consistent across all of your cars, not just one of your cars.

THE MODERATOR: We've run out of time. This has been a fascinating discussion. Thanks to Mike Hull and Tim Cindric.

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