

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Saturday, September 10, 2022

Will Power

Callum Ilott

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joined by the front row for tomorrow's Firestone Grand Prix of Monterey, Callum Ilott. Giving Juncos Hollinger Racing their best starting position, certainly Callum's best starting position in his rookie season. Congratulations to Will Power and the Verizon Team Penske Chevrolet, career pole No. 68, moving past the great Mario Andretti for first place on the all-time INDYCAR Series list. Will, congratulations. Couldn't be more crucial picking up a championship point at a point like this.

WILL POWER: Yeah, that was the focus. That's all that was on my mind. It had nothing to do with the number of poles. I need to get poles to give myself the best chance here.

So we ticked that box and also another box with the 68. Very good start to the weekend. Super focused on tomorrow.

Q. How crucial is starting up front going to be tomorrow do you think?

WILL POWER: Well, it's one point. I plan on leading the first lap, which is another point, and if you get a real run you can lead the most laps, it's another. Just keep going like that.

Yep, super focused, man. I want to give all the boys my best, give my team the best because that's what they've done for me this year.

THE MODERATOR: Callum, congratulations. Up front for the first time in your very young NTT INDYCAR Series career. Your thoughts on a huge day for you and the team, as well.

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, what a run, what a day so far. Yeah, super happy with that, honestly. If I didn't have lunch maybe I would have taken it away. I think he needs it a bit more than I do, but I would love a pole. I'll have to

wait a bit. I mean, you waited enough for 68, so I can maybe get there in 25 years. I'm joking, mate. You're all good.

Q. What did you have for lunch?

CALLUM ILOTT: Pasta. Pasta and chicken.

Honestly, these guys working so hard throughout the year, we knew sometimes got the pace, but there's so much more to this series than just having a good car. You've got to put it all together, and to do a day like this where you almost get it, almost get it, I think it's great to finish off the season like this and take a front row.

Q. Will, to be greeted on pit lane by two Mount-Rushmore-of-motorsports figures like Mario Andretti and Roger Penske, you see Roger all the time, you said it's like when you please him it's like pleasing your father. You really don't have that much interaction with Mario. What's it like to get congratulated by a living legend like that?

WILL POWER: I was actually standing there, I saw Roger there, I saw Mario there and all the cameras, I thought, This is really surreal. It just blows my mind that I can be -- I surpassed Mario and obviously I drive for Roger, but just to have those two legends there congratulating me, it's real, and a lot of gratitude for the chances and the opportunities I've been given over the last decade and a half.

Very fortunate. Very fortunate, and I want to repay them back with a championship tomorrow.

Q. Just following up on that, what was it like to be congratulated by that huge receiving line that you had of other people? Seemed like there were other people, team members, Chevy execs --

WILL POWER: Yeah, just looking around, it was surreal. It really was. At such a crucial point, it's kind of -- I couldn't celebrate it very much because I'm so focused on tomorrow and I don't want to give out too much energy because I'm going to need it tomorrow, but yeah, a day you'll remember for sure. Something I'll remember the rest of my life.

... when all is said, we're done.®

Q. I know you probably can't reflect on it too much now, but did you realize there was that much respect for you and what you've done?

WILL POWER: No. I'm not sure respect. You have those sort of figures there congratulating you, you kind of pinch yourself. Yeah, I wasn't even thinking about that today. My goal was to get to the Fast Six, and it was to get pole. I didn't even think about the number of poles it was.

Q. For Callum, I think you were telling us yesterday in the bullpen that you feel like you've been talking to team management and you guys have just enough to do things as necessary but not quite to take that next step. To qualify second and do all this planning for next year and the second car, is this a big boost for your team?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, it shows what we can do with what we have in a certain way. I mean, we started the season with two and a half sets of dampers and one of them is for ovals. We finished with, I think, three and a half, and they're not much different to the first one. We just bought another version of the first set and adapted them a little bit.

That's what happens when you work with what you've got and you optimize it.

Yeah, we're not -- our terms of development this year have been what we had to start with, and again, just fine-tuning it. Whether it's me and the driving and the experience, we've just been chipping away and trying to do a good job with that, and yeah, it's been tough, especially with no teammate to kind of have anything to use very well, learn from. To get to this stage and have a result like this, I think they're all super chuffed, and yeah, amazing job.

At the end of the day even if it's just one lap at the end, it's great to do it, finish it like this, and I think gives us so much more motivation in the off-season when they get some time to really digest everything and work on it.

Q. Callum, you start second tomorrow next to the points leader. What's your plan of attack there to win that race?

CALLUM ILOTT: I mean, if they're very nice to me, I might hold up the others.

Q. But you're not going to screw with them?

WILL POWER: It's a Chevy so I'm lucky in that respect. I'm going to tell him where I'm going to go so he can slip in behind me.

CALLUM ILOTT: I like steak. (Laughter.)

No, unfortunately, I can't have the alcohol tonight, but we'll talk about it.

No, honestly, it's the fourth time starting in the top 10 -- third, whatever it is --

Q. It's your first Fast Six, right?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, first Fast Six, so we'll take that. It's one step at a time. I'd love to win races if we have the pace to do it. I'm not going to ruin anyone's race to do it. But it's more about working away. I'd love to just finish the season with a top 5, top 3, take it as it comes.

Hopefully I have a long career, and like this man, can have many podiums and wins, so there's no point messing people around to try and save something with the last one. The team will be happy with that. If we've got the pace, I'm all for it, but it's a long, long race.

These races aren't won in the first corner. They're won with good strategy, good pit stops and a fast car. We'll see. I'll be calm and all of this, but if someone pushes me off I'll get them soon.

Q. Your season has taken a real turn since you've started coming to the bullpen, so thank you.

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, for reference, I was told it was invitation only, so I took that and I never turned up, and I do apologize. Not that anyone wants to hear what I have to say anyway, but I will turn up now. So I do apologize.

Q. I don't know who told you the invitation only.

CALLUM ILOTT: Well, we're a new team. If you don't make it clear, you get what you get, and that was not me.

Q. Will, there were a few people that were running off during qualifying and you obviously can see that because you see the dust that you drive through and everything. Was there any concern that maybe you needed to back off just so you didn't run off the course yourself? Did you need to take it easy at all?

WILL POWER: Actually it was definitely a thought in my head when I was doing the black runs because if it goes red at any time you need to keep updating in the top six, so I was very conscious because you get to the very edge of the track, you even stick some of your tire over the edge a bit. But yeah, it's easy to get sucked out into the dirt.

... when all is said, we're done.®

Q. For tomorrow, are you going to be thinking championship all day, or are you going to try and go out in style and stay out front for the entire day?

WILL POWER: Just thinking start, now that, and then just get into that rhythm and then it will sort of play out as we go based on what the other competitors do. Yeah, just need a good solid day.

Q. Callum, a lot of people were I think slightly surprised when you re-signed with Juncos so early because at that point we didn't know they were definitely going to go up to a two-car team and also because it was such a fluid silly season. They thought you might be in with a shot at one of the bigger teams. Does this help vindicate your decision to stay?

CALLUM ILOTT: I mean, that decision was made independently of the results now or at the time. It was made with the work ethic behind. Yes, the world is moving very quickly in motorsports, and this year has been a shock for quite a few in this silly season. I had some discussions, but that was quite late on really.

Yeah, it just shows that we can do it in the right places. I've always said at the beginning, I think when the car is in a good window we can compete, and this is one of those weekends where we got it in a good window and it was there. But it's a tough championship, and the experience is what counts.

Like I said, I want a long career in this. I don't want to burn any bridges by being a dick.

You know, money is one thing. It comes when you're in this sport a long time. You're comfortable anyway. I'm not trying to get too much from any situation in that sense.

I'm taking my time. Yes, you could argue that some situations maybe would have boosted me a bit quicker if it was to appeal to F1 teams. Again, that kind of thing, maybe jumping to another team for probably an easier start to 2023 may have been better for that. But like I said, I want a long career, and I think doing it this way, whether it's for '24, '25, '26, getting recognized by other teams, I'm sure if they're looking now, they'll definitely look in later years.

Q. Will, I wanted to ask about your tire tactics in the Fast Six. Like we saw you do one lap on primaries and then on TV they were speculating that that was to warm up the brakes and that kind of thing but then you just sat on pit lane and gave yourself one shot. What was the idea behind it?

WILL POWER: Yeah, it was. Wanted to save a set of used reds and then obviously warm the brakes up on those blacks and then just go out and just do one. I had a second one going just in case, so we were going to see what happened.

Q. Once Palou didn't improve on --

WILL POWER: They called it, yeah.

Q. Will, early in the session when you saw that everything was kind of falling into place for you, the Newgarden incident which also badly affected Scott Dixon being able to get out and trying to advance, were you beginning to think that, hey, man, this is my day?

WILL POWER: It made things easier, yeah, less pressure for sure because we didn't have to shadow exactly what those guys did. Yeah, definitely took some pressure off, I'll tell you. Yes.

Q. I know that you've said in the past you never really wished for your closest competitors in a championship to have problems, but certainly helps --

WILL POWER: Yeah, in this series, a problem like that can win you the race tomorrow because you have more tires. But you cannot -- it kind of sucks because Firestone or the series doesn't give us enough tires. But yeah, that can totally be the winning strategy. What happened? Yeah, I screwed up in qualifying. That's how you won the race? Yeah, that's how this thing rolls sometimes.

Q. Do you think 13th where Dixon is would be the first place a team or driver would flip the strategy?

WILL POWER: Yeah, it's a great spot because he didn't use his tires up, and he's not that far back. So yeah. Tough. Tough, man. Tough race. It's far, far, far from won, and I'm really aware of that.

Q. Will, you talked about the achievement that you had today and not focusing too much on it because of having to focus on the championship tomorrow. How difficult is that to not celebrate the success and get excited about it?

WILL POWER: I've only got one day, so not long. Maybe I'm celebrating, maybe I'm not. We'll see.

Q. Callum, obviously you've come a long way since you last came to Laguna Seca. Where do you think the biggest gains have come from from what you remember from last year and how the car is now?

... when all is said, we're done.®



CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, our car was not very good last year. I felt like I did a good job, but yeah, it was T25 I think in qualifying, which was horrendous, considering I kind of knew the track a bit, as well. It wasn't very good. But that was last year. We changed a lot, improved, turned things around, and personnel change, as well. Yeah, massively different and massively positive. To be on the front row, I think, yeah, I'll take it.

Q. Will, prior to today, the time you were one away from Mario, then equaling him, at any of those points did Mario ever come up and chat with you about the record at all, and if so, can you recall what he said?

WILL POWER: No, we never spoke about the record. But I was informed by Marco every time I got a pole, Mario was in a bad mood. (Laughter.) Marco told me that about 10 poles ago. Yeah, I was told Mario was watching, but rightly so because it is a longtime standing record that he had. I'd be feeling the same.

Q. Callum, we've obviously talked about how small the team is, but at the beginning of the season did you ever think that you'd have a chance at possibly grabbing a pole position? You were just like, what, two hundredths off of grabbing it?

CALLUM ILOTT: No, not really. I learned very quickly on that it was going to be a hard year and a long year. Putting it all together like this, yeah, we had some weekends, I think bar we are was the first one where we kind of clicked and got it right and that was P11 in qualify, and then from there it was getting closer and closer. But it's so tight, and just having that edge when you put everything together, getting the tires in, not having yellows or even here like guys just chucking dust up out of Turn 3 and then ruining your lap, yeah, it's not easy, and it has to all come together.

So yes and no. I would have loved to. I didn't think after the first couple races we'd get there, probably towards the end of the season.

But yeah, we got there, and I think everyone is super pleased with that.

Q. I know you're just getting out of the car, but do you know where you lost that tiny bit of time or where you might have been able to gain it?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, the corkscrew. It was the second apex. I kind of bounced and didn't get the throttle. It was a close one. I think I was up on the first two-thirds and I threw it away. I guess experience, you know.

Q. I really would like to know a little more about these tires and how they survive. It sounds like being a low-grip track that drivers have said the reds might only last a lap or two so maybe people will start on reds hoping there's a caution and get off of them. How far do you think the reds will last, and what about the black tires? Will they last 20, 25 laps, or do you think it's like Dixon said, might be five pit stops or more?

WILL POWER: Yeah, it's going to be interesting. Yeah, I have to say, though, the second run, reds were pretty good.

CALLUM ILOTT: One of them was. The other one wasn't for me.

WILL POWER: You did two runs?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah.

WILL POWER: Okay, two singles. Like I said -- was your hottest set the worst?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah.

WILL POWER: I wondered if they cooled if they got better.

CALLUM ILOTT: No, it was the other way around.

WILL POWER: But yeah, it could be just like Detroit where the things just die. It could just be like that because it's going to be very interesting.

I think they're going to drop two seconds like they have done in the past. I think they'll be similar.

CALLUM ILOTT: When we were testing here, it wasn't much. So yeah, it will be an interesting race.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, thanks for coming up. Appreciate it.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports