

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Marcus Ericsson

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Now joining us, the driver of the No. 8 Chip Ganassi Racing Honda, Marcus Ericsson.

Ready to get back at it later this week?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, that sounds good.

THE MODERATOR: How many more things do you have associated with the 500? You have a ticket unveil probably coming up?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, I think it's going to be a lot of things. I'm not sure yet. I said that I'm available, so I'm sure they're going to include me in a lot of stuff.

But it's all fun. It's been a busy off-season for sure because of it, but in a very good way.

THE MODERATOR: Tell us about the preparation during the off-season, getting back on track Thursday at Thermal?

MARCUS ERICSSON: INDYCAR off-season is a bit long, longer than I maybe would like.

Yeah, it's been good. We've been focusing on trying to improve our package for this year. We feel like we have some areas where we could improve from last year, so we've been focusing on that, trying to, yeah, become better as a team, as a driver. I've been focusing a lot on myself trying to improve my performance for this year.

We were close to winning both the championship and the 500 last year. We need to keep pushing to try to do that this year.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. You made it all the way to the last race of the year still in the championship battle, although it would have taken a big effort to win it. How much urgency do you feel to get a championship this season?

MARCUS ERICSSON: I don't know if I feel urgency, but I

definitely target it. Like I said, I had a chance going into the final, but I also was leading the championship for a long time last year. I'm still a bit pissed off about the ending of last year because I felt we were having a really strong year, then the last three races or so we just fell off a little bit. That was disappointing.

But it's given me a lot of motivation to work hard in the off-season to try and be better this year. It's definitely our goal to try and get that championship this year.

Q. When you look at the Ganassi lineup for this year, some changes, Takuma coming in, Jimmie not racing full-time anymore, Alex coming back for - our understanding - this year only, of course Dixon is always the team leader. For you, how do you look at all that long-term?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, I mean, I'm feeling very much at home in the team. I think I've been there a few years now. I'm super happy about that. I wish to stay for a very long time, as well.

There is some uncertainty with other places maybe in the future, but Dixon seems to be just getting better and better. He might be here for another 10 years or so, who knows (smiling).

But that's great. Me and Scott, we work really well together. I can still learn a lot from him. Yeah, I'm happy to be in the team. Like I said, I want to be here for a long time and win races and championships together.

Q. For the end of this week, getting on track at Thermal, what is your understanding about why this is a good place for INDYCAR to hold a pre-season test? Why do you think you're here, even though you're not racing at it? What do you feel like you can learn at this track that might apply to other tracks on the schedule?

MARCUS ERICSSON: I think this time of the year, it's really hard to find places for us to go testing. Usually we test at Sebring, like the short course at Sebring. I've only been here for four years, starting my fifth year, and I feel like I've done I don't know how many days of testing at Sebring short course.



For me this is a lot better to come here. I like lot the idea of having the pre-season testing, official testing back on the calendar to get all the teams and drivers together. For me, that gives more because testing is testing, but you can still sort of compare a little bit to your competitors, see a bit where you stand compared to the others. I think that's a big plus.

Then, yeah, it's fun to see new places. I think the track looks pretty cool. I've only seen it on video and YouTube. It's going to be a bit of a challenge to get used to that.

But, yeah, I'm happy we're here. Like I said, I prefer this over doing private testing in Sebring like we've done the last couple years.

Q. Does it remind you of any current tracks?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, I think Portland is probably the closest. Some parts of Portland I would say is closest to this track. But it has a lot of slow corners by the simulations we've made. I don't know how relevant it will be to other tracks.

But in the end of the lap there, there's a quite fast complex as well that's going to be a challenge for the car and driver as well.

I think in general, though, if we find stuff here that works, I'm hoping it's going to be able to translate to other road courses on the calendar.

Q. You mentioned watching YouTube clips. Felix was talking probably similarly about watching a YouTube video of this track. When you don't have it loaded on a simulator, is that the best way to prepare for a track like this?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, it's kind of back to old school way of learning racetracks before we had simulators and that.

Yeah, maybe there is something where you can find this track, but I haven't found it at least. I went back to, yeah, how I did it 15 years ago, whatever, looked at the track map, then found some onboard clips on YouTube, some old Ferrari dude driving around. I was watching that, sort of picturing how an INDYCAR would run on it, trying to get an idea at least so I know if it's going right or left down the straights. That's a good way to start.

But, yeah, it will be a bit challenging, but we have a few days.

Also us drivers these days, I feel like after 10 or 15 laps,

you're into a track anyway. Of course, you can always find more if you do more days and more testing. I feel like after 10 or 15 laps I'm going to be pretty much up to speed with the track so it shouldn't be a problem.

Q. The folks following you in here were with Vice, taping "100 Days to Indy." What has your experience been like so far getting the show kicked off behind the scenes?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, we've been filming a little bit here the last week or so. It's been super cool. It's good people. You can tell that they've been experienced with this type of stuff from before, documentaries, sports documentaries. I've said it before, I'm super excited about it. I think it's going to be great for the series. It's going to be great for us drivers.

Yeah, I've been trying to be as open as I can, sort of told them whatever you guys want to come along to, just join; it's going to be good content, let's do it. I'm hoping it's going to help all of us to get the series out there, get the sport out there and get new fans.

Q. The track at Laguna Seca is being repaved. You've mentioned you're not pleased with the way the season ended. How do you think the track at Laguna Seca will maybe change potential outcomes?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, I'm excited about that. I think Laguna is one of the best tracks on the calendar, but the surface there the last few years, it's just become so slick that it's almost been -- like last year when we were there, we were basically driving rain lines, going outside the normal racing line trying to find grip.

I think it was entertaining to watch in some ways because it was very tricky to drive. But the driving experience was not the best I found because it was just so low grip. Yeah, it was like driving in the rain, but it was not raining (smiling). It was weird.

That's why I'm excited about the repaving. I think it's going to be good for the track. Maybe it will be a little less overtaking, but I think it will still be an entertaining race. I think it's going to be good they have a new pavement there.

Q. Ring looks good.

MARCUS ERICSSON: I thought I'd bring it along, flash it up. I can still wear it for a bit longer (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Is it big enough?

MARCUS ERICSSON: It's not very comfortable, but it's okay.

Q. (No microphone.)

MARCUS ERICSSON: We're getting that. I think it's now in February or something. I haven't received that yet.

Q. Your qualifying improved last year a little bit. I'm assuming that's where most of your gains can come. Is that driver related, car related, a combination?

MARCUS ERICSSON: I think a combination. I think us as a team, it's been one of our weaknesses the last couple years in that we're not qualifying as high as we should. Race day I'm not scared of anyone. I think on the 8 car we're always going forward in the races; we're always very strong in the races.

It's no secret that we need to improve on qualifying day. That is us in the 8 car but also Chip Ganassi Racing as a whole. I think if we can all improve, it's going to help us. These days as well, INDYCAR is becoming more and more competitive. So many good drivers and teams. If you start mid pack, yeah, it might be long races, but to win a race from mid pack is getting harder and harder.

It's been one of the big focus areas in the off-season, to try to find things in the setup, in the way to understand the tires, stuff like that, to mainly improve our qualifying performance. It's been a big focus for us. It's going to be interesting this week to see if we have found some things that are going to work, then apply that throughout the season.

Q. Two Marcuses on the same team; is that going to get confusing in the debriefs?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, it is. I'm angry (laughter).

I think we're okay. I think we're okay. He seems like a good kid. He has a good name, so...

Q. Working with a new driver, a rookie driver, he comes with a lot of accomplishment. So far what are your impressions?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, I've only met him a few times here. But, yeah, a young guy that has been with the Ferrari program for quite a few years. Been successful over in Europe, in the Euro series.

I know that it's a big step coming over here to America. It's a big challenge. But he seems to be very committed for it.

Yeah, I think it will be a good addition to the team. Also in combination with Taku, of course, it's very exciting. He's going to be a threat on every oval we go to.

So, yeah, I feel like we have a very strong team.

Q. You mentioned you wanted to be better as a team in qualifying. Do you think it would make a difference if you had longer track time for practice? Is that where you're not quite getting the setup that you need? Used to be that INDYCAR had longer practice sessions.

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, I think it definitely would make life easier. The problem is that everyone would maybe get better, as well.

In the end of the day, we can't really blame that. I love driving race cars, so the more practice and test days we could get, the better it is.

But the way it is now, we still have enough time to get the setup right in a race weekend. I think Ganassi as a team, we are very good at simulations and preparations. I always feel like we unload with good cars.

Yeah, I think we just need to find a bit more peak performance. I think our cars are some of the best on the grid for, like, consistency, drivability for the drivers, but we're looking a little bit for some more peak performance. I think that's going to be the key for us in qualifying, to get our average up a bit more.

Q. What do you think you learnt last season that you can bring into this year?

MARCUS ERICSSON: I know what it takes to win Indy 500, yeah (smiling).

I think you're always learning a lot every year. I think last year running up front, leading the championship for a long time, that was something that -- that experience has helped me into this year. Just the confidence in general, being an Indy 500 champion, race winner, all that is going to help me this year.

It's hard to, like, pinpoint on one specific thing. But I definitely feel like I'm getting better and better here every year in the INDYCAR SERIES.

Q. Obviously in your early years you're learning the track, car, tire, different aspects. When recently has it changed to trying to improve qualifying, trying more race craft stuff? When did that journey shift from learning tracks and cars to now race craft to try to become more of a championship contender?

MARCUS ERICSSON: It's difficult to hear.

Q. When did your journey change from learning tracks or cars to race craft, qualifying, ovals?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, I think race craft is something I learned a lot in my Formula 1 years. Planning a race, driving, thinking longer ahead in stints, taking care of my tires, fuel, stuff like that. I think my race craft, I really started to master that in Formula 1. It was one of my big strengths in F1.

I feel like I brought that to INDYCAR, and it's been my strength really from year one. I felt like I was pretty good in the races.

Of course, you always try to become better and better. I try and analyze a lot and work hard with my engineers to understand and be involved in a lot of things. I think that helps me on race day to be prepared.

It's the same thing, that's what we've been working on hard now in the off-season to try and improve on the qualifying side, to sort of analyze and understand why we're lacking a little bit more there comparing to the races.

It all comes down to hard work, having good people around you, being open to try new things.

Q. Your peers last year in the paddock started being more vocal about the respect they had for you. How much does that mean to you as a driver, to know that your peers respect you?

MARCUS ERICSSON: No, of course it means a lot. But at the same time, you sort of race for yourself in a way. I think INDYCAR is, if not one of the absolute toughest series in the world, it's amazing drivers here in the series. I feel like the last couple years I've shown that I can be fighting up front, winning races, fighting for championships.

But, yeah, of course it means a lot to get respected by your competitors.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Marcus. Have a great rest of the day.

MARCUS ERICSSON: Thanks.

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