

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Sting Ray Robb

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll start with Sting Ray Robb.

Q. I know each platform is different, but what do you see as your biggest transition hurdle coming from your previous series until now?

STING RAY ROBB: I think the driving style is fairly similar moving from Indy Next to INDYCAR. My first day in the car it felt very natural. It felt like it was an Indy Next car that did what I wanted it to do. I didn't have to wrestle it around as much.

But at the same time, you had more tools at your disposal. Obviously more speed, more power, better handling, the tires are much grippier. I think the biggest thing for me to learn would be on the strategy side, pit stop side of things, because that's nothing what we've had to do before.

Obviously Indy Next Series is more of a sprint race style, whereas we're going into longer duration races where pit stops are required, different tire compounds, and you've got to play that out with the other guys on pit lane.

There's more to it than just what's the optimal way around the racetrack. There's going to be a lot that goes into that.

Q. Given the nature of the series, what types of tracks favor your driving style the best?

STING RAY ROBB: So I grew up go-karting, and I think any track that's high speed or where you're kind of balancing between the turns a little bit, like street courses I think are favorable to my driving style.

Laguna Seca has historically been very good to me. So low grip, high deg tracks. And then I'm working on the ovals. That'll be something to check off this year.

Q. Although Laguna Seca has changed.

STING RAY ROBB: That is true. Hopefully it'll still be the Laguna Seca that we know and love.

Q. What is your biggest thing to learn from Thermal?

STING RAY ROBB: Thermal will be interesting because it's not a track that we've run at before, nor will we run at during the season. I think that we can learn a few things from it, but at the same time, it'll just be nice to see where we stack up against the other guys.

Q. Can you explain a little bit how you eventually ended up at Dale Coyne Racing because your name circulated around Ed Carpenter Racing, at Juncos over the winter, eventually you came to Coyne. How did you make that choice in the end?

STING RAY ROBB: It was a busy off-season. I'll say that right now. Lots of talks between different teams. Obviously I didn't know what I was going to be doing at the end of the year. We took a leap of faith when I stepped into the role of not having a ride and not committing to the Indy Next Series and just committing to going to INDYCAR.

There was a few teams that we were talking to, and Dale's team was not the one that was at the top of the list because we thought they already had a driver. Obviously with Linus winning the Indy Next Championship, we assumed with the HMD association there that there would be a straight shoe-in for him.

But I actually was at PitFit Training one day with Linus and discovered that was not the case. That created an opportunity for us that allowed me to call up my manager, Peter Rossi, and get him on the phone, and he immediately called Dale and said, hey, we're available.

I think there was a mutual understanding of what availability was for either one of us. That's when conversations began with testing options, et cetera, because at that point he had already committed to testing Marcus in the car and Daniel in the car at the Sebring test in the late off-season last year in 2022.

Then we had a really good test in 2023 right at the beginning of January, and I think that was kind of the one that set the tone that allowed me to get in the seat.

Q. What you're saying is that staying in Indy Next for a third year was never an option, it was going to be

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INDYCAR or broke basically?

STING RAY ROBB: Yeah, staying another year in Indy Next would have been a bigger risk than reward because there was a tire compound change that didn't allow for any teams to have any data from the past.

Driving for Andretti last year I was able to lean on the data from past champions that they had run, as well as have past knowledge of where to brake, where to shift, all the stuff that we can go back and review and then over time find out what the best way is to grow in those areas, et cetera.

With the new tire compound you don't know who's going to be the best team, who's going to be the quickest. We saw at the Homestead test recently that the teams that were on top were not the teams that have been there in the past. They're new. The Andretti guys were not the ones that were at the top. That's not to say that they won't figure it out, but it's a risk that you take.

Let's say that I finish third or fourth in the championship rather than second or first. That lowers my stock value, so it creates an opportunity that's not as welcoming for me to step into INDYCAR because I don't have that high of a value after that.

There's been drivers in the past. To name one, I think is Santi Urrutia. He was a driver that did really well in his rookie season and from there he just didn't win the championship, but the only place he could have gone was higher.

So to not finish as well as he did or even finish the same, it doesn't show that he's got the ability to move up to the next level.

Q. You went to the gym. Linus happened to be at the gym. What are you doing next year, and that led to you guys making the call?

STING RAY ROBB: Yes. And there is actually more to the story than just that.

I don't know how much I'm supposed to tell you guys, but --

Q. As much as you want.

STING RAY ROBB: No, we already know that's not the answer. I'll have to sensor some of this maybe. I assumed Linus was locked into the seat. Obviously he had a good year. With the HMD association, I just assumed that was a perfect shoe-in, like I said. But Dale and us, we were talking but we were also still talking to another team.

At some point there was a journalist that called me, and he asked what I could tell him, and he said, I've been hearing rumors, it sounds promising, and I said, yes, I can't tell you anything yet, we're still talking to a couple teams, but it looks very, very good. I'm excited to see what we can do.

At that point, we weren't confirmed anywhere.

He said, all right, well, I'm sure when they sober up from their World Cup win that they'll be giving you a call. That was interesting, because Argentina won the World Cup, and we all know who's from Argentina.

And anyway, I guess he had a conversation with Dale after that, and it expedited the process, and here we are now. I think that allowed us to put a little fire under our seats and get a move on.

I think there's been some opportunities that were miraculously created that we couldn't have done on our own.

Q. (Indiscernible).

STING RAY ROBB: I work out at PitFit, like I said, and there are occasions when Linus is there, but I haven't seen him since the end of 2022.

Q. The experience that Linus had last year, was a pretty tough guy to beat out there. Do you feel like he deserves to be -- I know you wouldn't give up your ride for him, so I'm not asking that, but do you feel like he deserves to have a shot in the series, whatever it would take?

STING RAY ROBB: Well, I believe that I deserve a seat and he beat me, so there's your answer.

Can I say one more thing real quick? So Linus does deserve a seat. His on-track performance was incredible. But it takes more than just a driver to get into INDYCAR. You've got to have village around you that supports you, and so I think that that is where my group made a difference. It wasn't just in my performance, but it was the people around me.

I feel bad for Linus because as a driver I can feel that way towards him because I could be in that seat if I didn't have those same people around me. So there you go.

Q. David Malukas is pretty young, you're pretty young, Dale Coyne has been around forever, so that's an interesting dynamic of two really hot-shoe drivers with a guy who may be the best timed racing strategist in

INDYCAR. Dale has got a lot of tricks up his sleeve. He's able to make the most out of what he's got. What is it like having two really young drivers with a team owner like Dale Coyne?

STING RAY ROBB: Yeah, we're the two young guns. We're like little babies out there compared to everyone else.

But I think that we're ambitious because of that, and I think Dale has that ambition, as well. He's very tied to his team. I was doing pit stop practices the other day and he was simulating a guy doing tear-offs, with his stopwatch in hand timing everyone and critiquing everyone. I think that's what is required of a good team leader.

To have his experience along with our rookie experience, I think that we can learn a lot from Dale, and having him so close to the team just allows us to utilize that knowledge much more.

So I think that because we're young, we're pliable, and that he can kind of form us into drivers he wants us to be a little bit. And obviously David is already doing that very well. He's almost rookie of the year last year, finished on the podium, and is probably going to continue to be on that path this year.

I think there are bigger teams than Dale's team is, but they don't maybe have the flexibility that he does. He may not have the full resources, but he can change directions and adapt very quickly.

Q. Have you been burning up I-65 on the way up to Dale's shop?

STING RAY ROBB: I may have made a few trips to Chicago from Indy so far this year, but that'll continue.

Q. You started to allude to it before, but a good friend of mine, Hunter McElrea, who was your teammate last year --

STING RAY ROBB: I recognize your voice.

Q. Oh, dear. It's the Kiwi accent. So rather than necessarily about you, but for Hunter going back into Indy Next this year, what do you see as a driver that's not only raced alongside him, but in that championship some of the hurdles that he needs to uncover to have a good year?

STING RAY ROBB: I think that Hunter is one of the most talented drivers in the field. Even though he may not at times know what to do with it. It'll be interesting to see how

he interacts with the Firestone tire.

From what I've heard, it sounds like a different driving style is required than what was on the previous compound, and I don't know if that necessarily plays into Hunter's hands.

But I think that he'll have to do a good job of reading into the data and adapting his driving style accordingly. Being light on his feet, I think that'll pay big dividends in the end. He's got young teammates around him. I know they may be talented, but they don't have experience in the series like he does.

So it'll be up to him to lead the team a little bit in that sense and where the car's setup direction is going to go. It'll be interesting to see how he leads the team.

I think this last year we were all able to lean on each other a little bit because we were all in a similar boat. Matt Brabham obviously had a lot more experience than any of us, but there was lots of talent in the engineering room at that point because we were all at a similar level we could each other every session.

So it allowed us to adapt the car to our individual driving styles rather than start from ground zero and figure out which direction to point the car.

Q. Looking ahead to your season, one of the biggest things and maybe one of the most exciting things, because you've talked about having the practice already will be when you get to St. Pete in that very first pit stop.

STING RAY ROBB: Yeah. I think it'll be interesting. It's like parallel parking a car at 60 miles an hour. We'll see how that goes with 26 other cars around you and an airport runway. It is an exciting series.

I think that I'll learn as we go, but I definitely have some things I need to work on already.

Q. Obviously with you having done a couple of tests with Dale Coyne previously, is that kind of beneficial to you going into the test this week and then going on to the start of the season?

STING RAY ROBB: I hope so. I mean, we just had the one day at Sebring this year, so we haven't spent too much time together and we're still getting to know each other a little bit, but I think that we can learn a lot from this weekend or this week, and we're in a similar boat to the other teams where none of us know which end is going to be up at this track. It's going to be a whole new ballgame.

We're going to be figuring out what setups we need to run, what setups are similar to here, so we can kind of see what it'll be like to line up against the other guys. I don't know what else we can apply from this test, but it'll be interesting.

Q. Some of these people probably get to know you a little bit better, so how does a kid that was in musical theater in high school, played basketball in high school, lived in the middle of nowhere, Idaho, become an INDYCAR driver?

STING RAY ROBB: That's a good question. You've kind of been there for the story, so you already know this, but it's good.

Q. Taking one for the team.

STING RAY ROBB: Thank you.

I mean, I grew up in a small town. My graduating class was less than 100 people, so there's not a lot of expectation of where your career is going to take you in that sense.

Harmon Killebrew was a baseball player, and he's been the town hero because he's the celebrity that the town knows. Recently I've gotten on Wikipedia and it says, notable alumni from Payette High School, Sting Ray Robb and Harmon Killebrew. It's nice to be seen and appreciate all the things that I've learned and been through.

I think I said it before, it takes a team. The Road to Indy created a good program for me to learn what I needed to do on and off the track, and as some people know, I won the 2020 Indy Pro 2000 Championship. It wasn't enough to promote me to INDYCAR.

There is a lot that goes into it. With Peter Rossi as my manager it gets us some experience on the contractual side of things. And then my mom, we call her my momager because she's my mom and my manager. She has been a huge role in my career because she does things that I'm unable to do as a driver.

She's able to play hardball with the contracts, et cetera, and have my best interest in mind when it comes to negotiating, along with Peter. He may be someone that has a lot of experience in the series with Alexander, but he may not know what's best for me.

It's good to have them both on my side, and I can learn a lot from them. But again, growing up go-karting, it was my mom, my dad, my grandparents on the road every weekend. My dad has missed one race in my entire life, and it was because he was in the hospital trying not to die.

So we let him have a pass, and he was still on the phone every 30 minutes making sure that tire pressure was right, engine temp was right, we had the right gear on the car, et cetera.

So it's everyone that's involved. That's what it takes to get me here.

Q. Were you able to hit some power like Harmon Killebrew, or are you more of a singles hitter?

STING RAY ROBB: I'm more of a consistent singles hitter, slap hitter if you want to call it. No home runs, just doubles or triples here and there.

Q. Your name, I don't know why no one has asked a question about your name. Assuming your father chose your name for you. How has he forgiven you for going to a Honda team?

STING RAY ROBB: That's a tricky question. Yeah, my parents are big Corvette fans, and I think that they ruled out criticizing me too badly because they know the dream is INDYCAR.

I'll be in a Honda car and I'm assuming it'll go pretty quick, so I'm okay with all of that.

Q. They're not going to rename you NSX or something?

STING RAY ROBB: No. I hope not. My name is my name. I don't need a rename. Thank you.

Q. I wanted to ask, in terms of your -- a lot of people say that there's no substitute for actually being in the car in terms of building the right muscles, leg muscles, arm muscles, all that kind of thing. Is that one of the biggest limiting factors of having so few test days?

STING RAY ROBB: Absolutely.

Q. In INDYCAR now?

STING RAY ROBB: Absolutely.

Q. Getting physically fit?

STING RAY ROBB: Absolutely. I think the physical fitness side is underestimated in a lot of senses because people think, I can drive a car. I drive it down the freeway all the time. Well, you're not doing it with four or five G's on your neck with no power steering and it's 120 degrees in the car and you've got 26 other guys that are trying to rip you off

the racetrack.

But we need to be able to perform in the car without thinking, and even if you are capable of turning the wheel and holding your head upright, you have to do it with a subconscious ability. So you have to build up that muscle.

If I told you right now, I need you to go squat 700 pounds, you'd probably have to think about it a little bit, even if you can do it. We need to do all of that without thinking about it. It needs to be subconscious. It needs to be natural, second nature. Because if you're thinking about it, you're already behind.

There's too many things that are happening in the car for us to be thinking about how do I hold my head upright. That's why drivers have to be very comfortable. That's why we have the custom fit race seats. That's why we have forced air intake. That's why we have the cool suits. That's why we have water. If you didn't have those things, that's not to say that they're foolproof, but you get what's called brain fade, or at least that's what I call it, where you get deep into a race and a driver will make a mistake because they get brain fade from the physical fatigue.

We talk about runners, when they get their runner's high and they hit that wall and they have to break through it, and if they don't break through that wall, they can't perform at a high level, and that wall that they're breaking through is what we're trying to avoid because a runner's high is them zoning out. They're just falling into a rhythm.

But in a race car, there's so many variables that are changing lap to lap, corner to corner, that if you fall into a rhythm, you're going to hit the wall. You have to be on your toes 110 percent of the time.

Q. How was it for you adapting from going from just a halo on the Lights car to the NXT car, going from that to the INDYCAR? How was that for you?

STING RAY ROBB: The aeroscreen, visually, it's fine. I do miss the airflow that came from the Indy next car just because I might be giving some secrets away but it doesn't matter now because I'm out of it. I used to be able to feel the wind direction on my helmet, the way that I could hear it flowing through my helmet, so if the wind direction changed, I would brake sooner or later in the turn. Instead of reading the flags, because the flags are so high up in the stands, et cetera, you don't get a good reading unless you're sitting in the car. There was tracks like Barber, for example, back in 2021, there was a couple Andretti cars, I was with Juncos at the time, that caused punctures on their tires from locking up so much, and it's because the wind direction changed halfway through the race. I was able to

feel that on my helmet, and I started braking 10 feet sooner and didn't lock the tires.

Not having that will be interesting, but I think that there might be a few tricks that play into that through the season, but I haven't been in a car on a hot day yet, so we'll see how that goes, as well.

Q. What's your education?

STING RAY ROBB: Dumb. I don't know.

Q. I assume you graduated high school?

STING RAY ROBB: I graduated high school.

Q. Did you do anything past that?

STING RAY ROBB: No, I didn't do anything past that. I actually graduated a year early so I could focus on my racing career. I was actually home schooled as a kid. I went to someone's house actually and she taught me from the time I was in pre-K through sixth grade, so in seventh grade I started going to public school, and I hate to say it, but I feel like I stopped learning after that point. But it was okay.

Q. So you got some social skills?

STING RAY ROBB: I got some social skills, lucky for you guys.

Q. (No microphone.)

STING RAY ROBB: I will be spending some time on the simulator. I'll tell you that right now. Obviously you can't simulate speed, but I'll be doing as much as I can to learn from Dale and David. I think both those guys have a good idea of what a rookie needs to do to learn fast. Don't turn right. If you're turning right, you're not Lightning McQueen and it's going to be a bad day.

THE MODERATOR: Keep your schedule going. Thanks for coming in, NSX Robb. Well done. Best of luck this season.

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