

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Callum Ilott

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joining us is Callum Ilott, driver of the No. 7 Juncos Hollinger Racing Chevrolet. There's a lot of good stuff happening right now at Juncos Hollinger Racing.

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, some big stuff up. Hopefully that continues on the performance side, as well. But yeah, it looks really good, really professional so far, and I'm pretty impressed.

Q. Some good stuff toward the end of the season, namely qualifying second at Laguna. How do you parlay the successes you had last year to get going now early on here in 2023?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, I mean, that's a good baseline for us. Obviously Laguna was a fairly impressive for what we could do. But I think more the consistency stuff, which we're we were getting to Portland, I think the P10s, P 9s. That was more of a solidity for us to kind of work on the performance side.

But going into St. Pete, also Long Beach and the ovals for me, that would be really where the performance gain is because I think my Long Beach, we'd been there the year before and I don't think we'd made at step at all, but throughout the season obviously to be able to really compare the performance gain that we had across the season to last year compared to now this year, that will be important to see.

St. Pete will be a tough one but a good one to see where we're really at.

Q. Your thoughts on having a teammate this year and how much of an advantage that's going to be?

CALLUM ILOTT: Let's see. Let's see. I mean, Agustin is in a very tough position. It's not easy being a rookie, and it's definitely not easy being a rookie without single seater experience, so I'm very interested to see how he gets on. I'm going to do my best to help him as much as possible, especially over the next few days here.

But yeah, it's just data for us. The closer he is to me and the better he does, the better the team does, so it's quite important to be able to get that comparison, and I'm sure he'll do a good job.

But yeah, it's data. It's another car. It's another item, another option to test items on, so yeah, incredibly important.

Q. In talking with Marcus Armstrong, you're one of the guys that sold him on this series. Are you building your own little European guy gang over here? What is it that you tell people about INDYCAR and why they should come here?

CALLUM ILOTT: I don't know, maybe -- I don't know, probably a lot of them try and use their little brains, those little racing driver brains, and see that it's not a bad opportunity over here and I'm enjoying it. Obviously I've known Marcus for quite a long time. We lived together in Italy.

I mean, I knew kind of what he was looking at and what plans were going on. He didn't tell me everything. It was a bit sneaky with some stuff.

I think, yeah, they're all interested. A lot of them ask a lot of questions. I think from Europe it's a big jump to do because of the potential opportunities you have there. This is not the first thing that people think of.

I think it's starting to come more and more into play now, but yeah, there's definitely a lot of people interested. It's just like for me, I was interested since 2019 but I never made the jump. It's a big thing to just go, okay, right, I'm going to commit to that now.

I'm not trying to get more people to emigrate over here, but they seem to like looking and being interested. I'm sure there will be a few more faces coming to a few races.

Q. To that point, you're part of a new rookie class last year, four new rookies this year. People from all over the globe are now interested in INDYCAR. Are you aware in your mind that you're part of this changing face of INDYCAR?



CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, I mean, of course I'm not the face of it --

Q. But part of it, like the youth movement and these new guys.

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, it's good. I saw a lot of potential in INDYCAR when I came over. I think there's some things it does really well. The racing is incredible. I think there's some things they could definitely improve, but I think most people know that and are in tune to it.

That's a part of anything as a driver. You want to improve and you want to do better, and the potential it has as a series really has been highlighted across the years.

What sets it apart from like a Formula 2 or whatever is you are constantly competing with the best, and if you look at the grid this year, it's incredible.

I thought last year was good, and this year is probably going to be even a touch better.

From Europe, people recognize that, the career opportunities. It's one of those things where I was looking at doing INDYCAR versus WEC or the IMSA stuff. It's very hard to jump from IMSA to INDYCAR or WEC to INDYCAR. It's not impossible but it's tough, whereas going from INDYCAR to that kind of stuff in a couple years is not impossible.

I kind of took that mindset and that jump to make life easier -- well, to try and win some stuff here and then see what the future holds.

Q. Obviously you finished well last year with the ninth at Portland, qualifying second at Laguna. Seemed like you acclimated throughout your rookie season. How is your approach going into your rookie season? You know the tracks, you know the car. Can you shift and work more on your race craft or do you feel like you're in a better place?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, my race craft has always been slightly weaker than the qualifying side of things, so definitely that scenario for me to work on.

I think like in Laguna, I proved that if we had a car that's competitive, that's what I can do with it, and on the qualifying side. It's kind of up to the team to give the car on the weekend. Of course I work as much as possible for it, but there's only so much a one-man show can do in a year.

But I think the ovals, that's going to be a bit different, again, having a teammate, as well, to at least share some feelings

on is going to be very helpful.

The attitude, I'm just a bit more relaxed. I know my limits. I know what I'm confident in, and I know what should and shouldn't happen, so I think I can kind of tame myself in the ways that I maybe didn't last year.

And then on another way, know where I could improve when there is the time.

Q. On your teammate, how well do you know him? There was a discussion yesterday kind of about how INDYCAR, maybe a two-car team is different than F1 where it's like F1 here's the car and the drivers have to adapt to it. INDYCAR maybe allows for a little bit more autonomy between each driver. I know you haven't had a teammate yet, but do you think it's more about you have another guys with data; doesn't necessarily mean you guys have to drive the same?

CALLUM ILOTT: It's a tough one because of the position that he's in. It's a bit of an unknown for me, for the team, for the championship, because for sure he's quick. But again, it's a real really tough thing to jump into.

So I really -- I'm a bit nervous for him, and I admire the jump because it's not easy to do. Obviously Scott McLaughlin has done it in, shall we say, a different environment, but he's done it, and Agustin has that background but from Argentina.

It's more I have to wait and see where we're at and what we're doing because it could be more of a data thing or it could be really something that we can work together as a team and build off of.

But I know it's definitely not easy as a rookie, but then taking my own experience, we worked really well together as a one-car operation compared to big four-, five-car operations, and sometimes we kick their ass.

But that gives me the confidence that no matter what, I can kind of work with what we've got and do a good job with it.

Q. Having Armstrong now in the field and you have Lundgaard already, do you have a book on those guys already from the time in F2? Does it make it easier to have guys you've raced against in other series coming here and racing against them?

CALLUM ILOTT: If I was leading the championship, you can open up the book to make them suffer, shall I say, but I don't think -- unless something changes, I don't know where we're going to be, but I don't think that's going to be a big problem at the moment.

No, I know them pretty well. Christian less so. Like we've known each other for a long time. I spent a bit of time with him. But Marcus I lived with. I know the ins and outs of that man a little bit too well really, unfortunately.

But no, he's a lovely dude. He's not doing the ovals, is he, so I'm sure there's another step for him to learn when he comes and does that, if he continues. He may not like it. He may be afraid of all of us now.

Q. (Indiscernible.)

CALLUM ILOTT: No, no. He spends a bit of time with me, but he's in Miami, so...

Q. (Indiscernible.)

CALLUM ILOTT: No. He dropped a couple of things off, including his car, but that's about it.

Q. I think maybe it's just street cred.

CALLUM ILOTT: I mean, he did stay in my place for four or five days in December. I guess that denotes living with me. He can take it if he wants. I know I'm cool, but I'm not that cool.

Q. It seems everybody loves you.

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, I don't want to have like an orphanage of European expats. (Laughter.)

Q. Did he leave you the keys to the car?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah.

Q. What kind of car?

CALLUM ILOTT: One that I definitely didn't drive.

Q. You know when you're improving; the engineers know when you're improving. Can any of this improvement be defined or quantified with results this year? You know when you're doing a lot better laps around the course, but that may not equate into higher finishes depending on the race.

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, if I be really, how would I say, factual, I'm very quick. If you put me in the quickest car, I don't think there's many people quicker than me, honestly. Looking at Laguna, we had a good car and I was able to put it there.

I'll be saying the whole year, once it's there, I can always

compete with it. So that's up to them to do it. I rarely make mistakes in qualifying.

If it's slow, it's partly maybe 5 percent of the time it could be me. It's a bit -- I feel a bit cocky to say it, but I can tell them when I've nailed it and when I've not. Normally I'm quite honest if I messed up.

With the races and stuff, we've had incidences where I've made mistakes and made the wrong decisions under a bit of pressure. We've had instances, like Iowa was a good example, where we had great pace race but couldn't keep up in the pit stops, so you lose four or five positions every pit stop, which is painful to do, but it's just the way it goes.

Quantifying that, I think eliminating the mistakes, being consistent, obviously if I'm doing a more solid, consistent job, we can really see the strong tracks for us, where we're good, where we're slow, the areas to improve.

I think I have a big idea of where we needed to be better, especially like the short oval qualifying. For some reason we were just not quick, but then we get to the races, and with the tire saving that we have, I think we can't extract the peak out of the tire, but we end up being able to go 5, 10 laps longer than some other people.

Yeah, some street circuits could be better, so that's why I'm interested for the first couple races.

Q. Callum, you're talking a little bit about Agustin's tough road that he faces this year as a rookie, so little single seater experience. I know the data you get from having a teammate now is really important to you and this team's growth. Do you still feel confident that the data he can produce as someone who's so unfamiliar with INDYCAR can ultimately still be beneficial if he's doing still so much learning this year?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, that's where it's tough. Obviously the closer he can get to what I'm doing and the more similar he's, shall we say, reenacting what I'm doing, because hopefully I am the baseline in that sense, the better, because that can help us.

Obviously he is a racing driver. He has done many years of it. For sure when we try something, he should be able to feel it. If he feels it in a slightly different way, that's still feedback for the team. It's still good. Especially if something is negative on the car, you should be able to feel that, as well.

We definitely have had a few times where it's been really negative, and it wouldn't take a rocket scientist to figure it out.

Adding on to that, yeah, obviously it's when you get to the ovals and that kind of style of like you're probably not going to know when you're feeling but something is going to be there, so just try and explain it. I'll try and digest it in my own way, and of course as a team we'll try and digest it in our own way.

But that's where you've got to be a bit cautious because everyone's feelings are quite different for interpretation. Honestly, it's a bit of a discovery process. I'm excited to see, but also the language side of things. I think he started learning English at the end of last year when he knew it was happening, and he's come a long way actually since because I remember seeing him for the seat fit and it was a bit of a struggle.

Now he's good and we're conversing normally, shall I say.

Q. In this process of the team ultimately deciding on him as the driver, I know Ricardo and Brad made a long-term commitment, and you guys getting a multiyear deal signed last year, and we talked a lot about wanting you to be the cornerstone of their growth these next couple years. Were you involved at all in the conversations about what direction to take with adding a second car, or did you kind of let them ultimately make that decision and just be happy with whatever direction it took?

CALLUM ILOTT: I mean, with most things, I offer my input and my feedback on anything which is kind of going on, whether it's on the mechanical side, engineering side, or even on a team design side. But I don't really like to, shall we say, push or influence, that sort of thing. But I give my feedback. I give my suggestions. You can either use that or not, and I like to take that approach.

Of course you have to understand the circumstances. There are lots of things other than just what meets the eye with anything that goes on.

Being part of the team from the get-go within INDYCAR, it's important to be involved on those side of things, I feel, and be more than just a driver and help build the team and be part of its success beyond just driving.

So yeah, I do enjoy getting involved in those things, but I don't want to make the decisions, and I don't want to influence too much. I just offer the suggestions.

Q. What ultimately is a successful year for you and for this team from a results standpoint this year?

CALLUM ILOTT: It's hard to say. Again, it depends on the

performance a bit because, as you can see, even with the established teams, it's hard to be perfect all the time. I think for us, if we can maintain the kind of end-of-year finishes like the Portland finishes, P9, P10, and have a consistent kind of hitting like that, that would be great, and then when we have those opportunities to get the good results, just take them. Eliminate the mistake, stay consistent, and grab the opportunities when they come.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and wrap things up. Callum, thanks so much for coming in.

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