

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Helio Castroneves

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joined now by four-time Indy 500 champion Helio Castroneves. Auto Nation back on board, Sirius XM, full time once again with Meyer Shank Racing, driver of the 06 machine Honda. Of course on board with the powerplant. You're back on track tomorrow, right?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yes.

THE MODERATOR: You've been on the track in the last several days, but this is in an INDYCAR now.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: In an INDYCAR, that's right. We're excited to be back. This is great that we're doing here Thermal. Haven't been on the track, no idea, but heard great things about it.

Well, looking forward to starting back on our No. 06, and yeah, start getting back into action.

THE MODERATOR: Just in general your thoughts looking ahead to what the possibility is for this year?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, so we have some change of personnel in my group in the 06. We have Dave, our engineer; also we have some data people, as well, in the pit stop. We're going to have some communication that we've got to -- that's why it's important two days, at least for us, to get everybody going.

And yeah, it's important because we've already been one year with Meyer Shank Racing, so putting all the pieces and puzzles together, looking forward to a great 2023.

Q. Looking at this year, it was a one-year deal that you signed to return. How important is this year to kind of maintaining your place in INDYCAR?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Oh, huge. Everyone understands when you're going through, even if it's one year, people think it's a long time, but hey, we're talking about teams that's been together for a long, long time, years of experience and communication and everybody is in sync.

Even though for us we did 2021, all those people were part-timers and we have to start all over again. That was the first time that we had two cars in the team. There was a lot of dynamic changing.

Now we are continuing to move forward. It's important for us to be part of this process, be patient. Yeah, I can't wait when things start to connect so we can show at the racetrack.

Q. Are you looking at this year you have to win, you have to improve on last year --

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Oh, you're always looking for improvement. The good news is we finished 18th last year in the championship. That's not a place that we want to be. However, we feel there was some areas that we felt we could have better results, but racing is unpredictable, as always.

But we're only looking forward, and we feel we're going to have a much better season.

Q. Simon was saying yesterday he felt like you and him were working closer together than ever and helping the team. I know that was a reason Mike Shank brought you guys in together. He said he felt like everything was going according to plan.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I think so. The expectation is obviously always to do well, but also we understand the possibility of things not going according to the plan.

But I feel the plan is that. It takes some time to collect some of the informations that we want, our alliances with Andretti Autosport also is still very strong. They also know that they need to improve. It's not only in our organization.

We still keep pushing each other so that we can have a better result like we had in the past or that Andretti had in the past.

For us, remember, the alliance, they have their own engineers, their own resource, they translate it to us, and yeah, we're looking forward to having a much better season, and let's hope for the best.



Q. Independent of what happens with your future in 2024 beyond this year, you mentioned finishing 18th last year in the championship, which I know you're not used to. What would you come away from the season feeling like it was a realistically successful one in terms of on-track performance and championship --

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Look, expectation for me, it's obviously the big one. It's Indianapolis 500. That's the one that we feel that we have the same car, we have all our bets on to that.

However, I'm not going to give up on the other ones, either. I feel that we have as much of a chance as anybody in some of the places that I feel comfortable. In position, if you're thinking about finishing in the top 12 would be a great goal, would be a great place to be.

However, we want to be able to have a podium. We want to be able to show what we can get, and we can.

INDYCAR is so competitive. There's so many scenarios that you're like, I will never see that. That's why. We're going out there thinking that we do have a chance to repeat what we did in 2021, and obviously have a better result in the road courses and street courses, as well.

Q. Mike has tested Tom Blomqvist in an INDYCAR which is I know something he was potentially interested in pursuing. It's been mentioned you could swap roles where you could run IMSA full time and he could come here in INDYCAR. I know you're focused on trying to keep this ride here. Does having someone who's on your team who Mike might look to switch things up, does that deliver you any more pressure, make things any weirder?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: First of all, it's too early to say. Second, I don't want anything more than great things for this team. This team is incredible. They continue to grow as much as -- they already stamped that they're not just a small team. They stamped that they're an incredible team, that things amazing about to happen in the future.

Tom, come on, the kid is a superstar. He's really quick. I feel that he did -- he's doing an amazing job. Last year he did a great job; this year continued doing it.

Let's see. Everything happens and falls natural. But as of right now, it's too early in the season to predict and think what's going to happen.

Our goal is to have a phenomenal result with MSR so that we can show what this team is capable.

Q. Last, a non-INDYCAR question. When we see a sporting great like Tom Brady step away from --

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I can't believe it, man. Really?

THE MODERATOR: With him, you think. You never know.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Last year it was the same thing, right? I'm upset, actually.

Q. When you see something like that, he's stepping away from the sport seemingly on his own terms, if he actually does indeed retire. Would you ever, whenever that time comes for you, do you want to step away on your own terms or play until someone --

HELIO CASTRONEVES: A great question, too.

Look, I just won Daytona 24-hour. Do you think I'm thinking retiring right now? There is no -- there isn't a thought of that.

Look, also the same thing it repeats. It has to feel natural. I can't force myself. I can't put a number or date that I can say this is it.

As of right now, I am enjoying very much what I'm doing. I'm about to start a great season with INDYCAR, and my mind is only thinking about that. I'm just going to continue working and get that result that I really want, that I know I'm capable and I know what the team is capable. Whatever happens in the future remains to be seen.

Q. Helio, you've driven for a very organized corporate type team at Team Penske for all those years. Now you're with Meyer Shank Racing, and Michael Shank is like the guy next door, the buddy you'd go watch the Super Bowl with, just a regular guy. How do you contrast what it's like being there, and are you really not taking anything against Team Penske, but do you feel more relaxed in this environment?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Well, there is two different personalities, of course, and that translates to the team. Roger has been a corporate person for so many years that everything runs the same way.

Mike, as you mentioned, is a totally different person. He doesn't need to wear a suit and tie to run his business.

We are humans. We adapt to the environment that you're in. You try and bring some of the things that you learned from the past, and I learned so much from Team Penske,



which was great to have Simon as well, because it was just reassuring what I said it before, we can do it.

And Mike has his own way. Look, the results will start showing. You've got to respect that. Obviously in INDYCAR, it's a very young team comparing to those INDYCARs and the ones that have victories and wins and success.

I do believe that 2023 is going to be a great turnaround for MSR. And it doesn't matter how you run, if it's just a straight line like Team Penske or if you have some waves around the line with Meyer Shank Racing. As long as you have the passion, which both have, Roger has a passion about racing, Mike has passion about it and he wears on his sleeve. I just think it's just different personality.

Q. Simon was saying that his big problem with the MSR car last year was tire wear, and he said that -- he was obviously saying how sad it was that simulators have largely replaced proper track time, and it's really hard when you have different compounds at each race, to deal with that. Did you find that same problem for you, and how do you resolve it?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, I think one of the biggest things that probably hurt us last year, the change in the compound of the tires. 2021 was a little bit different.

Even because the engineers are not from MSR, it's from alliance with Andretti, it takes a little time to readjust and change their mind and the philosophy. However, Simon and I have been working very hard to look for the other side, to look in some areas that maybe wasn't visit.

But I do believe the system works well, and yes, we hopefully can move those areas. Now the qualifying are so close to each other, but we see even bigger cars or teams are able to start like back there, but in the race combination they were able to race themselves to the top, and because of that better combination, especially when you're talking about Iowa. You know, tire wear was just incredible.

Unfortunately that pushed the performance backwards when you don't have some sort of things that you're thinking about. That's why you take notes. Now we're back to the drawing board and fix it for this year. That's the goal for this year, to have those priorities to make sure that we have a better result on the race instead of so much in qualifying.

Q. Are you confident that the street courses you're still good -- you were in the second row at Detroit last year. Are you confident you can make progress with

the road courses without losing anything on the street?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, I do, I do. That's what we need, to improve in those areas last year. Especially in Laguna last year we were able to get finally to the top 12. We were able to get a little bit better, but yellows and reds caught up to our situation. But yes, I do believe it.

Even though it didn't show for you guys, but we did finish in a high note last year, and we believe that we can carry on from that to the 2023.

Q. Ageless Helio, what are your thoughts on Tom Brady retiring?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I don't like it. Someone told me, comparing me and Tom Brady this year, and unfortunately --

Q. Last year, and you won the Rolex.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Last year, too, but I'm telling the story because he didn't win the Super Bowl. I'm like, whoa, whoa, don't compare me now. So now we've got the Rolex.

Look, it's amazing. In any athlete's -- any person that achieve goals, even with the experience that you have you go through some scenarios, and I don't think he's hurting right now. I think he's pretty well.

That's the type of scenario -- the guy can retire and come back if he wants at any time.

Unfortunately it's not like that in our sport. We need a team, we need a car. But yes, he's incredible.

Q. Also incredible was the MSR performance at Daytona. I'm wondering, what does that do? We talked about it a little bit, but now you've shifted into INDYCAR mode. What does that do for you and Simon and the organization to come from that high into your real job?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: It's huge. It just brings all the positive energy and attitude to everyone. We have some of the INDYCAR teams at the Rolex; some of the mechanics were so worried that the thing wasn't holding on that we were preparing ourselves as much as we could, so they were able to have the taste a little bit of the result.

Anytime in anything, not only in racing, when you have a positive vibe around you, you want to continue that going. It's just great. I am super excited for 2023 because this



team not only deserves, but this team, it is going to another area that people might think, wow, look how far they've come.

And it's true. Mike is putting everything on the line. It'll be a good year.

Q. Simon said yesterday that you and he are closer than ever. You were teammates before, so what has changed that has strengthened it?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: When you go into an organization that's telling you what to do, it's different. You're just doing your own thing, and you're competing against, literally, right there. Now when you come into a team that asks what we need to do, now I believe more minds thinking alike can increase the possibility to find the solution. That's what it is.

Simon and I, we're constantly talking every week to make sure that whatever we need for the results of the team and the continual pushing to what we need, it's the best way to do it.

Yes, we are super close. I really like Simon. Now we are not only -- I love him. We always did very well together. I don't have any issue with any teammates that I think -- some I have to scuff it up and it's like, look, let's sit down together here and find out what we need.

But with Simon, Will, Josef, and even Juan Pablo that everyone knows is a very strong personality, I didn't have any issues.

Right now we are closer together because we want this team to benefit from the best result, and we know we can help them to get the result, and we feel 2023 is going to be great.

Q. (On Simon and Josef.)

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I hear from you guys. They didn't comment anything to me. I've been hearing from you some of the background gossip. We should put that on the show.

Q. First race in INDYCAR 25 years ago now. It's going to be the 25-year anniversary --

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Is that right? We were trying to figure out the year. I was actually joking with Scott Dixon. He's about 20, as well, so he's not that far, either.

But go ahead. 25 years ago, dang. That's a long time.

Q. How much did you see the sport change in a quarter of a century, and how much stayed the same, in a way?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Well, starting with the safety, INDYCAR has been incredible on the racetracks with the safe walls. Obviously the cars, as well. We used to have almost 1,000 horsepower, and today the lap times are similar to what we have because of technology and the way the cars are designed.

Also the windshield or the aeroscreen, as we call it, it's been huge for the safety of our sport. It's amazing what we can do with all the progression over the years.

The competition level is still incredible. I think when you have a car that is the same for many, many years, all the tricks, all the details start to translate to the other teams, as well, and that's why today if you see a qualifying time 10th, you probably have about five, six cars.

It is incredible. There is no favoritism, I believe. There is always not knowing who's going to win.

However, back then it wasn't really like that because of yellows and also big props to Honda and Chevy for reliability. Back then, because you're pushing the limits, sometimes you used to have some of those scenarios with mechanical side.

Now it's competitive as it could be. A driver can finish most every race if he doesn't have any issues with independent suspension or anything like that because the incredible amount of work with the manufacturers are being outstanding.

Q. How much of a bonus is it for you coming back this year? Obviously last year was kind of a building year for you guys with the new team full-time. What did you learn last year that you can bring forward to this year?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Knowing the environment that you are in is always help. The communication, understanding, and obviously you fix some of the mistakes that you did, whether it's strategy, whether it's setup. You don't go to that route again, and that helps you to -- since the cars are not changing much, there was a few things with large bore and things like that, but hopefully with the testing that we have in the next two days, that will help us understand a little bit more.

Every time you're behind the steering wheel with an INDYCAR and when you have a chance, it will -- especially in the place that we've already been -- it will help tremendous.

I think those mistakes that we did last year, they won't happen again.

Q. Helio, what is your most favorite track for this year? What race are you most looking forward to this year?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I'm looking forward to the Indianapolis 500 again. I'm looking forward not only for the crowd again, which was awesome, and yes, I can't wait to be back at Indy.

Q. How did it feel climbing the fence at the Rolex?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: You know, great question, because I didn't finish this time racing in the car, so when Tom actually stopped on the track, I was like, oh, that's cool, but I wasn't even thinking that we were going to climb the fence until Mike said, are you ready?

I'm like, really? You want to do this? He said, yeah, let's do this. When I went to climb the fence I don't have my gloves, and it really hurt my hands this time.

So if you noticed I was kind of like between the safety wall and the fence because I couldn't believe how hard it was.

Look, it was so cool to see the team doing again what we did last year, and yeah, it was a perfect ending for sure.

I think that was the worst, because not being prepared -- I don't know what happened, but it was the first time -- you know when you're holding and you couldn't hold it. I was like, man, this is hurting. But for me, it was great to see everyone repeating the same scene from last year. That was emotional for sure.

Q. That could be an emotional thing, too.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Plus the banking. The banking last year I thought was a little tighter. My knee was not going up as high as I wanted. But I think it could be that, too, the adrenaline.

Q. Are you still able to get that high like after the 500?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, many years I've started learning if you start going too high, the higher you can go, the harder to fall. You've got to balance. Sometimes I don't go that high not because I don't want to, but I know that on the way back -- because when everybody is together, people don't realize, the fence is not new, it's bouncing. Trust me, there's a technique. People don't realize, it's very difficult. It's not just climbing the fence,

people. Something is there.

THE MODERATOR: We'll cut you loose. Thanks for coming in. We'll see you at Thermal tomorrow.

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