

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Wednesday, February 1, 2023

### Scott Dixon

#### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We continue on Day 2 of content day coming to you from the Palm Springs Convention Center, now joined by the six-time INDYCAR Series champion, Scott Dixon driving the No. 9 PNC Bank Honda for Chip Ganassi Racing.

A couple wins, a pole last year, a bunch of podiums and top 5s, and another pursuit here coming up in 2023 of championship number 7. A couple changes in the off-season amongst the team, but tell us about your outlook for 2023 right now.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, looking forward to it. I think everybody at this point getting here for the start of media day or content day is always a good sign because you'll be back in the car soon, so looking forward to getting back in the car in the next couple of days. Be interesting for a lot of us I think with the new track.

As you said, a lot of changes in the off-season with driver lineups and also personnel of the team. Yeah, looking forward to it. Some change, and all positive.

**Q. I was talking to your former teammate from the last two years, Jimmie Johnson, back in October about how he made the decision. I asked when they went to good wood if talking to you and Dario helped it come clear, and he said, actually, to be honest, you told him, please don't leave me, I need you back here on this team. What was it about working with him the last two years where you two just really clicked?**

SCOTT DIXON: I think anybody that knows Jimmie well, he's a great person. He's a fun guy to hang out with. I think what he brought to the team, whether it was on the sponsor side to his competitiveness and competition side and info, not just information but kind of his history of being so successful I think really helped with the team.

Yeah, for me it was probably more so on just the friendship side of hanging out with him. I think that was in Nashville where he was kind of talking about maybe not coming back or how it was going to be, but I was like, come on, man,

you've got to make sure you can get the deal together and come back.

Obviously we can see that he's moved on to different pastures, and a lot of exciting stuff for him that's coming up.

**Q. Were you surprised when he came and asked... (indiscernible)?**

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think that surprised a few people. I'd kind of heard rumblings and we had spoken a bit about it, probably right around a similar time. I don't think it was a super shock to a lot of us, but I think for maybe the industry it was.

But I guess some people, that's kind of the natural progression. I think who and how and how he did it I think was probably more of a shock than him actually going into the ownership role.

**Q. Do you think we'll see Jimmie for the Indy 500 with you guys? Is he still holding that out?**

SCOTT DIXON: I think so. I'm not sure about this year, though. I don't know. You'd have to ask him. Maybe he's already punted until next year, I don't know.

But he wants to do it. It's just timing. It's very difficult, and especially with the Garage 56 entry and all that kind of stuff. There's a lot going on, especially around that period of time. It's pretty tight.

**Q. When you look at the Ganassi lineup like you were just talking about, can you give us your perspective on adding Takuma and Marcus Armstrong and Alex coming back with Marcus, just everything?**

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, strong lineup. I think this team always has a really strong lineup, but this year I think obviously welcoming another Kiwi to the team is always great. It's good to see the young talent coming through and having three of us in the series, been a long time since we've had any other than myself, so it's nice to see that progression.

Hopefully some more in the near future here that are

**ASAP** sports . . . when all is said, we're done.®

coming through the pipeline, as well.

But yeah, excited for the new year. I think the lineup and obviously you try to have as much as you can to have a constant in all the cars, I understand what they did with Marcus and Taku, so that lineup over there is going to be really strong. Looking forward to it.

**Q. I asked Marcus Ericsson yesterday where he fits in with Ganassi and his long-term plans. He said he wants to be there a really long time and maybe eventually move into lead driver role but he said he keep getting better and might drive for another 10 years. Would you agree with that assessment?**

SCOTT DIXON: That's a long time.

I think every year you have your ups and downs. I think the biggest thing for me is that you're still constantly learning. Each weekend there's something different, which I think is what makes it so much fun and interesting, I think, for anybody that's involved.

Yeah, 10 years sounds like a long time. Maybe five.

Mario and AJ were kind of that --

**Q. And Kanaan.**

SCOTT DIXON: Kanaan, is he turning 50 this year? 49 this year? Yeah, 49.

**Q. Can you talk about the addition of Takuma, what you want to ask him about the 500 and things?**

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, looking forward to working with Takuma. I haven't seen him. I kind of knew for a while that that's where it was kind of going.

I guess the only down side that I would say is that he's not doing full season. But yeah, looking forward to it.

We've had some tremendous battles throughout the years. Obviously the 500 is something that he's extremely passionate about, and obviously a two-time winner.

I think the year I finished second to him was definitely very tough, but it's always had a very big rivalry at the Indy 500 with this team. Be fun to work with him. I've never worked with him in that capacity. Maybe we can seek some insight there.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

SCOTT DIXON: Oh, pole? Yeah, he can take pole.

**Q. Scott, I know you're welcoming on a new lead engineer on to your program this year. You've had a couple changes in these last couple years. What is that process like working with a new engineer? Certainly it seems like it doesn't change your results, but the first test or the first couple races getting everything moving the same direction, what is that like?**

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I'm looking forward to working with Ross. I think he's done, I think -- we tried to hire him actually probably nine or ten years ago when he first came out of college, but it never worked out.

Yeah, I think for the majority of my tenure I probably had just two engineers, and they decided to move on to bigger and better things.

Consistency is sometimes good and change is sometimes good. I really loved and enjoyed working with Cannon. I thought he was a tremendous guy and had great insight and did a hell of a job for our team, and obviously he's moved on to different things now.

But yeah, looking forward to starting the season strong with Ross, and been really impressed so far with his just way of thinking, his aggressiveness. He's a pretty young guy, too, but he already has -- I think with the people that he's worked with at Coyne, he's a young person but with some kind of older concepts and understanding of the sport.

**Q. You mentioned Marcus Armstrong, another Kiwi coming, not only to the sport, but to this team. How much or how well did you know him? He said that he grew up watching you on TV and part of why he wanted to come to INDYCAR was because of what you had done in the sport over the last couple decades. What has that teammate relationship been like since he joined the team?**

SCOTT DIXON: I think I've only seen him twice: The Christmas party, and then I saw him once for a gathering in New Zealand for a Giltrap group kind of thing. He kind of came through slightly different paths, I think, just with people that -- I think myself, Hartley and maybe Earl were kind of similar groups with the investor side.

But yeah, he's a great guy. Got to spend a lot of time -- ran into his dad actually a few times throughout the Christmas break down there, and he's a lot of fun, as well.

Yeah, it's funny to hear some of the stories of him watching me when I was a younger self. But yeah, I think it's huge for New Zealand. There is a lot of talent down there, and

to see some of that coming through, I think even with Earl on the IMSA side and some possibilities this season of some other guys doing some testing, I think it's great from that aspect.

Really going to enjoy working with him. He's a young guy, a fun guy, and obviously very talented. Hopefully I can help him if he has any questions or help him along the way if he needs it.

**Q. Scott, Marcus was saying that he's particularly targeting improving in qualifying, and he says that the group struggled in qualifying last year as a whole. Looking at your relative performances with Alex and Marcus, you never seemed to all be struggling at the same time, but you're also never all high at the same time. Is there one breakthrough that can resolve this kind of qualifying issue for all of you, or are you all chasing different ways to improve your qualifying?**

SCOTT DIXON: You know, I think the outlier was definitely road courses, where we had the inconsistency either between the cars or in general. None of us got a pole, which I would say right now the road course kind of tire and combination is probably Alex's specialty and he's extremely good at it, and to see him not get a pole I think was definitely something that was missing for sure.

There was definitely some instances where we made pretty heavy mistakes, I think, on the 9 car side of just not being in the right configuration or doing silly things that shouldn't have been done.

But I think there was two pretty big things in the off-season that we saw that we were probably doing wrong and then also not emphasizing enough on.

I hope that once we get to kind of the first few rounds of road courses that that understanding of what we're missing definitely helps. I think outside of that, our other packages have been pretty strong.

Yeah, so it's -- I don't know, you keep working at it in the off-season is where most of the preparation is done for understanding kind of your weaknesses, and that was definitely a big outlier for us.

**Q. Obviously you have hardly any test days, but what you do have are on a road course. You can never test on temporary tracks, but that seems to be where you draw strength from. You nearly got pole at Toronto. Does it seem strange that -- and Meyer Shank are the same. They have really strong performances on street courses where you can never test, and the road courses where you can test, it's all up and down.**

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, some of it I think is -- yeah, there's some outliers that we were doing I think pretty wrong, so I think that would emphasize more of that circuit type, which I would say if you look at the consistency or the inconsistency for us was why it played true.

The tire, too, is quite sensitive now. It plays to some driving styles a little bit easier than others, so that's kind of another window you've got to unlock a little bit.

Yeah, it's hard to explain and get into it too deep without kind of giving some things away, but yeah.

**Q. Honda, obviously I think everyone was a bit rocked back by what Chevy have found in the previous off-season. Do you think Honda has responded? How much can you tell before you actually hit the track?**

SCOTT DIXON: I know one thing is that Honda will never lie down or give up. That's for sure. Sometimes getting beat really does help fire that.

I think across the board, as a partner, we didn't do maybe as good a job as we could have, but I know even talking to salters several times in the off-season and at Daytona and things like that, they're flat out, man.

The difficult part now is that it's a very mature engine. It's been around for a very long time. To find some big gains can be extremely tough.

But I think, again, it's like any of the process that we go through, say at the Indy 500, it's never one, two, three, four or five big things, it's always hundreds of small details that you've got to get right.

Yeah, I know they won't stop working. It's going to be good.

**Q. Looking at Marcus as a teammate for you this year, first time that you've had a Kiwi teammate, but what do you think one of the biggest things that he'll have to learn to adapt to, having come from Europe, you hear Callum Hott talk about various things, and even Romain Grosjean talk about the Formula 1 world. INDYCAR is quite different socially with the fan base over those European series.**

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, there's a lot of differences. Probably the openness and how you work with your teammates is probably a big one, too, where in Europe I don't think that happens too much, whereas with at least our team it's very open and you're encouraged to work together. That might be a big change for him.



I would have said ovals would be obviously an eye opener, but he's not doing those for the first year; and then street courses, our form of street courses are a lot different than the form of maybe European street courses.

There will be a lot coming at him for sure, and especially it's fairly difficult these days because the testing is so limited. Yes, the rookies get a couple extra days and some more tires throughout race weekends, but still, it's nothing like what I think most are used to.

It will be a lot for him in the first season, but I think the road course sort of package and driving style will and should be pretty similar to what he's used to, but yeah, looking forward to a strong season from him.

**Q. Once the season kicks off really, once you get past St. Pete, it all comes in a bit of a roar and all of a sudden you end up at Indy GP and of course the 500. How much of that plays into your mental space about the fact that the 500 is getting very close but there's still the championship game to play towards, as well?**

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, you just take them as they come. Obviously it's a bit of a slow start, but I think for any driver, that's the part you look forward to the most is actually when you get to drive the car.

I look forward to obviously kind of that May period, and once it kicks off into the summer stretch where it's pretty flat out I think is exciting for all of us. Indy is its kind of own little thing and a bit of an outlier, and obviously this year, too, with Sebring 12-hour and then maybe Le Mans in the middle of it all, it could be a pretty busy time.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.