

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Scott McLaughlin

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joined by Scott McLaughlin, season number...

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Three. Three and one month. I technically did October 2020.

THE MODERATOR: Yes, there we go. Three wins last year, three poles, seven podiums, eight top fives, 12 top 10s. Remarkable season, yet you got to get better if you want to think about winning a championship and the Indianapolis 500. Your thoughts heading into a new year?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Look, absolutely. I know that we made a massive step personally for me last year. That was due to a number of things, things clicking, working out really good.

But now what we know of INDYCAR racing, you just need to continue stepping up a little. McLaren is going to be fast, Andretti, Ganassi as we know is unreal. We need to continue to build as a team, myself. I've certainly looked at negatives that I can improve on. Hopefully that bodes me well for the rest of the season.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. What are the negatives you can improve on?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, for me, I made a couple mistakes mid-season. My Indy crash, Detroit going down the escape road, a few things that just sort of put me on the back foot championship-wise.

If you looked at my season from maybe Road America on, I felt like everything sort of clicked. I just took races as they came. The way I finished the season last year, I've got to start and continue to do every race of the year like that. I can't afford mistakes. You can't afford mistakes in INDYCAR and be on the back foot.

Q. Took a big step in year two. Three wins. Josef said he wants to end the run of 17 consecutive years of the championship coming down to the season-ending

race. Have you been in that situation before? You have to keep going up against two championships that are your teammates.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I got asked a similar question today. For me, it's rewarding when you can beat those guys. You know that they're at the top of their game. They're probably the best INDYCAR drivers, some of the best INDYCAR drivers around right now. You know when you're beating them, you're doing a good job.

As a team, we push each other. The competitiveness between us all, we hate losing to each other, but we also know the reward in beating each other, for the team to win. It's just good camaraderie, the boys and girls push each other on the mechanics side. Whose cars get done the fastest. Good, competitive rivalry between everyone.

That starts from how we interact, the three of us. Yeah, it's a lot of fun.

I wouldn't say it's frustrating that I have them as teammates. I think it's like -- I just want to chase something, if I'm better than them on the day, you have to be somewhere thereabouts.

Q. (No microphone.)

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I beat them last year. Had times last year when I won and I felt like I was fastest on the weekend. It's swings and roundabouts. Times they pass me, I have to learn to try and build.

I think the last couple years I've learnt how to put weekends together, starting from practice one through the race, where when I first came in the season, I thought it was all about qualifying, the race. Sounds stupid, but practice one it starts, how you approach that, not scaring yourself by making a silly mistake, losing track time. There's a whole lot of things, not only a full season work but a full weekend in INDYCAR.

Q. You talked about last year coming from Australia, being on top of the world there, then the struggles as a rookie. You make the improvement last year. Mentally now are you like you can win a championship?



SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think right now I feel comfortable with where I'm at. I know, I believe I'm fast enough to win the championship. It also comes up to me executing and doing what I can to perform on the day.

What I tried to do last year was sometimes when I had, like, an eighth-place car, I tried to make it a second-place car and I'd crash or go down the escape road or something like that. That's what I changed towards the end of the season. It's just about letting it happen, letting the pace come, hopefully it bodes us well towards the end of the season.

I know I have the speed to win a championship, but I've got to put it together. That's the same for Indy 500. I've learnt a lot over the years that I know I've got the right ingredients around me, I feel like I've learnt enough to be a force come May. At the same time it's about executing at the moments that you really need to and not risk too much in the moments you don't need to.

Yeah, I get a lot of enjoyment out of that. It's a tough series in that regard.

Q. Were you still a superstar when you got back to Australia, New Zealand?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, I mean, I had so much support, it was awesome. It was awesome. I spent six weeks in Australia, two weeks in New Zealand. Yeah, it was awesome to see everyone. I spent some time commentating. That was fun.

Certainly have a new appreciation for what the guys in the com box do. It's a tough old slog trying to read races, get the most out of interviews. You guys do a pretty good job with us.

I don't know how you ask questions when we're angry. I absolutely shit myself when I had to ask a couple questions to a few drivers when they had a bad run. It gave me a new focus. Okay, I probably should be a little bit nicer to you all (smiling).

Yeah, it was good.

Q. Scott Dixon said earlier that we've gone from all those years where he was the only driver from New Zealand, now we have three. What does that say about the popularity of INDYCAR in New Zealand? What do you know about Marcus Armstrong?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I know plenty about Marcus. Seen him come from go-karts, racing in Europe, then racing in Europe in cars. Excited to have another Kiwi onboard.

We're a small country, five million odd people, we punch well above our weight in terms of drivers.

You have us three, then Brendon Hartley, Mitch Evans in Formula E. Tom Blomqvist, a semi-Kiwi, when I was in go-karts back in the day.

It's pretty awesome for our country right now with Tom winning last weekend, three of us in INDYCAR, two top teams.

Q. Earl Bamber.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Earl, exactly. Le Mans winner. We punch above our weight. Proud to be a part of it.

Q. Last year when I interviewed Tim Cindric, he said you're right where he expected you to be in year two. Year three he said he expected you to go into the last race of the season with the championship in his hand. How realistic is that especially after you've been through the fires of a championship battle?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I'm sure it's realistic. I believe in myself that I can do it and be a part of the fight again. I mean, being a part of the fight last year was a pretty cool moment. Realistically we weren't really a part of the fight, but we were mathematically in it.

This year for sure I'm excited to continue to learn and be a sponge and just execute the way I think we need to execute to be there at the end. I truly believe I can do that.

Q. After the global success of Bus Bros, which we get down here in New Zealand, as well.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: You get YouTube down there (laughter)?

Q. For you, with all you do with Josef, when do you switch from Bus Bro to Scott McLaughlin, INDYCAR driver?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Look, I think that's why our relationship is so good, because we openly admit to each other that we just want to beat the living daylights out of each other on track. I think that I guess helps our trust levels and how we interpret each other in debriefs and whatnot.

Going back on like me hanging out and chilling, I've always been someone that enjoys life off the track, away from the sport. I feel like I'm also one of the more dedicated in terms of my data and what I look at behind the scenes that I don't probably broadcast to the social media world.

Ultimately I enjoy just having fun and living life. I know that this is my job. There's a time to switch on. I am one of the most competitive people in the world. Yeah, I enjoy the outlet that Bus Bros gives me. When it's game time, it's game time. I feel like I have a good sort of mentality when it comes to needing to switch over to the real stuff.

Q. For years Dixon paved the way for the Kiwis in the INDYCAR SERIES. You're there a couple years, Marcus joining the Ganassi squad part-time, I think the statement probably that you reinforce to people here is the fact that these dreams are achievable and America is a great place to do it, isn't it?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, I think if it wasn't for Supercars I probably would have been over here a lot earlier. I've always wanted to be here in America. I think the scene for a young driver right now is really good. I think you can earn a really good living here in America. You can live in a great part of the world. You can race against some of the most competitive people in the world, some of the best teams on the planet.

Yeah, I think what Hunter is doing, doing such a great job with it. He's come up through the F2000, Pros, now he's in INDY NXT. Embedded in the Andretti organization.

Exciting stuff for New Zealand, but certainly something that I fully support more New Zealanders looking stateside than Europe.

Q. It's not only New Zealand, but the number of Kiwis that are involved behind the scenes as well.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think even on the McLaren side there's a ton of people there at McLaren that are Kiwis. We always like a Kiwi photo at the Indy 500 every year. I feel like there's more and more people in that photo every year to the point we're going to need three or four cameras to take the photo.

It's exciting for New Zealand. It opens a lot of doors. I'm just glad the America is starting to see - not that they never saw it - but we do punch above our weight. Like I said it's exciting for everyone at home.

Q. Some athletes don't buy into the you can take momentum from one season to the next. Do you feel like you can take what you just did at the end of last season over to 2023? Does a longer off-season negate that?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: No, the same length off-season last time. I think it's more up to you and your mentality and

what you think.

I certainly believe you can't stop me from learning what I learnt last year. I still know what I learn understand and what I can improve on.

Whether it's momentum or whether it's just learnings, I know what I learnt and what I need to learn and be better at from last year, I know what I've had to work on in saying that. That's what I've worked on.

I think that hopefully will put me in good stead.

Q. You've felt pressure on yourself. You've always wanted quick results. Now everybody is pointing to you as a championship frontrunner. Do you feel that pressure? Do you block that out?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think now you just know, like, the learning is over now. Team Penske, you got a car that you know can win races. You're expected to compete for championships. That's just an expectation that I have, that I had in Australia for five, six years. I understand the mentality and understand what it's like to have that pressure.

I feel like it's not an unknown for me. I'm not really stressed about it. I sort of know my ability, what I can do. If it's good enough, it's good enough. Yeah, it's not an unknown and I'm not too worried about it at all.

I put more pressure on myself than anyone can put on me. I just focus on that myself.

Q. What are your goals for the test this week?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I need to learn the track first. I sort of don't really know where it goes. I feel like I'm going to get lost out there. That's probably the first thing.

But we've got a bit of a list of things we got to get through, mate. We'll work on that, get some bits and pieces done for what we think is going to help us later on in the season.

We don't know what the bitumen is like, if it's hard on tires, low grip. It looks low grip and hard on tires. Who knows when you get out there, how long it will take for the track to rubber up.

We got plenty to get through, like we always do. We'll try to make the most of every lap we have.

Q. (No microphone.)

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Just Indy.



Q. (No microphone.)

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: No. Later on.

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