

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Wednesday, March 1, 2023

### Will Power

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: As you know, the season begins this Sunday in the streets of St. Petersburg, Florida, with the Firestone Grand Prix of St. Pete.

Certainly when it comes to success down there, there are few any better than our guest today, two-time race winner, nine-time pole winner at St. Pete, and you know his all-time mark of 68 pole positions. It just so happens to be a special day. He told me not to mention it. I'm not sure if I can or not. Maybe most of you know if you follow him on social media.

Will, congratulations on your special day today. There's certainly no better way to spend it than looking ahead to a big weekend, a place you've had a lot of success. How much are you looking forward to St. Pete this weekend?

WILL POWER: Yeah, very much so. As I say every year, it's the moment of truth to see where you stack up. It's very important to get off to a good start.

Usually anxious two weeks before. As it becomes race week, all the anxiety goes away. You feel relaxed, ready to go, knowing all the work's over for the off-season, and you get to do your job that you love so much.

Yeah, can't wait to get there.

THE MODERATOR: It's not easy, but at least you get into a pattern, a rhythm of a race weekend, which you don't have during the course of non-racing season. But last year, as you well know, it was a very concerted effort to emphasize consistency for you. It certainly paid off with your second NTT INDYCAR SERIES championship. Is that the same approach you're heading into now in 2023?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I mean, that's always the goal. Always the goal. It wasn't just last year I was trying to be consistent. It played out that way very well with that sort of approach. I tried that the year before and had one of those bad seasons.

Every season has its flow. Sometimes you have to do

more than just be consistent. Sometimes you have to win some races to get out there. We'll take that as it comes.

I know the game so well, I know it so well. I understand the level that I need to be at. I know how it rolls. I'm going to use all that knowledge and wisdom that I have had from so many years in the series to see if we can get another championship, another Indy 500.

THE MODERATOR: It all begins in just a couple days in St. Pete. We'll go ahead and open it up for questions.

**Q. Points are points in November or March, just as they are in September. It seems like all the drivers that get off to a fast start early seem to be in a very good position at the end of the year for a championship. Why is that?**

WILL POWER: That is a good question. I'm going to say it probably has to do with the fact that you build (indiscernible) when the pressure is not so much on. Let's just say it probably takes some desperation out, which it shouldn't because, you're right, they all pay the same points this year. It's all the same, so it shouldn't matter.

But, yep, just for whatever reason, you start off well, it allows you to have a lull and then still be in the game at the end. If you start off well, you get that points buffer, you have a couple bad ones, it allows you to come back.

If you cut the season into thirds, that's what it's always felt like, the first third, the middle third, the last third, you have two-thirds are going to be good in a row. It's a little bit like that.

It's not always necessarily the same. You can have a slow start and come through and win the championship, as well.

**Q. We know why the Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg is such a great race, anticipated. It's the start of the season. Everybody is excited. From a race driver standpoint, how challenging is it?**

WILL POWER: Oh, yeah, you don't get much rest around that track. It's a very rhythm track, a lot of 90-degree turns. Yeah, for whatever reason it really suits me. I really like it

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

a lot, the way it races. Just the track layout actually. It doesn't race as well as some other tracks. As far as getting speed out of it, I really enjoy it.

**Q. Jay Frye and his staff have made some tweaks to the rules. What are your thoughts? How excited are you to see he always seems to be a little open to hearing what you have to say to making an improvement for the product? Not saying the product needs improved, but little tweaks here and there.**

WILL POWER: Yeah, yeah, no, it's a good thing about INDYCAR, they're always looking to improve what is already probably the best racing product in the world. I mean, the amount of different winners, the unpredictability of each weekend of who might be on pole, who is going to even be in the top 10 honestly is better than anything else around.

Yeah, that will be interesting. The fact that you can carry those reds through to qualifying pretty much makes it that everyone will carry them through to qualifying. I'm not sure it achieves exactly what he wanted it to achieve, which was that everyone would do more laps in practice. I think everyone was going to save that set. If it was a set of blacks, then you probably would use it in practice.

**Q. Heading into the new season, what do you think you learned last year that you can take forward into this season?**

WILL POWER: Yeah, I would say you're always picking up little details here and there. The cars have remained the same, so it just compresses everything even more because the people that were struggling come back closer to the mark or right on the mark or maybe they set a new mark. It just makes it ultra-competitive.

Yeah, I think we probably are working on a few strategy things, a couple strategy things, yeah, especially on the short ovals. Yeah, not a tremendous amount. Very similar mentality. They're always picking stuff up.

In the off-season you work on your weaknesses. Qualifying was a little bit of a weakness last year a few of the rounds. Pretty focused on getting that right, yeah. Little things. Nothing significant, yeah.

**Q. After a successful 2022 season, what changes did you make at Penske for 2023 or is it kind of fine-tuning and polishing that?**

WILL POWER: It is just fine-tuning and polishing. No changes on the crew. Same engineer. All the same guys. It's a pretty well-oiled machine, not just my car, but all three

teams at Penske.

So, yeah, I expect I'll be there battling my teammates for a championship again. Yeah, same people in the mix. Maybe a couple more.

**Q. So successful in qualifying in St. Petersburg. What makes you so good at that track?**

WILL POWER: I don't know. I mean, it's just one of those tracks that really clicked with me. A few of them on the circuit where you are naturally fast, but you still have to work on it. Sometimes you struggle.

I love the flow of that track. I love it. Yeah, really getting close to walls. Just seems to suit my style.

**Q. The double points scenario from Indy, now that it's finally gone, how do you see that impacting how a championship is played out? Different philosophy knowing you don't have those extra points.**

WILL POWER: It certainly allows you to attack a little bit more at Indy. You're not guarded. If you're in the top 10, or let's say you're in the top five, you just sit there in fifth if you don't think you can get to the front and win to collect the double points.

Yeah, I'm glad it's changed. It really was such a hit if you had a bad day there because you had 33 cars, so if you had a DNF, you had more than 30 cars taking points away, double points away from you. Pretty big.

Yeah, right decision. I believe it was the right decision. Good to see it.

**Q. In terms of your teammates for this year, Penske organization, similar to last year, is that a positive for you moving forward?**

WILL POWER: Yes, I think things just flow better. Everyone knows their place. You got experience. Scott is in his third year now, so it's just good information. You learn a lot from your teammates, so that matters. The engineers, as well.

Yeah, it's good to have that kind of continuity. I know from my perspective on my car, to have the same group as last year, it's really great.

**Q. Obviously Penske-Chevrolet combo won nine of the 17 races last year. I think the most dominant win was Palou at Laguna Seca. Does that ring alarm bells in Penske to think Ganassi have crawled back up, we need to redouble our efforts in the off-season?**



WILL POWER: I always say we put a ton of effort into the Indy 500 again. I'm not sure there's all that much to be found on road and street courses.

Yeah, Palou was another planet last race. He's going to be right in the game again this year. Yeah, it's interesting, just interesting, that last race with the deg and all that. Definitely some variants I felt between the tire.

I scuffed two sets and I really struggled in the middle stints, then I put a non-scuff set at the end and I was right on pace with Josef at least.

Yeah, maybe there's something in that. I don't know. But, yeah, you expect Ganassi's guys to all be up there, all of them.

**Q. The little testing that you've actually gotten done at Thermal and Sebring, have you got an idea of how the Chevy-Honda balance measures up compared with last year?**

WILL POWER: Yeah, looking at the sectors, it looked like Honda may have been turned down, just looking at the sectors. We were like it seemed as though they turned theirs down for practice for whatever reason. Maybe it's to save the engine. Don't know. Don't know.

Really it's the road and street courses, then there's Indy. Really there's everywhere and then Indy. How good are we at Indy? The lower boost level. Yeah, that will be the question.

I think on the road and street courses there's not much to be found. It was pretty even last year. I expect it will be reasonably even, hopefully even, this year.

Hopefully we've got the upper hand. I mean, we've had the engine so long, no one's going to make a massive jump, no one. You'd be questioning the jump if they did.

**Q. The jump last year was drivability options.**

WILL POWER: Last year was a big gain for us. It was power, it was just the way the drivability is, the delivery is so much better.

**Q. You're coming off of the off-season, first race of the season. Another very hot day in St. Petersburg. How do you prepare for that after the off-season, jumping into a really hot race?**

WILL POWER: Is it? I didn't even look at the weather. Now you got me worried (laughter). You get all this winter

training up here. Heat training is basically you just got to be in the heat. I didn't even think about that.

You're saying it's going to be a hot day?

**Q. Looks like it will be 84 at race time. I know a lot of drivers at the end of that race are exhausted.**

WILL POWER: Yes, yes, yes. 84, huh? Wow, I didn't expect that. It's going to be hot, yeah. Hope that cool shirt works.

Honestly, yeah, you get a lot of heat training. Unless you heat a room up, yeah, haven't done a lot of much heat training.

**Q. I guess it will be time to hydrate and wish you good luck. I know St. Petersburg has become one of these places that people look at the champion since three of the last five years the champion at St. Petersburg went on to win the season championship.**

WILL POWER: Yeah, yeah. No question.

**Q. Do you know from the testing who the contenders will be for the championship or is that something you will learn at St. Pete or during the rest of the season?**

WILL POWER: Yeah, I think you'll learn over the first five races who is really right in the game. It's so hard to predict. So many fast drivers and fast teams, good teams. Who knows?

You know the Penske cars will be good, Ganassi will be good, the Andretti guys. You have Kirkwood in there now, which I think he'll be very strong. Yeah, a bunch of guys. McLaren guys. Like it's crazy. It's very, very fiercely competitive.

**Q. How do you work to gain because everyone knows the cars almost inside-out? Is it difficult to find some new ways to improve?**

WILL POWER: It is very difficult to find any advantage. I think the key is to be able to, with what you get to work with, which is what everyone has to work with, springs, bars, roll centers and stuff, is getting the right philosophy and package for that weekend, and condition. That's really the difference these days, is you're able to dial it in in sort of the two practice sessions you get before qualifying, be in the right window. That's a big part of the battle.

But, yeah, it's always very close. You have to absolutely get everything right to just be in the top 10 honestly these days. Top 10 is good.



**Q. Do you feel different from the first time in 2015 when you had to defend the title? Does it feel different to you?**

WILL POWER: You know what, I haven't thought about it. Like, I haven't been going in going, Oh, I'm the defending champion. It hasn't even been in my mind. It's just been focus on the season ahead.

I think it's different from that perspective. When I won it in '14, it was such a celebration, I was on a high, really happy I guess in the off-season.

I've just been very even-keeled after I won a championship. Maybe because I'm older, move on to the next thing.

**Q. You're always going to have top-tier cars at Team Penske. When you had a season like you had in '21 when things went poorly, then you follow it up last year with a championship, is there something you've learned about yourself in the worst seasons compared to the best seasons? Do you realize the things you have to do to eliminate certain areas or does it come down to fortune and luck?**

WILL POWER: No, you have a lot more experience at this point in my career. Yes, it is a combination of everything I've learnt over the years. Being in that particular team, which obviously has been given amazing equipment to get it done.

I can't tell you the difference in mentality between me now and let's say even a decade ago. I'm just so, so much more rounded in many ways, even just in life in general.

As you would know, as you get older, just experience helps you deal with any sort of ordeal or anything you have going on, which motorsports is full of ordeals all the time. It's full of challenges and obstacles. We just get very good at managing that and managing the emotions around it.

I just think it all comes with experience.

**Q. Given that you're on the other side of 40 now, all the things that have happened at home over the winter, do you start to think about life after racing? How many years do you think you still have racing at a championship level?**

WILL POWER: Yeah, I think I can be very competitive for another five years. Yeah, I mean, it's interesting, it's a matter of keeping the desire. I think that's what gives you that ultimate speed. I think if you lose desire, you're not going to put in the effort and the energy that's required to

be able to be fast enough in these cars.

As long as the desire's there and the speed's there, I'll try to keep racing. Yeah, no question I've thought about what do I do after. It's tough. Like what do you do? You spend your whole life getting to this point. You haven't built a business or company or something that requires attention all the time. You build a talent and then it just stops, yeah.

That's why I'm never going to put a solid date on it because then you're racing to that date. Mentally, I think it's bad for you.

**Q. Are you running the 1 or the 12 this year?**

WILL POWER: Running the 12 I believe. Actually I haven't even asked (laughter). They asked me in the off-season. I said it's not really my choice, but I would love to keep the 12. Yeah, I like the number 12.

**Q. I noticed Scott McLaughlin and Agustin Canapino traded some ideas. Did you spend any time at Thermal with any drivers that were new or coming up, share thoughts with people in the paddock?**

WILL POWER: Any other drivers? Yeah, I was real busy at Thermal. I didn't speak to too many drivers. I had lunch with a couple. We just chatted about the racing. Yeah, not really anything of significance, I would say.

**Q. Was Thermal useful to you in any way? Anything you might have learned?**

WILL POWER: Yeah, I think more for us was just to get back in the rhythm of a race weekend, the changes the mechanics have to do, myself working with the engineer. I really enjoyed the track. It was really technical. I think it was physical, too, which gave you some car fitness.

Yeah, I really love the place. I loved it. I thought it was a great test, where it was, the mountains in the background. Just everything about it I really enjoyed.

THE MODERATOR: Will, you're going to want to look for car number 12 when you get there in St. Pete.

WILL POWER: Good stuff (smiling).

**Q. Obviously the testing of the hybrid was frustrating in terms of the minimal amount of laps. Is the technical challenge of dealing with a new formula in 2024 one of the things that spikes your interest and will excite you for however much longer you choose your career to be?**



WILL POWER: Yeah, it does interest me a lot. The weight distribution change, obviously the car becomes a lot heavier. Then you have this other power unit you have to learn to work with.

Yes, it will be interesting.

**Q. Considering the hybrid unit wasn't in its ideal placement, were you surprised, given the few laps you got in, that you managed to get down to a second and a half away from the cars that are completely tuned for this season?**

WILL POWER: Yeah, actually we'd taken the motor off the back at that point because it didn't work to try to get the capacitors working. Yeah, I mean, it was still 65 pounds overweight.

Yeah, I don't know. I didn't look at the lap time. To be honest, I don't think it really gives any indication the way this thing is going to stack up.

I think what we need to do is make it as simple as possible for the first year, then started adding in things that are a little bit more technical.

**Q. Do you have hopes the 2.4 can be introduced further down the road once the hybrid piece is up and running?**

WILL POWER: Yeah, I do. I hope so. I got to drive the 2.4 actually. It had a lot of power. Pretty good. It's almost what it needed for the torque and everything down low.

Yeah, honestly I think it needs a whole combination of new car, new engine, new everything if they're going to do that. Get the weight distribution right. It means you can sweep the front wheels back a little bit because you get the wheel base you need.

I hope if they do a new car, they speak to a very experienced driver and engineer together on what is required. Especially for someone like me, I'd been through Champ Car, many different weight combinations. I have a really good knowledge of what the tire size of this car needs, weight distribution-wise, power versus weight, all that.

Yeah, we'll see going forward. I mean, I get it. If everyone has the same, why spend the money? I understand that. The racing is good. Why would we go and have to have the teams spend a ton more money?

But I'm a driver, so I'd love a new car. All the good stuff with a new car.

**Q. This year you will have the opportunity to repeat the championship. You have the opportunity to make history. Only two drivers in the history of INDYCAR can say they did that. Is it something that motivates you to face this season?**

WILL POWER: It's only race by race. I am well-aware I can go back to back, which would be fantastic. But the mentality approach is just race by race, extracting the most out of every single lap basically when you get down to the nitty-gritty.

Yeah, I didn't realize only two people had ever gone back to back. Obviously Dario is one. Who is the other?

**Q. Sam Hornish Jr.**

WILL POWER: Went back to back on championships?

THE MODERATOR: That was with Panther.

WILL POWER: There's only two people. That's crazy. That's impressive to show how competitive our series is.

**Q. Talking about the championship, there is plenty of challengers. Who do you think will be the most dangerous opponent?**

WILL POWER: Apart from my two teammates, I want to say Palou is probably going to be the other toughest guy I think. Who knows if Herta gets some real good consistency. It's very difficult to say, yeah. I mean, Dixon is always there. I feel like Palou is a faster version of Dixon because he's extremely fast and consistent. I think obviously they're both extremely good drivers. The field is full of very good drivers.

**Q. How has the rise in Formula 1 popularity after Drive to Survive affected the interest of INDYCAR racing?**

WILL POWER: I think it's been good for open-wheel racing to have motorsports suddenly. I feel like Formula 1 is probably one of the biggest sports in the world now. I think it's been good for us. More people are aware of open-wheel racing. Obviously our cars are very, very much like a Formula 1 car. Our series is slowly growing. I think it will grow more this year than it has in the past few years with everything that INDYCAR is doing.

Yeah, I think it's been good for motorsport overall, Drive to Survive. Obviously massive for Formula 1, massive. It has done so much for that series. It's amazing. I think without Drive to Survive, it would have been interesting to see what happened there. Man, massive.

**Q. Would you like to have a race outside of the United States if that opportunity arose? A long time since CART went outside the United States.**

WILL POWER: Yes, I believe so. I think if you had a race in Mexico with Pato O'Ward, it would be huge. Argentina would be huge with the new driver, always forget his name.

THE MODERATOR: Augustin Canapino.

WILL POWER: Yeah. Japan with Sato would be huge. Also Europe. Sweden with the Swedish drivers. I think it's getting big, too. I think there's a great opportunity for INDYCAR to race overseas. I think it would do very well.

**Q. The hybrid switch, how relevant is that switch for the manufacturers? Could there be an opening for a new supplier to come in and provide engines?**

WILL POWER: Yeah, I think it's a good opportunity for that to happen because it's new for everyone. Starting at the same spot as everyone else, not trying to come in after years of development. Although the combustion engine part of it, Chevy and Honda have had a lot of time on.

Yeah, it's hard to get manufacturers these days because Formula 1, they're all wanting to get into Formula 1 right now. That's the big focus of all the manufacturers.

I think INDYCAR will grow very well if everything is done right in the next decade.

THE MODERATOR: 27 full-time entries this year in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES, the most since 2011.

**Q. Mentality and mindset, you've been candid the off-season speaking about anxiety issues that you've had in your career. Have you had any reaction to that in your documentary after your championship? How are you doing right now heading into this weekend?**

WILL POWER: Yeah, good question.

The feedback I read in comment sections and all that, a lot of people identify with the anxiety thing. It seems to be very big in our society these days, yeah.

Me personally, these days, honestly going through all that in '16, '17, it made me very mentally strong. Through meditation and stuff, just working out mechanisms to deal with it, which I'm sure a lot of people go through. At some point you have no choice but to because there's no escape to it, nowhere you can go, because it's just there all the time.

It's made me, yeah, going through that tough time, very mentally strong I feel like, able to deal with situations better than I would have before that.

THE MODERATOR: The last forecast I saw was sunny and 80 with a low of 64 the night before.

WILL POWER: 80? Better than a hundred.

THE MODERATOR: That will wrap things up.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports