

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Sunday, March 5, 2023

Marcus Ericsson

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Now we'll bring up the champion of this year's Firestone Grand Prix presented by RP Funding, driving the No. 8 Huski Chocolate Honda for Chip Ganassi Racing, picking up his fourth career win in the NTT INDYCAR Series, first of course since the win last May at the Indianapolis 500 presented by Gainbridge, and the second all-time win here at St. Pete for Chip Ganassi Racing. The last one was some guy by the name of Dario Franchitti back in 2011. So long overdue for Chip and company. Let four laps, comes home with the win. Congratulations, Marcus. Johnny-on-the-spot, you were in a position to pounce when you needed to and had to.

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, I think we had a really good weekend from the get-go. I think the whole Chip Ganassi Racing organization has done a tremendous job in the off-season to improve our street and road course package, where we thought we were lacking a bit last year. We went to Thermal, tired some stuff there, and we were fastest. And then going here, we were pretty confident we were going to be better than last year. And I think we showed that all weekend we were fast.

Qualified fourth, one of my best qualifying of my career in INDYCAR, so that was a big area we've been focusing because we know on race day we can be really strong.

I think today was one of those races where a lot of things happened. It seems every time there's a red flag, we win a race. Yeah, in the end, I did a bad restart, got out in the marbles, lost a couple seconds on Pato and had to hunt him down. But I knew our race pace was extremely good, so I could close that gap and put pressure on him. He had an issue, whatever happened there, but we were putting the pressure on, and then things can happen.

I think we showed all weekend that we were fast, and it's obviously a perfect way to start the season for us.

THE MODERATOR: All the concentration, you win the Indy 500 last May, so many things come with it. Even in the off-season you're doing so many things, you're in New York a couple days ago. How anxious were you to get

back on track and look ahead to another season just to see where things would stand? Obviously not only maybe win another 500 in May but make a push towards a championship in 2023.

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, I was very excited to come here because yes, it's been an amazing off-season. I got to experience so many cool things and celebrations with the Borg-Warner trophy. And winning the 500 is a win that keeps on giving.

People were worried, kept telling me you need to focus and you need to not get carried away. For me, all those celebrations, all those things I got to experience just gave me more energy, gave me even more hunger to win more and win again in the speedway and also to win the championship. We were in the hunt until the final race last year. We dropped off the last couple of rounds, and I was really disappointed with that.

I put in a lot of work this off-season together with the team to try and understand and analyze and improve, and I think that for me was -- I was really excited to come here and show that and show all the hard work we've put in can make a difference, and I think we showed that today.

Q. Marcus, I was going to ask about Detroit, Nashville, Indy 500, here, all red flags. Is it because of the red uniform? Is there anything to this? What's going on?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, it's my thing, apparently.

No, but it seems when a lot of things are happening -- people are making mistakes and things are happening in the races, we seem to be able to stay cool, both me and the car, and the guys on the strategy and pit stops and everything. And we seem to be able to get everything together in those situations.

All those races are very high intensity races. It's not sort of straightforward races. There's a lot of things happening. You need to be ready to adjust your strategy, pit stops, restarts. There's a lot of things going on, and we seem to be very good at that. That's definitely one of our strengths.

Not saying we cannot win without the red flag, but it's

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definitely been working for us.

Q. No one is questioning you as a deserving winner here. You won Indy on your merits clearly, but here, Nashville, Detroit -- Detroit especially was sort of similar to here where it seems like when someone has trouble, you inherit it. Would you like to have more wins where it's like, hey, I'm just going to the front, I'm staying there, win the race?

MARCUS ERICSSON: It seems whatever I do, people are thinking maybe I don't deserve it or stuff like that. I don't know, I won a lot of races, four races now in INDYCAR, and been at the top of the championship the last couple years, so I'm just going to keep to that.

Obviously today I didn't want Pato to have a problem, but from what I heard the problem was because we were putting pressure on and they did a mistake or he did a mistake. And that's when these things can happen. I felt bad for Pato, but we were there to pick up on it. If I wasn't putting pressure on him and hunt him down, he would have been fine and we would have been second. But we were there right on his gearbox, and we got past.

Q. A lot of guys were angry at each other today, Colton is mad at Will and Grosjean is unhappy with McLaughlin, Dixon and Felix had a thing --

MARCUS ERICSSON: I'm happy with everyone, so I'm good. (Laughter.)

Q. As wild as the race was, what was the closest encounter that you had?

MARCUS ERICSSON: I had a couple of restarts when we were going sort of wheel to wheel. I think Scott got by me on one restart when he was on alternates and I was on primaries, and he got by me into 4, and then me and Will was banging wheels. I think that was when Colton ended up in the wall and I wasn't a part of that, so we were banging for a few corners.

To be honest, that last restart, I got a bit caught out with Pato going early and I slid a bit wide in 13, 14. I didn't think much of it, but I think I picked up some marbles because the next half lap it was like driving on ice, and I lost I don't know how many seconds on Pato and he got that big gap and Scott was all over me. That was probably the two most tricky situations for me in the race.

Apart from that, it was pretty straightforward.

Q. Up and down pit lane a couple of drivers and crew chiefs were saying they really weren't surprised the

race was that wild, that there had been some changes to Turn 3. Did you notice anything? Because Scott thought a lot of it might have been that there was a head wind back over in Turn 3 that caused the cars to get a little squirrely over there.

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, it was definitely worse on Friday when the track was green, as well. I think there is a little bit more of a bump there in the middle of 3 compared to before, so it's a bit more tricky there. But I think when the track is gripped up, it's become less of an issue. But, yeah, it's a little bit tricky. And also the braking down to 4 I think is a bit more slippery now with the new surface there, and I think that's why we saw some incidents into 4 because it's just quite hard to get the car stopped offline there, I felt like. And that's why I didn't try so many overtake moves into 4 because of that knowledge I sort of gathered in warmup, because I tried a few times to brake on the inside there, and it was very low grip.

Q. You said you feel bad for Pato. Pato actually asked Scott when Scott said he felt bad for him. Do you actually feel bad for Pato?

MARCUS ERICSSON: No, I think we deserved to win. We did a great weekend. We were there when they had an issue, did a mistake or whatever that was to happen. Like I said, if he had that two-second gap that he got after the restart, he could have had that issue and he would have won anyway because he only lost half a second or something. But we were right on his gearbox and that's why we could get by. That's racing. Things happen. That's why you need to be there until the end.

Yeah, I feel a bit bad for him, but I still think we deserved that win.

Q. Do you think you could have got him without the issue? You had a little bit of a Push-to-Pass advantage. Or were we looking at a McLaughlin-Grosjean thing down in Turn 4?

MARCUS ERICSSON: No, I was going to have a go at it. I think I knew over a stint we were probably a bit stronger than McLaren. He looked a bit struggling through the rears and I was catching him, and then I wanted to put pressure on him to try and see if he did a small mistake so I could get an opportunity to go for an overtake. Of course, second is a good start to the season but a win is perfect. I was going to put the pressure on and try and go for it. I had built up an advantage on the Push-to-Pass, as well, so I was definitely going to have a go.

Yeah, this situation obviously helped.

Q. Would Turn 4 have been where you would have taken a shot --

MARCUS ERICSSON: No.

Q. Or maybe Turn 1?

MARCUS ERICSSON: 1 or 10 for me.

Q. You mentioned the work you had put in in the off-season. What did you need to fix with Brad, your engineer, to make it to where you were able to start the year off like this, especially the way last year's championship ended?

MARCUS ERICSSON: We needed to qualify better. One-lap pace has been one of our weaknesses the last few years. I think on race day, we've been super strong on every type of track on race day, but many times our qualifying average is a bit too low for -- or high for us to really be able to win races. So that's something we focused a lot on the off-season.

On the car setup side, so Brad has worked really hard there and really done some good improvements because we worked together now for a few years, and he really understands what I need in a car to get everything out of my driving.

He's helped me and the whole Ganassi engineering crew has helped me to get me a car that I'm more comfortable with over one lap, as well. And like I said, I think I showed that in Thermal being fastest and, again, qualifying fourth yesterday. We have made some improvements there, which is very positive.

And then me personally, as well, I've been working hard on sort of how to focus mentally for a qualifying session and sort of deliver better my ax performance.

We've all put in the work, and it showed off this weekend.

Q. After the 2021 season, Brad told me you put in a lot of work on improvement on the ovals. How difficult is it to work on trying to improve your qualifying here and things like that, while not losing any of the gains you had made after the previous off-season?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, it's part of the game. You need to analyze and sort of figure out your weaknesses and try and improve them, but obviously still work on your strengths, as well. That's the hard thing with INDYCAR is that you need to be strong on all types of tracks to win a championship.

I think we're going to be good on all types of tracks. That's the goal, of course. Yeah, it's been a promising start for us, and we need to keep working hard because we cannot just relax and say everything is fixed. This was one weekend. We need to make sure we continue this trend for the rest of the year, as well.

Q. Marcus, I can hear in your voice that you feel like you need to defend your wins and defend your record.

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah.

Q. When will that go away? You've won four races, won the Indy 500? When did you tell them, hey, just look at it?

MARCUS ERICSSON: You tell me.

Q. Who are you defending it to? Who are the naysayers anymore?

MARCUS ERICSSON: I don't know. I don't know. I'm here to win. I want to win a championship. I want to win another 500. That's our goals, and what other people say doesn't really matter. But I think we've proven last year and the year before that we can be up front and run, fighting for a championship. We just need to keep doing that, and what people say, I don't really mind too much.

Yeah, it will be an interesting year.

Q. I think I heard you talk about this after qualifying yesterday, but can you give us the full story of the fan club with the beans? Who are these guys and where are they from?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, I know one or two of them. They are not from my hometown, but they're from around there, and the rest I think is their friends, and they were here already last year making a lot of noise. They seemed to come on even stronger this year. Now they have some more to celebrate for us, so I think they're going to have a good night, I'm sure. I was surprised to see them here this morning because they were pretty on it yesterday afternoon.

Q. Are they going to be at any more races?

MARCUS ERICSSON: I don't know. I'm not sure. Maybe the 500. We should bring them.

Q. I feel like you should know who are about these guys if they're flying all around the world to watch you race.

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, for sure. Like I said, I know two of them, know who they are. Yeah, maybe I need to invite them to the 500 now so I can have my own fan club there.

Q. Are those guys the "Beanie Boys," or do they have a name?

MARCUS ERICSSON: I don't know what their official name is. Maybe you have to name them that.

Q. I think for a lot of today's race, a lot of people expected a former Formula 1 driver was going to win the race, and it ended up being true, but it was you that won it. In a lot of ways, do you feel that you won this race by staying so cool and letting everybody else around you just fry out?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, for sure. We were definitely not in a winning position to start with. There was a few cars ahead of us. I think we did a good strategy and the car felt good, but we needed a bit of help.

You know, we were staying cool when other people did mistakes, and that's what got us to Victory Lane in combination with a good strategy, a good race car and good driving.

I think it's always like that in INDYCAR, it's a combination of things. But yeah, street courses they seem to be a bit more -- accidents happen than other places and today was one of those days, and we were there to pick up the pieces.

Q. What went through your mind when you saw Grosjean and McLaughlin in the tire barriers? Secondly, what went through your mind when you saw Pato have his problem at the end?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, when McLaughlin and Grosjean was there, it definitely helped my situation. I knew a podium was in the cards then.

But you you're so focused, and I was just focusing on the next restart and all that, so I didn't really think much about it.

With Pato, I was hunting him down and putting pressure on, and I think it was clear we were faster than him there towards the end, so I wanted to put pressure on him, and then I thought he missed a gear shift or something like that, so I saw him stalling a little bit but then get going again, so I had to be quick and make my move, and yeah, that was good.

Then I was just focusing on bringing the car home because I knew I had a pace advantage on him.

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