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News Conference

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Takuma Sato

Rinus VeeKay

David Malukas

Santino Ferrucci

Press Conference



kind of direction after the open test, but today is another day, and we did some components on and off, and it was very productive in the end.

THE MODERATOR: David Malukas, a lot of media members were talking about how it's David on an oval, a lot of flashbacks to Worldwide Technology Raceway. You were quick here a year ago, as well. Tell us about your day today. Did you get all the boxes checked off today?

THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up this Wednesday at Indianapolis Motor Speedway, obviously a full day here as we look ahead to next week's Indianapolis 500. We're joined by Takuma Sato, quickest today in the No. 11 CGR Chip Ganassi Racing Honda. Also joined by David Malukas who was 16th quick but fast all day long; 226.141 was his top speed in the No. 18 HMD Trucking Honda for Dale Coyne Racing HMD. Santino Ferrucci was third quick. He'll join us here momentarily, as will Rinus VeeKay, who was the top driver, top car when it came to no-tow speed.

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, it also feels pretty good that me and Takuma are back up here. It feels good. For us it was a good day. We took it slow, and in the beginning we definitely started the setup off a little bit too spicy, as I was kind of saying. It was definitely very much on the oversteer side. He probably would have loved it; he likes it like that, always on edge.

Takuma, something about this place you hop in day one and you go fastest.

But I was like, yeah, we need to bring it back a little bit, especially for the first day, and that's exactly what we did. We came back, did a set down, and then in the afternoon it was all about trying to race in traffic.

TAKUMA SATO: To be honest, we had an open test, so it wasn't really a true first day. But yeah, I think obviously yesterday was a little bit shame it rained off, but today it's a beautiful day and then shook down the car in the morning and everything working the progress.

We ended up getting to a point where we were very quick to getting I'd say about five car lengths back but just that last little bit we were struggling where drivers like McLaughlin and Pato, I was just watching them and they were going inside and -- they could do whatever they want. They're going to be some drivers to watch, like very quick when it comes to racing.

Obviously the speed here is not really presenting on the actual race speed, but it's good to be on the fast side, and certainly for all the Chip Ganassi cars we were very competitive all day long.

But yeah, and at the end there we were kind of struggling with making the tires last, so that's going to be something we focus on tomorrow and then all eyes forward for qualifying.

THE MODERATOR: The Ganassi cars, they all looked pretty strong right out of the box.

Q. David, I'm curious, two-part question. To come out and have a decent day and get everything shaken out, how much does that help after how last week went for the entire organization? And two, what is it about you and ovals, that little Dave can get up there and race with the big guys?

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, I think it's showing that Dixie and Alex was straight out of the box this morning clocking at 228, 229. That was quite impressive, but I wasn't up to speed by that time.

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, going off the first question, it feels good. After the way the last weekend ended, it kind of just -- as a weekend as the whole, if you don't look at the

But in the morning it was just finding the way which direction we really needs to be. Now of course we knew

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race, we've been struggling on road courses, and that's very clear. That's going to be our main objective after the 500 is trying to find some sort of setup.

I feel like we have something for the street courses and ovals, of course, but yeah, road courses we're really struggling, and after the incident after the race, me and Sting Ray talked and there was no hard feelings after that, and the team moved on. Next day we were already still back to how things were.

Now full focus for here, and it feels really good. I don't know what it is with ovals. I love them, and I feel like I connect very well, and of course it very highly depends on the Dale Coyne car. I feel like it gives me a lot of confidence and can show my true 110 percent of my potential that I can give to the car.

I just love it. To me it just feels like a giant game of chess. You can play on the offensive, on the defensive, you can react to drivers' mistakes, et cetera. I just love it.

Q. (No microphone.)

DAVID MALUKAS: That's actually a really good question because before I'd say INDYCAR, I mean, I'd say in Indy Lights. It was in Indy Lights when I realized I really started to enjoy ovals, but that was going to be my last year in Indy Lights.

Before that I actually really did not like ovals and really struggled with them and I just thought, this is just not for me. But it was Gateway 2021 in Indy Lights. Right after that weekend I kind of started to get an itch for ovals, and every oval I've done after that I've absolutely loved it and had a blast no matter where we finished.

Q. Takuma, obviously a lot of differences with the aero stuff that they're allowing you guys to use this year, and there was some discussion this morning, like Dixon was trying to compare what it's like to race here now versus when he won here in 2008. You're a veteran at this place, won here a couple of times. How different is it or how much of an adaptation has it been to figure out how to make these parts and pieces work versus what you've run here in the past?

TAKUMA SATO: I think it's difficult to say, but obviously condition plays a big part of it. If you don't have enough ability, then you have to according to the condition.

But today we are allowed to have so many options which you can suit more downforce, less downforce. Obviously the importance is aero efficiency and the total downforce is just a number.

It's good to have a couple different options allowing us to have different philosophies. That's made this sport attractive. For me, working on the details and making the most efficient car with the team's resource, that's entirely impressive. That's why I think on day one the car is working straight away.

Q. Is it totally different than when you won here in 2020 and 2017?

TAKUMA SATO: No, it's not totally different. I think 2020 to today is very similar in a way.

Now, of course, 2020 we didn't have a bar sport available, so I think on top of that the total downforce you're talking about a few hundred pounds in difference.

But today I think everybody has the luxury to add on to the downforce, so you can close more racing each other, but it's difficult to get away once it hits the front.

2017 was an entirely different, the story. The manufacturer -- how can I say, the aero packages available, so aero efficiency was pretty high, and we had more downforce than today.

It's going to be a game of which kind of downforce are you going to choose.

Q. For David, kind of following up on that, obviously it's only your second time running the Indy 500, so is it maybe an advantage a little bit that you come into and it's completely new, whereas veterans that have been here for 20 years or whatever might have preconceived notions you can kind of come in and just I'll run whatever, I'll do whatever to make the setup work?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, I mean, there's definitely certain ways where of course a veteran that has a lot of experience, they have the advantage. They have all that information. But in some ways, I don't know, you kind of -- from my end I'm just going into it a little bit -- I don't have that much information. I do have one season under my belt, and in some ways I feel like that can help, but I guess it just depends on the way you look at things.

THE MODERATOR: Also joined by Rinus VeeKay, driver of the No. 21 Bitnile.com Chevrolet for Ed Carpenter Racing, the top no-tow speed today at 223.212 miles an hour, pretty important as you look ahead to qualifying this weekend Saturday and Sunday, and also Santino Ferrucci, 228.977 miles an hour in the 14 Sexton Properties Chevrolet for AJ Foyt Racing. Rinus, overall your thoughts on your day today, P1 on the no-tow.

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, it was a good day, good to be out here, and got that first day over with.

It was pretty good, good no-tow speeds. We think there's still a lot more in it, so that's a good sign, but also mostly the focus all afternoon has been race running, just making sure the car is good enough for the race, getting behind the backup cars, and yeah, we found out a lot about bad and good changes.

THE MODERATOR: Santino, you've always been good at the speedway. I'm thinking back a couple years ago, a fourth here in 2020. You liked your car so far today, so far this month?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: It sure looks like that. We didn't really change much today, just a couple small things. We rolled out actually -- we weren't strong on the open test at all, but we didn't really have everything together, and to have all that extra day, especially the rain day yesterday to roll out today and to immediately just be comfortable was really, really nice. I haven't been this comfortable in a couple of years.

Q. David, Dale has had some pretty fast cars here in the past. 2017 I believe is when Sebastien had a real rocket here before he hit the wall. He could have probably won the pole that year. Also Ed Jones finished third to Takuma that year. You have to have a lot of confidence in the type of car that Dale gives you. How much does that really help?

DAVID MALUKAS: It's massive. From last season to this season, the car is still very good. Straight off the bat, like I said, we were a bit on the spicy side so we couldn't really push 100 percent because it was definitely a little bit on edge.

For the next few days, it's just going to be bringing that back a little bit to a point where we can give it 110 percent. It's very good.

The only thing that we seem to be struggling a little bit on is, like I said, with following and trying to make these tires last. But other than that, just when it comes to raw pace, we are very, very quick, and it feels good knowing with Dale and he gives a lot of advice, a lot of information, and also coming from Bourdais, there's a few changes and things that he gave to the team that we might be trying in the next few days.

Q. Takuma, only four previous years has the fastest speed on opening day been faster than yours today. What type of speeds could we be looking at when the

boost gets turned up on Friday and this weekend?

TAKUMA SATO: I think we're all interested in how much we can cross, but honestly speaking, again, it's really depending on the condition. I think aero configuration for the race, yes, you can choose quite a lot of difference from last year, but I think when you go down to the qualifying trim, there's probably very similar to the last year. So if the condition allowed us to go to first, we would see the big numbers, but otherwise probably very similar.

Q. Takuma, from 2017, 2020, and if you should win this year, that would be a rather historic group of years for a three-time winner. What has your success been here? Why have you been so good at this track and in this race?

TAKUMA SATO: I don't know. Just like David said, I enjoy racing in INDYCAR and specifically for this Indianapolis Motor Speedway. It's just a great -- during the race, everything has to be perfect, and you need to even luck, as well.

You just can't predict. But it's obviously been a great team, and great teammates together, it certainly helps and helps for your confidence.

I think I need to get a little bit more comfortability with the boys and the engineers and how the car reacts because the car is a bit different from what I've known. I really need to learn and try to get more details, hopefully tomorrow, and then the Fast Friday for sure.

Q. Takuma, you were in fewer races this year. I wondered how that's impacted your preparation because I guess you've not had the consistency of the previous races like the other drivers have, but you've had more time to prepare for this race because you know this is the big one. Can you talk about that?

TAKUMA SATO: Absolutely. The Indy 500 is very special and for many circumstances. You get a couple good days in practice, which is really nice to bring up the refreshing all the things and get to the rhythm rather than rushing into the competition.

I certainly feel more comfortable after today, and certainly my confidence and comfortability will boost tomorrow even farther and try to catch these guys this season because I don't have obviously the momentum, or getting the rhythm is extremely different from just one deal of things.

Certainly the Indy 500 is helping, and certainly the team is helping big time.

Q. Santino, obviously it's hard to know what everybody else is doing up and down the pit lane and it's probably difficult to know where you should exactly be on the leaderboard, but I guess are you feeling very confident after today's run?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, no, we're in full race trim, nose down, rear wing is pretty stacked on there.

Honestly, we were looking for a tow lap like everybody else. What I didn't expect was to be passing people in that lap, and to be able to follow as closely as we did because we did make a change before we put the set of stickers on because the left rear is a little bit softer this year, so with the track being as green as it is, they're not quite lasting as long as we probably would have liked the first day, but expect that to obviously change.

No, I'm pretty comfortable, and this is definitely a car that I can see not needing too much adjustments for next Sunday.

Q. Takuma, I noticed when David was answering his most recent question, a little bit of a smile came up when you were looking at him. Is there any kind of pride knowing that he's taking everything that you've taught him and is using it now and is actually doing pretty well?

TAKUMA SATO: Well, of course David and I had a fantastic year last year. I wish we kept going in together, but this is racing. This is something the season that you like to see the young guns comes up from Indy Lights and they're doing successful and obviously David is super talented. Everybody already observed last year how quick he is.

Now it looks like he knows about it. He knows about how you talk and experience gained for sure. It's a bright future. But it's nice to see David being -- obviously it sounds like a father, but he's growing up all the time. It's nice to see that.

Q. For all four of you, we know one car is going home. Does that fact add any tension to the briefings or anything else, or is it just business as usual, we're not going to worry about it, we're just going to do what we do?

RINUS VEEKAY: Not for us. I think ECR is not going to be worried.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I don't know, I don't ever give it any thought.

DAVID MALUKAS: I don't think it affects anything, but I think it's cool because now we're finally getting more cars on the grid. I know it's just one but hopefully in the future more.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: If you go back a couple years, maybe 20 years ago, there was like 40 of them. I think that would make people more stressful. I think one is what it is.

Q. Rinus, you led last year's first practice on the no-tow chart, too. Is that something you work on as a team on the first day, and can you really gain anything by working on your qualifying stuff?

RINUS VEEKAY: It's good to get a feel on it. It feels like far away, but in two days we're at Fast Friday.

It's good to get a feel for it, get some data on a lower downforce trim, see what that gives us, and where the balance migrates. It's good to be fast on my own. It's a consistent battle to be faster in a group of cars because things change all the time and one little change can make a lot of difference, but just raw pace, you don't find that with the quick change.

Q. Rinus and Santino, Conor was talking this morning about how you guys have lacked grip, you just don't have the pace so far this season. It's been a tough season, that you needed a good two weeks here. What's this season been like, and how does it feel to have the fastest non-tow speed on day one?

RINUS VEEKAY: It's definitely been my hardest season so far. It's been a struggle, but we keep working, and hopefully we can find back that pace.

This might be the turnaround. I know we have a fast car here. It showed again today. The whole team does. And of course driving we get a bit more data, and hopefully it just lifts up the spirits of the team and hopefully we nail that setup coming to road and street courses later in the season, and yeah, hopefully it gets better. That's the goal.

Q. Did you have this circled as sort of like hey, Indy 500, I've qualified well there, I know we're good there, we're good on ovals? Through the road and street courses where you guys were struggling, were you looking at this as a place could you make your speed?

RINUS VEEKAY: Definitely. One thing is for certain, ECR has fast cars on the speedway. That makes me excited, but also it's just nice to really only have to fine tune the car, not the little details, because we're already right at the top.

It feels really good, but it's Indy; we keep working on the

car, and one day is good, the other might be worse, and it's a roller coaster always. Don't be too relaxed; tomorrow is another day, and only on Saturday and Sunday it counts this week.

Q. Santino, you said you haven't felt this kind of comfort in two years or whatever, and I saw Larry Foyt and some other people out there smiling. What's it meant for the team to just have day like this where things are clicking when they haven't that much this year?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I think a lot of people know that this year at the team there's been a lot of changes, a lot of personal changes, and I'm commenting as the veteran driver. With Michael Cannon coming in, a lot of his focus has been put towards this race and the second half of the season. I think we actually showed quite a bit of speed in the GP, especially for the race, to go from last up to about 13th before we had a small issue.

I think our season is going to turn around hopefully starting with this race. But it's not for lack of trying. We've definitely had some really good pace and results up to certain points that I think people can see if they pay attention.

No, it's just keeping our heads down, and today I think was a huge relief because we didn't really know what we were going to have, and to just roll out and be straight comfortable, I don't know, I don't feel like that's something we're going to lose this month.

I think the team is really proud of themselves. I'm really proud of the team. We'll just keep the Homes for Troops car up there.

Q. Along those lines, AJ said he really didn't want to come this month, but then he decided it would get his mind off of things. A day like today probably makes him pretty happy. I don't know what kind of conversations you've had with him, if any, since he's arrived, but --

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, no, I think it was good to see him in the GP, in the stand, and I think obviously we were having a really good day. He was really happy to see that. I think he's happy to see the program coming along.

I know for a fact in the garage on Sunday and on Monday he was really, really happy to see the car and to see the progress, to see I think something he hasn't seen out of this team in a long time as far as build quality and all of the work that's gone into it and all of the development that's gone towards this car. He's super excited, so I think to

have a day like today to back that up is huge.

It's a huge confidence boost for the whole organization, for the sponsors, for everybody, and to be honest with you, I think to maintain it, it's difficult. It's the most difficult race of the year. It's very stressful, ever changing.

But I think we'll be able to stay somewhere in that really top realm. I think the Ganassi cars are obviously really, really good and competitive, and I think that's what we're going to strive to get to.

Q. Do you feel like you need to do that for AJ?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I feel like yeah, I feel like it's definitely -- I wouldn't say need. I feel like it's kind of deserved to see that. Yeah.

Q. Takuma, where do things stand beyond this race?

TAKUMA SATO: How do you exactly mean?

Q. I mean, should you go out and win this race, it almost kind of forces Chip into making a decision on keeping you around a while longer. But do you have more races that you're definitely guaranteed this year?

TAKUMA SATO: Right. I think my future is wide open, and really there's nothing guaranteed in the world. It's been a privilege to drive for Chip Ganassi Racing for the Indy 500, but just entirely focusing for this race first, and of course I'm representing on the No. 11 car for the rest of the season and hopefully two ovals more, too. But first things come first, the Indy 500 is a team score too, so yeah, that is very clear.

Q. Taku, what's it like working with fellow Indy 500 winners Scott Dixon and Marcus Ericsson?

TAKUMA SATO: Just fantastic. Every teammate I've been really fortunate working together, to be honest, but of course my teammates is either Indy 500 winner or championship winner. It's the quality of the four of us or five of us gathering together is always helping to push the team forward, and certainly Dixon and I of course have been together for a long time in the competition in a different team. Now I can talk to him whatever I want to, and vice versa.

It certainly helps, and to be honest, today is my first run in a Chip Ganassi group run. That was really helping that Marcus was there, and of course Alex was trying to beat us all the time, which is really nice that we can share lots of things, I can trust the teammates all the time. Definitely a great environment.

Q. Santino, Michael Cannon is widely respected in this business. Talk just a little bit about your working relationship and how that's been to date for you.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, you know, I met Michael Cannon in 2018 when I came into the sport and worked with him as a young driver and as a rookie and in my first rookie season in 2019. To be honest, we finished seventh here as Rookie of the Year, then we went on to have three fourth-place finishes and almost a win at Gateway.

He's just someone that I grew really close to, and we had a lot of success for me, who's never really seen any of the tracks before and didn't grow up in the Indy Lights series. So speaking with him this winter and getting him -- before I did anything in my career, I'd always talk to him, moving forward with my path, because he's someone that I've always trusted.

So given that opportunity for the stars to align at AJ Foyt, it was really cool that he wanted to come on board, work together again, and try and get some of that unfinished business out of the way a couple of the races that we felt like we gave away in '19, particularly this being one of them that we knew we had a hell of a car back then, and we were definitely in contention to win, I just had no idea what I was doing as a rookie.

But the dynamic is awesome. Seeing him in the team working with my race engineer Daniele and with Benjamin's race engineer Roberto has been phenomenal, and a lot of his focus is taking the pressure off of those guys and doing different things and working in different areas so they can focus on the day-to-day tasks with the race car.

It's paying off. I think we do show a lot of success in the races regardless where the results say we are, and I think coming here where Mike has put a lot of his efforts into this car, today I think it shows.

THE MODERATOR: That will wrap things up. Thanks so much, guys, Takuma, Rinus, David, Santino.

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