

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Thursday, May 18, 2023

Marcus Ericsson

Conor Daly

Simon Pagenaud

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up Thursday practice here. Joining us now Conor Daly for Ed Carpenter Racing, who next week will make his 10th Indianapolis 500 start.

No shocker, the Ed Carpenter cars are pretty good, Conor.

CONOR DALY: Yeah, thankfully this track we've still managed to retain our speed. It's been nice. It's been fun. The couple days have been interesting.

I still think it will be very interesting come tomorrow when the power goes up because I think we'll see a general trend on fast cars, but what is that going to look like when we got all the juice? We'll see what happens.

But I'm very confident so far, more confident than I would say I was last year at this time, both in traffic and in no tow. So, yeah, not too bad.

THE MODERATOR: When things get turned up, we're pushing about 100 horsepower more tomorrow, Saturday and Sunday.

CONOR DALY: 100?

THE MODERATOR: 90, maybe 100.

CONOR DALY: Geez, I thought it was only 50.

THE MODERATOR: What could it do to the cars balance-wise?

CONOR DALY: Honestly, it depends on I guess who is developing the most grip mechanically. We could see some people, at Texas it was interesting, some people managed to run with more downforce and actually be faster.

It's about efficiency, the less scrub the better. So

sometimes you can trim out here too much and be a victim of kind of being a bit too aggressive.

It's just finding that little window. By lap four, for sure the tires are going off. When you're doing two hundred a ton miles an hour, the first laps feel like I got this, then three and four you're fighting an animal - at least I have been.

I've always struggled a little bit in qualifying here, but I feel better already going forward, so that's nice.

All three of our cars are similar in speed, which is encouraging. Obviously the team brings three good cars here all the time.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Conor, it's been a difficult season for ECR. How confident are you coming back to the Speedway, seeing the rhythm is coming back, the cars are fast around this place?

CONOR DALY: Well, I mean, it just shows like Rinus and I haven't forgotten how to drive, thankfully. There's been a lot of difficulties this year.

When we come here, though, it's been a great two days. It's been fun. It's more fun to be competitive as well. Appreciate the team, the effort they've put in here.

Yeah, I mean, the goal is obviously to take advantage of it. It's hard because you never know what can happen, but we're trying to execute every day, as good as we can.

I love the new look of the car. We want to do the best job we can here for Chevrolet as well, at the Chevrolet Indoor Speedway. We want to be strong for them as well (smiling).

Q. Obviously you had a lot of boxes you wanted to tick in the first three days. How much did you feel you have ticked and how much do you feel still needs to happen?

CONOR DALY: I actually feel pretty good when it comes to race setup. I think we're all still going to try to do a

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bunch of stuff on Monday and get a little bit more dialed in. But realistically there's not a ton of changes overall compared to last year, I would say. We want to try to dial in a few more things.

When we come to Sunday, next weekend, raw speed is going to be really what helps. If we can just get our cars to go faster, it's a little less work to go that fast, then we'll be in a good spot.

THE MODERATOR: Also joined by the reigning Indianapolis 500 champion in Marcus Ericsson. 229.6 overall speed, then towards the end you snuck in a no tow speed of 224.4. Tell us about your day.

MARCUS ERICSSON: A really good day for the whole Chip Ganassi team. Yesterday we worked a lot on the race cars. We were good straightaway. Then today we built on that. I think we did some changes overnight that helped me in my feeling in the car. Felt really happy with my race car.

In the end we just did some stuff for tomorrow, some preparation for tomorrow one run in, managed to be P1 on the no tow as well. Very positive day. Hats off to the Ganassi team. The organization has done a really good job again this year with really good cars.

Q. Conor, is there much changes for setup or in principle can you do the car unchanged when the boost goes up?

CONOR DALY: Honestly today, as Marcus said, we try to do a couple runs in the qual trim. We peel a lot off the car for at least kind of baseline qual trim. It is different from what we're doing race setup-wise.

I would say what we ran today we'll just also start tomorrow with the more power because usually it's not too dissimilar. We'll try to run at least what we did today for our single-car runs for tomorrow and go from there.

Q. How difficult is it to go back to normal boost and race setup? In principle can you start from last year's?

CONOR DALY: It always feels wonderful tomorrow because power is your best friend. That's going to be amazing.

Going back to the race setup, it's actually a great feeling after you've done three days of all qual trim, absolutely wringing your neck for speed, it feels really lovely to go back to the race downforce. You feel like you can do anything, throw the car around.

It's just part of the game here. You have these next three days where you're going to be sweating a lot and it's going to be a very, very challenging situation. We'll see what we can do.

We want to put all three of our cars up front. I think this team next to me are going to be the ones to beat for sure. Hopefully we can show up in the Fast Six, 9 or 12, whatever the numbers are.

Q. Marcus, how do you feel this time compared to how you felt last year with the car? What do you remember about last year?

MARCUS ERICSSON: I think last year we were super good all practice, the whole week as well. I think we are as good this year for sure.

I think the team has done a really good job of trying to improve the package that we already had last year very strong.

I thought yesterday I was struggling a little bit in traffic. Today we made some changes that made me more happy with my race car. I was actually quite pleased mid afternoon when we started to change over to quallie trim. I definitely feel we're in a very, very good spot.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously joined by Simon Pagenaud, third quick today. 2019 Indy 500 champion.

Tell us about your day. Finished off strong.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, two good days. Very studious yesterday. Another one today with, like a lot of people, did some fine details working on the qualifying, then we switched to race running mid afternoon.

Got hot, which is good, because it's going to be a hot race day. You obviously want to know what the car is going to do in those conditions. We had a monster tow at the end and took it. Felt really good. Happy to put a big number up the charts and give a big smile on my crew's face and everybody at Meyer Shank Racing.

Q. Anyone you worked with today that you really felt someone around you that had a strong car, were impressed with what you saw from other people?

CONOR DALY: I mean, I think these guys are strong. The Ganassi cars are strong. I think Josef looked quick, too. Josef seemed pretty strong in traffic. All three of our cars were pretty decent, as well, when I was running around those guys.

I don't know. I think there's like one group, then another group. You definitely feel slightly quicker with that one group. The other group, it looks like they're having a tougher time.

When you're around fast cars, everyone seems fast. It's interesting. But usually the key players are still really quick.

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, I think for us, most people were on quallie sims this morning. It was only us and McLaren that was running race run. They seemed to be strong like last year.

Like Conor says, there's a lot of good cars out there. Carpenter, Penske seems to be better this year. I'm sure it's going to be tough.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah (smiling). Yeah, these guys are strong. I'm sure they're hiding their games. Everybody else is doing it but you guys.

MARCUS ERICSSON: Exactly (smiling).

Like Conor said, some cars, obviously when you're behind Marcus, you feel like he's got a jet behind him. Other cars, you stick with them and you get to have some fun.

Yeah, it's going to be interesting. Obviously I think the fact it's going to be a hot day, it's going to help also the good chassis. I think that could make a bit of a difference.

Q. Marcus, Conor said it seems like everybody said that Ganassi is going to be the class of the field. Do you feel that way?

MARCUS ERICSSON: We feel strong. We feel better than last year, and last year we were pretty good.

CONOR DALY: You guys were pretty good last year. If you're better...

MARCUS ERICSSON: We feel better. We worked hard in the winter already to improve on a strong package. Testing is testing, it's hard to make conclusions. But of course we feel we're going to be fighting up front. From what we've seen so far, we should be up there.

We don't want to underestimate our competition because there's a lot of good teams that work really hard to improve. We can't underestimate that challenge going into this weekend and the next one.

Q. Simon, you were talking yesterday about with all these aero changes, there's minute details that you

like. Is it a good environment for you to be the leader where you can really have a lot of input into what the team is doing, put smiles on their faces like today?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I mean, you're spending two weeks here with everybody, every day. You get to have coffee in the morning. You get to be there with them until the garage closes. You're living infused with everything.

During the day obviously when you're making pace forwards, it just gives a dynamic to the team. I can feel the momentum has been created. Today's is perfect. Just having a chance to put a big lap, it's just a little push to make everybody happy.

Speed's everything. We're racers. Everybody want to be fast. So just doing that tonight. It's my birthday, makes me happy, makes everybody happy.

MARCUS ERICSSON: Happy birthday.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I was like, When was somebody going to say something (laughter)?

CONOR DALY: What are you, 29?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Pretty much 29. Everybody forgets your birthday, 11:59 p.m.

THE MODERATOR: We didn't forget your birthday. We have something right here.

(Presenting a cake.)

THE MODERATOR: It's got brownies and Rice Crispy treats.

SIMON PAGENAUD: That's INDYCAR.

MARCUS ERICSSON: You have to eat it all (smiling).

Q. Conor, you talked about the changes, how that gives you a lot of encouragement. Dixon said yesterday he feels like that could help teams close the gap a little bit. Do you feel that's the case? Are you seeing evidence with all the stuff you can try, you can find a way to decrease their edge?

CONOR DALY: Oh, I don't know. I mean, if you're talking in traffic, it still is a challenge I would say. If you're deep in the pack, it didn't matter what car it was, it was rare to see people making progress unless people were letting people by.

The first two cars, boy, it looked like they were having a

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heck of a race. So I don't know if that's the case. I don't think it brings us closer. I think the entire field is just closer because everyone is really good, and the teams are really good.

When it still comes to the qualifying trim stuff, everyone is going to be peeling off all the stuff we can put on, so it's still who can generate the most mechanical grip and take the most downforce out comfortably.

I don't know. I still think closing the gap to them, it's a challenge, but that's what we're all here to do.

Q. Simon, does getting a big tow on your birthday make you feel better?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yes.

CONOR DALY: Who gave it to you?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think everybody knew it was my birthday.

Q. So they were kinder to you?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah (smiling).

Q. Your big number is with a tow.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yes.

Q. Are you feeling better, because Helio is still where Helio is? How are you feeling about your progress?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I actually feel pretty good. Car is good in traffic. I still need to make some progress, but I feel pretty good.

I think we're decent speed. I think the Fast 12 is not out of the question for us, which is really cool. We still need to do some work, for sure.

Yeah, I think it's better than it was last year. We were in top 10. Who knows what can happen. But I felt really good tonight and this afternoon in the heat. Yeah, pretty satisfied.

Q. Simon and Conor, when the defending winner says, We feel like we're in a better place than we were last year, should we all just go home?

CONOR DALY: No.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Never, because you never know.

CONOR DALY: Has to be a big bag of witchcraft working over there. When we show up tomorrow, it will be serious.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Double jet pack.

CONOR DALY: Triple (laughter).

Of course they're going to be good, it's Ganassi. Not like they forgot how to do things.

It's great to have really good teams like that to race against, right? If you do feel like you make progress towards them, it feels way better. If we're in a duel for the first two rows or first three rows, it means you're going up against the best of the best. Shouldn't be any other way.

Q. Marcus, we've talked a lot about your confidence, how it's been building, how good you feel about where you are. On a day like today when you're fastest in both charts, are you feeling on top of the world?

MARCUS ERICSSON: No, because it's only practice. I feel really good. Like, I feel really confident in the car. It's doing what I want.

Again, we need to keep working hard. Like I said I feel we are stronger than last year, but I feel like everyone else is getting stronger, as well.

Yes, it was a good day, but tomorrow is a new day. High boost, so you never know what happens. We need to be working hard, trying to improve again. That's the name of the game, for sure.

Q. With all the different aero pieces that INDYCAR approved for Texas, some of them being here, do you notice a massive change in handling, not that much?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I feel like we have a good range of downforce level, parts that we can use to make the car behave a certain way.

I think INDYCAR allowed us to have a bigger wrench, and I feel like it's better for racing. But it doesn't stop the fact that when you are fifth in line, like Conor was saying, it's still very difficult. The car ahead of you is still drafting, going same speed as you. Even if you're good there doesn't mean you're going to pass.

It's still going to be first, second trading every single lap, similar. We have a better range to work with, and that's enjoyable.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, everyone.

