

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Marcus Armstrong

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Hi, everyone. Obviously another big week ahead for the NTT INDYCAR SERIES. Sunday it's the Music City Grand Prix on the unpredictable streets of Nashville.

Our guest today has some good momentum. Nine days ago picked up a season- and career-best seventh on the streets of Toronto. Leads the Rookie of the Year standings with a 24-point advantage. He heads to Nashville with a team that has already won in Nashville both previous occasions, Chip Ganassi Racing. None other than Marcus Armstrong.

Thanks for doing this, Marcus.

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Thanks for having here.

THE MODERATOR: Toronto, the team had all four cars in the top 11. What was the vibe of your group coming out of Toronto?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Yeah, Toronto was fairly uneventful on my side really (smiling). I mean, I was slightly disappointed really with my own performance leading up to the race. I knew that we had good pace, so we would make it towards the end during the race despite starting I think 10th.

But, yeah, I thought in the race we had good pace. Again, slightly uneventful. It would have been nice to have a bit more pace, like I saw Scott pass me at one point on a different strategy, going extremely fast. I feel like there's a long way to go before we can really nail it like him.

But in a general sense, I thought there was no real mistakes. Certainly we are building some momentum, like you said, just due to the fact that we haven't really been making mistakes as a group, as the No. 11 team.

Also personally, I don't feel like I've made any errors. It's just been sort of learning and trying to get as many laps under my belt in order to be in a better position towards the end of the season.

THE MODERATOR: To that understand, heading to Nashville next, certainly you have the capability of tapping into the resources there at CGR. Can you keep the momentum up a little bit? Sometimes a race that maybe isn't as exciting for you personally isn't so bad because you rack up another top 10, which you've done a lot certainly this year.

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Yes, Nashville is clearly I used the word 'eventful' before, but this one is certainly that just due to the nature of the circuit. So many variables involved.

Yes, CGR has won the races, which is not many, two at Nashville, which is always nice to know. Certainly we've got to get everything right. I feel like we have a lot to work on, which is in a way quite comforting because I feel like, despite having had top 10s in the previous races, we haven't really done that great of a job, or personally I don't feel like I have.

Nashville provides an opportunity to try to learn from the things I did wrong at Toronto, which was a similar layout. Like I said, the continuity of street course racing is I think quite useful for me.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

Q. The move to CGR, having a coach such as Dario Franchitti, how has that been for you?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Yeah, Dario has been really, really great. I think I've probably been on the phone to him about five times over the course of the last five days, so... He's great in every aspect really.

He certainly points me in the right direction. I often say that he needs to be more harsh with me, like tell me what I'm doing wrong, because clearly I need to improve on stuff. But he seems to be very positive all the time about what we have been doing as a group and what I've been doing and how I'm progressing.

He's very observant. He understands the sport probably better than anyone. Equal with Scott Dixon, let's say. So



for him to be on my stand for the majority of the races this year, and also just to have a very good personal relationship with him is clearly an advantage.

Yeah, we're always trying to find things to improve, whether that be driving or whether that be managing the people around me. I feel like, yeah, it's a huge advantage having him.

Q. This is the fifth street course you would have been on. Different than Europe and F2. Have you found that more challenging for you as a driver?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: The circuits here are obviously bumpy. Not sure how to sugarcoat that (smiling). It provides challenges that you can differentiate yourself to others really.

If I compare to, like, racing at Monaco or Baku or even Macau to a certain extent, they feel like road courses compared to a lot of these street courses just because they're very smooth.

Monaco, it's resurfaced every year. There's not a single bump on the track. The grip is like driving around (indiscernible). The biggest challenge is the fact that the wall is so close.

Here there's the bumps, which creates obviously a big challenge on how to position the car. It obviously gives an advantage to the guys that know the circuits very well because there's so much character on the circuit that it actually takes time to find the sweet spot of where you need to place the car.

I feel like that's probably the biggest challenge, is not necessarily doing a good job with the difficulty of the layout and the bumps and everything. It's more so just understanding it very quickly because I have Scott Dixon who was doing those circuits before I was born. I sort of need to learn quickly so I can start near the front. Normally towards the end of the race we're well and truly on the pace. It's just a matter of getting there quicker.

Q. Your year is going pretty good. Are you feeling fizzed about it?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Yeah, no, it's been awesome. I follow obviously The Crowd Goes Wild in NZ, which is kind of cool. No, I'm fizzing for this weekend, a whole lot of things happening aside from the race as well. Some meet-and-greets with some cool people. I know that the vibe in Nashville is pretty insane. That goes a long way really.

I know often people call it the Vegas of the eastern side of America. I actually went there in 2021 to watch the very first race in Nashville. It was extraordinary. I thought it was such a cool event.

All the things outside of the racing itself is really great, which draws a big crowd. With that I draw inspiration, and I hope I can do a good job in front of them all.

Q. Obviously you have the opportunity for this race coming up. How do you feel about that? Is it kind of cool being there, your first year? I don't know what I'm trying to say.

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Yeah, yeah, no, it's a very cool opportunity.

As a team I think we've been successful on these types of circuits. Obviously my teammates, Alex, Marcus and Scott, I think apart from Scott, I know that Marcus won the first race on the street course. Alex has obviously won a few races, probably on street courses. The package is there, which is very reassuring, to be honest. Gives me a lot of motivation to do a good job really because I know the car is capable of it.

Yeah, I'm ready to go.

Q. With the increased pressure of each step in racing you take comes a lot of responsibility. Are you still having fun?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Yeah, no, it's really great when you have a team around you. There's a great team synergy, let's say, where everyone is helping each other. There's certainly no blame game. I feel like that's one of the reasons why as a group we're so strong, is because everyone is helping each other, but we're also honest with each other.

There's a great group of people. Every personality, I'm learning so much from everyone really. Everyone has been here a long time. They've had a lot of success. Whether it be my engineers, mechanics, teammates, they've all had success. The fact that they're so willing to offer information to me is a massive advantage.

THE MODERATOR: You were talking about Alex Palou. He finished on the podium last year, so a lot of experience there.

Q. Have you ever raced over a bridge before?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: That's a good question (smiling). I don't know. Maybe. I don't know. I'm going to

say no for argument's sake.

Q. Nashville is the only track in America that I can think of where you're racing over a bridge. What do you think of that unique aspect of it? It will be changed in the future. For the time being, what do you think of how unique that is?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: There's a lot of unique things about the Nashville circuit. The bridge itself, I know it's very picturesque, let's say.

It doesn't make a big difference to my life, honestly, racing over a bridge unless there are bumps on the other side of it. Honestly, I don't really look at the outside view of the circuit. I'm more focused on the layout itself. But I know that it looks pretty cool.

I would say the biggest challenge with the Nashville circuit is the titan twisty parts of the circuit which is probably less extravagant from the TV screen, but it certainly is a big challenge from inside the cockpit.

I know these bridges are long. Like the straights are long, which means we'll be entering into reasonably tight corners at very high speeds for a street course. That provides challenges of itself. Also the fact that the racing is so close here, it's fairly chaotic as we go into these braking zones at high speed.

Q. Because all these tracks are all new on especially the street courses, you don't have a chance to test. How valuable is the simulator?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Sim is very important. I've done more hours on a simulator than I could possibly imagine. Doing simulator in Europe when I know the circuits is one thing. Doing it here preparing a new circuit in America is a totally different game because I'm obviously seeing it for the first time.

I prepare a lot more, I would say, from my sim sessions this season than I have in the past just because I sort of need to make the most of that time.

Also the team is very helpful, let's say, by allowing me to go normally last of the four drivers. That means that I get a whole lot of data to look at for what it's my turn to drive.

Q. Even though your careers have gone in different paths, you're going to share a racetrack next weekend with Shane van Gisbergen. How exciting is it what he was able to do for New Zealand in the Chicago NASCAR event?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: I think it's so cool. I know him very well. To see what he did at the Chicago race not long ago was very special.

But honestly, I wasn't surprised because I've seen him, apart from when he was competing with McLaughlin, who dominated Supercars and Porsche Carrera Cup over on our side of the world, I also did some training with him at the beginning of the year in a Porsche Cup car. I know that he's super fast. I think it was really cool to see him succeed so quickly.

I expect him to be quick at Indianapolis. No pressure, Shane (smiling). I think it's so cool. I find it really intriguing as to why New Zealand has so many successful racing drivers really. I think there should be maybe an investigation of some sort of what they do down in New Zealand. If you listed all the top guys, it's pretty remarkable.

The fact that Shane has come over here and started doing well is great, but there's more. There's more great guys coming through. Yeah, it's awesome.

Q. We know how Scott McLaughlin got so excited at the end, how he documented that on his social media. Did you have a chance to watch the end of the Chicago street race? How excited did you get, if so?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Yeah, I was on a plane leaving Mid-Ohio. Everyone on the plane were basically racing people. We were watching it all together on the runway waiting for the takeoff. I think there was a late safety car just as we were taking off. We were all like, Oh, well, he might not win now. Then we landed and found out he did. Yeah, it was cool.

Q. We've seen some really good stints from you this year. What do you need to do better to nail an entire weekend? Has qualifying been a consequence of trying to learn the ultimate tire?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: No, I don't think so. I think learning tires is a particular skill of mine just due to the fact that I spent so many years on a very demanding Pirelli, let's say.

I would say it's more so getting to the pace quicker. Like I said before, learning the circuits. Circuits have a lot of character. When you come back time and time again, like the other guys have, it's quite difficult to arrive straightaway and be as quick as them. I make big steps through the weekend from FP1 to the end of Q2, then the race.

I feel like I just need to be, yeah, on the pace in FP1, then

make smaller steps onwards. For the moment, I'm having to find big chunks from session to session.

I understand that that's part of it, but I feel like we have everything. We have all the ingredients to do a very good job in quallie. We just need to get there quicker and chip away at the small details leading into the final laps of quallie, yeah.

Q. What's next year looking like for you? What's the target for your 2024?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Well, I mean, I haven't exactly kept it a secret, but I'd love to stay here at Chip Ganassi Racing. I think I've been reasonably vocal about trying ovals for the first time. It would be a dream come true to compete at the Indy 500.

At the moment my focus is on just getting good results because my own results is going to help me in the long-term. Yeah, it's not really in my hands on the contractual side, let's say. All I can do is just compete at the maximum of my ability, try and stay present, which is fairly easy seeing as though it's going well. The team, it's a very enjoyable environment.

I feel like it's all training in the right direction. I just have to keep pumping out some good results.

Q. With being in a shared ride this season, is it hard to find a rhythm or keep momentum going?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: I mean, in a way I would love to sort of have the continuity of constantly racing, just chipping away at everything.

It isn't difficult to sort of step in and out. I think throughout a season you always gain momentum and start to get into a rhythm.

Obviously the two disciplines are very different, oval racing and street course racing. Whether or not one complements the other, I'm yet to find out.

In any case, I'm at the races. I'm sitting on the stand. I'm doing everything but driving the car, so... I don't feel like it's messing with my own performance, if that's what you're asking. If anything, it's helping it because I actually get the time to sit back and chitchat with people that I wouldn't normally get the chance to do, talk a bit more personally, let's say, with my teammates and everyone that I work with just due to the fact that I have more time on my hands.

INDYCAR weekends are very compact. You have a lot to do in a short amount of time. So having these weekends

to actually sit back and communicate with everyone I think has been extremely beneficial, just to give myself a good perspective of the situation and why one guy is doing so well and what they all do differently.

I think it's been great either way.

Q. Is there any advantage, Toronto was your last race, where the other guys in the paddock are focusing on Iowa? Do you shut off Toronto and focus on Nashville quickly or do you try to learn when you're at Iowa?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Yeah, I mean, I'm pretty much focused on the next circuit as soon as the race ends. I think in one way it's good. They have to get straightaway back in the car, and I can get into the gym and do my normal prep. From a training standpoint, it's quite good compared to them being constantly on a plane.

Yeah, I guess I've lost my train of thought. Sorry (smiling).

Q. What is the ultimate goal for the end of the season? Do you feel a podium is the next step, a top five? Do you feel a podium is achievable? Rookie of the Year?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: I think it's possible that we will have some very good results the next couple of races. I've said that from the beginning of the season really, straightaway right after the pre-season test, there will be a time this year where I feel like everything's going really well and I can achieve the result that I want.

I feel like we will be able to compete for a podium, as we did at Road America. My target isn't necessarily on, I want to win a race other I want to get podium, but I certainly want to be fast enough to win a race, then certainly be in the leading pack. Get into a good rhythm, sort of arrive at the next race weekend hitting the ground running and be at the pointy end.

Once I get over that hurdle of learning the nuances of this championship, I think that will help me a lot in the future.

THE MODERATOR: You talk about ovals. What is the most intriguing thing to you as you sit on the pit stand and watch your teammates go out?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: I mean, I was listening -- I'm good friends with Jamie Chadwick, who has just sort of gone through the first experience of an oval. We were both sort of chatting about it.

It's a race car. There's pedals and a steering wheel. We still don't know what we don't know on what it requires to be better than someone else, if you actually think about it.

What I find intriguing is just how one guy can get momentum at one part of a race and just create such a pace deficit compared to everyone else. That I'm still trying to figure out how we can manage that.

Also watching the way that Scott drives compared to everyone really in the team, there's so many different ways to achieve the same lap time. There's just so many styles. I feel like that's intriguing.

And, yeah, I think the way that everyone achieves the same lap time in totally different ways, that's quite interesting to me. I just sort of want to experience it and understand what I feel it needs and what I feel I need to do to get the best lap time.

Q. Obviously Chip Ganassi Racing are going into this weekend having had four podiums of the six we've had in Nashville. In terms of your consistency this year, you're leading the Rookie of the Year standings only doing a partial schedule, what do you put that down to? Is that just the team you have around you and the consistency of the results?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: The reason we're leading the rookie championship?

Q. Yeah.

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Well, I haven't looked closely at the rookie championship really. I think that due to the fact that I'm just trying to get really good race results, to be up there with the top guys, that's sort of helped me to just - what's the word - chip away at it and get a lot of points.

I feel like it's obviously a disadvantage not doing the whole season, considering that you everyone get points for finishing last year in America. I don't get any if I don't start the race, unfortunately.

No, I mean, yes, I'm extremely lucky to have three great teammates. I think that's probably underestimated in the paddock just because I can learn from them and just understand what works in this car and what doesn't quicker than other people.

Yeah, it's a big advantage them being very communicative with me and open just to share information about anything. Like when we're in the engineering room, I'll ask point-blank, Scott, what are you doing here? He'll tell me without any hesitancy. That's a big advantage I would say, yeah. I hope they continue to share it with me.

Q. In terms of this weekend, a track you've never

raced at before, in an ideal world what would be your aim for the weekend? What would you be happy with in terms of results?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: That's difficult to say really. Like I said before, I'd like to be there or thereabouts in the first practice, just chip away at the pace because I know we're always going to progress properly through the weekend.

I think for the race itself, staying out of trouble would be a big one, seeing it's fairly chaotic judging from the past couple years. Then being at the pointy end, whether that be a podium or a top five I couldn't tell you if I'm happy because it's all relative. If I'm leading the whole race and I end up finishing fifth because I lose it on the last lap, I'll be pretty angry. But it's all relative (smiling).

Q. You talked about pumping out results. You also pump out content with the podcast. Most drivers go into extracurricular stuff after their career. Do you feel a responsibility to keep doing this podcast? Is that something that is a distraction at all or something you enjoy doing?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Yeah, we do a podcast that is yeah, I mean, pretty much as Kiwi as you could get. Me and my mate from New Zealand, now Clement Novalak, a driver from F2 does it, chitchat. We have one with James Hinchcliffe coming up soon.

Initially we started it because it was quite a fun use of our time when we were sitting in London between races. Obviously I moved to America since. We will continue to do it. It's a lot of fun. That's the point.

It's also cool to - for lack of a better phrase - bro down with other drivers, get to know them a bit better. It's been difficult to nail down a few of the INDYCAR drivers, I'll be honest, for the podcast. That's a work in progress (smiling).

Q. This year in your first eight races you've had as many top eight finishes as you had last year in F2. Being in Europe there's a bit of randomness in your results. Would you agree with that assessment of INDYCAR, the results count for more than it did in F2?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: We also won three races last year in F2, which obviously I haven't won three races this year.

But you're right, I feel like getting a result in INDYCAR, it is directly -- your performance directly correlates to your results in INDYCAR. I think many times in F2 I've had

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

races where I felt like I was the fastest on track, and I'd end up finishing P12 just because of some massive tire deg in the last 10 laps or something like that.

But, yeah, being top 10s I think in INDYCAR is one thing. Being top three is another. There's still a big step to be made to be consistently with Alex and Scott, the other Marcus. There's a step to be made to being inside the top three. I think you can't understate how high the level is right at the very pointy end of INDYCAR.

I'm just going to keep trying to find bits and pieces to get that.

Q. In terms of trying to get some oval experience before you race on one, was Indy next on the radar? Was Gateway a possibility for you? Do you solely want to keep all your oval knowledge with the top crews?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Well, that's not really up to me. But, yeah, Takuma is doing Gateway. It would be great to get some oval experience before next year. That would be ideal, let's say. But like I said, it's out of my control. All I can do is perform well on the race weekends I'm doing. Yeah, let's see.

Q. In qualifying this year you've been very consistent. I think you just missed Fast 12 twice. You never reached the Fast Six. What do you think is lacking for you?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Like I said before, I think it's important to arrive at the weekend quicker for the first prepractice, then we can chip away at the small things to ultimately be in the top six in quallie. I think you need to be already quick in FP1, make small steps all the way through to that session.

At the moment I'm learning the circuit. I'm learning a few bits and pieces, which means I have to find chunks of time through the weekend, which, yeah, puts me on the back foot a little bit. I think if we can arrive a bit quicker in FP1, we have certainly a better chance of being there for Q3, the Fast Six.

Q. How are you feeling about ovals for 2024? Did you ever think about competing in Gateway?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Well, I feel like people want me to do Gateway (smiling).

No, obviously Takuma is doing the ovals this year. Like I said before, I would love to try ovals and start learning about them. It's certainly going to be a learning curve,

whether it be big or small, on how I need to attack ovals.

It would be a great thing to try as soon as possible, but that's not in my control. All I can do is perform well on the tracks I'm doing.

THE MODERATOR: I know you're a foodie, you like coffee. Have you scouted out places to go to?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: I have. I've actually made - not me personally - but we have made bookings at you're favorite restaurants that we have yet to go to. Already last month, it was, I think. I don't want to miss out.

We've got about a crew of 10 to 12 people with us this weekend. Wherever we go there's going to be a lot of Kiwi accents. I know we as a group are big granola lovers, so we're big breakfast people. We're going to scout the best granola bowls in all of Nashville. If you have any suggestions, I'd be very open (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: I do, but I can't help you out on granola because it's all grits in Nashville. You have to have a bowl of cheesy grits.

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: What's that?

THE MODERATOR: What's the best way to describe it? Almost like a rice-ish bowl, you put a little butter and cheese in it. It's nothing like granola.

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: I'll be honest, mate. That doesn't sound like something I'd like (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Hominy, if you're familiar with that, made out of corn. Anyway... I don't want to name restaurants, but what I've food are you looking for?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: I don't eat meat. That's a bit of an issue. I don't know specifically where we're booked, but I know we have. There's a rooftop bar somewhere with a nice restaurant. There's some places on the strip, I believe. We'll be going to more vegan or vegetarian or Mediterranean restaurants.

We're big Lebanese lovers, Greek food, all that. I feel like you should listen to my podcast because we talk about this extensively.

THE MODERATOR: I do. I'm heartbroken that you're going into a great area of barbecue, ribs, pork, you name it, and you're going vegetarian.

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: How can I compensate for the fact I don't eat meat in Nashville?

THE MODERATOR: Whiskey and beer. I don't know. I got nothing on that.

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Geez.

Q. How do you prepare yourself, do you have a routine for getting in the zone before races?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Yep. That's a good question. I am not very superstitious like a lot of other drivers. Actually seems that no one is superstitious in America. In Europe, it's a thing where everyone has a routine they do before the race. If they don't do it, they don't perform well. I'm the opposite to that. I'm fairly laid back.

I will always get in the car from the same side, which I guess isn't really a superstition, but it's just comfortable. I always warm up before I get in the car. It's easy to pull a muscle or something driving these beasts. To warm up properly.

I drink a lot of coffee before I drive because I like coffee, if I didn't already disclose that earlier. Yeah, I'm pretty laid back, man. I just like to warm up properly, be feeling loose. It's always a competition between me and Dixon to see who can get changed at the last minute and still make it in the car for the green light.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, everyone for joining us. He will not be competing with any meat eaters this weekend in Nashville, but he will be competing in the Music City Grand Prix. Thanks for doing this.

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Thanks for having me, mate.

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