

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Sunday, August 13, 2023

Kyle Larson

Rick Hendrick

Gavin Ward

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started here, what is soon to be afternoon at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Great to see everyone.

Certainly exciting news a few months ago, the announcement of the partnership between Hendrick and Arrow McLaren. Today unveiling the cars as we're a step closer to the Hendrick 1100 coming up next May, both here in Indianapolis and in Charlotte.

I'd like to recognize a few folks that are with us here today, Mark Miles, President and CEO of Penske Entertainment Corp. Mark, thanks for being here. As well as some folks, friends here at General Motors as well. Great to have Jim Campbell here, Chevrolet U.S. Vice President Performance and Motorsports, and Dr. Eric Warren, Chevrolet Executive Director Global Motorsports Competition. Thanks, guys, for being here today.

Oh, and we have an Indianapolis 500 champion here as well, 2013 Indianapolis 500 winner Tony Kanaan, who's with Arrow McLaren these days. Tony, thank you for being here as well.

On stage today we welcome Gavin Ward on the far left. He's the Racing Director at Arrow McLaren INDYCAR. In the middle Kyle Larson, driver of the No. 5 HendrickCars.com Chevrolet, and of course next May the No. 17 HendrickCars.com Arrow McLaren Chevrolet. And of course on the far right, Mr. Rick Hendrick, owner of Hendrick Motorsports and Chairman of Hendrick Automotive Group.

Mr. H, we'll begin with you. You're making this look easy, this partnership. I know it's not. It's never easy on something like this. Just talk about how big of an undertaking this has been and your experience thus far as we look ahead to May next year.

RICK HENDRICK: You know, just trying to figure out how it's going to work, but I'll have to give Arrow McLaren the credit because they had a plan and we looked at it. We're starting to execute. Today was one of those days.

Kyle's been in the simulator some, and hopefully we'll be here in October for the rookie deal, and so the sponsor was no problem. We're just real excited to think we can partner with a world class team that has tremendous speed and reputation. I feel very, very fortunate.

Number one, I felt I wanted to own the car, but I had to have a partner to make it work. So Gavin and his team, everybody there, Zak, have been so helpful. We feel like we've been together longer than six months, but it's an exciting time and something all of us have dreamed about.

Of course Kyle put a lot of pressure on me, and I'm used to that with cars, but it's all good. We're real excited. Do it with Chevrolet too. Never raced anything but a Chevrolet, so we can do that. Again, we're real honored to be able to even come participate in this event. So we're excited.

THE MODERATOR: Gavin, we'll turn to you. Maybe you talk about the process a little bit more as we make this dream a reality. Sim runs that Mr. H talked about, seat fitting and so on, where do you stand right now?

GAVIN WARD: We've got the seat fit down. We've done some laps in the sim. We're getting ready, as Mr. H mentioned, do some first real running here in October.

But our goal is just to build up and get as much prep and seat time as we can, just to hit the ground running and be as prepared as possible come May.

THE MODERATOR: Absolutely. Kyle, first of all, congratulations. You got in, what, 4:00 a.m. or so, fresh off of Knoxville.

With each step, this becomes more of a reality. How do you manage the anticipation, the excitement of all this, knowing full well you've got another job here before with the NASCAR Cup Series?

KYLE LARSON: Obviously I'm extremely excited, but at

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the same time, I'm so busy racing and trying to take care of my family that I haven't -- like it hasn't really set in yet that it's truly a reality. When you have days like today and you unveil the car, all those little steps, it definitely makes it seem more real.

But I'm sure once things slow down in the off-season and I have a lot of time to sit around and think about the upcoming season is when it's really going to hit. I'm sure that's when all the nervousness will start to creep in, but as well as the excitement.

I look forward to prepping even more. I definitely, obviously, look forward to October and getting to do the rookie orientation. I am -- I have thought about that a little bit, so I am nervous when I do think about that. But I think once I get in the car, a lot of those nerves will hopefully go away after a few laps, and it will feel like home, just like all the other race cars I drive.

THE MODERATOR: One more before we open it up for questions. Anything surprise you about the process here, about INDYCAR thus far?

KYLE LARSON: Not really. I think just kind of how easy it's all been, as far as like going to fit the seat and all that. I thought it would be a full day process, and it was like an hour. It's like really? We're done? So it's just stuff like that.

I know it's going to get way more in depth as we get more into it. They were obviously so focused on what they had upcoming, getting ready for the Indy 500 with the teams that they were running, and it was nice to get to come here, kind of listen to some radio communication, just to get to see all their hospitality, stuff like that, in May.

Just getting eyes on stuff a year in advance will hopefully make things a little less overwhelming for next year. So I thought that was really important to come to a practice day and also get to come to the race for a little while, just to get reminded of how crazy this place becomes with all the people and the ceremonies and all that.

I think getting eyes on it all was good, and it will hopefully knock some of the edge off next year.

THE MODERATOR: Two more people I want to recognize. Say hi to Doug Bowles, President of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway and of course Greg Walter, the Executive Vice President and GM at Charlotte Motor Speedway. Thanks for coming.

Q. Mr. H, you've always been a stock car guy, but what does the Indianapolis 500 represent to you?

RICK HENDRICK: I think Daytona and the Indy 500, and I got to do the 24 Hours of Le Mans, so I'm kind of getting my bucketful here. I never dreamed I'd go to Daytona in a stock car, so we're coming up on 40 years next year. This is such an unbelievable place, that and Charlotte, doing the 600 and this race. It's going to be unbelievable.

We all talked about it. Kyle wanted to do it. We're just very fortunate that Arrow McLaren were able to put it together for us. So I can't wait to have that car in the museum.

Q. Also, early in your career you had an Indianapolis 500 Rookie of the Year drive for you, Tim Richmond. Did he ever tell you tales and stories about what it was like?

RICK HENDRICK: Tim Richmond told me a lot of tales (laughter).

You know, he just said it was cool. His talent is a lot like Kyle. He can race anything, drive anything. But, no, he never spent much time telling me about this race.

Q. And this is for Gavin and Kyle. The fact the GM Technical Center is in Huntersville, how big of an advantage will that be for Kyle to work on the simulator?

GAVIN WARD: It's already been an advantage. That's a great question. Just walking across the road for Kyle. We're down there all the time working at the GM Performance Center on our program. Yeah, it makes it pretty handy when we've got a day or got some time and can get Kyle over there.

KYLE LARSON: When I'm in town, I work out there in the morning. I spend a lot of time at the Chevy Center, may just be in the gym, but it's nice. You work out and walk downstairs and hop in the simulator.

That facility is state of the art too. It is truly amazing. They did an amazing job with it. And, yeah, it's right next door to HMS as well. It's all right there, everything I need. Yeah, I look forward to spending more time there, just to try to prep as much as possible.

Q. Rick, have you been down the road before in putting together an INDYCAR program, or is this the first time it's really gotten serious?

GAVIN WARD: Jeff and I, Jeff Gordon and I talked about it, but he wasn't really keen. He was so focused on driving the Cup car. But this is the first time that we really got serious with it.

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So Roger and I have talked about it for years. I actually had a sticker on his car a couple years back. But no, this is the first real effort that we said, hey, let's go do it.

Q. Kyle, what is your impressions of being in INDYCAR when you've been in the simulator thing, and where have you done laps?

KYLE LARSON: I did Mid-Ohio, and it was -- I would say like when I first got in it, I thought I would be out of control and go in the grass, all this stuff. I was like, okay, I feel like I'm doing all right, like I felt like I got into a rhythm.

They were just, the engineers and stuff were staying pretty quiet. They would chime in like, hey, you know, everything looks good. Just keep working on your braking zones and stuff. Okay, more brake pressure, whatever, go a little deeper. Yep, that's a little better. And I'm like, well, how much more do I need? They're like, well, you need about a thousand more pounds of brake pressure. I'm like what?

So the max brake pressure there is like 2,800 pounds. That's insane. I've never pushed anything that hard. Like for instance, here into turn one we'd be like 800 pounds of brake pressure max. So trying to get your brain wrapped around slamming the pedal that hard and releasing it quickly but also like maintaining some was just super difficult for me. I couldn't ever figure it out. I felt like I regressed once I got closer to the max brake pressure stuff.

Then, yeah, Felix Rosenqvist, he showed up and was way faster than me, so it was starting to get frustrating. It was just eye opening to see data, right? Like I've always heard about the downforce cars and braking and all that, but I've never seen the telemetry of what they're doing behind the wheel. So that was definitely interesting. To see how consistent they can be while pushing that hard was pretty wild, definitely eye opening.

Like I've said in other interviews, no matter the result from this whole experience, I'm going to come out of it a better race car driver. I already have, I think, just in the short amount of time I spent in the simulator.

It's definitely having the support that I do from the teammates at Arrow McLaren as well as Chevrolet and drivers who have raced INDYCAR stuff before as well as stock cars. I'll have a lot of people to lean on to soak up a lot of knowledge. So very, very thankful for that.

Q. I have two questions again. One for Gavin, one for Mr. Hendrick. Gavin, also, NASCAR and INDYCAR are two totally different cars. Is there anything from the

engineering point of view you can take to your advantage into the INDYCAR business? And the question to Mr. Hendrick, before you started the cooperation with Arrow McLaren, did you ever play with the idea to set up your own INDYCAR team besides your NASCAR operation?

GAVIN WARD: I'll start here. I mean, yeah, obviously very different race cars, but at the end of the day, still run on four tires. Really there's a lot in common with any type of racing, I think. Probably the most in common thing is they're all driven by a talented team of human beings hopefully.

Yeah, we're already kind of exploring how we can work together to raise the bar in both programs, and that's been quite exciting.

RICK HENDRICK: Any time that you spend time in any racing environment, downforce power -- of course we can't do much to our cars. Basically just a little spring shock and tire air, that's about it.

But these cars, just watching them, I think the fact that our teams have been together and we've watched the -- Kyle's watched the Indy race, listened to the radio, and Gavin's going to listen to the radio today and how these guys communicate. So every time we're together, there's something that we see.

We'll probably get more out of what they're doing than they're going to get out of what we're doing, but the big deal is the cooperation. And when people work together, nothing is as good as communication with smart people. Everybody's open minded. We know what we don't know, and we're not trying to get in the middle of what they know.

Like he said, the Tech Center's right there, and Eric's here today and Jim and responsible for building that place. We've got all the tools and all we need. We just need a little time in the car.

We're taking this one step at a time, and it's just fun talking to racers and talking about what makes a difference in what they do and they'll see what we're doing. So the communication is really good. We'll come away from this, all of us will be better off.

Q. Gavin, ahead of this hopeful ROP for Kyle in October, what other simulation plans, tests, whether it be on an oval or a road course, do you guys have in line to get Kyle ready and prepared for that October test?

GAVIN WARD: We're building up that plan. So we'll kind



of communicate that once it's all kind of finalized. Yeah, just in general, trying to maximize everything we can to get up and running as best as possible.

To sort of get back into that last question as well, what Kyle was sort of saying, no matter what the results are out of this, he'll be a better race car driver. I love that because that's kind of how I see it for the team. No matter how we do on this, and we'll put our everything in to make it a success, we'll come out as better race teams. That's the mentality that I love and preach, so it's nice to hear that.

Q. Am I right to assume that you guys would probably have to go to a track like Texas or somewhere like that to run a shorter oval test before coming to IMS, or will he be able to come here on the oval?

GAVIN WARD: Come here straightaway, but I think we definitely wouldn't rule out other oval testing before coming here next year. So that's definitely something we're looking at.

THE MODERATOR: One final question. I got a text from someone in the room. Kyle, can you rate your drivers coach.

KYLE LARSON: Tony (laughter). Honestly I was very happy to hear -- I didn't realize that Tony was sticking around to be a specialty adviser for Arrow McLaren. We have past experience working with each other, being teammates at the Rolex 24 Hour with Chip. Tony and I are the same size. We use the same insert. Well, he's got way bigger muscles than me, but besides that, we've got, I think, a lot in common.

No, I think he's going to be able to help me a lot. He's a past champion of the event, won a number of INDYCAR races. He's just so experienced. I'm going to be leaning on him the most for sure. He's so easy to talk to and work with that he's going to help me and get me steered in the right direction very quickly.

GAVIN WARD: You were surprised how well the seat fit. That's because you basically just fit Tony.

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I said make it like this.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and wrap it up. Congratulations on the unveil today, guys.

Countdown to 287 days to the 180th running of the Indianapolis 500, presented by Gainbridge and the Coke 600 as well and the Hendrick 1100. Thanks, everyone.

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