

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Thursday, September 7, 2023

## Marcus Armstrong

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Just one race remaining in the 2023 NTT INDYCAR SERIES season calendar. It's great to be back at WeatherTech Raceway at Laguna Seca.

Several race teams continue to look ahead to 2024. That includes, once again, Chip Ganassi Racing. Earlier today, the team announcing that Marcus Armstrong is continuing with the team full-time in 2024 as part of a multiyear deal.

Marcus currently leads the NTT INDYCAR SERIES Rookie of the Year standings up 24 points with one race remaining. It comes up Sunday, the Firestone Grand Prix of Monterey. Marcus joins us this morning and/or afternoon depending on where you are.

Marcus, thanks for joining us. Congratulations.

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Thank you very much, Dave. Is it 24 or 26 points that I'm leading?

THE MODERATOR: Did I say 24? I meant 26, yes. You should know.

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: I don't, to be honest.

THE MODERATOR: Well, you're on the verge of clinching perhaps this weekend, which is a great accomplishment I'm sure.

Full-time next year, ovals included. You must enjoy INDYCAR, is that what you're saying?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Yes, definitely so. Somehow it feels like yesterday we were at Thermal doing our preseason testing. It's gone remarkably quickly. In saying that, I feel like I've learned a lot, and I've learned to truly love this series, this championship.

I feel like it's a place where I really see myself staying for a long time. So I'm going to do my best to earn the right to be here, and that starts already from this weekend and onward. So I'm very pleased with the recent announcement.

THE MODERATOR: What did you learn about the sport here in the United States, about the series, that you're ready to build on for next year?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: There's a lot of things that are different to what I was used to in Europe. The technical aspect, I think, can't be understated just how unique these cars, tracks, and tires are. To get the maximum from them, you really need to understand what you want and what you need.

Due to the, I would say, the culture of the team and this championship, the team does listen to the driver a lot, which is something that is not so common overseas. Generally, overseas you will be given a car setup that is in theory maximized to the conditions and track characteristics but won't take into account the driver's personal needs.

Here in America you have a lot of responsibility to give the right feedback because the team at Chip Ganassi Racing listens to me. So I would say getting the maximum out of the car is difficult. I've said it before and I'll say it again, the window of the grip is just so small that you need to be constantly adapting. In that sense, I've learned a lot on the technical side.

THE MODERATOR: Interesting. Good perspective there certainly as you look ahead to 2024. We'll go ahead and open it up for questions.

**Q. Marcus, congratulations on getting the multiyear deal with Chip. I know how much that means, and it means you're a teammate with Scott Dixon for a lot longer now as well.**

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: It certainly does (laughter). Yeah, thank you very much. That's cool. I haven't really spoken to Scott much about it. Well, then again, we were just in the driver room having a laugh about how many announcements he's seen this morning.

But it's cool to be here learning by his side essentially. At this rate, Scott could be racing for the next 35 years, so it's cool to be a part of his journey no matter where, which part



of it may be.

I'm very, very lucky to learn from Scott and my other teammates as well. There's a reason that those other guys are here at Ganassi, and that's because they're phenomenal, they're a great talent and work ethic. So to learn from those guys, I'm very grateful.

**Q. I know your dad's on the way. He's due in tonight. We're catching up with him tonight because we're just down the road in Salinas. I'll see you shortly for the test day. Looking ahead to the September run in Texas, the first oval run for you, high bank oval at Texas, what are you thinking going into something like that, especially at that place? It's a lot different to, say, Indianapolis or a short oval like Gateway. It will be a big day for you being in the car there.**

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: It will. I'm looking forward to it. It's going to be my first time on an oval. So I'll have a couple of people there to help me out my first day. Ultimately, I think I'm going to sort of respect the learning process for the first day. I'm not going to try and break a lap record on my first lap.

But I'm going to sort of go in and keep my eyes open in the sense that I want to learn as much as possible. Like I've said a couple of times, ovals is a completely different game. I mean, I've got all the data in the world to compare to, so I'm going to keep my eyes open, learn as much as possible, and trust my instincts as well.

**Q. I know you said to us in the documentary that, when you arrived at Ganassi's for the very first time, the team manager bought the crew a box of doughnuts that were supposedly from you. So is there a big box of doughnuts coming towards Chip after the signing today?**

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: That's a good point. I've actually completely forgotten about that.

**Q. I'm on my way down to the track. I'll bring some down for you.**

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: If you could, that would be very appreciated.

**Q. Great news, and your dad will be very proud when he arrives into the country tonight as well.**

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Thanks.

**Q. Marcus, congrats on the signing. Being only 23, now you've got a multiyear deal with Ganassi, is it safe**

**to say this is a dream job? Is this something that at your age that you've got ahead of you, is this something that you would classify as a dream job for you?**

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: I would say yes, it's a pretty special place to be really, especially at my age. It gives me the best opportunity, I think, to compete for championships, something that I believe I'll be capable of soon.

I feel like, had you told me two years ago that I'd be here, I probably wouldn't believe you. Yeah, to think about it like that, it's a place exactly like I planned when I was 8 years old.

**Q. And to clarify too, obviously with Linus coming over, do you get to keep the 11 team? I know probably car numbers are irrelevant, but are you going into next season with the team you currently have right now?**

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: I don't know what the situation is on that side. That decision will be left to Chip and Mike and the rest of management.

**Q. Kind of what David just asked with the oval test coming up, I'm going to assume the rookie test at Indy last few years has kind of taken place in October. Are there any testing plans for Indy coming up after Texas? I know Larson, Kyle Larson, was last month at the Speedway talking about some nerves on his side going into an oval test in an INDYCAR. Do you have any nerves, trepidation, or anything going into Texas and maybe Indy ahead after that?**

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: I don't know at the moment. Yeah, I can't say anything at the moment.

**Q. Fair. Any nerves going into Texas? I know you talked about the first time being on an oval. Is there any kind of nerves going there in a couple weeks?**

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Yeah, certainly it's going to be something like I've never experienced before. So whenever you go into a testing situation or anything for that matter that you don't know what to expect on, it always brings some nerves, I think.

It's like jumping onto your first street circuit. It's always a little bit daunting at the beginning, but it doesn't take long for you to acclimatize to that and to trust your instincts.

With ovals, like I said earlier, it's something that my skills will obviously have to improve as I become more experienced on ovals. I'm excited for that challenge because it's something that really fascinates me.

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**Q. Obviously you've got a rookie title to claim this weekend, but now that you know your future is solidified, is the pressure off, you feel, coming into this weekend now? You don't have to prove anything. You've got a good place with the team, good spot in your life that you know you're going to be here. Is there less pressure you feel coming into this weekend's finale?**

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: I wouldn't say that. I don't have external pressure from anyone. I didn't feel that at any point in the season really. So I would say the most important thing for me is to get the results that I want, irrelevant of the rookie championship or anything like that.

We were on target for a great result last week, and I feel like I'm just going to focus on what's going to bring me results this week.

I am in a very special situation where I have a great team around me, I have a great car, and I have the opportunity to win races, simple as that. So I'm going to go out there with that mindset and try to take advantage of this extra test day to give myself the best chance of performing tomorrow and on Sunday.

**Q. Marcus, back in February when we were talking about your planned W in INDYCAR, you compared it to wrestling an alligator. Since then, has that assessment changed? Does it feel slightly less like that right now?**

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: That's a great metaphor.

**Q. I know, I loved it.**

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: It depends on the circuit really. Because I would say Toronto felt like I was wrestling an alligator for however many laps the race was. Also Nashville was up there. But these normal circuits, it's very normal road circuits, it is slightly more normal to me. It's more downforce orientated as opposed to mechanical grip orientated, and you have to drive in a way that is similar to what I'm used to in Europe.

It is a very intense car. To get the most out of, it is very difficult. But in saying that, when you do feel like you're wrestling an alligator, you're generally not going very fast. So it's when you try to make everything seem slow but it's not, that's when the lap times come.

Every weekend it becomes more and more natural to me, and especially when we come to circuits like this, it certainly reminds me a lot more of what I did in F2 in

Europe.

**Q. And going into next year with your future sorted out, do you feel that you have to go for a championship already next year, or do you first get that first race win out of the way? What kind of goals do you set for yourself?**

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: There's no external pressure to do that. I know that we are capable of it. I know that's their expectation because I am in a fantastic team who have won the championship 15 times now. Essentially my goal at the moment is just to get to the level that Alex is at.

I think Alex is performing at a level that I haven't seen before. He is extremely consistent. He has a tremendous feeling with the car. And my immediate goal is to try and learn in a way how to do that, but in my own style, and the results will soon follow.

**Q. Marcus, congratulations on today's announcement. Looking ahead to this weekend, what are you expecting the track conditions to be like? Obviously with the uniqueness of Laguna Seca with the corkscrew, how excited are you to challenge that?**

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Very excited. I like the fact that it's been repaved, so it's like Road America in a way. Obviously Road America was repaved, and the grip was extremely high. I think it will be similar here. They're very physical circuits that I expect our car to be strong.

So it's top that we have an extra test day that I can get my eye in and not be taken by surprise by anything tomorrow through practice one.

**Q. Excellent. In terms of next year, obviously other than the Indy 500, which oval are you looking forward to most?**

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: I haven't seen a schedule yet, but having watched the races this year, Iowa looks like a lot of fun. It looked like chaos at one point but a lot of fun. You said apart from Indy 500, but the Indy 500 is extremely special. That will be circled 50,000 times on my calendar.

I don't know, I think every single race I'm looking forward to, especially on the oval side because it will be a completely new thing for me.

THE MODERATOR: Marcus, the Indy 500 for you, after seeing it firsthand, does your opinion or thought of it, the grand nature of the race, changed in your opinion?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: I think you don't quite get it until

you've raced it, which is the significance of preparing for something for so long and then arriving and having so much effort put into one single race. You can't really know how it feels until you've raced it.

But I have been in the engineering office for the entire month watching how they prepare for it, and from what I understand, it just requires so much attention to detail and confidence from a driver's side. That's what really stuck with me this year.

Like I said, you need to drive it to really understand the significance, I think.

THE MODERATOR: And have the services of Dario Franchitti at your side too. That will certainly help with your growth in that particular oval, if not all of them.

**Q. Marcus, congrats on the contract extension. Since we are actually at the end of our time here, I thought I'd leave you on a lighter question. If you were stuck on a desert island with nothing but a case of champagne, are you going to be accompanied by Bear Grylls or Penelope Cruz?**

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Oh, man, have you been watching Screaming Reels?

**Q. I actually don't know what that is, but I might have to check it out. Congrats on what you're doing on the track as well. We're excited to have you in Indy for another few years.**

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: That's so funny. I'll have to know how that joke ends, but that's so funny.

THE MODERATOR: We're going to wrap it up here. Marcus, congratulations on the multiyear deal, full-time in 2024. More importantly, good luck this weekend.

Marcus Armstrong from Chip Ganassi Racing joining us. Remind you, if you're not here with us in person, the season finale comes up Sunday, the Firestone Grand Prix of Monterey. Coverage begins at 2:30 eastern live on NBC, Universo for Spanish language audience, and INDYCAR Network. Thanks, everyone, have a great rest of your day.

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