

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Saturday, September 9, 2023

Felix Rosenqvist

Scott McLaughlin

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up qualifying for tomorrow's Firestone Grand Prix of Monterey, Laguna Seca. On pole position, Felix Rosenqvist. Second pole of the season. First since Texas Motor Speedway a few races ago. Fifth career pole. Going for his second career win tomorrow here at Laguna Seca.

How quick was that? Looked quick.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Oh, man, this track is something else. I think it's been the topic of the weekend, just the grip out there, the anti-grip off the line. It's hard to put one together. Haven't really had a single lap, to be honest, until in qualifying. Practice was just kind of a mess, as you saw. A bit of a question mark. I felt like we were still kind of testing in qualifying. Yeah, just kept getting better and better for every run.

Huge thanks to NTT DATA, Arrow McLaren, Team Chevy. It was awesome to see Team Chevy front row. Also great way to end my time with Arrow McLaren and NTT DATA. We have had a few years together. Just love going into this last one in the best possible position.

THE MODERATOR: It is special to end your tenure there with Arrow McLaren with a situation like this, pole position?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, I think it just, I mean, in a way it's ironic. It's just kind of proving the pace we have, we keep having. Things haven't been straightforward. We haven't been good enough this year. I made a lot of mistakes. The team made a lot of mistakes. We had some unfortunate things happening.

I think the number one thing as a driver you want to keep showing is your pace. Obviously Portland was a very good weekend for us. To kick off this weekend like this is just perfect.

As I say, it's the last weekend with the team, so a bit emotional obviously. I love all these guys and girls in

Arrow McLaren, NTT DATA. Even with other teams, I've been working with them.

Yeah, it's definitely a perfect way to end things.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. How special was it to share it with Billy Vincent because he's leaving the team, too? What do you expect from him now that he's going into the driver development business?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, for sure, he's been a guy in my ear for three years now. We're good friends outside of the track. As you said, we both are leaving the team. I feel like it's really cool for us to kind of have some good flow here the last couple of weekends.

I feel like we're very relaxed. I don't know if we're relaxed because of that. I think also my future is kind of set straight for the next coming years. I feel that's also relaxed me a fair bit.

Yeah, that's what you need as a driver: go out there, have fun, relax, enjoy. It's definitely paying off.

THE MODERATOR: Scott McLaughlin also joining us. Another front row start. Eighth front row start of the season. Almost getting NTT P1 award there in the final lap.

It wasn't towards the end of the lap where you maybe had ebbs where you lost a 10th or so...

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah. I absolutely (indiscernible) it's up going into 10. Just drove off into the dirt. Not the ideal thing to do.

They're not taking anything away. We were on the limit. We were just saying in the trailer, it's so hard to put it together, as you can see by all the red flags and stuff this weekend.

The limit is so small, but you have to be on it. I said to Cindric, Tim Cindric, yesterday, This is why you come INDYCAR racing. This is why everybody is talking about it.



It's why it's so cool. You're so close to the limit. There's nothing left in the car. The downforce, you're right on the maximum of everything.

To do a lap around here at that pace is super cool. So, yeah, props to Felix. I felt like we let one get away. He might be nice enough to let me go tomorrow. We'll see.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Felix and Scott.

Q. We finish the season with eight different drivers having two poles each. What do you feel that says about how close and competitive, somewhat wide open qualifying can be in this series?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I think it's just there's so many things. Obviously I've been in the series for a while now. I feel like when I came into it, you could kind of do a 97% lap if you knew you had the car underneath you and execute. It would normally be enough. Now you have to throw everything at it, not only drive-wise and executing the lap, you need the tire temps to be right, out-laps to be right. You have to have a good set of tires with you in the Fast Six. You need someone not to put sand on the track in front of you. There's so many factors.

I struggled to get into Q2. Then I was pretty comfortable into Q3. Then pole. Every time you're out there fighting it out, it's like you have to throw everything at it.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, I think it just shows the talent that we've got up and down the depth of the teams. Everyone's getting so good right now. There's mechanics and engineers that are going from different teams. Everyone is sort of half understanding what everyone's doing. Up and down the lane it's so tight. You just can't miss.

Yeah, for me the most stressful part of my weekend is Q1, getting through that, because you know you have the potential if you get through that. Somewhat easier once you get through that session. Q1 is the hardest session by a mile, just getting through that. Then it's more cadence after that. You have clearer track, whatnot.

Getting through that is hard. It's the parity we have, the drivers we have, the tracks we get to race on. A lot of fun.

Q. Felix, drivers move around end of season. Seems like Arrow McLaren has made a point to want to wish you well. You mentioned the freeness of coming into this weekend. Your future is settled. What is the mental mindset of how different this weekend maybe feels in and out of the cockpit compared to weekends past?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Well, I think, like most of us, we don't like to admit that we're struggling or being under pressure. Obviously I've been in the situation for quite a long time where I don't really know what my future's going to hold. I always kind of played it off like, It's fine, I got it under control.

I think somewhere a couple months ago, I started having some bad results. We had a lot of DNF's and stuff. Kind of things out of my control. You get to a point where you have to settle something for next year. It's obviously stressful. I think that actually got to me a bit.

Having signed a contract multi-year, I couldn't really believe how free I would feel after that, so... It's kind of a good reminder for the future when you feel stressed out, you kind of have to take care of those things firsthand, make sure you're nice and relaxed at the track.

In a way, like always, it's always so close. I feel like I could be sitting here being pissed from not transferring in Q1. We got the pole. Honestly, the difference is a couple hundredths. I'm not saying that we're just smashing it every time we're out there. We still have to work so hard for it.

I think those things matter, as well. With Billy and I, like, leaving, we are just having fun, relaxed. We're confident. Also with the setup changes and stuff, I feel like we started believing on our own stuff a little bit more end of the year. Nice to see it pay off.

Q. Zak told a group of us this morning after the 6 reopened up a little bit a month ago, he still felt like it was the best thing for you guys to move on. Did you have any second thoughts, ability to come back if you wanted, or were you set at that point?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I mean, I don't really want to go into details of what we were discussing. I think it was pretty clear at some point that it wasn't like a clear call. I had a feeling they were going to move on with someone else. I had to guard myself against that.

We've seen so many drivers, even like Bourdais, Hunter-Reay, good drivers all of a sudden they won't have a seat. It can happen with champions, 500 winners.

I'm really excited to move on with Shank. I think it's an exciting chapter for me kind of coming in as a team leader, building a team around me, something I haven't done in a long time.

As much as I love this team, I think with Shank we can do

a lot of great things together. They have obviously resources, good partners, amazing team around them. I'm super pumped to get going with this.

Q. Earlier today after the INDY NXT race, Christian Rasmussen said overtaking is not very easy. How is the traffic situation when trying to overtake?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: It's just tremendously loose offline. It's just train tracks out there right now. Yeah, watched the INDY NXT race with a lot of interest, just seeing how they raced, especially at the start. I said to myself, I really don't want to be on the outside into one. Now I'm starting on the outside going into turn one (smiling).

It is what's. You just got to figure it out. But, yeah, there's no grip out there. I feel like the pavement is worn in where we have been running. Everywhere else where we haven't been running, it's a bit polished like when Felix was running here.

I'm sure it will wear in as the race goes on. That transition traditionally doesn't bode for much passing. It is the last race of the year. The championship is sewn up. I'm sure there's going to be some Kamikazes out there. So, yeah, it will be a lot of fun - kind of (smiling).

Q. Following the resurfacing, which corners would you say have most changed in nature?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I don't know. I think the braking distances... I think they haven't really changed that much. It's more the speed you carry through the corners now.

Probably like turn 10, the right-hander. The slower-speed stuff is so-so. It's like turn three, turn four, you're nearly flat there now, which makes it very knife edgey.

But, yeah, like I said, the brake distances haven't changed too much. It's just the amount of speed you can carry through the mid- to high-speed stuff.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: The banked corners like five, ten, nine, it's so much more load going through there. I'm surprised at turn six, which is kind of like the ballsy corner in Laguna, it hasn't changed much. I don't know. Even the corkscrew, at least on the entry, is kind of slippery. Everything else is another level.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Nine is nearly flat.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah. You have to lift because otherwise you kind of understeer off. I think if you set up the car for that corner, it will be pretty easy flat.

Q. A lot of drivers talk about the perfect lap, how it sometimes can be unattainable. Felix, for that lap for pole, was that your perfect lap or was there something missing?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: It was certainly my best lap of the weekend. I kind of have had a scrappy weekend, not many clean laps. My strategy was kind of to just look at my sectors over the weekend and see where I was at. I felt pretty good about it.

I said, I'm going to save my big moments till Fast Six. I got into the Fast Six, then I threw everything at it.

I think Scott probably had more potential, but I didn't feel like I had a lot more in it. There's different strategies and mileage on the red tires. I think what we had, I'm super happy with the lap. It was one of my best ones, for sure.

Q. Scott, you mentioned it was the beginning of the lap where you felt like you lost the most time. What was it at the beginning?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I dropped wheels in the dirt, nearly all four in the dirt, at turn 10. Basically held it flat. It stuck. Yeah, after that it was just an ultimate send everywhere.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: It would have been pretty cool if you got on pole.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: When I did a five, they said that might be it. Then they said, P2. So thank you (smiling).

Q. (Question about holding onto the steering in the race.)

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I mean, I'm not going to lie, it's not easy out there. Turn nine, yeah, makes you work hard, for sure. I think there's been a lot of crying about less caster in the paddock.

I was a bit worried yesterday. Now I feel a bit better about it. It's always the same, you kind of get into the rhythm in the weekend. Once you're in the race stint, you'll be fine.

But it's pretty brutal. I'm glad this is the last race, not the first race of the season, because that would have been very hard.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I was one of the drivers that asked for caster out, more so from a precision sort of point. Yeah, I think I've spoken a couple Indy Lights guys. They say it's sort of the same for them.

Really doesn't matter the weight of the car or whatnot. It's

just the ultimate grip of this track and the commitment level that you have.

So, yeah, the main thing I'm probably more worried about is your hands, because when you kind of grip onto it, full tanks, new tires, that's when it gets really hard earlier in a stint.

Q. Scott, you're 13 behind Pato for fourth and 22 behind your Bus Bro for third. Are you aware of that? Is that something you're keeping track of? Obviously you want to finish as high up in the standings as possible.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: No, I'm very aware of that. The best thing I can do tomorrow is win. That's my deal, so... I just got to focus on that. If I can beat both of them, win the race maybe, that's going to be the best I can do.

Yep, for me, I'd love to finish. I was fourth last year. I'd love to equal that. Another top five would be fantastic. Third would be a bonus. I think we've shown really good potential towards the end of this year.

Q. Scott, a lot of the drivers yesterday were talking about how heavy the car was getting, how physical it was going to be over the race. Do you feel that's changed today, that you've got into the race weekend, or is it similar to yesterday?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I definitely thought after our test day and stuff we might have to have a bit of a -- you sort of look after the driver a little bit so you have longevity.

Like Felix said, it's the end of the year. I got out after Portland and I was completely fine. I think at this point you have so much match fitness, strength in areas that you can't train in a gym, it's fine.

I have no doubt that we'll be fine tomorrow. Once the adrenaline goes, it's a wonderful thing. But, yeah, I'll be sore and craving a beer tomorrow night.

Q. With the forecast of a few yellows tomorrow, how important is that going to play into race strategy?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, that's huge. I feel like the last four or five events we've been on the wrong tire to start the event. Hopefully we can make the right decision there, things sort of fall our way.

Yeah, yellows, communication is going to be a big thing tomorrow. If there's chances of a yellow, maybe ducking in where you know it's your window, something like that, to try to hope for a lucky one.

It's going to be an interesting race. We always say this. When we have heaps of red flags in practice and whatnot, we'll run green flag, flag to flag. You just never know with drivers really. You just don't know.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations on front row. We'll see you tomorrow.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports