

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Wednesday, January 10, 2024

Helio Castroneves

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joined by Helio Castroneves, driver of the No. 06 Honda for Meyer Shank Racing, who will continue his drive for five at the Indianapolis 500 as we get to the month of May and of course culminating with the 108th running of the Indianapolis 500 presented by Gainbridge coming up May 26 at the famed Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

Did you catch any sleep at all? What time did you get in? 3 a.m., right?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: We made it, yes, 3 a.m. It was interesting waiting, but I guess everything went fine. We got here safe, which is the most important thing.

Q. And you love the weather here, so...

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, I was expecting a little cooler.

Q. Looking ahead to obviously 2024, very busy with you adjusting to sort of a new role but when May rolls around you'll be concentrating on driving the Indianapolis 500. How has that dynamic been so far?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: First of all, happy new year to everyone. It's great to be back. As you mentioned, the new role will be very interesting, a learning curve with MSR. We are working already intensively, our group. As you guys know, the MSR, a lot of the people from sports car end up being on my side on the INDYCAR side for the third car.

Tom and Felix, they're already set, which is what Simon and I were able to build up from '22 and '23, and yeah, great to learn this new aspect of going from inside and understanding what we need to be doing to become faster and faster.

The last two 500s basically was interesting. I felt that we worked well as a team but unfortunately weren't able to execute with speed. We didn't find what we are looking for, and I feel that now we are definitely on the right track,

which I'm very happy to say.

The last two years were like, I'm not sure, I'm not sure, but now we are ready to go.

Q. I know it's not a full-time thing, but as you outside of the month of May put on your team owner hat and are looking at things maybe in a little bit different lens than you have the last couple decades when you were just strictly a driver, how has that changed or widened your perspective on where the series is at, the things that are doing well, the areas it has to potentially grow now that you're maybe looking at things a little bit differently?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Well, in that aspect, looking from behind at how the series is going, does it need to be a team owner or driver or spectacle or fan. I believe we know that we have some -- we have a lot of work ahead of us as a group, as a family, as a series.

But I understand that everyone is doing the best that they can. First example is the hybrid that they really -- if it's not right, let's start it right, not trying to start something just because it has to be -- all of a sudden we're going to have trouble.

It shows that everybody is committed, shows that everybody is having intention to improve.

In my view, I'm 100 percent on board in every aspect with the decisions that are made.

Now, are there areas that we have to improve? Yes. But we have to continue and sit down as a group and move forward.

My role now as a team owner, it's learning and understanding the other side. As a driver, you don't see much of it. Sometimes team owners doesn't share that. You just go with what you see at the moment.

As of right now, as I'm seeing, it's a lot of hard work at MSR, to be honest, which is great, but the boys and girls are doing everything they can to first deliver a great package in terms of setup and buildup of the cars.

ASAP . . . when all is said, we're done.®
sports

The rest of it, we're working on it, Mike and myself and Jim, and it will be fun. We can't wait to start 2024.

Q. Do you find yourself thinking about or caring about things like a new TV contract that's being negotiated right now a little bit more than you were when you were in the heat of your driver days?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I remember a long time ago when I think Randy Bernard was the one that closed this deal 10 years ago, and the interesting part of it, there was other contracts in the series that's come up, and that could give us sort of a leverage or sort of a reference.

At the end of the day, RP, I've been to many meetings with him. I know how he can be strong, and I know he's going to do everything he can to have the best for the series together with Mark Miles and all the rest of the team.

Q. In your role now as a partner at the team, have some bills come across your desk that have kind of popped your eyeballs a little bit, going, wow, I have to participate in that, too?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yes, yes. I've seen numbers, and I'm not like RP, I'm more like myself. That's too expensive; shouldn't we just cut down a little bit here?

No, all joking aside, Mike has been very transparent, which is great learning all that area. I'm working obviously in Capitalize (phonetic), new partners, which we've got it, which is great, which will give us not only a light at the end of the tunnel but it's long-term, and that's what we're looking for, and that's what I'm shooting for. It's not for '24, it's not for '25, it's actually for beyond.

We're working intense for sure, but Mike is an incredible person, and really having fun so far.

Q. As one of the more respected voices in the garage, you've seen INDYCAR grow to this point. It had a little bit of a rough month of December with the delay of the hybrid and also some of the comments that were made from Honda about making it more cost effective for teams or they may consider leaving, where do you see INDYCAR right now, and what are some of the things that you see being able to turn that storyline around?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Well, I see that we're taking the right step. As I mentioned before, sometimes manufacturers want to make things happen, but we've got to work as a group. They might threat, they might push it, but at the end of the day, we're all working together. It's the right thing to do instead of having half of the field or the

entire field having issues.

That's not going to be good for the series, not going to be good for the fans and racing.

At the end of the day, it's the right thing to do. We've got to take our time. Because of that, we don't want to ruin the biggest race of the season, which is the Indy 500, so we want to take our time to make sure that it happens. Plus it's not only that, it's the supply issues for a lot of the teams who hardly have the equipment from Dallara and the gearbox. It's been a challenge from that aspect.

It was the right thing to do, the right decision.

The series is taking the right steps, going modernize, make the cars a little bit better, according to what the trending is going. I'm sure in the future we're going to have a new car, but at the end of the day, we've got to take -- we can't just go in and make things happen.

It's always the way the series did, and I fully support it.

Q. Rick Mears played a key role in always being there when you were with Team Penske to be able to learn from and bounce ideas off of and get advice from. Now you're in that role here. Do you draw on a lot of those conversations you had with Rick now that you're talking with some younger drivers?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Big time. Big time. Having Tom and Felix, Felix obviously having more experience than Tom in INDYCAR, certainly will be interesting.

This is a new role for me, as well, because I'm not much of a well-spoken in terms of words, how they need to be doing.

But I feel because I know I worked with Tom as a driver teammate a few years already with MSR, I guess now he understands what am I going to be able to give some advice.

To Felix, I'm going to be knowing Felix during the series, during the season, and it will be fun. I'm up for the challenge, no question.

Q. Helio, about Gil, I'm wondering if you could share some of your memories with him and what made him so special.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, I sort of lost my consultant, my advisor in being a team owner. Yeah, certainly we're going to miss him for sure. But my memories with Gil is from the beginning of our era with

Team Penske was us having our first meeting, which took us about an hour and 45 minutes, which means Gil was an hour and 40, and mine was five minutes.

Certainly his personality was completely different than mine. Even though he's trying to be funny, which he wasn't funny, became funny. He was one of those guys that -- big heart, very, very intense, incredible knowledge, and yeah, we had a lot of good moments, myself, Gil and Cindric. We were called the Three Musketeers. Nothing could stop us.

For sure there was a lot of memories for sure. Yeah, he's the first guy or first person actually that close in my life that is not going to be with me or with us anymore. But yeah, we've just got to keep it going, and I'm sure he is up there right now redesigning the gates of heaven, so trying to make a modernized or electric or whatever it is, and Kika, as well, is probably helping him and telling him what to do and who to talk and make sure he go and talk to the big Lord. I'm sure he's having fun up there.

Q. Two-time defending winner of the Rolex 24 and not getting a chance to make it three straight this year, how do you feel about that?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Disappointed, to be honest. I definitely would have liked to defend the race win and tried to go four in a row.

But I'm glad that I have a lot on my plate, as well, at the same time with MSR, even though MSR is not in the sports car program. We're working hard to come back in the near future.

But yeah, I wish everyone a great race and good luck for sure.

Q. Following up on the question about the sports car thing, was there ever a discussion between you and Mike about possibly maybe racing for another team at the Rolex? Second part of the question is is there any chance that you might have to race any other races in the INDYCAR Series this year?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: First question, when you say racing in another team, me racing in another team?

Q. If the opportunity arose, if some team said to you -- would Mike have allowed you to race --

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Oh, yeah, yeah. In fact, Tom is racing with another team and another manufacturer. So that wasn't the issue at all.

I would be able to race for sure, yes.

The second question, I am allowed to race in the INDYCAR Series; however, that's not the program. We don't want anything to happen to our drivers at the moment. But I'll be ready in case they need it. But as of right now, it's not the plan for us to race the full season or anything like that.

Q. You've seen different hats now as a driver and ownership, as well. What's one rule change you want to see, maybe the drag-in, going inside, the red flag stuff. Is there a rule in mind that you would like to see a change on, and also which ring are you wearing?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: The ring is the last one, 2021, and the rules, when you're talking about just for the Indy 500 in general? The Indy 500 I believe we should have some sort of -- in my opinion, some sort of, if you're five laps to go or three laps to go or one lap to go, we should draw a line. I would say last year was kind of unexpected. Nobody wants to turn out to be okay. But I remember going through the field, and the green flag was thrown, and I was still in Turn 3. It was sort of like rushed.

I feel if we just set up, which gives everyone, not only the drivers, strategists, the fans, understanding if lap X -- I don't know, two laps to go, one lap to go, whatever it is, the race is over because that's the rules. That I would like to be more clarified, that if we're going to come up with something, we should just determine it.

All the rest of it, I believe it's working. The series is working extremely well. We talk about different qualifyings, have three groups now instead of only 12 cars and 12 cars in two groups.

I feel we can have opportunities to have races. That's my opinion again, in different days. It doesn't need to be for the protocol just because of TV. Sometimes Friday night could be an option to engage the fans going to Friday night or a race. Things like that I feel that the series could take some chances.

But in terms of technical parts and package, I do believe, and I know, we'll have one of the best races out there. It's so competitive. It's incredible, the times and the difference. I would not change the rules in that aspect. I believe we should keep it.

Q. You said you've seen some of the back-end numbers and costs that are associated with this now. Do you foresee that changing some of your driving style for the 500 or some of the aggressiveness?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: No, when you go, you go all in.
You don't think about that.

I'll tell you what; as I said, Mike was able to build an incredible team with a group of people, but this is part of it. That's why we're working to have great partnership, not only put the name on the car but also create opportunities for the company, being invested in and being a part of it.

No, I will drive the same way as I drove before.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

