

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Will Power

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Kicking off the afternoon session here day one of NTT INDYCAR Series content days at the JW Marriott in Indianapolis. We are led off by Will Power, driver of the No. 12 Verizon 5G Team Penske Chevrolet; enters his 20th season in the NTT IndyCar Series, two-time series champion. Of course the 2018 winner of the Indianapolis 500 presented by Gainbridge, 41 career wins, and of course the series record 70 NTT P1 Awards, and I'm just glad that the neck injury you posted on social media --

WILL POWER: It's feeling a lot better. It was just a brief injury.

THE MODERATOR: That's good to hear.

WILL POWER: You should not try to squat 300. That's big.

THE MODERATOR: How does 2024 look for you?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I think we've made improvements on the team front. Disappointed with 2023. Very determined to turn up in '24 with simply better performances.

I would say going to '23 was not a very good situation and the preparation wasn't normal, and that kind of continued into the year a bit. Yeah, turning up ready to go.

Q. If you look ahead to 2024, strong out of the gates; consistency, obviously that was a big factor in your second championship, as well.

WILL POWER: Yeah, it does matter. It does. It really does. It puts you in that non-defensive mindset if you get the points early.

But it doesn't necessarily have to play out like that, either. Every season has a different flow. Sometimes consistency matters, and sometimes you really have to win races to win a championship. You kind of get that feel as we take off.

The field is so tough and so strong and so close, yeah, you have to -- it's very hard to dominate. As we saw last year, someone did, like really dominated. That's a tough level right there.

Q. When we talked after Laguna Seca you talked about reflecting on 2023 and how tough it was for you from a personal standpoint with everything going on in the background with Liz and her health. I don't want to pry too much, but have things gone on this off-season that puts you in a better ability to be more focused on racing and not so much worried or anxious or focusing on things off track?

WILL POWER: Yeah, it does, yeah. Liz is doing a lot better. It's actually about a year now since that happened. Yeah, she's actually back, started working out a little bit. Way, way better from where she was.

Yeah, not having that stress, the constant thought in the back of your mind of what's going on there frees up a bit of space. You can get back to the sort of normal routine of preparing for a season and working during the season.

Q. One of the toughest parts of that, was that just the mental load you were having to carry, where racing just couldn't be your sole focus?

WILL POWER: Yeah, exactly, yeah. Those distractions really take away -- you just cannot compete at a high level if you're not 100 percent in on that thing, which is racing. If you're not 100 percent in, you're going to struggle in this field. It's too tough. Depth is too strong.

You need to have everything going for you if you're going to win in this series.

Q. We don't know a debut date yet on the hybrid, but supposed to come at some point after the 500, so it's probably somewhere around the halfway point in the series. As someone who's put a lot of miles in the car testing that for the series and Chevy and Team Penske, how do you imagine that could factor into a championship hunt when you have some different rules and regulations splitting up this championship in 2024?



WILL POWER: It will be very interesting. There's no question that it's going to be a factor in the championship, how the car -- obviously the weight distribution changes, the weight of the car goes up. You have this hybrid system that you have to use as efficiently as possible.

So there will be, yeah -- people will be learning through those races on how to extract the most out of the system, which is a good thing. It'll make for a very interesting championship. Very interesting.

Q. You were among the workhorses of the hybrid testing, so all those laps and all those miles that you did, how would you assess where it started and where it's at right now?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I mean, I've done quite a few test days where you just run all day, two days, and no problems. No problems at all. I think it's a bit of everything, a little bit of supply issue and so on.

To me, they've got to be able to -- I think INDYCAR wants it to be absolutely bulletproof when it's introduced, so I think they made the right decision there.

The testing has been good. The system has worked really well. I think the way it's packaged and everything is really good. It just needs a little bit more time. That's all. It just needs a little bit more time, and I think they want to introduce it with absolutely zero chance of problems, and that's the smart way to do it.

Q. Now, one of the unintended benefits that comes with not having the hybrid is they lighten the car, so now you should be able to go faster because of the lighter car before the hybrid is put on. You always being a driver who loves speed, how important will that be for you?

WILL POWER: Oh, yeah, I love the fact that it's lighter. It will make for a much nicer car. Well, a nicer car. Anytime you're knocking weight out, it's good.

Yeah, I don't think it'll be a big difference. It's not like we're knocking 100 pounds out of it. But it will be -- it won't be slower.

Q. But with the hybrid development, wasn't there concern because of the added weight, even with the extra horsepower, it could be slower?

WILL POWER: It would depend on the track. Obviously track with long straights and all that, you're going to get benefit from the horsepower.

Yeah, I think there's a lot of potential in that hybrid. I reckon it'll be started pretty conservatively, so if the lap times happen to be slower, that's the reason. But eventually they'll be faster because you don't want to -- you want to ease into it. I don't think you just want to go, yeah, this thing will give 150 horsepower, bang, let's go do it.

It's still a hit, like it really -- it jumps out of the corner when you're using the hybrid. And you're only using a third of what it's capable of.

Q. Finally, a lot of people focus on race strategy, and Rick Mears told me the other day, the best race strategy is a fast race car. I guess in many ways is that your best strategy, the fastest car?

WILL POWER: Oh, it makes things so much easier. As you can see, if you're just a little bit outside the window, you just struggle to even get in the top 10. Yeah, when you have that slight advantage, you just have a bit -- you're right in the window, just eases everything off of it.

You're not making those little mistakes trying to make up for time. You're just able to nail all your braking points and apexes and everything comes together nicely.

Q. Question with the hybrid engine. I know you've done a lot of testing, and you make it sound like it's really easy. Do you feel that some of the younger drivers or the rookies are going to have a harder time adjusting to that change, or...

WILL POWER: I think it's an easy -- honestly, it's hardly changed anything. The car pretty much behaves the same, and they've given you the ability just to push a button out of a corner and that's it. I think it's auto-regen, so you're not holding the paddle or anything like that. It's pretty straightforward.

I think it'll be a pretty -- it'll be more about extracting the most out of the system, where you deploy it, all those strategies which kind of makes it a -- it's up to the teams to do the simulations and understand where to do that and where to regen, all that sort of stuff.

So yeah, I think it's pretty straightforward. It's not that complicated. Pretty straightforward.

Q. So it won't take a couple races to get the hang of it?

WILL POWER: I mean, yeah, you're just pressing a button. That's the long and short of it. All the simulations will be saying out of this corner is where you should be

hitting the button, and that's what will happen.

Maybe in the races, slightly different strategies, maybe hitting a different spot to pass or something like that.

But yeah, I think it'll be good.

Q. I'm curious your thoughts, you've been with Penske a while now. Do you feel since you've been there the morale at that team, with Team Penske, is as high as it's ever been? I know you've got two straight Cup Series championships; you won the championship a few years ago; Josef just won the 500. Do you feel that yourself?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I do. It has changed quite a bit since I started there. Obviously the process has changed, the competition changes, and you evolve with it, and Penske is very good at being ahead of the curve on that stuff.

It's a good tight-knit team. And I wouldn't say as far as the number of people that work within the team, it's not like a -- it's run lean but very efficiently, so everyone works very well together.

But yeah, winning two Cup championships back-to-back is very big. The 500 Championship last year, 500 this year in INDYCAR. So, yeah, the team certainly is firing on all cylinders. It's pretty cool to be a part of it.

Q. It's already ridiculously difficult to win an INDYCAR championship; when you introduce a hybrid and it creates that required adaptability mid-season that we're going to get this year, how much more difficult or how much more weight does that put on maybe or how much does this championship stand out, or will the eventual champion stand out compared maybe to other years?

WILL POWER: Yeah, like I said, I think it certainly will be -- it's definitely going to be a factor in the championship. Like what engine does it -- what manufacturer does it complement the most, is it the Chevy or the Honda, because it's going to hit in a certain power range.

Yeah, it's hard to say how that will all play out, because it's not like you're going back to the same tracks. It's sort of -- yeah, it will play a factor in the championship. I don't know how. I think it'll be about adapting because it's difficult to say what the struggles will be until you're in the situation.

Q. Once upon a time, anybody could get maybe one, possibly two bad finishes and be right there at the end for the title hunt. You've got Dixon only had one finish

outside the top 10 last year; Palou didn't have a single finish lower than eighth. Can you make a mistake in this championship?

WILL POWER: When someone doesn't have a lower finishing place than eighth and wins, what, four or five? Five wins, nothing outside the top eight, man, that is -- what was the average finishing position for him? My God, you're just sitting at such a high level there.

That's why I said, like that is -- yeah, people say he wrapped it up with one to go or he was almost done with two to go. He probably could have -- he was on his way to winning the last race. He had taken off the lead in that thing obviously with a lot of mayhem.

But that's a championship to remember in this field. That is a very, very impressive run. Very strong.

I couldn't see anyone beating that -- there's no one sitting back going, if I just finish this race -- like everyone is just going, this dude just absolutely mopped the floor, like he nailed it.

But very strong.

Q. Does that kind of reset how you attack a championship in the sense that you just can't have mistakes when guys are on that kind of level?

WILL POWER: Yeah, it's not having mistakes plus winning races, not just finishing -- you can't just be top 5 every time. You've got to win races. Yeah, that's one tough team and competitor right there. It just resets the bar in this series, which is a very high bar already, which is pretty cool. Pretty cool to see.

Q. You had a very long off-season but also did a lot of the hybrid testing, as well. How important is it to be able to take a step back from driving and testing and all that kind of good stuff and be at home away from everything and just recharge away from the shop, away from personnel, texts, social media and everything and just be a dad and be Will Power?

WILL POWER: That is important, to completely just disconnect from everything because of all the connectivity we have now.

Yeah, that's great for two or three weeks, but then you want to get back to the job at hand and go hard again. That's what it requires anyway, to be competitive.

Q. What is the most valuable advice Roger Penske has given to you that has left you thinking deeply as a

person or racer?

WILL POWER: He often says to me before the race, just finish. He never really says go out there and win. Which is good advice. Just go out there, just be careful on -- yeah, there's many things Roger has told me. But when he talks, you listen.

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