

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Scott McLaughlin

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Continuing on, joining us, Scott McLaughlin, driver of the No. 3 Team Penske Chevrolet beginning his fourth full-time season now in the NTT IndyCar series, finishing a career-best third in the championship last year with a win last at Barber Motorsports Park, along with four podiums from there on.

That's in the past, though, right? Rearview mirror. It's on to 2024 and even bigger goals for you.

SCOTT MCLAUGHLIN: Yeah, for sure. 2024 is exciting. I think I've said a number of times today, I feel like my off-track side is sorted in terms of I've got my Visa now, I've bought a house, got a second dog. Everything is sorted on that side, and I can finally at the start of the season focus on racing in some ways.

I'm excited to hit the ground running hopefully at St. Pete, a place that I love. I feel like we really finished the year strong last year and it is going to be important to start the year strong with the changes throughout the season.

I'm really excited throughout the year and feel really comfortable with where I'm at.

Q. You said a second dog?

SCOTT MCLAUGHLIN: We bought a golden retriever puppy. The dogs are getting along really well, which is fantastic. The dog, Chase is five, and, yeah, he took her under his wing pretty well. Good stuff. Big steps.

Q. (No microphone.)

SCOTT MCLAUGHLIN: That never really bothered me from that point of view. I always feel like I'm pretty loose when it comes to having a bit of fun outside the track. When I put my helmet on and I need to get ready, I know when I'm ready.

Yeah, I felt like we had our best year last year leading the three of us, and I felt really good with my process. It was just a matter of putting together things a little bit earlier on

in the season and winning races when we probably should have.

There was a couple of races we kind of let go as well. But, yeah, I'm super excited for the year. I feel very comfortable with where I'm at with the team. Nothing is going to change on my team as far as I know, which is nice to go into the season ready to go.

Q. (No microphone.)

SCOTT MCLAUGHLIN: Oh, huge. It was awesome to be in Phoenix with Ryan. We're very close. I play a lot of golf, but hang out outside of golf courses and race tracks together. It was awesome being a part of that, and like you said, certainly puts a bit of fire in my belly to get it done and come back here stronger and hopefully do the same for myself this year.

Q. I did want to clarify something that Bruce mentioned. I think we know about Josef and Brian's split and Brian's new venture that I know you're part of with him as one of his drivers. Bus Bros is just not happening this year from what you guys know?

SCOTT MCLAUGHLIN: Yeah, that's their own deal, but I guess Josef is the producer, so we've got no producer now. Bus Bros is not going to happen. He's doing his thing. Brian has his new stuff at still house, which is going to go fantastic.

For me, either way, whether it was going to go ahead or not, it doesn't really affect me from a driving or how I go about my racing.

Bus Bros was fun because it was like -- it was just an opportunity for people to get to know me and Josef and see who we are outside the car. We did some pretty stupid stuff, but it was fun chapter. If this is the end, it's the end. If not, we probably might do something, I'm not sure.

Yeah, definitely not a good start when we don't have a producer anymore.

Q. I know when that was going on, you guys both talked a lot about how, as much as you guys were

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working together on that and were becoming great friends through that creative process, that it wasn't going to change how you guys were going to be on track, still going to fight each other for every inch, just like you always would, teammate or not. Looking back on that process, I know that sounds easy to do when you're engulfed in it and what you're shooting for, was that easy to do when you kind of reflect on last year and working in a lot of different ways with Josef?

SCOTT MCLAUGHLIN: From my end, I have no doubt that I felt we were, I think as colleagues -- it's not even just Josef, Will as well. I think the three of us worked together really well and have -- it's very competitive between the three of us, but I feel like it's cool when we get out of the car and stuff. It's sort of just back to normal.

Honestly, all three of us go our separate ways in some ways, and certainly that's what's happened this off-season, which has been -- it's the first time I've seen Will or Josef all year was here today. It's never really been a factor for me with how I race Josef.

I still want to -- I've always said that I always want to beat him, always want to beat Will more than anyone because that's my job.

Yeah, the Bus Bros ending, Bus Bros starting hasn't changed that at all.

Q. You mentioned after Laguna Seca, you were really happy with being able to say you were the highest-finishing Team Penske driver in the championship. That was a big thing for you coming into that weekend. I know you won a couple of races in 2022. Was it two or three? I can't remember.

SCOTT MCLAUGHLIN: Three, yeah.

Q. Maybe kind of a two-part question. First, did you come into last year feeling like you had a legitimate shot at winning a championship? And regardless of that answer, how much better prepared do you feel like you are to potentially do that this year?

SCOTT MCLAUGHLIN: I think ever since I won my first race, I knew that every year after that, every year I come into the sport now, I'm going to have a legitimate shot, knowing that the tools I have at hand and where I am in my development as an IndyCar driver.

Yeah, I never come out and say I'm going to win the championship. I don't. I know that I've got the tools to. I feel like I'm in the best possible spot I've ever been for a long time, but even probably better than last year.

But it's the same for everyone. Everyone comes in and says the same thing, that they feel better and whatever. It's just a matter of doing your talking on the track. I feel comfortable. I knew what we could do last year. I knew that I could beat Will and Josef in the championship, and especially when I had an opportunity to.

It was a matter of me and Ben coming together and working out exactly what I wanted, and we had a really strong stretch. That was what really made it happen.

I think we can certainly do that -- with the championship side, we can have a really good run and put ourselves in position to hopefully finish off the year in a position that we are in contention for the championship.

Q. You hear through stick and ball sports, even I'm sure in super cars, rising up through the ranks, rising up through the grid is one thing, but to get that next little bit, the top of the game, is one of the most difficult steps. You're pretty much there. Have you seen that in IndyCar? Is it tougher than you thought it was? What are your thoughts to get that next little bit to be a champion in the sport?

SCOTT MCLAUGHLIN: It's like weight loss, right? You lose a heap, and the last little bit you want to lose is the hardest part. I'm going through that at the moment.

The same thing with this sport. The hardest thing here is you just know you're competing with the world's best drivers in some ways. It's so competitive, the margins are so tight, but you're trying to get that last little bit.

Sometimes that last little bit in the sport is a little bit of luck, whether it's like yellows or certain things. You might have the fastest car and certainly places like Nashville and other places, road course that's we've been to throughout the year, we had a really good opportunity to win, but the yellow didn't fall our way, or fuel strategy didn't work our way or whatnot, and you find yourself fifth or sixth in a race that you could easily have been maybe the top step of the podium.

I think that's -- what Alex did last season was incredible. His season was fantastic, and it's a credit to him and his team. We all strive for one of those seasons, and there's no doubt that it can be done because he did it. But it is hard to find that last little bit. Somehow, some way, you find it. You've just got to keep working.

Q. You mentioned about having your Visa now and you feel like your life off track is sort of -- how big personally is that? I know your wife's a citizen, but to



have that all squared away just personally coming into this year. I know sometimes that can be a distraction. How rewarding, I guess, is that for you?

SCOTT MCLAUGHLIN: It's nice because you feel like you're building actually the American dream in some ways. Last year my Visa was sorted, I had a green card and everything was sorted, but I was going through trying to buy a house with Karly and I didn't have a credit score, so the whole credit thing was crazy. So that was like a stress thing.

It's just nice. I love this place. I love the people. I love the places we go, the racing, and I can certainly see myself being here for the rest of my life. Yeah, it's nice to have that, like you said, off-track sorted. Not that it's going to reinvent my wheel, but it's a nice feeling. It's just really cool.

Q. A lot of talk today about former drivers and what their roles are with various teams. I recall your first go at Texas when you got out of the car, Rick Mears came up to you. That was a personal moment. I won't ask about what he said. But talk a little bit about how he has influenced your career both professionally and personally.

SCOTT MCLAUGHLIN: Yeah, huge amount. Rick's basically my eye in the sky in some ways. He's not my spotter, but he certainly watches everything with a keen interest and where I'm positioning the car. He's one of the first people that always comments about my driving when I come back in from an oval.

It has been more so his help has been on ovals to accelerate that phase, and that's been amazing for me, particularly at Indy, but short ovals as well, I just find myself picking up the phone and ringing him, which I've had the privilege to, which is an amazing feeling.

But, yeah, trying to use him the right way has been really enjoyable to do. But also, at the end of the day, I've really leaned on Josef and Will as well. Josef helped me a lot with short ovals last year and Will from a qualifying perspective as well.

Like I said, we've got really good camaraderie, whether it's Rick, whether it's the three of us as well, it's a really cool team, and it's certainly helped me accelerate to the point where I am today.

Q. First of all, Scott, you're comfortable in the U.S., but we're still going to call you a New Zealander.

SCOTT MCLAUGHLIN: Please, I'm still going to call

myself a New Zealander.

Q. Looking at the comment you made before and the fact that the 33s are all back together again, the consistency inside the team for you, having people like Finchy there alongside you doing strategy, is that important rather than having a change around in team members?

SCOTT MCLAUGHLIN: Look, like I said, as far as I'm concerned, it's the same. It hasn't been finalized just yet, but I know for a fact that Ben's going to be my engineer and whatnot, and Malcolm is -- it's fantastic to have that same core group. We get along very well.

It's no secret that we play a lot of golf and hang out outside of the track, but that's how we work together. We have this pretty seamless sort of feeling between all three of us, and it's a nice feeling knowing that they're in your corner.

Malcolm's been with me since I came to America. He's a super good guy and super smart guy. Lucky to have the pair of them. But at the same time, our car and the 12 car and the 2 car, we all -- it's a very good group and a lot of motivation in the group this year to go bigger in '24 and hopefully bring the Astor Cup back.

Q. You've been around the surroundings before in terms of a chase for the championship and categories you've driven in previously. Last year you got to be in the IndyCar Series. Having now done that within this series, is that going to make you smarter come the last quarter of the season, like you're aware of the situations that come into hand?

SCOTT MCLAUGHLIN: I definitely think having the experience of trying to win a championship and being in a position to have that pressure, have the TV, have the media talking all about it, it definitely is a nice thing compared to someone who hasn't been in that position before. I think that helps.

But by the time everything, honestly, shakes out in IndyCar, you're hard pressed to find a point at the end of the season where a reigning champ or someone that hasn't won the championship or the 500 isn't involved in winning the championship, which is a testament to how good they are and how good the category is.

Yeah, I feel -- I wouldn't say it's an advantage, but it definitely probably settles me down mentally knowing what to expect, I guess.

Q. Finally, you're back in Indianapolis for this content day that the season's doing. It's actually still quite a

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long time until the start of the season, but being back in Indianapolis, is that one place down on the corner of 16th and Georgetown that says come visit me in May, do you feel the vibe of the Indy 500 lurking in the background because you're back in the city and knowing that it's not really that far away?

SCOTT MCLAUGHLIN: Yeah, it's awesome. Every time you fly in basically, you fly over the track. So it's pretty cool. It reminds me a lot of Bathurst where you sort of come over the hill on the road there and see the Mount Panorama sign for the first time. Same sort of vibe, same sort of goose bump feeling.

That's a big focus for us this year to be better at Indy, particularly on my car. Yeah, that's the next goal for sure.

Q. It's kind of crazy to think that you're entering year four. It's kind of gone by pretty quick. Your transition into IndyCars has been nothing short of stellar. I'm just kind of curious, third place in the championship last year, this transition that you're kind of going into, do you look at this and think that maybe there's a specific area, whether it's strategy management or applying data, driving lines, whatever it might be? Maybe tools in the cockpit. Is there something that you kind of look at that maybe you're trying to just get that extra little oomph to seal this transition completely, if that makes sense?

SCOTT MCLAUGHLIN: I guess the first oval win is the next thing for me, to finish off everything. But I think from a comfort, pace feeling perspective, I feel really at home. I certainly don't feel like the new kid anymore, and I feel more like an open wheel driver than a touring car driver now.

Yeah, it's very small. I was talking about the margins before, like the margins move up now, like there are a few little areas, a kink in my armor that I need to figure out that I'll keep to myself, but I feel like we're in a really good spot for the start of the season.

Q. Obviously the hybrid getting introduced middle of the season going to impact the championship in some form or fashion. I guess I'm just kind of curious your thoughts on maybe how you feel that's going to really shake out how this year might play out for the eventually champion.

SCOTT MCLAUGHLIN: I think it puts a bit of emphasis on knowing what you have at the start of the season. Obviously going into the start, we know the package. We know where we're at, even setup-wise and whatnot. After the 500, it all sort of happens.

I think the category has done the right thing from a competitive standpoint. It does suck for everyone that we haven't been able to get the parts and whatnot in time, but I think doing the right thing to keep our world renowned competitiveness in the category, and I think it's going to make an exciting sort of finish to the year about who can combat the changes the most.

That's what the championship and building the championship is all about is combatting the change. Things aren't the same from St. Pete to Nashville, and they never are. We need to combat that, whether that is adding a hybrid or whatever it is. That's all part about building a solid championship campaign and working with your guys and girls and making sure you can get at the front quicker than the rest of them.

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