

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Tom Blomqvist

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Continuing on with our first day at NTT INDYCAR Series content day with Tom Blomqvist, driver of the No. 66 Meyer Shank Racing Honda, ready for his rookie season after three starts last season.

Tom, of course 2022 IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar champion, Rolex 24 champion, and you got a new fire suit. Content day is going smoothly I'm assuming.

TOM BLOMQVIST: I don't know any better. I'm just like, follow the leader. Luckily I've got a great PR lady who's holding my hand throughout.

THE MODERATOR: 2024, what do you think lies ahead?

TOM BLOMQVIST: A lot of challenges. I've been saying it kind of throughout the day. This is the first time in a while where I've got this sort of, this anxious energy about getting started because it's so new.

Obviously I've been doing something so familiar to myself for the past eight, nine years, and jumping across to the NTT INDYCAR Series is so different but I'm really excited to get going, to be honest.

It's a completely new challenge. Although it's, I would say, a carry-on, a natural progression from my junior career, I kind of sidestepped since 2015.

I'm really excited to just kind of get rolling again, and to be honest, it'll be nice to get out in a car. I haven't driven since basically the race in Laguna Seca. So thank goodness I did get some of that mileage under my belt the back end of last season, which has mentally prepared me for some of the challenges that may lie ahead.

But yeah, I'm just really keen to get out on track the end of the month, which is going to be good, going to be fun.

But yeah, there's going to be a lot going on behind the scenes, and definitely opened my eyes the back end of last year getting those events under my belt and seeing the areas that I personally need to work on.

Now I've got a whole season to work at it, so I'm keen to get things going.

Q. The natural follow-up is what a luxury to have three races under your belt heading into a season fresh and some experience, right?

TOM BLOMQVIST: Yeah, it helps tremendously, more so in just preparing for the way the event runs. Whether that be the structure of the practice session, the qualifying session, or the little intricacies that people from the outside maybe don't understand that aids a driver in getting the most out of a weekend.

Because when you're so new to that, you're constantly -- your mind, your brain is constantly under stress, and all those small things -- when you're doing them for the first time, everything is new. You feel like you're at 100 miles an hour in every area.

So when you've really done that, you know and your body is prepared for it, your mind is prepared for it. It's so much easier.

Q. Going into your first full INDYCAR season, what is the main thing you're hoping to achieve this year?

TOM BLOMQVIST: The biggest thing is more a satisfaction level with my own performance for myself. I'm kind of used to everything I've done in years gone by, I'm kind of used to -- I'm disappointed if I'm not winning and on the podium or fighting for victories, and I'm under no illusion that it's not what I'm going to be expecting when I first roll out.

But if I can get to a place, which I strongly believe I can otherwise I wouldn't be here, where I'm satisfied with my own performances and getting the results for the team -- I mean, I put a small target, goal on achieving -- that's realistic. Maybe a top 15 in St. Pete. I think that's a reasonable goal for me to go for.

But long-term, the goal is to be here long-term, and that means being competitive race in, race out.



Q. What track are you most looking forward to?

TOM BLOMQVIST: Probably -- I haven't even been to an Indy 500, so can you imagine, the first one is the one I'm racing in. I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing.

Yeah, I'm excited about that one, which is probably a bit of a cliché answer.

Outside of that, I've actually been to most of the tracks. I'm actually looking forward to St. Pete. I've never obviously been there, raced there.

Then from an event perspective, probably Nashville.

Q. Who do you think you're going to lean on the most? Are you going to lean on Helio or Felix to learn this year since you learned something from your three races, but...

TOM BLOMQVIST: Yeah, I'm very fortunate that Felix is let's say -- not a veteran in the series, but he's now been here five years, so he's got a lot of knowledge and he's been through some of the things that I have.

We kind of grew up together racing against one another, and I think his whole learning process when he came into the series, he came in this modern era so I can learn a lot from him, so I'm excited for that.

Helio is a one of a kind. Why is everyone laughing?

I think when we get to the speedway, it's going to be really, really -- I'm really excited to see his -- I've known him for a while now. We've been teammates in the car, in the sports car stuff for the past couple of years, so I know how he works and I know how he operates.

I think it's more about seeing how he gets through that whole month of May and how he structures his practice sessions, what he focuses on in a session to where he's kind of driving the direction of the car and all those little small things.

I'm really excited about -- I've got a good bunch of guys there to lean on in the various events we go to. I need to maximize that.

Q. Not only it's your rookie year but now they're going to throw in the hybrid engine halfway through. Have you got any experience with that kind of different engine with other series, or is it all going to be new for you?

TOM BLOMQVIST: No, I feel like I'm quite experienced

with all that, the hybrid stuff and electric stuff. I've got quite a lot of experience in -- well, I've got experience in Formula E, which is basically 100 percent electric, and now last year the GTP class is a hybrid now.

I would say I'm very -- in terms of INDYCAR settings, I'm very familiar with that sort of technology and how to utilize it, how to get performance from it.

I'm quite excited for that element of the racing to be introduced. Yeah, let's see how that's implemented. But I haven't yet driven or seen, actually, our iteration of it.

Q. Expanding on that, you've driven quite a few different series over the past decade or so. Does that adaptability going to help you learning another new type of car here this year?

TOM BLOMQVIST: Yeah, I think so. I think growing up when you're younger, you kind of focus on one series, and it was always -- almost not frowned upon. Maybe a little bit frowned upon, trying to do other things, because it always takes a little bit of time to adjust back to another car or whatever.

But I've built up this kind of database, large database of all sorts of race cars over the last decade, as you said.

I think that definitely helps. It definitely helps more when conditions change or certain random elements are thrown at you. We've got this new hybrid element thrown in, it's going to change things.

It's not a negative for sure, but I am looking forward to now just knuckling down and focusing on INDYCAR. Although I am still complementing it with some of the sports car races because I still have an immense love for that style of racing, and I don't want it to end. But yeah, the focus is obviously getting up to speed and becoming a competitive INDYCAR driver.

Q. You said that just being satisfied with your own performance is kind of the main goal, but if you had to choose, would you rather be able to be consistent and get top 10s each weekend, or would you like to have a breakout race and understand what that's like to be up at the front podium, whenever that might be?

TOM BLOMQVIST: Yeah, I think when you get a breakout result, that's generally more often than not not a fluke, and that might be more signs of things to come or something has clicked, because it's a funny sport. Sometimes you're kind of knuckling on, finding a little bit here or there, and then all of a sudden it comes together.

In your instance, your example, that might be the case and might lead on to bigger and better things and also gives everyone around you a lot of confidence and even yourself that you can do it.

But yeah, I think consistency is what's going to earn you long-term results in the series. The ultimate goal is to be consistently at the front.

Q. We're going to call you the fourth Kiwi if that's okay with you.

TOM BLOMQVIST: Yeah, mate, no worries.

Q. Have you had much support from New Zealand in relation to what you're doing, either before now or now that you're in the INDYCAR Series?

TOM BLOMQVIST: It's hard to say. I wouldn't say so, if I'm being 100 percent honest. But I don't think it's -- it's probably partly my fault in that it's always a bit of an awkward one for me because I spent a lot of my childhood there, but I don't have any of that Kiwi blood in me.

Yeah, it's a bit of an Achilles' Heel of being a bit of a cocktail, I would say. If you can show me some love down there, mate, that would be appreciated.

Q. Because of the years that you were with MSR in the sports car program and then moving over to the INDYCAR program, are there any people that you've brought from the sports car program with you over to INDYCAR, or were they all part of the INDYCAR team already?

TOM BLOMQVIST: Actually next year or this season coming to us in '24 we have a lot of carryover guys from our sports car program. We don't have that program anymore, so we've got a lot of, as I say, staff, a lot of mechanics.

Actually my mechanic, my No. 1 mechanic for this year is going to be the same mechanic I had running the show over on the sports car side.

That's going to be great, and I've worked with everyone.

I think also from my perspective coming into -- although I'm changing series, working with a team that I know and I'm so familiar with definitely helps that transition across to my new challenge.

Q. Staying with Helio for a second, obviously when we get to Indy and his Drive for 5, that's one thing, but more importantly, now that he has a slightly different

role with MSR and that relationship that you have with him not only having driven with him but having him effectively as a driver-coach, there's certainly a lot that you can fall back on with someone like him, isn't there?

TOM BLOMQVIST: Yeah, 100 percent. I've got a guy who's got so much experience at that speedway, and a lot of time what he touches turns to gold sort of thing around there.

He knows what he's doing around there, and it's going to be -- yeah, it's going to be hugely beneficial to me to lean on him, and I'm 100 percent (indiscernible.)

And the good thing is he's very helpful. He's very open about it. He's definitely willing to help me because he also has a vested interest in helping me as well now, so that's good.

Q. The Indy 500 will be your first oval race, your first high-speed oval race. Does that hinder you with no oval experience before?

TOM BLOMQVIST: That's a difficult one. I've thought about that because although I haven't got an oval race under my belt before the 500, Texas was always going to be very difficult having basically not much practice and just kind of jumping in, so now I've kind of got a bit more time. You get a lot of practice for the 500. We've got open days in April before we head into the full month there.

No, I'm not too disappointed about that, to be honest. I think I'm going to hopefully have an ample amount of time to figure it out.

It would have been nice to have that race because race conditions change things dramatically. But hey, it's something I've got to deal with.

I'm not totally disappointed about that.

Q. Obviously the team stepping away from IMSA this year and focusing towards INDYCAR, do you think this is going to help a step forward in performance? Do you think it will benefit the team significantly this year?

TOM BLOMQVIST: Honestly I don't think it'll change -- from our perspective, the teams are very separate and obviously were operating at great levels. I can only hope to obviously bring something more to the table.

I know personally having worked with the guys that are coming across, I have a lot of faith in them. I know what

they're capable of.

So hopefully. But in theory, it shouldn't really make a difference.

Q. Last year you kind of touched on the fact that these races in INDYCAR are so physical, and you're just needing to kind of get stronger to handle the full length of a race and not feel as worn out as you were. Just curious how intense did you attack the off-season strength training program and how much you bulked up or whatever?

TOM BLOMQUIST: It wasn't so much the racing. It was more taking the car, wringing its neck out over one lap even. I've been so used to slowing my hands down. The biggest thing is I'm used to driving cars that are very sharp, and steering that's relatively light, and you hardly turn the wheel, and I came into a car that requires a lot of brute force and fast hands let's say, and I've been used to slowing my inputs down to get the most out of the car, whereas the INDYCAR is almost the complete opposite.

It's like a muscle memory thing. When you haven't played a particular sport for a while, you almost slow down. It was more that, getting the body used to that.

But I put on a solid eight pounds already, so big percentage-wise for my little weight, so I'm happy with that. But definitely it's been a bit of a project over the off-season, definitely, because there's nothing worse than feeling physically limited behind the race car and you can't even extract your best performance.

But luckily I get a bit more testing. I have a few days of testing before I get to the first race, so all that stuff is -- that's what's going to make the real difference is when you get behind the car and you're really using those very specific muscles that you use in a race car. You do your best outside the cockpit, but it's very, very hard to replicate 100 percent the muscles and the sort of physicality that goes into a race or race weekend.

Q. Earlier this off-season team owner Mike Shank told me one of the reasons he brought you on board was he liked your brain capacity relative to what it's going to take with this new hybrid to learn. I'm curious, obviously you haven't driven the new hybrid, but if you could assimilate it to what the Daytona prototypes are like in IMSA and how much you had to grow and learn and how much of a skill set that is because of how busy you are in a race car now, how do you think that's going to transition from the base level of INDYCAR that you know right now to maybe what it could grow to with the hybrid?

TOM BLOMQUIST: Even jumping in the GTP for me, it was easy for me because I was used to a much more complex system in terms of Formula E and having experience there prepared me for what to expect, and like I said, how to get the most out of some of the systems.

To be honest, the INDYCAR system is kind of even more straightforward in a way than that.

I'm not too worried about it. I think we need to figure out exactly how it's going to be used. The biggest thing is actually how you charge it up and how that's implemented in terms of not affecting the drivability of the car, so in terms of braking -- there's certain ways that -- there's the most efficient ways of generating lap time from a race car where you have to charge and discharge, and it's how you as a driver can adapt to that. Not only adapt to that in terms of driving, but use it in an almost driver-friendly way, and work with your engineering team to make it as efficient as possible to deploy and to kind of not affect the driving in a negative way.

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