

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Friday, March 8, 2024

Will Power

Felix Rosenqvist

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up day one of the Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg presented by RP Funding. Again, Felix Rosenqvist, P1 in that practice session, will join us here momentarily.

Right now joined by nine-time pole winner here on the Streets of St. Pete. Finished fourth in that practice session at 1:00.8. Driving the No. 12 Verizon Business Team Penske Chevrolet. Two-time winner here at St. Pete. Will power, got it out of the way. What happens the rest of the weekend?

WILL POWER: Just small improvements. Felix is on another planet out there, but everyone else is extremely close. We'll go back and look at it.

I felt like overall the session was pretty good. I don't mind that. There's more room on track and less backing up.

But, good, car feels good. Everything feels calm. When you are fast and things are calm, it's good. You've got a little bit in reserve.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Will, the trade-off is there's less congestion with the groups, but do you get a chance to really get in a rhythm and try things?

WILL POWER: Honestly it's a very similar flow to qualifying. You get the ten minutes, so you have to get a run done. Yeah, I didn't mind it. It's been very difficult in the past just to get a lap, and each time you went out, you got clear runs. For me I liked the format.

Q. I don't want to devalue the guy sitting next to you, but I mean, the team didn't really perform that well without him. Are you surprised how quickly he's put him up on top of the board?

WILL POWER: Not really. I actually thought he would do

really well in that environment. I think, yeah, he's quick. He's quick. Doesn't surprise me he's been very quick. At the end of last year he's been coming on very strong, so no surprise.

THE MODERATOR: And he would be Felix Rosenqvist who joins us again. P1 in that practice session in 1:00.3. Driving the No. 60. AutoNation, SiriusXM Honda for Meyer Shank Racing. Of course, who can forget your first race here at St. Pete a couple of years ago? You started third; finished fourth. P1 today. No better way to start 2024, right?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, really smooth start for us. I would say I haven't had a bunch of running this winter, so I think we've been feeling confident coming here, but also unsure how we're going to stack up when everyone is out there pushing.

So, yeah, a little bit relieved actually and a little bit surprised as well. I thought we were going to be good, but not as quick straight away, but obviously I think it's still early days, and everyone is going to improve a lot. We're going to try to see if we can keep that gap ahead. Yeah, so far so good. Really happy.

Q. Felix, I just have a little technical question. It's very warm, really hot temperature. Especially when you are coming from Europe. Does this affect the aero package of the car?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: The temperature outside? I mean, not necessarily if you are from Europe, but I think in general it's less downforce.

Yeah, honestly on a street track it's not a lot. It's not really that sensitive. I think if you go to Road America or Laguna, something like that, you feel a massive difference, but here it's mainly about mechanical grip. The track is just getting quicker and quicker every lap, the more rubber you put down. Again, you just get more and more understeer. I tried to keep ahead of that game, but yeah, nothing crazy.

Q. Felix, you said that you expected to be okay. I guess you feel good about how testing has gone. Where do you think you are at the start of the season?



Are you a winning team?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I think on the street tracks we're good. I think Linus jumped in a couple of races last year, and he was really quick in Nashville mainly. Helio and Simon had some really good runs on the street courses.

I feel more confident on this race and those kind of tracks. I think ovals are probably a question mark for us that we're trying to work a lot with Andretti to improve. That's the main focus.

Yeah, I think it's no secret that the Andretti package has been really good on the street tracks. So, yeah, we'll see how it goes.

Q. And you personally, how has this change of scenery helped you?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I mean, I think it's just been really nice to come to Meyer Shank Racing. It's been a super easy transition both with people and the car, which is nice.

I think it's also no secret when I went to McLaren it was a big learning curve with the car. Obviously I was a bit worried that it was going to be the same here, but it's been the direct opposite. It clicked from lap one pretty much.

With the amount of testing we have, that's very important because you don't have time to try to learn the car. I'm really happy about that.

Yeah, the team has been super, super nice. It's obviously a smaller group, which is good I think because it's just so much easier to get to know everyone and get up to speed quickly. Yeah, super good.

Q. One for Will and one for Felix. Will, we all know what you had to go through last year in January and February and even December, and you didn't really have a chance to properly get prepared for the season. Thank God Liz is doing fine and doing better, but how much better prepared, even though you've got an allergy right now, do you feel entering the season?

WILL POWER: Oh, yeah, way more prepared. Way, way more than I was last year. I'm fitter, have more miles, and just, yeah, ahead of the game in many ways. Mentally better because you're not thinking of your family. It's tough when your mind is somewhere else. My mind is right in the game, right in the game.

Q. Felix, I don't know any other way to put it, but in some ways do you feel like you're out to prove a point? It seems like the last couple of rides you've had

you've been overlooked to a degree. Ganassi you were always going to be in the shadows of Scott Dixon and then a very uneasy, tenuous time you had at Arrow McLaren. Do you feel like this is a great situation? You have a point to prove how good you are?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, I don't look back at my five years with any regrets or anything. I want to be teammates with the quickest guys, and I think I've been with some of the absolute quickest guys for sure, which has taught me a lot.

Obviously a little bit of different scenario now. I have to take that leader role obviously a bit more. We're a two-car team, and Tom is a rookie. So obviously we know each other from the past, and we have a really good relationship, and trying to get him up to speed as quickly as possible.

Yeah, it's a little bit of a difference, but I feel like I'm ready for that after quite a while in the series now. I think every year you learn something, and you bring that with you, but at this point I have quite a lot of experience in the bag. Yeah, feels good to be in that role.

Q. One for both. I'll start with Will. Can you give me a sense of the mood at Team Penske coming into this year? I know you guys won the Indy 500 last year, but you went winless. Josef seemed really frustrated at the end of the year. Scotty won once. Then you have Penske doing so well with NASCAR Championship and the IMSA Team, the WEC Team, the Rolex win. Is there more motivation I guess is what I'm asking? What's the mood like coming in this year for you and your teammates?

WILL POWER: It's personal. I think everyone is personally a little different. I'm certainly very motivated to have a strong year after going winless. I was really pissed off about that, so putting a lot of emphasis on that.

Yeah, Team Penske, man, they've been right on it the last couple of years. Two NASCAR titles, INDYCAR title, Indy 500, 24-hour of Daytona. So, yeah, it's expected of that team. It's expected. You must perform. They've got the resources, and you are given the car each week.

I've had my head down. I haven't really been thinking about anything else but competing at a very high level this year. I've worked hard, and I'm sure the other boys are in similar situations, and there's a lot of people in the field that are in contract years and trying to prove points. It will be a very tough INDYCAR season, which is just great.

Q. For Felix, I was noticing that Sunday marks five years to the day since your debut here when you finished fourth and led 31 laps. When you look back, does that feel like yesterday? Does it feel like forever ago? Now the perspective of you are on your second team since then. That day I think a lot of people were expecting you were going to be at Ganassi forever and maybe be a championship contender. I guess maybe just reflecting on that five years later, and also does your start here today kind of make you feel like it was in 2019 when you were here?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: It feels like ages ago, to be honest. I was definitely in a different place personally, professionally. Yeah, different person probably back then.

I think I was a bit immature at the time. Even if I had a lot of experience, I was immature in terms of INDYCAR and the challenge that it was. It was a big learning curve even if I started off really well. It was super tough to compete with these guys and all the different kinds of tracks and stuff.

Yeah, it's nice to look back. I feel like I've taken a lot of steps since then. I feel more calm, less pressured, and just kind of more in harmony with the series and my team and everything. Yeah, hopefully we can just keep building.

Every year everyone gets better. Dixon and Will and these guys are showing. The level just steps up every year. You have to work hard in the winter and try to close every gap you can.

Q. Felix, I'm just wondering. Obviously you were quick in a Ganassi car and a Honda Ganassi. You were quick in an Arrow McLaren Chevy, and now are you back in Honda. Is there anything about the power Honda band that seems to suit you better?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: There's pros and cons on all kinds of tracks. I think maybe it falls me a bit more naturally, this engine, but it's so close. Some tracks you'll be better; some worse. Over the season I think there's almost nothing in it, but I'm happy to be back with Honda.

Obviously it's the same kind of engine as when I last drove it, so I feel like it's still kind of in your muscle memory a little bit how you drive this engine. Yeah, definitely it went pretty quick to get used to it.

Q. Will, a couple for you. The first one being, have you noticed any differences in the track in terms of how they've eased a few of the corners and then the repitching that's taken place, has that affected anything?

WILL POWER: Yeah, the track at turn three is a lot smoother. A lot nicer there. They haven't really changed anything else. It's all pretty similar apart from that. Yeah, but that was a big problem last year, turn three.

Q. Then just one other thing. Sort of crystal-balling towards the end of the season, this year is quite different to previous years where we're going to have a bunch of oval races at the end with St. Louis, a return to Milwaukee, return to Nashville. Does that change a team's outlook on how they prepare cars knowing that you're going into a stretch of ovals rather than the traditional road courses to round out a championship?

WILL POWER: As far as car preparation, those short ovals street you pretty much run your street and road course cars anyway. Super speedways are slightly different. Indy is where you build a special car. Everywhere else these days are pretty similar. Yeah, the cars, that won't be a big deal.

Q. Obviously with you joining Meyer Shank you're not just getting the info from MSR, but you're getting the technical feedback from Andretti. How beneficial is that going to be for you being with the new team like Meyer Shank but knowing that you have the fallback with Andretti?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I think it's very helpful as for a two-car team. It's nice to kind of bounce ideas. During testing, Kyle and Colton and Marcus have been jumping on the pit stand and in our truck, and we're in their truck. It's very open, which is super nice, and there's always ideas being built in those meetings.

For sure I think it helped me getting up to speed, and I think with being between us, what is it, five cars in total you get a pretty good idea of if someone gets a bit lost or if someone finds something good on the car, you can pretty much -- that feedback is messaged pretty quick to the team, and you can build on that quick. I'm pretty impressed how well that relationship is actually working.

Q. I noticed the roll-out, the field was there 45 minutes early just to line up to roll out. I saw drivers heading to pit lane a half an hour early. How much was that pent-up let's-just-get-going? It's been a long offseason. How excited were you to just get out there and do your thing?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: You don't want to be late to the first practice of the year (laughing).

WILL POWER: You have to get your ear pieces.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I feel like you're pushing it more during the season where you show up one minute before. You're kind of out of the groove a little bit, so nice to be down there early, take some sun, build a tan a little bit.

WILL POWER: Yeah. Everything he said.

THE MODERATOR: Great way to start the weekend, guys. Good luck the rest of the way. Will Power, Felix Rosenqvist.

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