

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Wednesday, April 10, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Kyle Larson

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up day one of the Indy 500 open test here at the capital of racing. We're joined by the driver of the No. 17 Hendrickcars.com Arrow McLaren Chevrolet, none other than Kyle Larson. Day one kind of in the books, rain shortened, but during the time you were out there, what did you think?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, it was a good day, good to -- like you said, we didn't get a ton of laps or at least laps in a pack or anything like that, but it was still good for the amount that I got in something, just to visually kind of see what that looked like and feel the runs and all of that. It was good.

I feel like for what I needed to learn and check off my list, I thought it was a successful day, and yeah, hopefully the weather could get better for tomorrow and check some more things off.

I feel like rain follows NASCAR, so it's probably my fault.

Q. Is it almost a little bit like a tease that you were going to have all this track time supposedly and you really weren't able to get that much? In some ways, how do you balance that? There could have been a lot done today if the weather had cooperated.

KYLE LARSON: Honestly I kind of feel the opposite about it because I feel like I've been checking the weather for a week, and it's looked worse. I wasn't expecting to get on track at all. No, I feel like I've gotten more out of this week than I anticipated getting.

I was happy to get the solid couple hours that we got in in the morning. So I would rather have gotten something rather than nothing.

Q. Do you look at tomorrow as -- it looks pretty grim tomorrow. If you do get on track, it would be bonus time?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I guess so, definitely. Any laps is

good for me. Any laps is bonus at this point.

I just hope that it gets better, and I doubt it, but we'll see.

Q. Obviously with the schedule that you have, any track time you need is good for you, obviously. With the obvious damper on the weather, losing possibly two and a half days of track time, how much does that change for you with trying to prepare for this race knowing that you need as much as you can get and obviously with the weather that takes away a big part of the opening session to help you get ready for May?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I don't know. I think there's a couple ways you could probably look at it. I think laps would be great. I would obviously like more laps. But I think in conditions like this, I don't know how well of a representation it would be for the month of May, especially race day.

Maybe it's best that I don't get that many laps this week because then I would have a false sense of what's real and what's coming in a month.

I won't be sad if we don't get laps tomorrow just because I know that the conditions aren't hopefully going to be anything like what it will be in May. I think there will be a lot more to learn once we really get into the two weeks that we're on track here.

Q. Dating back to October when you were out here, it's probably been information overload. What is something that has surprised you out on the track that you've had to adjust to, and what's something that maybe has come a little bit more natural than what you expected?

KYLE LARSON: I don't know. I mean, again, I don't think anything is quite real out there in practice like to what I'll experience in the race. I think I'm going to be overloaded during the race trying to process information -- not only information, just learning during the race.

But for practice, like the few laps I got in the second session, there was a lot of checking up for whatever reason like getting in the corner. I think that kind of helped

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me realize that I needed to look further ahead than the one car that's in front of me. Like I think I was like fourth or fifth in line at that point, and I probably needed to look a couple more cars in front of that person. When I say that person, also it's like, I don't know who I'm out there around because in a stock car somebody turns the corner you can see a door number or there's a number on their back bumper. I've got no clue who I'm out there around and learning off of. That was surprising. I thought it would be easier to know who was out there around me. Yeah, it's difficult.

Then I don't know, just the cars to me feel very similar to a stock car, in a way. Everything that I feel out there is like what I would expect from a 9:00 a.m. practice session in a stock car at the Brickyard 400. Cool conditions, got grip, all that. We wouldn't be running around here wide open in a stock car. The way the tires feel and all that feels relatively similar.

Q. Curious about your thoughts at ROP last year, the experience you had at Phoenix Raceway? Have you been able to build one on another or is each one of them separate in its own way?

KYLE LARSON: No, I think for sure doing the ROP -- I wish it wasn't so spread out. I wish we didn't do it in October and then in February and then in April. I wish it was days apart or weeks apart.

But I think had I had to do the ROP today, I would have been stressed out and really nervous and just not able to focus on something or anything. So having it spread out like helped me kind of take my time with, all right, I wanted to feel the car at the ROP and just feel like little stuff, what the steering wheel felt like, visually, what all that felt like. Like okay, that was good. Then go to Phoenix, now I want to feel the car and it slipping and moving and work on ins and outs of pit stalls and things like that. That was good for that test.

Now today I could move on to the next thing, like all right, now how does it look like around cars. How does what I've learned in the past translate to now being behind cars, where I think had the weather been good today, I would have been stressed out about the ROP and what that was going to look like and then now you're past that, now you've got to go out there and run wide open behind somebody. Like I don't know if mentally I'd be ready for that.

I'm fortunate that I was able to do the ROP last year and then be allowed to run that little bit at Phoenix for sure. I think it's definitely going to help.

Q. When Jimmie Johnson was in our series, he was pretty honest about the differences going from the NASCAR car, the Cup car to the INDYCAR. Did you talk with Jimmie before you came out here and did this?

KYLE LARSON: Just briefly I think a few months ago. He just said I was going to have a blast, honestly, really. I've tried not to ask too many questions to people. Like I feel like the way I've learned in the past is like I just need to learn on my own a little bit, and don't get me wrong, I'm leaning on Tony Kanaan a lot and was in there during the couple-hour break talking to my teammates and stuff. But I think to a point, I just need to almost just feel things out on my own sometimes.

Like Jimmie didn't -- hasn't ran a NextGen car that much, so I don't know how well he could compare to what I currently feel in a stock car and how that would relate to this. Any information is good. I just don't want to overload myself with too much information from too many different people and just confuse myself. I think there's just a -- although we're on track a lot, it's a small window of time to learn, and I think if I overwhelm myself with too much info, I can get lost.

Q. Going back to what you were saying about like a 9:00 a.m. practice for the Brickyard, I think you said earlier that the Next Gen has made the transition similar to INDYCAR. Can you elaborate on that? How is the Next Gen, which obviously looks nothing like an INDYCAR, how is it maybe more similar now that it feels like --

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I don't know exactly what the components are that has made it feel like an INDYCAR or whatever. It's not exactly like it, but just the feel that I feel in my hands with the front tires -- not that I'm feeling the rear tires here, but like at Phoenix, just feeling the rear tires and kind of the lateral grip or lack thereof grip felt more similar to a Cup car.

The old style car you could slide it around more. It was a bit lazier feeling, where now the Next-Gen cars are closer to like a sharper edge of having grip and then losing that grip, where the sensations that I get in the INDYCAR, it's like -- like at Phoenix, I got that feeling a lot, and then just the way the front tires kind of load and you get your hands to a point and then you can steer past the slip of the tire and all that. I don't know, just something maybe I'm feeling in the sidewall or whatever. But it feels very similar to like what I would feel in my hands if I got tight or understeer in the middle of a corner.

So yeah, it just feels -- the Next-Gen car is closer to the

edge of grip and then losing grip, which I think the INDYCAR is even sharper but similar.

Q. You said in your Peacock interview, you were talking about how you wished you had the SMT data that you have in NASCAR. What's one thing -- is it just knowing where those guys are lifting in the corners, throttle traces? Is there one driver in particular whose data you would love to see just based on what you've seen today?

KYLE LARSON: I would look at anybody's, honestly. There's not one driver. I think it's difficult at a place where it's so big and there's drafts and stuff. If I could just go and look at -- like when I'm in a drafting pack of like, okay, this is what I look like I'm doing, compared to what guys typically do, like overlay on the same corner -- I can't sit here and describe SMT to these people because they've never seen it but you have.

It would just be nice to see myself -- ghost car on top of mine from somebody that was running around and what that all looked like, where they're grabbing gears, where I'm grabbing gears, line shape, all that. Everything about SMT would be amazing to look at and be so helpful for myself and for anybody who's a veteran in there. I think they would love to see it.

SMT is just a great tool that we have in NASCAR that I guess I'm thankful for as a rookie, but I guess at times in NASCAR I wish we didn't have it.

Q. How did you find your first experience running in traffic? How did the car behave differently compared to when you've just been running alone?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, so when I was able to go that faster lap or whatever, we were just -- I think that was my first run on that set of tires, and there was a few cars in front of me, and I've been hearing about how the dirty air is and all that and how bad it is. In that run I was like, man, it doesn't feel that bad. It didn't feel that different from clean air, and I was wide open behind them, and it was no problem.

Then we did some ins and outs and got towards the end of that set of tires, and I was by myself just kind of running and building lots of understeer by myself, and we stayed out there to kind of allow Newgarden to catch me, and he ended up passing me, and I totally lost the nose. That was pretty crazy kind of feeling that and all of that.

But I think I could have done a better job, as well, when he passed me timing the air and the run and all that. Once I kind of lost the nose, it was hard to recover from it.

It was so sensitive that, again, I don't even know if that's real, but I would assume that's more real than me not feeling a balance change in traffic. But yeah, that's why it's just kind of hard to learn right now when the conditions are like this and the packs are smaller and all that. There's still a lot left to learn. But that's what I felt in those couple runs.

Q. I think you've spoken before, as well, about maybe not knowing where you stack up against other drivers, not having a benchmark on track. How encouraged are you after today when you have been on track with other cars and you can see that you are very competitive with them?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I mean, it's tough to really say because I just think I got like a magic draft and laid a lap down. So I really don't know. I don't even know how to answer that.

I think I still have a lot of time to learn, so I'm excited about that. But yeah, I'm not sure. I saw Twitter was going crazy because oh, Kyle Larson was second in his first INDYCAR practice with people, but there's a lot of people that weren't drafting out there or didn't have the draft that I had. I take the credit, but it's really not a big deal, either.

Q. You're very familiar with the guys that you race with every week in NASCAR and you're really probably pretty familiar with the guys you race with in sprint cars, but this is a group of drivers you haven't raced with before. How important is it to really learn their nuances and their traits and their characteristics so that you can recognize that when you're up here running for real?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I think it's very important for sure. I just kind of think back to when I started racing late model stuff. I had to do a lot of studying on draft -- I literally watched no dirt late model races before I raced or got the idea to go race them.

See, I had to study and it's much easier to study a dirt race than it is a 500-mile INDYCAR race or whatever. But yeah, I don't know. I think for me and Indy, I'm probably just going to have to go off of what other -- my teammates tell me about other drivers and all that.

But I haven't really heard much about other drivers and their aggressiveness or who's really aggressive, who's crazy, who's not, who can you take advantage, who can't you, stuff like that. I don't even know if that really translates to an oval.

I think I wouldn't be surprised if like guys are maybe

aggressive on a road course or maybe not quite aggressive on an oval. It would be hard for me to watch Long Beach and be like, man, that guy is going to be crazy at Indy.

So I don't know. I just try to listen and soak up as much of that sort of information as I can, too.

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I know how -- and I'm probably the most aggressive when it comes to sprint cars, so I know I've got that.

But on this, I probably won't be very aggressive. Or at least not for a while. But we'll see.

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