

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Theo Pourchaire

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good morning, everyone. Thanks for joining us to welcome Theo Pourchaire to the INDYCAR paddock, ready for his first race in INDYCAR.

He is the reigning champion of the 2023 FIA Formula 2 championship with two wins in the past season and 10 podiums. He will join us for the team today during David Malukas' injury from his left wrist.

Theo, welcome to INDYCAR. Ready to race?

THEO POURCHAIRE: Thank you very much. Good morning, everyone. It's great to be here. Yeah, really happy to be here in Long Beach.

THE MODERATOR: You spent the past two weeks with the team in Indianapolis, getting acclimated to the new INDYCAR environment, with the seat fit, sim session, see the eclipse...

THEO POURCHAIRE: First of all I have to thanks Arrow McLaren for giving me this amazing opportunity. Of course, I'm thinking about David, his injury. It's not going to be easy for me to drive there because I have zero experience in INDYCAR.

But the team is amazing. I met all the people in the team. I spent two good weeks in Indianapolis. I had the chance to see the eclipse, which is great, do a little bit of simulator, do the seat fit and work with the team.

I feel comfortable. Even if I don't know the track and the car, it's going to be a first time for me this weekend. But I really am looking forward to drive this afternoon already.

THE MODERATOR: Heading into the first practice this afternoon, what has been the your focus with the team getting ready for the first time on track?

THEO POURCHAIRE: Yeah, the focus for me is just to learn the car and the track, to do as many laps as possible. We will see where the performance is.

But I just want to build a strong confidence in the car and get used to everything because everything is new for me. But, as I said, everybody is helping me in the team. I have great engineers, great mechanics, great people around me. I'm happy to be here.

THE MODERATOR: With that we will open it up to questions.

Q. Theo, in the release, you talked about watching INDYCAR as a kid. What are your recollections of that? What did you think when you were watching it? You're with a Formula 1 team. Where do you see your career path going?

THEO POURCHAIRE: I mean, for me, INDYCAR has always been one of the top motorsports series. Since I'm a kid, I watched a lot the Indy 500, of course, because it's one of the best race in the world.

One thing I remember is watching, for me, Pagenaud winning a few years ago. As a French, of course I was supporting him. It's a crazy race. I love the racing there as well on all the tracks, street course, road course, ovals. It's amazing.

To be able to also drive for a great team, it's even better. Such a legendary brand, McLaren is amazing. As just a motorsport, fun for me, it's a crazy opportunity.

Q. (Question about career path.)

THEO POURCHAIRE: Current path? I mean, it's a bit classic, I would say, from Formula 4 in France to Formula 2. I'm vice champion in Formula 3 in 2020, youngest of a race winner in Formula 3 and Formula 2, Formula 2 champion last year.

I mean, of course also Formula 1 is a dream for everybody. I'm really, really happy to be driving in INDYCAR.

Q. How will you ultimately grade this weekend? What is a successful weekend for you?

THEO POURCHAIRE: As I said, it's for sure going to be a tough task to, yeah, do great result there. I mean, for me, I



just want to get used to everything.

As I said, it's an amazing opportunity. I just want to help the team as well scoring points, helping the team to maybe -- I'm a new driver also for them, so maybe I can help them for the car setup. I mean, it can be good for them, as well.

I will try just to get used to everything, learn the car, the track. It will be helpful for the future, for sure.

Q. We haven't had any recent ex Formula 2 champions yet. We've had young Formula 2 drivers come over to INDYCAR. A lot of the issues seem to come from not having an ability to step into Formula 1, seems like it's been tough for drivers graduating from F2. Would you consider INDYCAR a potential long-term home for you if an F1 drive might not work out for you?

THEO POURCHAIRE: Yeah, I mean, for me, INDYCAR, as I said before, is one of the best motorsport categories. It's a very quick car. A lot bigger teams than Formula 2. Three cars per teams, many more engineers, mechanics. It's very professional. I mean, it looks amazing.

Of course, Formula 1, as I said, is a dream for all the racing drivers in the world. But driving INDYCAR, there's not many people who can drive in INDYCAR already, drive for McLaren in INDYCAR. I'm smiling since two weeks. I'm smiling every day because it's an amazing opportunity.

For me, I would love to drive, of course, in INDYCAR in many more races in my career.

Q. You had the relationships in F1 with the Sauber F1 team. How did this situation come about to you? Where did the outreach come from? How did you see this opportunity come together?

THEO POURCHAIRE: Yeah, of course I'm part of the Sauber academy since four years now. I'm also their reserve driver in Formula 1, which is really good. I'm really happy with that. It's a great job to have. In case one of the drivers is not able to drive, I'm replacing them.

I mean, thanks to them, as well, for letting me drive for McLaren. I think also Zak Brown contacted Andreas Seidl. Then they of course contacted me to give me the opportunity to drive. Thanks to Sauber as well for letting me drive. It's good.

Q. How did this come about? Did they call you and ask you if you were interested?

THEO POURCHAIRE: Yeah, so basically Sauber contacted me just to let me know that Arrow McLaren

wanted me to drive for the next two races, to replace David. I mean, he's injured. Now hopefully he can get back soon.

Yeah, I'm here just to try for this race without any experience. So I said yes, of course, it's an amazing opportunity. Either I don't drive or I have this amazing opportunity. For me, it was amazing.

Then, of course, Zak contacted me, as well. I said yes. Of course, I want to drive. It's McLaren, it's amazing. For me, it's an amazing opportunity.

Q. You said the next two races. Are you anticipating racing next weekend, too?

THEO POURCHAIRE: I'm racing in Long Beach, then we will see if David is getting better. This will depend on David.

Q. There are other F2 guys here, Armstrong, Lundgaard, Illott. Have you talked to them and asked them how do I adjust to this? Or those were your rivals and there's no communication?

THEO POURCHAIRE: No, Christian is a good guy. I know him from '21 when we were teammates in Formula 2. I talked to him a little bit. I think he adapted pretty quickly. He did a race in '21 there, I think it was in Indianapolis. He qualified fourth, if I remember well.

He told me the car is close to Formula 2 because there is no power steering and, I mean, it's closer to F2 than it is what F1. It's a lot more powerful, of course, compared to Formula 2. There is the aeroscreen, some things I need to get used to.

Overall, yeah, I will see this afternoon on the track. I will do my best.

Q. You've been in the simulator for the INDYCAR. You've been in the simulator for F1. What are the differences there?

THEO POURCHAIRE: So I cannot say much because, of course, it's a little bit private information, I would say, because I don't want to say information about the F1 simulator.

It's pretty close. Pretty close. It's good. INDYCAR, as I said, is very, very professional. I mean, I didn't drive the car yet. It looks closer to F2 in terms of performance. The professionalism, the number of people, the simulators, it's closer to F1.

Q. You've been in the simulator. When was the last time you were behind the wheel of a race car, go-kart, on track?

THEO POURCHAIRE: The race in Japan. I think it was in March, yeah.

Q. How close do you anticipate the SUPER FORMULA to the INDYCAR?

THEO POURCHAIRE: I think it's very different. It's not the opposite. Yeah, SUPER FORMULA is really light, a lot of downforce, but not so much powerful compared to INDYCAR from what I saw from the onboard videos and the races I watched from INDYCAR.

Q. When a new driver has come into the series, in the past sometimes the team will rent a track somewhere and give the driver seat time. I don't know what the weight difference is between an F2 and INDYCAR. Some drivers have problems from not being in condition. Have you done any physical fitness? What are your assumptions when you get in the car?

THEO POURCHAIRE: Yeah, as I said before, I mean, it's going to be tough of course technically because I don't know the car and the track. Physically, as well.

I will give my best. I will for sure not give up. I know the race is 85 laps, I think, without power steering, with a very bumpy track. But it's going to be a great challenge and I'm looking forward to it.

Yeah, of course, I think I will be a little bit tired at the end of the weekend, but it's fine.

Q. How neat is it to be with a group of teammates that have experience on what you're doing now but also successful on this racecourse?

THEO POURCHAIRE: It's very good for me to have the two teammates this weekend. They are really, really great drivers. They perform very well in INDYCAR. I mean, one of them is a reserve driver in F1, is doing well in INDYCAR. I think he's between the championship now, Pato. Alex is also an ex F1 driver, he won the Indy 500. For me it's very good to have those teammates.

It's going to be difficult to be close to them or to beat them, but I will work with them, I will watch the onboard cameras, the datas, work as much as possible, and improve my driving and my INDYCAR experience from them.

Q. Could you expand on how much of a last-minute thing this was. When did you find out you were going

to race this weekend?

THEO POURCHAIRE: It was not a long time ago. I think it was probably two weeks ago, two and a half weeks ago. I was in France doing nothing. Yeah, some physical preparation for my next SUPER FORMULA race. Yeah, I received the call. It was an amazing news.

Yeah, then I book the flight straight to Indianapolis, then I worked with the team. It's been a last-minute call, of course. It's okay. It's even better like this. I love it. It's an amazing surprise. It was an amazing surprise.

Q. You're coming in without any testing. A difficult opportunity. How do you think this weekend is going to be interpreted in the future? Was there worry about that because these guys have done three races pretty much already, already into the swing of things, you're coming in with a lot to learn? How do you feel about that?

THEO POURCHAIRE: I mean, I will give my best, try to do as many laps as possible in practice one today, learn many things. I think if you see me try to lock a bit the front wheels, try to go to the limit, do a lot of pit lane entries, pit stop practice, that kind of things. Of course, I will try as many things as possible.

It's not going to be easy, but that's my job at the end of the day. I'm with a great team. That's a good point. I know I will have a good car. It's just on my side to do the job, improve lap after lap.

I'm sure I can do something good. I just have to build the weekend.

Q. Have you talked to David? How have those gone? Is it uncomfortable at all?

THEO POURCHAIRE: He is with us. He is with us. I saw him already in Indianapolis. Now he's with us in Long Beach.

I mean, of course, I think it's not an easy situation for him because he's injured. That's the most difficult thing to manage for him. I think he has to think about getting back physically in a good shape. That's not easy.

But he's good. We did a track walk yesterday together.

Q. (No microphone.)

THEO POURCHAIRE: No, no, we did the track walk together with the engineers. No, he's a nice guy. I mean, I wish him a good recovery, of course.



Q. How much time did you spend in the INDYCAR simulator? Was it a few hours, days?

THEO POURCHAIRE: So I spent, to be honest, not many time in the simulator because as it was a last-minute call, the simulator, it's the Chevy simulator, we have to of course book it. We cannot go when we want. We have to call the people there, yeah.

I did one session, probably like four or five hours in the simulator, which is already really good. I could have my first taste of INDYCAR, even if it's virtually. The simulators are really good.

I could also discover the track on the simulator. Yeah, I did that. But I also worked a lot with the team, with Tony Kanaan. He helped me quite a lot. So that's great.

Q. The differences in feel, the sim to real track, what felt different from the F2 car to the INDYCAR for you?

THEO POURCHAIRE: I think the INDYCAR is a little bit, yeah, more powerful. There's more power, for sure. I don't know how much, but it feels very powerful.

The aeroscreen is a little bit strange. I will have to get used to that during the first practice. I already jumped in the car yesterday for the first time with the aeroscreen when we did the seats. There was no halo and no aeroscreen on the car.

It's going to be all right. No power steering, like F2. Brakes should be similar. Just getting used to the track, that will be important. A street course like this, like Long Beach, the walls are really close. Of course, the track is really bumpy. That's the main difference with the European tracks, tracks of the Formula 1 calendar where the track surface are really flat. That's going to be a thing to adapt.

Q. You had some success in Formula 2 at Monaco on a street course. Do you like the street courses? Does that give you a little bit of confidence coming in?

THEO POURCHAIRE: Yes, I love street course. It's very good because especially in qualifying you feel when you are at the limits, one very, very small mistake and you can end up in the wall. You have to be really precise, push a lot, take risks.

I will just try for me this weekend to get used to everything because compared to when I won in Monaco, I don't know the track like in '21 in Monaco. But for me I will have to learn the car. Even the championship, everything is new.

I will just take it easy at the beginning and just do my best.

Q. Do you have any personal expectations for the weekend, goals? What do you see as a successful weekend from a personal standpoint?

THEO POURCHAIRE: Yeah, just to give my best. Of course, I want to do the best result possible. I'm a competitor. As a racing driver, as a competitor, the only place we all love is to finish first.

I mean, I'm realistic, so I just want to give my best. If I have an opportunity to do a great result, if I qualify well, if in the race I feel comfortable, then I will of course give my best and try to take good points or very good results home. So yeah...

Q. Unfortunately F1 seat didn't come your way last season. Was INDYCAR an avenue you were potentially looking at previously? Is it something you're looking at potentially after SUPER FORMULA after this year?

THEO POURCHAIRE: F1, I'm a reserve driver at the moment. Let's see what will the future look like. Right now I'm just focused on my INDYCAR race in Long Beach. It's already a lot to think about, a lot of information, new things to learn.

I'm thinking about only the INDYCAR for this weekend.

Q. There's also a French driver that drove in Formula 1, Romain Grosjean. Have you talked with him? Has he given you some advice for the race?

THEO POURCHAIRE: I didn't understand the question.

Q. If Romain Grosjean has given you any advice or you have talked to him about the race?

THEO POURCHAIRE: Not really, to be honest. I talked a little bit with Christian Lundgaard, Marcus Ericsson, Felix Rosenqvist as well. I met them in Indianapolis. They invited me to watch the Japanese Grand Prix. It was fun to meet some of the drivers.

But, yeah, they just told me at the end of the day, of course, it's a race car like any others. Just it's quite heavy. The championship is difficult, very high level, very good drivers.

I mean, I will have to adapt myself. I need to discover myself everything, to adapt quickly of course because I have only two practice sessions, so...

THE MODERATOR: Thank you all very much. Thank you, Theo, and best of luck this weekend.

THEO POURCHAIRE: Thank you very much.

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