

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Théo Pourchaire

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. Quick turnaround from the streets of Long Beach to Barber Motorsports Park. Even quicker seemingly for our guest today, Théo Pourchaire, back after becoming the biggest mover in the race at Long Beach. What does he have in store next?

Théo, here we are Wednesday, your first NTT INDYCAR SERIES race just three days ago. How much are you still thinking about Long Beach and how difficult is it to transition looking ahead to your first road course race?

THÉO POURCHAIRE: Yeah, first of all I think I'm really happy how the weekend went in Long Beach. It was my first ever race weekend in INDYCAR. Yeah, I was discovering the car on Friday, the track, and the team as well.

Of course, I arrived two weeks ago there when the team called me to drive for them in Long Beach. But it was still, I mean, new people to me, engineers, mechanics, all the people working in the team.

It was a good weekend overall. I'm happy with my performance and the team's performance. In the race we were really quick. Of course, I finished as the biggest mover of the race from 22nd to 11th, which is incredible my first INDYCAR race. Yeah, really proud of that.

Looking forward to jump back in the car in Barber.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously a lot thrown at you there. Have things slowed down a little bit? Are you getting more comfortable?

THÉO POURCHAIRE: Yeah, I'm getting a lot more comfortable. For the confidence, as well, it's super important for me. I mean, I did a great weekend in Long Beach, I didn't do any big mistakes. Sometimes I think I touched the wall twice. I was trying to reach the limits of the car and the track.

I have a great, great team around me. They are helping

me a lot. For my confidence, it's amazing. Hopefully I can continue like this in Barber. I still have a lot to learn. I just did one race weekend in INDYCAR. Never did a complete test day in INDYCAR. I still have a lot to learn.

THE MODERATOR: Let's go ahead and open it up for questions.

Q. You were just talking about learning. What did you learn the most? I imagine there was a lot going on last weekend.

THÉO POURCHAIRE: Yeah, I mean, I learned a lot of things. I think how the car behaves on the racetrack like Long Beach was important for me to discover. But it will be even more important to rediscover the car, I would say, in Barber because the track is completely different. This is one thing.

I would say also the INDYCAR races, it's super long, 85 laps in Long Beach. It was really tough. A few pit stops. The strategy, as well. The fuel saving. For me, it was something new. It was not easy to learn.

In the end I think I adapted pretty quickly to this championship, to this car, to the team. As I said, I still have a lot of things to learn like, for example, for me this weekend it's going to be a new racetrack. Again, I will almost start from zero. I have a little bit of experience now so I feel a little bit more confident, yeah.

Q. The physicality of an INDYCAR, what was that like for you? Do you feel you were fit enough to handle it?

THÉO POURCHAIRE: It was a challenge, to be honest. But I don't think it was an issue for the performance in Long Beach. I think I was feeling good in the car. I had a good rhythm during the race. I could manage myself, rest myself in the straight lines. It was okay.

I expect the race in Barber to be a little bit more difficult on that side. There's a lot of high-speed corners from what I saw in the simulator, and I watched many races in onboard cameras to prepare the race. I feels more like Silverstone or Spa, tracks I'm used to in Europe. Very physical.



I'm going to give my best. Again, I will be exhausted at the end of the race, but that's all right. I will give my best.

THE MODERATOR: I remember Romain Grosjean's first test at Barber Motorsports Park. He said the first thing he needed to do was go to the weight room and lift some weights. It will be interesting to get your feedback Sunday afternoon.

Q. It's only been one weekend, but do you almost feel like you're already at home coming over to INDYCAR?

THÉO POURCHAIRE: Yeah, sure. I mean, I feel like the team helped me a lot to adapt myself to this championship. Adapting myself to the car and the track is my job for my side. Of course, I have engineers to help me with that. I have simulators. Adapting myself to the American culture, to the INDYCAR championship, this was very important because, as I said, it was my first weekend in INDYCAR.

But, yeah, I feel like home here. I have great people around me. As I said, for my confidence as well in the car, it's super important to feel ready. Thanks to Arrow McLaren. They prepare me very well for that.

Q. You're a reserve driver on the Sauber side. Reigning F2 champ. Played with an INDYCAR. Where do you balance the timeline for yourself?

THÉO POURCHAIRE: Yeah, sure. I mean, INDYCAR was already on my list last year. It's something I always wanted to do. I didn't have an opportunity to drive. I feel like I was also waiting on an F1 driver with Sauber. Unfortunately, I was not able to go to F1.

There was also the SUPER FORMULA, which is a great category. That was also an option for me. I decided to do that.

INDYCAR is great. Why not coming here full-time in the future? It's an option.

Q. Do you have a timeline on that as far as how long you're willing to wait on the F1 opportunity?

THÉO POURCHAIRE: I feel like I have a lot of time in front of me because sometimes people can forget that, but I'm only 20 years old. Of course, I'm F2 champion, which is great.

I want more. I want to win a few championships. If I can win one day the INDYCAR championship, my dream is also to be an F1 world champion. That's the dream of everybody.

I have a few possibilities. I still have a lot of time in front of me. I would say, yeah, probably a few years.

Q. How do you feel about ovals?

THÉO POURCHAIRE: Ovals, it's something I always wanted to try one day. Hopefully I will have the opportunity to try it. It's for sure not easy because some people in Europe can see it as we just have to turn left and be full throttle. That's completely false. I already had a look a little bit at the races. I was like, Whoa.

I was watching Indy 500s. I'm watching this race every year. It's really difficult. But I would love to try one day. It's also very difficult. A lot of strategies. A lot of fuel saving as well on the ovals.

Yeah, why not try one day? If I have the opportunity, yes.

Q. For a driver that is coming into a rapidly approaching race weekend, how much time do you spend this week on rehashing and learning from what you learned from Long Beach versus preparing for a new track?

THÉO POURCHAIRE: Yeah, I feel like this afternoon I will work again a bit with my engineers. We will I think speak a little bit about Long Beach, but not too much. Barber is a completely different track. I don't have a lot of time to adapt myself to this new challenge. I think we will mainly talk about the points we can improve from Long Beach that can be useful for Barber. I would say probably the out-laps, in-laps during the race, pit stops, race starts, overtaking, things like that.

The pure driving will be different in Barber. It's a lot more high-speed track. I think we will focus more on Barber right now. When I arrive in practice one, I have to be in the pace quickly because, I mean, we have a little bit of time in practice one. Practice two is really short. I have to be already in the pace by practice two. Then quallie, it's super tight in INDYCAR.

I think we will work on Barber.

Q. What have you told your mates from Europe about the NTT INDYCAR SERIES? Has anybody called you for you to discuss what you did at Long Beach?

THÉO POURCHAIRE: To be honest, there's a few people, yeah, from (indiscernible) F1 team, they wrote me a message before the race just saying, Let's go, Théo, give your best. We know it's not an easy situation without testing. Yeah, they were supportive, as well, which is good.

After the race, I received a few messages from many people. They were happy with my performance. It's great to see also the people from Sauber watching what I'm doing here in America.

Q. What do you tell them as far as the INDYCAR SERIES? What is your perception a few days later of the series?

THÉO POURCHAIRE: I mean, it was incredible. In Long Beach, I think of course it was really good event to do your first INDYCAR race. It's an amazing place, a legendary track.

Of course, I think I expect Barber to be as good as Long Beach because for me Barber is going to be a new track, but it looks like an amazing track, very, very different. I will be able to discover a new side of INDYCAR, a road course track, very high-speed. I will be able to experience the downforce.

Yeah, I mean, it's going to be great. I'm super happy. INDYCAR is a great championship. I expected to be great, but that great is cool. It was really cool. I was able to be quick in the race, which makes it even better.

Q. Last week was the first time you ever stepped foot in California. Have you ever been to Alabama before?

THÉO POURCHAIRE: Yeah, tomorrow's going to be my first time in Alabama. Yeah, I think it's great. The good thing is that I always loved the USA. To be able to have this opportunity in INDYCAR at the moment, I'm able to travel and discover a little bit the USA. I like it.

Q. Going into Barber, what are the keys to taking that next step? How do you keep this momentum going? What are your expectations heading to Barber?

THÉO POURCHAIRE: Yeah, I think it's been a great first race for me in Long Beach. Good thing is that it was already good without any experience in INDYCAR.

So coming into Barber, I just want to think only about myself, just trying to drive the car again in practice one, do a lot of laps, discover as much things as possible.

I have a little bit of experience now, so I will not be completely lost at the first time I will be in the car. In Long Beach, the first session, I was discovering everything. The track was really bumpy. There was a lot of traffic. The experienced drivers, they were already driving really quick, passing me on the track. It was a bit tricky.

Now it's going to be fine. I just have to work hard again. I'm sure we can have a great car as well there in Barber. The team is doing a great job. I just have to follow my teammates. They are great drivers.

Yeah, I'm sure I can improve from them, learn from them, and myself. It's going to be great.

Q. Has anybody told you about Alabama, what you have to see here?

THÉO POURCHAIRE: Not really, to be honest. They just told me that the track is amazing. That's the good thing. As a racing driver, I'm happy to go to an amazing track. I think there is a great museum. Also it's a beautiful place.

I'm looking forward to discover Barber. Unfortunately, I don't have a lot of time to visit Alabama. I hope to be back in the future to visit, only visit the country. I'm here to race. As soon as I arrive at the airport, we go straight to the track and work.

Q. You've come into INDYCAR very quickly. How much of a benefit has it been to have Tony Kanaan on your side helping you out?

THÉO POURCHAIRE: I mean, it was very important for me to have someone like Tony helping me to get used to introduce myself to the team first and to get used to the INDYCAR championship.

I mean, he's a really talented driver, of course. Experienced driver. He won a lot of races in INDYCAR. He could help me a lot in the simulator as well watching the onboard cameras, telling me what to do, what to avoid also in Long Beach, for example, on a tricky track like Long Beach. He will also help me and it will be useful in Barber because he already drove there. For sure he has experience.

Tony is also a very nice person. He's like a friend now. It's super important for me to have him and speak to him, to laugh with him. We are always together. It's good to be with him.

Q. You're going from a street course to a permanent course in Barber. What can you bring in terms of your experience of racing in Europe?

THÉO POURCHAIRE: Yeah, for sure it looks like more European track. I said it before, Silverstone, Spa-Francorchamps, more or less like that. High-speed corners, elevation change.

I mean, it's a new track for me again. I expect it to be a

little bit difficult at the beginning, but I will get used to the track after a few laps.

Driving a car with high downforce in high-speed corners, I know how to do it. But the INDYCAR, I never tried the INDYCAR in those conditions.

Again, I don't expect myself to be in the top five or top three after the first session. I expect myself to start from, yeah, a good pace, follow my teammate datas and work with them, work with the team, build a strong weekend from practice one. That's the key for me, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: You're not paid by the kind words you give Tony Kanaan, are you?

THÉO POURCHAIRE: Don't worry (laughter). I have to be careful because he will be too confident after. I have to be careful with Tony.

No, he's a nice guy. It's good.

Q. You always are referring to the simulators. Can you take us into that, your sim work, how important it is. What does it look like? Hours upon hours? Do you own it? Is it Arrow McLaren's? How realistic is it?

THÉO POURCHAIRE: So in INDYCAR the simulator is a Chevy simulator. It's based in Charlotte. All the teams who are running a Chevy engine can use the simulator. You have, of course, I think to book the simulator if you want to drive in the simulator.

Yeah, you just jump in the simulator, do a lot of laps, a lot of laps, try setups, try different grip levels to be as close as possible for when you will be jumping in the car in practice one. You can try a lot of things.

But a simulator session, I mean, we can start from 8 in the morning and finish around 6, 7 in the afternoon. Of course, we do some little breaks. We can watch the datas, try to watch onboard cameras for the racing lines if we want to try different racing lines.

It can be a very long day in the simulator, especially from my side, the Formula 1 simulator, I'm doing a lot of simulator with Sauber. Those days during the race weekends when I'm there, for example the team is in Japan racing in Suzuka, I'm in Switzerland racing in the simulator during the night, during the Japanese time. It's tough because we do a lot of laps and we try to find a good setup to help the guys on the track. This is tough.

Yeah, I mean, simulator nowadays, it's super important because we don't have a lot of track time. We need to be

prepared when we jump in the car to perform well.

Q. Have you ever done any sim work on an oval?

THÉO POURCHAIRE: Never, never, never. That would be interesting. I think if one day I have an opportunity to drive on an oval, the first step is to do definitely a little bit of simulator.

I don't feel I will be able to jump straight into the car on an oval driving at crazy speed range. I would like a little bit of simulator if I have to do ovals.

Q. Can you describe the similarities and differences between SUPER FORMULA, F2 and INDYCAR?

THÉO POURCHAIRE: Yeah, I think I can say I'm a lucky guy. In last six months, I drove a Formula 2 car, Formula 1 car, SUPER FORMULA and now an INDYCAR. Not a lot of drivers can say that and I'm really happy because it's good. I'm only 20 years old. Just to have, yeah, the possibility to drive those kinds of race cars, it's amazing.

I would say, yeah, of course Formula 1 is amazing. It's super fast. Formula 2 is a little bit like INDYCAR, I would say. We have no power steering. Of course, the downforce level, the weight of the car is a little bit different. The tracks, as well. It's difficult to compare both cars.

The SUPER FORMULA is completely different. It's super light, not so powerful. We don't go too fast in the straight line. It's super fast in the high-speed corners. A track like Suzuka, for example, it's almost as quick as Formula 1 car in sector one. As soon as there is a little bit of straight lines, it's not quick. It's very different.

Those three cars, F2, SUPER FORMULA and INDYCAR are really good to drive. Especially the INDYCAR, I love it. I mean, the racing is good there. Racing in Long Beach for 85 laps, overtaking a lot of cars, pit stops, that's what I like. It's good when you have good races like this.

I mean, at the moment I'm super happy to be there driving the INDYCAR. I love it.

Q. You have experience with Formula 2 in Monaco, then Long Beach. How can you compare those experiences?

THÉO POURCHAIRE: It's a little bit different. I would say the track in Long Beach, there's a lot of bumps. It's crazy. Everybody told me that's one of the street courses with the less bumps on the calendar. I was like, Okay, already very bumpy for me coming from street course tracks like Monaco or Jeddah in Formula 1. They are really flat.

Monaco, there are some bumps, but it's fine.

The Formula 2 and INDYCAR are close. It's not so far, which I think it's help me quite a lot. So this is good.

Q. Can you recommend INDYCAR to Dennis Hauger? Is INDYCAR something he should look at?

THÉO POURCHAIRE: Yeah, I think so. I know Dennis very well. It's a really good guy. We are together since go-karts. We are driving in the same categories. Formula 3 we did together. Then Formula 2, two seasons together.

I really think he can win the championship this year. Of course, to have a place in F1, it's tough nowadays. I mean, if I'm him, if he wins the title, INDYCAR is an amazing option. It's not less. It's not under Formula 1, for sure.

F1 is good. It's the dream of everybody, every racing driver one day. Since I started racing as a kid, F1 is the dream. But INDYCAR is really good, as well.

I think about one day winning the Indy 500, winning an INDYCAR championship. That would be awesome.

Yeah, why not? Dennis, if he comes here, I will take care of him.

Q. Can you describe by your experience how difficult it is nowadays to reach Formula 1, even though you are the Formula 2 champion?

THÉO POURCHAIRE: It's very, very difficult because I feel like there is not a lot of new drivers in F1 nowadays. It's the same drivers since a lot of times. It's good to have some experience and good drivers, but they need to win, they need to be really good. So this is good.

But in my position, I'm young, I'm still really young. I know I can have probably a few more opportunities to go to F1 if I'm a really good driver. I think a place like the INDYCAR championship can be the best championship for me to show myself.

I hope I can drive more there in the future, if I don't have the opportunity in F1. That would be awesome.

Q. How did you find the racing product in INDYCAR? How did that compare to everything? How excited are you to experience more of it?

THÉO POURCHAIRE: The racing product is really good. The good thing in INDYCAR is that everybody has the same chassis, same tires. You can, of course, develop a

little bit the cars, if I'm right. You can develop a little bit the dampers, that kind of things. It's quite simple category. You have two engines, of course, which makes it also close. That's why the racing is good.

The drivers, the level of drivers, is amazing. You have really experienced drivers like Dixon, and also rookies. Everybody's good. It makes the racing really tough.

I like it. I enjoyed a lot Long Beach. I hope I can perform well again in Barber. I think I will enjoy it in Barber. There is also a lot of overtaking possibilities. The racing looks good there.

Q. Was there anything specific about the car that stood out to you that made it quite fun to drive?

THÉO POURCHAIRE: Yeah, the power. It's very powerful, which is really, really good. When you're in the car, you accelerate, it's like, Wow, there's a lot of power. I was surprised. I was smiling. I was a little bit not scared but in Long Beach the first lap, I was like it's very bumpy and powerful, I have to be careful.

In Barber, it's going to be fine. Yeah, it's very powerful. I like it to drive. It's close to F2, so it's something I'm used to a little bit. Even though it's a new car, it's good to drive. It's very fun.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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