

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Scott McLaughlin

Takuma Sato

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up this Wednesday at Indianapolis Motor Speedway ahead of PPG presents armed forces qualifying this weekend and obviously the 108 running of the Indianapolis 500 presented by Gainbridge, joined by the two quickest of the day, Scott McLaughlin, P1 overall and Takuma Sato who was quickest in no-tow speeds. He will join us momentarily, but Scott, driver of the No. 3 Pennzoil Team Penske Chevrolet, set to qualify for his fourth Indianapolis 500 a top speed of 229.493 miles an hour in the 78 laps that you turned today. Kind of a busy day for you guys in the limited time we had this afternoon.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, it was a pretty busy day. Well, the start of it was pretty slow, and then once we got out there, it was hustle and bustle just getting out there and finding some space, and traffic running was probably what we were working on. Race car feels really good, basically straight out of the truck. Even yesterday when we had those limited running, I felt really good there just from a balance perspective, and just had that confidence today.

But yeah, ran some really good runs in pretty dirty air deep in the pack and was able to pass a few cars, and that's always a good sign.

Q. So much anticipation to get out there, everyone hates waiting for the track to dry. Once you get out there, what was the feeling like?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: It's awesome. So boring, there's only so much Netflix you can watch. I was over it. I watched about three movies but then I was ready to go once we got going, and I was happy as. When the car is good straight away, that's a nice feeling. I feel that anticipation, as well, because it is quite a bit of anticipation just getting ready to go. I think this is two years in a row we've lost opening day. It's a nice feeling.

Q. What were the three movies?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: There was one about Wembley. It was Kevin Hart, his roast, and I can't remember now. Survivor. I actually watched an episode of survivor. Caught up with it.

Q. Some anniversaries this year, 50th anniversary Johnny Rutherford drove that car to victory in the Indy 500, 40th anniversary that Rick Mears drove that car to victory in the Indy 500. Do you look at things like that and say maybe this is my year?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: No, at the end of the day Indy chooses you, as we all know. But pretty cool. I actually didn't know about Johnny's -- 50 years since he won in this car, too. I knew about Rick, obviously. Super cool. We did some really cool stuff with that car this morning, and I think that's going to be some really cool stuff come race week that Pennzoil are putting out.

I count myself pretty privileged to work with a guy that won 40 years ago, and I'm excited to actually add a bit of history, but at the end of the day there's so much yet to go, and we all know, and I'll keep working.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously joined by Takuma Sato, 17th overall but quickest in no-tow speeds of 221.219 miles an hour. That came on Takuma's 28th of his 31 laps. Sato returns as a two-time champion of the 500, driver of the No. 75 Amada Honda for Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing, set to qualify for your 15th Indianapolis 500 already. 31 laps today. How did it go?

TAKUMA SATO: I mean, at last, right? Everybody is frustrated with the weather. We were praying it's a little less for us, but at least we got a good three, four hours in a session. Really great back at IMS, back in a car, and I don't know what Scott told everyone, but we really enjoyed coming back here.

It was a good day. Good day after a really short run after yesterday.

Good to be on top of the non-tow lap, but it's really supposed to be because we were working on some of the pure speed stuff, so let's say qualify-ish, the simulation



because of the team had a really challenging year last year, so we really needed to find the pure speed of that.

We had a couple items with experimental things, and we were probably 80 percent completed what we wanted to see. So it was a very productive day.

Q. Scott, everybody has got practice plans starting March and April, but of course the rain can always throw those away. How much have y'all been able to get through in the very limited running that we've had over the last few hours?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Well, it's not a huge amount at all, really. You have plans, absolutely, but they change a lot when you're here, especially at this time of year.

I think we're in -- for me, I look at it, it's the same for everyone. It's not like anyone else is going out there and running. We're all in the same box together. You've just got to make the most of the track time that you have, and I felt like we had a really good day today with how much we got through. We were able to sort of put the car away at 6:00 instead of running all the way to 7:00, even though the rain didn't stop, so that was always our plan anyway.

It's nice to be in that situation, but at the same time it can change quickly if you let it. You get a little bit complacent or whatever, so it's important that we stick with it and keep focused, and hopefully we're there or thereabouts.

Q. You were the fastest on the no-tow sheet. Were you trying to do more no-tow running, or were you trying to do more traffic running today?

TAKUMA SATO: Sure, ideally by yourself all the time, but bearing in mind that everybody wants to go to running today. It was nearly -- not impossible but very difficult to get by yourself, so the couple runs that we were in tow, gentle tow, but we tried to avoid it today. Overall I think we've done a lot since last year. I think we did very, very different the philosophy of the car, so it was good to see the car putting up better speed.

Q. How much fun was that out there today?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Always fun. It's always fun around here.

Q. Scott, I believe if you want to include April's open test and then the past two days, of like the 26 scheduled hours, there was only about six of green flag time. With that in mind, you had the fourth most completed laps today. Was that kind of the strategy you were looking for, just to complete a lot of laps in a

limited time?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, it was just a plan. We just ran through -- obviously running through a lot of race trim stuff, a lot of traffic stuff. A lot of it's also, for me, I feel like I'm improving year in, year out, and you just never stop learning. Sometimes it take a little bit to get back into the rhythm of things around here and understanding the timing, and that's how guys like Takuma have won this race is understanding that stuff, and I'm trying to get a handle on that pretty early.

We'll work on qualifying here tomorrow and whatnot, but at the same time, I think we're in a lot better shape. For me mentally, just I'm a bit more focused on the right things, not being blase on the little details because it takes every little detail to be good here, and I think we made the most of our time.

Q. Taku, yesterday when we talked, just the very limited time that you had, you said getting back in the car kind of jolted you a little bit, getting back in there, dealing with the G's, felt a little dizzy after getting out of the car. Did it feel better even though you only got 31 laps today?

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, that's totally gone. That was kind of very first day, first outing deal, and yeah, today I felt much better, much more comfortable.

Obviously we really need to check for the drivers environment in the cars, and like I said, we tried very different philosophy of the setup from last year, so everything is experimental, and the time is just never enough.

But we rely on my other teammates to get it run for the race trim to improve what we found in over the course of the winter vice versa that I just purely wanted to have a pure mechanical, can I say, go-fast car. So from that point of view, it was good.

Like Scott said, it's just rhythm, getting into rhythm. Even the guys in the car for every two weeks, a few need to get the rhythm back, so when you're out of the car for a few months, it's more challenging. But I've got fortunately good experience and a good team surrounded, so yeah, I'm happy.

Q. Taku, can you compare how the Rahal car feels around here now compared to when you were last in the Rahal car?

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, it was very interesting. After I departed two years ago, when I left, how has it been, it's



obviously last year was certainly the most challenging year for them for the 500, which is why probably Bobby keep calling me: Taku, when are you going to come back. But I'm very fortunate to be called back to the team. Half of the team members is really familiar faces, and the new members and engineering has been updated so much since I left.

Obviously huge thanks to Dale Coyne Racing Chip Ganassi the last two years to be able to go race together, and I gained so much experience from the other world, too, that I don't know how much I could implement to this team right now, but certainly the last four months we were working really closely updating every single element, so our teams trim will be so ready, showing the Rahal car was much more competitive than last year, just generally speaking.

Really happy to be back in the car, and the cars are just trying to finding the back-to-back which one is feeling better in terms of the performance. We really need to rely on the engineers, but they're doing a good job.

Q. When you say "interesting," can you shed light on anything? I know you've got to be general and probably not too specific.

TAKUMA SATO: Well, you can't really describe because the car is mentally, physically it's very, very similar car, so there is a little bit manipulation of a setting, it's just sensation is very different.

But you could say day by day -- from yesterday to today, wind direction 180 degrees different and car feels very different, too, and that kind of window is very, very narrow. But it's a relative thing, isn't it.

Today I think we found to be ourselves happier than last year for sure, and for me, the car is not there yet, where I want it, but there is some few signs that's quite promising, so we will see for the next few days we can gathering together if we can speed it up.

Q. Scott, I see you've got a Kiwi contingent coming over with the Scott McLaughlin experience. Talk about that and how cool that's going to be for you.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, I think it's just something that we just wanted to -- I guess this is an amazing experience for anyone even if you're in the States already, but anyone internationally to come and experience, and to have that option for people to come in and enjoy it from the inner sanctum with me, it's exciting. There's going to be people here for the whole week next week from -- I think from Monday onwards, so they're going to be doing bits

and pieces throughout Indy and then seeing Carb Day, parade, concerts, all that sort of stuff.

It's exciting. It's cool to be able to bring a little bit of a vibe to the INDYCAR event from the New Zealand contingent and just appreciate the support from everyone, whether they're here or not.

Q. Your fourth Indy, how are you feeling going into this one?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, I feel really good. I understand the race a lot more for sure. I think you just build a bit of experience every year, and it's just invaluable, that experience. Someone like Taku who's done 15, you want to have that experience, but you just try and soak everything up like a sponge and understand what you want from the car, and I feel like I've got a pretty firm understanding of what I want from the car, especially on an oval. It's just a matter of putting the pieces of the puzzle together, and I think I'm in that frame of mind and that experience level where I can really sort of take it to the next level. Hopefully we can do that this year.

Q. Takuma, I was sitting up in Turn 1 and towards the end of the last session I could feel the wind pick up. How challenging were the conditions out there going into Turn 1?

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, it's quite -- not gusty but it's relatively strong wind towards Turn 1, which means on entry face to get to the mid apex and then the whole car is pushing out. So it was quite challenging.

I would imagine if any cars go into the pack and the cars in front it's very struggling for the second half of the corner, whereas Turn 2 to Turn 3 is probably helping better by the wind and then Turn 4 is having a lot of understeer.

It is always challenging. Myself, too, kind of qualifying simulation by yourself when you're starting to trim, it's the same sensation. As a mechanic you really need to rotate and you need to find a balance. From that point of view, it was a good exercise today.

Q. We saw from the jump about 15, 17 cars jumping straight on to the racetrack into one huge giant pack. What was that like running in that this early in the week?

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, I think you could say quite a few years ago for the first two days maybe you just want to check up everything and install the cars and system check and then maybe do some wing sweep, right height sweep and making own aero map, et cetera. But now there is the

manufacturers and data sharing system, and we know when we bring the car here it's relatively in the ballpark, in a good window, particularly if you look at the weather really starting from the opening test, sort of last month -- like you said, six hours to green flag is very, very short. It's really rapidly coming up for the Fast Friday, which means Thursday tomorrow. Like Scott said, so many people is going to be qualifying sim still is not happy with the race car, et cetera.

Just with the time really difficult for everyone. That's why I think you could see just banging on to the tire, putting in the wings, and seeing how the car affects in traffic and relatively safely if you can finding a mechanically better situation, that is a goal. That's why I think you can see the giant pack from day one like today.

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