

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Jim Campbell

Rob Buckner

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Obviously also joined by some representatives from Chevrolet. We all know Jim Campbell, vice president, GM performance and motorsports. To his right, Rob Buckner who is the INDYCAR program manager. Jim, go ahead.

JIM CAMPBELL: Appreciate it. First of all, it's always great to be at Indianapolis. This is what we look forward to all year long. We're here at Indy for qualifying. It's one of the most special weekends of the year in terms of all motorsports. One of the toughest, as well. As a manufacturer I will tell you we are pushing as hard as we can to give our drivers and teams the most horsepower and performance that we can possibly give them because that's what you do at Indy. So we're pressing hard, and you can see obviously we're using the Indy 500 spec 1.5 bar. There's been no testing at 1.5 bar with the exception of some time on Friday, no testing prior to that at 1.5 bar. This is a weekend where you put the higher boost levels in and you've got to go.

What I would say is when you look at the Fast 12, super proud that nine of the top 12 are Chevrolets, representing five of our six teams.

We're excited about that and what that can mean for tomorrow and going on to the Indy 500.

As I said, we're pushing as hard as we can, and we had about five plenum events, on the 78, the 33, the 24, the 20, the 5 and the 17. What is that, six? And so the good news is the engines, no harm to the engines. Engines are strong and great. So that's good. We do -- obviously have put those drivers at a deficit when they've been trying to make their fast four laps.

The team, our team is going to work here overnight, running in dynos around -- our dyno facilities around the world. We're going to be running overnight, and then we're working on ways to mitigate the issue and eliminate -- aero

proof it for tomorrow around controls and calibration.

Obviously there's some team strategy that will -- as the ambient conditions are clear for tomorrow, we have the forecast, but as we get closer to it, there's some decisions they can make, as well, so we'll be working with them on that.

That's what I want to say. We're pushing as hard as we can. This year we have nine out of the Fast 12. Last year we had eight out of the Fast 12, but we did not get the pole last year, so we're pushing to get to the pole. With that, we'll turn it back to Dave.

Q. When you say you're going to have teams working overnight, is that globally or is that --

JIM CAMPBELL: Yes.

Q. -- these poor guys here?

JIM CAMPBELL: Everybody. Everybody. We do have teams in different parts of the world that will be running. We do have dynos that we have access to around the world. So we'll be running the dynos there, and then our team here, Rob and his team will be pouring through all the data, all the data analysis is what you have to do. We've got to be ready to go tomorrow.

What I would say is the performance for Chevrolet is there. Engines were not harmed. We did put some pressure on some drivers that were making some great runs. The 78 had a great run going, and that was on us. So we've got to make sure we're ready to go for tomorrow.

In addition, all the Chevrolet drivers have made the field. Nobody is on the bubble with the bowtie. So proud of that, as well, and I want to thank Rob, and I see Mark Stielow is here in the back who leads all of our programs across all of our motorsports, so Mark and Rob and the team, I appreciate what they've done.

Q. The 78 was obviously very upset after his lap. How does Chevrolet feel when these things happen?

JIM CAMPBELL: Yeah, we feel terrible. Chevrolet and our

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sister brands at our company, we race in seven, eight, nine series around the world, when we have an issue that is on us, we feel bad. But these are partnership efforts, and so we've got to -- it happened. We've got to go forward now. What are we going to do to go forward. The 78 is one, they had a great run. But every one that I mentioned had decent runs going, and we had to basically -- they basically lost that opportunity.

But it's racing. When you have an issue, you've either going to ignore it or dig in and work to fix it and mitigate it, and that's what we're doing.

Q. Much like Kyle Larson, I do not know what a plenum effect is in layman's terms. Could you just tell us, is that a hiccup in the engine? Is that the driver's fault? Is that on Chevy's end? Larson didn't know, either, so I don't feel so bad.

ROB BUCKNER: Yeah, absolutely. I think these engines are being operated on a knife edge here this weekend, and we're pushing for every bit of performance. So on top of the cylinder heads in the air inlet system of the engine is a plenum, and there's some port fuel injectors up there, so while these engines are sustained high speed, that plenum is very full of fuel, and if we have any event over a downshift that can ignore that fuel, it ends up evaporating the plenum of its fuel air charge, temperatures rise rapidly, and it pretty much -- to the driver it's a perceived engine kill, and they vary in duration, they vary in severity. Unfortunately here today, the ones we had were very noticeable to the drivers. Anything around Indianapolis is very noticeable to the drivers. It pretty much scrapped those runs, which we really hate for all those drivers that we impacted their day.

Q. It starts with the shift, the driver shift?

ROB BUCKNER: All of them today were across the shift. There's other times that circumstances vary because we're running this plenum full of fuel and really pushing as hard as we can today for performance.

Q. For either Jim or Rob, I know we've been running these power units essentially since 2012. We're getting to the end of the cycle before you guys add the hybrid unit to it this summer and will obviously have it at the 500 next year. I know we've seen a lot of engine failures from your competitor over the last eight or nine days. We've had these plenum events from you guys today. Are a lot of these hiccups or failures that we're seeing over the last week in some way related to just getting so late into this engine life and you guys trying to find every last little bit to find an advantage or reach maximum capacity and performance?

ROB BUCKNER: Yeah, I think the engine wars are unique, and when we see the drivers pushing each other, it's easy to see their fast hands, reactions, and things they're doing to compete. The engine programs are really behind a wall, and we're competing out of public eye in a lot of ways in how hard we're pushing these engines, and we're seeing the results of that. I don't think it's due to the age of the engine. I think it's due to how hard you have to operate and push them, the development paths you have to take to get that performance.

We take a tremendous amount of pride and responsibilities in showing up here with a great engine program, and we definitely had the power. We had the reliability, and we didn't fail any engines. All these engines are good to use, but we lacked some robustness in different conditions and the transience of the qualifying runs. I wouldn't say it's due to the age of the engines. It's really we are pushing very, very hard for every last bit of performance, and I'm very proud of the gains we made coming into this year. I think we brought great power. We've got to get all the details right, and I have high confidence that our group can do that overnight, and we've got a great shot at pole and front row tomorrow.

Q. As these were happening throughout the late morning and early afternoon, I think Kyle Larson's was the first one that cropped up, he was sixth in order as we were running through the first time. Can you take us through what your afternoon was like as much as you can? I'm sure one of these things maybe isn't too frightening, but when you start to see two, three, four, five and six, what were you guys going through in the background to try to make sure that this didn't happen again while still trying to get as many of these cars into the Fast 12 as possible?

ROB BUCKNER: Yeah, the only acceptable number is zero. That's the standard we try to push to. One is too many, so immediately when the 17 car's event happened, we're looking at ways to mitigate it, and unfortunately throughout the afternoon, they were increasing in frequency. We don't have a full understanding of why, but again, just full confidence in our technical group, our partners at Ilmor, everyone at GM motorsports. We will figure it out, and we'll learn from it, and we'll come back with a better package.

Q. You guys have both talked a lot about pushing the envelope, pushing for better horsepower, performance. Just to clarify, a plenum event, is that a byproduct of trying to get more speed and performance, or is it random?

ROB BUCKNER: It's definitely related to how hard we're operating these engines. I think it's easy to overlook how much engine performance has been gained throughout the years. A lot of times you come up with some really good gains. You show up here, and it's barely competitive. That's just a result of how hard us and our competitors push each other, how much the Indy 500 means as a manufacturer and as an engine program.

Again, this is judgment weekend for us. We want to bring big power. We want to be robust. We want to be reliable. We missed one little piece of it today, but to Jim's point, really proud of having nine of the top 12. I think we have a speed advantage, and we're just going to work as hard as we can going into tomorrow to finish executing the weekend.

Q. The last one of these I can recall was when Pato O'Ward was leading the season opener at St. Pete last year. Have you had any since then and now?

ROB BUCKNER: Yes. We usually have them in practice when they're not so visible. But one of the things we love about the Indy 500, we don't hide from it. We're accountable for what goes on here, especially with the engine program. We're going to own it, good and bad, and learn from it, and come back tomorrow.

JIM CAMPBELL: The other thing I would add, obviously the Chevrolet engine we develop with Rob, Mark, Russ O'Blenes, who's not here, he leads our engine programs for all our race programs. Then our partners at Ilmor.

But I would say it's not just engine. It's about in the off-season working on all the improvements we can on the engine and then just the overall performance integration. The teams have been doing that all the way through. Obviously proud of the improvements we made on the engine in the off-season, but it's performance integration that's the key, whether you're talking about racing or production cars on the performance side, both things matter.

Q. When you go back to the normal boost level for the race, will the plenum issue be taken care of that way with running lower boost?

JIM CAMPBELL: Actually that was one thing I was going to close on is that actually tomorrow -- we'll wrap up tomorrow, big day. We're focused on that. That's our primary focus. Monday the teams will run the same engine at 1.3 bar, and Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, they're switching to fresh engines, race engines. We'll run at 1.3 bar.

The incidence at 1.3 bar is much lower. Not to say it would never happen. But much lower. Much lower. When we get to 1.3 bar, it'll be a much smaller concern.

But nonetheless, we don't want any driver to be affected by it.

Q. Jim, from a business standpoint at Chevrolet, the fact that Kyle Larson, Hendrick Motorsports, Jeff Gordon, Rick Hendrick are going to be part of the Indianapolis 500, how much does that really boost your brand awareness with Chevrolet?

JIM CAMPBELL: Well, first of all, it's exciting. It hasn't happened in a while. Obviously Kurt Busch was the last time it happened, and in that case he ran a Honda over here, which we supported because we wanted to see somebody do the double, and he ran a Chevy at the Coke 600. We love it because you get crossover of fan base. That's the biggest benefit.

Then for Kyle, to see -- Kyle is one of those drivers, as you all know, he can race just about anything. For him to have this experience, I'm happy for him and his family, and it's fun to see the energy and enthusiasm as he discovers this incredible Indy 500 and INDYCAR racing.

We obviously have a lot of pride in what happens in our NASCAR programs, as well.

I think it's a win for Kyle. It's a win for Chevrolet. It's a win for INDYCAR and NASCAR.

By the way, the only way you can do a double with the same brand is with Chevrolet.

Q. NASCAR is a win on Sunday, sell on Monday type of sport. Can the same thing about said about the Indianapolis 500?

JIM CAMPBELL: For sure. When you win one of the greatest races in the world, it lifts the brand opinion. People think about it you more quickly when they're creating their shopping lists. By the way, many of the fans will swing by one of four or five locations around the track where we've got Chevrolets in the midway, we have Chevrolet cars, trucks, crossovers, got our OnStar technologies on display. We have race engines. We have an INDYCAR example there, Corvette. We have three different Corvettes over there. We have all of our battery electrics, the Equinox EV, Blazer EV, Silverado RST EV. For those in the market for a new car and then come here and have an amazing race weekend and discover about what's new at Chevrolet, and we see people will consider us more quickly when they think about Chevrolet, and if



you can run the Indy 500 and have nine out of the top 12 and hopefully more as we go through the weekend, I think it's credentials so when people think about a next car or truck, we hope they put Chevy on their lists, and we see over time that that does work.

Q. Rob, with something like this, is it a matter of -- obviously it's random, like you say, but is it a matter of also looking at maybe it's changing shift points or something of that nature, just because it seemed like a lot of them happened coming out of 1 into the short chute?

ROB BUCKNER: Yeah, I think it seemed like one of the first couple laps with the full boost, it seemed pretty prevalent. We're going to look at everything, ECU data, shift points, shift lights. We're going to work with the teams, drivers. At this point there's really no mitigation strategy we would eliminate. Just wanting to have a clean day tomorrow, and we'll do everything we can for that.

Q. What is the level of concern about tomorrow?

ROB BUCKNER: In my mind, top priority, we've got nine of the 12, so we've got a 75 percent chance at it. I think we've got some really fast cars. I think all nine of those cars are capable of being on the front row. Our intention is to put three Chevrolets on the front row tomorrow, hopefully with no plenum events. We're going to keep working towards that.

JIM CAMPBELL: And all Chevrolet drivers are locked into the race, which is great.

Q. Did you have any plenum events this past week or more specifically on Fast Friday leading up to tomorrow?

ROB BUCKNER: I don't remember us having any drastic ones throughout the week at 1.3 bar or yesterday at 1.5 bar. But again, conditions evolve. Engines are being operated as hard as they possibly can be today. This is really the day we hang everything out, us, the teams, the drivers. We always have seen some unique things pop up every Indy qualifying weekend is an adventure. We got some parts of it right, and other parts of it we have some work to do.

Q. Were there any particular concerns about this before today, or today was really the start of it?

ROB BUCKNER: Today was the start of it. I don't think we had any awareness of it coming into today, and we'll quickly get our arms around it and get it resolved.

Q. Following up on that, would you describe it as mechanical glitch or a software glitch, a detector glitch? How would you describe it?

ROB BUCKNER: A set of circumstances, a set of inputs and events that lead to rapid combustion of fuel. We can describe it a lot of different ways. To the drivers it's very interruptive to their lap, so we've got to eliminate that as we go forward. We'll learn from this, and I don't doubt we'll come back with a stronger package in 2025.

I think Jim said we had eight last year, nine this year, so I think he's expecting 10 next year.

Q. Jim, how important is it for Kyle Larson to do well? Y'all were all giving big congratulations after his big run down there in the pits, but how important is it for him to do well?

JIM CAMPBELL: You know, for a driver to drop into the series and be able to have the awareness behind the wheel, the quick learning cycles and the speed, it's impressive. So it's important to show that a driver can switch disciplines and do really well, and Kyle is one incredible talent, and it's been a long time since we had a double. I'm so excited. Kurt was the last one. It's just great to have a double.

There's others -- believe me, there's others that want to do it. Those that want to do it, we'll entertain it if we can find the right circumstances. It's really important.

Q. I know you guys are a little bit more technical on this, but when we think of boost, I think a lot of us think more in horsepower. You're talking about 1.3 bar to 1.5 bar. Are those normal boost levels for Fast Friday and qualifying weekend for the 500?

ROB BUCKNER: Yes, those are very standard. Superspeedway has always been 1.3 bar during this era. I think Fast Friday has been 1.5 bar and qualifying since 2020.

Q. From a horsepower perspective, that's again clarifying, about 100 extra horsepower for Fast Friday and qualifying weekend; is that correct?

ROB BUCKNER: Yes.

Q. Jim, you've known Kyle probably as long as anyone around here has. He admittedly doesn't know things like plenum event, manifold, milking the cow, all the Indy traditions, and yet he's still able to get in the car and turn the fastest lap of his life and be completely unfazed, like let's go race tonight. What

makes him so special, despite not knowing anything about cars?

JIM CAMPBELL: He's one of a rare number of drivers that can literally race in multiple disciplines. It just doesn't happen, because to be successful in today's motorsports, you almost have to specialize. He has found a way to break that mold. It's hard. He's done it, and he's convinced his various partners that he's better because of it.

The other one that was kind of like that was Tony Stewart, and Tony Stewart convinced a lot of people that he was better when he was doing multiple disciplines.

So Kyle, if you see him, he's super focused when he's getting behind the wheel, but he is energized. He's enthusiastic. Afterwards, after he made his lap and did the media, he was there with his family walking around the infield area just taking it in. I think that's a little bit of his -- he's a little bit older now, and I think he's realizing when you have a special opportunity to take it in. But when he's behind the wheel, it's all business.

Q. Do you believe that his ability to run different disciplines makes him a better driver?

JIM CAMPBELL: I do. I do. And I thought Tony Stewart was the same way.

Some people want to relax by doing something else. They want to golf. They want to rest. They want to go to the beach. They want to whatever. Tony Stewart and Kyle Larson relax by racing cars. That's what they do. And they're better for it.

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