

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Sunday, June 2, 2024

**Bud Denker**

**Michael Montri**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joined by Grand Prix chairman Bud Denker and Grand Prix president Michael Montri.

As a general question, interesting day, for sure, looked a little dicey at the beginning of the day with weather. Danced around it for a good part of the day. Despite that, great fan support, grandstands packed, rooftops packed, entertaining race. Initial thoughts?

MICHAEL MONTRI: I thought it was a phenomenal weekend. We work a whole year to put on an event like this. To see all those plans come through for the team, it's really gratifying.

We had a very successful event in '23. We learned a lot. We went into this year with the goal of fine-tuning a lot of those. To hear some of the comments coming out from the fans, just little things, right? It's great to hear that they were having a better experience. That's what we try to do every year.

BUD DENKER: Talk about the Turn Three Club. A little action out there.

MICHAEL MONTRI: Best seat in the house from the jump. Turn Three Club, Michelob Ultra Turn Three Club was in turn two. We had a grandstand there last year. We moved the grandstand out, brought in a platform, a true club-style seat. Huge success. Again, great views of turn three. Obviously that's where a lot of the action was. I didn't see much of the race.

Yeah, it was a great success.

BUD DENKER: How about your Victory Lane celebration area?

MICHAEL MONTRI: Yeah, that's another one of those, great idea. I think it was a huge success. Lots of notes for next year on how to make that better, smoother, more impactful.

At the end of the race to see the grid, pit lane filled, the proceedings on the victory podium, it fulfilled the vision.

BUD DENKER: From two perspectives. From our corporate support, looked like a battleship out there, the chalets. We have 73 chalets. We didn't sell them all out last year. Every one was sold this year. If you were up there at all, it was just a party the whole time.

It was a party also because we had a lot of people who were first-timers. They saw a lot of chaos, which was exciting for them. Very exciting for them. I think we got a lot of new fans this year because of the number of people that were there, the fact that it was sold out.

The Chairman's Club, we call it, we had a capacity for how many?

MICHAEL MONTRI: Well, depends on how you measure. We like to keep it at 400. We were way above that.

BUD DENKER: Close to six. It was really a party.

I think from a corporate perspective it was tremendous because we got many new sponsors in, including on top of one of the parking deck on Franklin Street, Siemens.

From a fan perspective, we worked on a number of different areas for fan experience. Jumbotrons, added more, so people can see what's going on around the racetrack, because it's very hard to do it. I would say that worked out really, really well for us.

Remember, half of this racetrack is open for free. That gives a very different perspective to our fans that are here than a fan that's paying money to come to an event. You had a lot of kids out there with their parents you probably wouldn't have had otherwise.

From a fan perspective, corporate, fan base, it was good.

We don't know what our numbers are from the fans attending, but talk about our revenue from a fan perspective.

MICHAEL MONTRI: Going into today with one day left of the ticket sales, good walk-up crowd, especially for the rooftops, we were 10% year over year on revenue, ticket revenue alone. A good year for that, for sure.

THE MODERATOR: When you look and see the comments from the drivers, the fans, different perspective of how we had it last year, different deal this year. Tailgating added. How do you evaluate that when you hear the comments about the fan experience?

BUD DENKER: I took a picture of the tailgating that was up there. Went as far back as you could see. It was people pulling up 10 feet off the wall, then picnic tables behind there, partying like you were at a football game.

Last year those fans were in there for free, okay? So this year they paid. That was a very cool perspective. I walked around those party decks. It was a party deck up there. Pretty cool atmosphere up there. That was one of the learnings from last year.

You think about that perspective, it looked like an amphitheater with all the people surrounding you. The dual pit lane was cool. At one time we had 17 cars. We didn't see that last year. How is this going to work? It all worked out fine, right? They figured it out. That was very cool for the fans to see.

THE MODERATOR: From the competition perspective, a lot of cautions.

BUD DENKER: Will Power, he had his moments. How many penalties did he have today? It's an even number. We were talking afterwards. He said he passed people in turn one, in turn three, in turn four, in turn five and eight, right? The passes in turn five are crazy, including Herta's attempt, right? Those were crazy. The action on the track...

I'm not sure if it was just the fact that the track was green because of the rain or craziness of it. Turn three, we knew that was going to be a better passing zone because we repaved it. We heard that in the sports car race yesterday. Much deeper on the braking.

I didn't hear Scott or anyone else's interview. I talked to Scott. He said it's an epic track in terms of the ability to get around. He said he got passed by Lundgaard one time. Never thought he'd pass me there. He passed him back, he said, Dixon said.

How many passes? Any idea?

**Q. 653.**

BUD DENKER: That was Indy.

**Q. 327 passes. That's off the timing chart.**

MICHAEL MONTRI: That can't be right?

**Q. This was today.**

BUD DENKER: Wow.

THE MODERATOR: We'll check that number.

BUD DENKER: Weren't there 180 last year?

MICHAEL MONTRI: Yeah.

THE MODERATOR: That is a crazy number.

MICHAEL MONTRI: That is a crazy number.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. Two days ago I walked around the fan zone. It's like Monte-Carlo without the craziness, risers, money involved. I was surprised to see fans from Finland, Sweden, Budapest, Germany, Sicily. Do you promote this race in cooperation with Detroit outside of America? We had some rain issues today. When you set up the date for this race, how far can you look ahead and see what the weather will look like?**

BUD DENKER: What was the second question?

**Q. How far in advance can you see the weather will look like?**

BUD DENKER: A week.

MICHAEL MONTRI: I would say like an hour (smiling).

BUD DENKER: Even a week, you discount it, right? I don't look at the weather until the day before frankly. It causes anxiety.

**Q. You don't have contact with the airport?**

BUD DENKER: We have a meteorologist. National Weather Service.

To your first question on the fans, I think what I saw and heard throughout the course of weekend, people came here from the other parts of the country because of what they saw in the NFL Draft. We had 775,000 people here, right? It looked so good that people saw it across the



country, perhaps around the world. I saw several people that came here because of what they saw on TV for the Draft.

The NFL Draft, we had 775,000 people. We didn't have one incidence the crime, not one. I think that all lends to the view of this being a safe, vibrant and clean city. We have the best mayor and police chief in the country.

You see it downtown. You feel safe, secure. It's clean. I think we got a lot of draft off the NFL Draft.

MICHAEL MONTRI: Good way to put it. I like that.

**Q. From an artistic standpoint, I'm sure that you as a promoter, your job is to sell tickets, get excitement, sponsors. To see the race take so long with all the restarts, the calamity going on, does that leave there's got to be a better way to do this?**

BUD DENKER: What was the race in length?

MICHAEL MONTRI: We were in our window.

BUD DENKER: Was it over two hours? Our goal is between 1:50 and two hours. I was surprised it wasn't longer than that, frankly.

I think there's opportunity. You look at some of the things, this is a Jay Frye thing obviously as the idea of quicky yellows. You go yellow, then you go yellow again a lap later, then you wait again.

I'm not a rules official, but why not a few laps of green. IMSA does 15 minutes. We wouldn't do that. You know what I mean? I think the quicky yellow is a good idea to get us back to green faster.

MICHAEL MONTRI: I would say also, I preface this by saying I didn't see much of the race, but if there were any out there that had to rely on the AMR team to restart, obviously that will go away I think with the new engines.

BUD DENKER: It did, yeah.

**Q. Seemed like it wasn't until the final 40 laps to have any rhythm. You'd probably like to see more action than that.**

BUD DENKER: At the same time people loved to see the action.

From a racer perspective, which I am first and foremost, I'd like to see it. From a promoter standpoint, nobody disappointed where I was. There was so much action

going on. There were some dive bomb moves there. What are they doing? That caused a lot of excitement.

**Q. I think Marcus Armstrong said he loved the course, would like to see maybe the pavement that you added in the areas for the whole circuit. That's not easy to do because of all the different governments that you have to deal with on this. Do you sit down and think about what you can do to improve the track surface?**

BUD DENKER: That's a good question. On Jefferson, for instance, Will Power asked me the same question, take the thousand feet down all the way. You can't because each intersection has to have drainage, has to have a crown. It's not going to be flat because you're not going to have drainage. As a result of that, you're not going to see a flat track across Jefferson. That's the problem there, okay?

**Q. Both of you are the ones who run Hy-Vee Iowa race weekend. It's a week earlier this year. How much of a constraint does that put you on? They're throwing a NASCAR race in the middle of that.**

MICHAEL MONTRI: Yeah, look, we have a great team here. Fortunately we're able to pull from a number of different places, not only in Detroit, but we also have a couple people in Iowa that are dedicated there, and the IMS team in Indianapolis.

The Brickyard is a week after Iowa this year. That's probably more of a constraint than this race is to them. But we're in good shape. Hy-Vee pitches in like no other sponsor in the country. Chevrolet is pretty plugged in. I would say Hy-Vee even takes more on their shoulders. We're going to be fine.

THE MODERATOR: 217 on-track passes today. That's up from 189 last year.

BUD DENKER: Despite all the caution laps.

**Q. One of the drivers brought up the fountain. It's very hard to balance the fountain against the podium. Images of the drivers splashing in the fountain. How can you balance to find some kind of iconic Detroit thing? Do you have any plans? Is that a consideration, to have something unique to Detroit?**

MICHAEL MONTRI: Well, I think for those of you who were out there at the Auto Traders Winner's Circle, fulfilled a lot of those moments this year. The fountain was iconic. No doubt about it. There's only one of those in the world, literally.

With this new winner's circle hanging above pit lane, I think



it created some really cool visuals. The fountain, it was spontaneous the first year. Took a couple years to catch on.

What you'll see the year after, the year after, is people coming to pit lane to watch the proceedings. It's a great atmosphere. It was packed. Everybody is celebratory. The winning team was out there. It was cool.

I think the shots we'll get from that, the atmosphere it created, I think it accomplished what we were trying to accomplish there with the new podium.

Plus, with it on that bridge, it really creates the stadium atmosphere that we were looking for. As Bud put it, the aircraft carrier suite structure that we have there, the grandstands on the other side, it is a stadium. With that Autotrader Winner's Circle hanging off that bridge, we just put it in the stadium really at the end of the day, so...

THE MODERATOR: Arni said 33 under yellow, or 32 under yellow compared to 47 today.

BUD DENKER: 15 more caution laps but much more passes.

**Q. Obviously Penske Entertainment is now promoting four and a half INDYCAR races. Having the extra events, that extra territory, made it more attractive to partners?**

BUD DENKER: You go.

MICHAEL MONTRI: Well, just to clarify, in Milwaukee INDYCAR is not the promoter, Penske Entertainment is not the promoter, it's Wisconsin State Fair. This team that is there now has never really done a major event themselves.

Certainly, anytime you can go to partners, potential partners, with a portfolio of opportunities, and IMS is one of those opportunities, it's a pretty good pitch.

Yeah, absolutely.

BUD DENKER: Great example of that is what Hy-Vee has done in Iowa.

**Q. Would Penske Entertainment be open to promoting more races?**

BUD DENKER: Sure, yeah, in new markets. Part of Michael's job.

**Q. It was crystal clean around here, which is important. Whoever did the environmental services, a**

**word about that. Pristine in terms of the appearance. I can't any of anything more important to a family.**

BUD DENKER: We put a lot of effort into clean. There's a big concert here on Memorial Day weekend called Movement that goes until midnight Monday night, late, late. It was a mess afterwards. We helped clean that up with the city's help. It's a state park.

Our focus on cleanliness is just that. Our team was out here till 10 Tuesday night in Hart Plaza. I take a great amount of time on the track. Anybody will tell you, I'm on that track a lot so it's clean, spotless, nothing happens.

We're in the retail business, right? Our company and business is selling cars. We have retail locations. Three thousand locations around the world. Those are all the nature of keeping our customer experience just that, clean and safe.

THE MODERATOR: One other thing I wanted to ask you about, volunteers. I heard a number of times with comments from drivers and fans how wonderful these volunteers are. This is a venue that required more support from the volunteers than ever before. Talk about the volunteers.

BUD DENKER: The breakfast we had, the continuity of people.

MICHAEL MONTRI: We started on Belle Isle a few years ago what we call our 10-year breakfast. It is open to any of our volunteers that have been a volunteer for 10 or more years. We're now up to 250 of those volunteers. If you can imagine, 250 of the volunteers have been here for 10 years. They can take their experience and translate that into the new members, groom them to be really good volunteers.

It's a point of pride with the people that work in our volunteer corps that is unmatched in any other corps that I've seen or been a part of. They do a phenomenal job.

BUD DENKER: Why do you volunteer? Why?

VOLUNTEER: (No microphone.)

BUD DENKER: Why do you volunteer?

VOLUNTEER: Third year. I work for GM. Great opportunity to spend some time around the cars.

**Q. Track design or layout. Was the car and drivers, IMSA or INDYCAR involved? Who was responsible for the track design?**



BUD DENKER: Michael and I. You have to think about the design of the track because the first thing you have to find is a pit lane. Behind that, 20 acres of asphalt to have your paddock. That's the challenge of having anything in a market like this, is where do you put a thousand feet of pit lane, then where do you put 20 acres behind it of paddock space. That limits you on where you could do it.

We didn't have a thousand feet of pit lane space. That's why you see a dual pit lane.

The other thing is you can't disrupt or shut businesses down. We have an international border crossing in the middle of our racetrack. Who has that, right? That has to stay open.

The design of our track allows people to come into the city, come into the Marriott, parking, but also come into the border crossing and get out of the border crossing without disrupting our race. It's the only place you can find where cars are going 25 miles an hour into the border crossing, cars going by you 185 miles an hour 12 feet away.

It was our design, his and mine.

Back to the point about we're racers, right? We know what it takes for overtaking, what you need to have in terms of space, in terms of runoff. We'd love to have gone down all the way past the horseshoe, turn three, hairpin, down to Huntington Place. Our original design was to go all the way down there and come around. The problem is there's no runoff down there. Couldn't do that. That's why we have the course the way it is.

We're not going to change the course. I think the course proved itself today and last year.

The elevations, you go up, down. Marcus Rasmussen said he looked on the computer, the sim, looked like it was a boring race. He saw the elevation changes which makes a big difference on people's perspective.

I call it the Monte-Carlo curve back here. The other thing that Michael did with Tony Cotman's help, many of the turns have Armco apexes. An extra foot which allows for better racing.

Turn nine was so smooth, turn three, picked up a second on what we had in qualifying last year. The design was Michael's and mine based on what you have in a city environment.

**Q. Without a track license you cannot make a race.**

BUD DENKER: We get certified every year.

**Q. In a couple years the GM headquarters are going to move. Any thought to how that is going to evolve? Will the track stay here?**

BUD DENKER: I think it will stay here. There's another thing you may not know about the 375 connector is going to change here in a couple years. We're in the middle of working with the state of Michigan to determine how it's going to look in the future.

The future plan would probably impact our pit lane area, right down through the middle. Michael is involved, our government affairs person is involved to make sure we can still race here when they change 375 here, which is two, three years away.

MICHAEL MONTRI: At best.

You don't race in a city, whether it's right in downtown or within the limits on Belle Isle since 1982, without really good partnership with the city. We're going to work really closely and figure it out.

**Q. The pit lane causes a lot of positive, negative, but interesting moments. One of the more negative we saw is that it kind of changes how severe a pass-through or stop-and-go penalty is for drivers. Do you think there's a way the series can have a unique rule for this track?**

BUD DENKER: That's a really good question because the came up afterwards to me from a couple folks. It's a real good point. You're not penalized as much it being a shorter pit lane, right?

Our pit speed was 40 or 45. My question is to the INDYCAR SERIES, what do you have to slow it down to to ensure you're not being penalized by having a drive-through penalty that's not really a penalty.

A very good point we saw this year. We didn't see it last year. We didn't see many penalties last year. It's one we're going to have to look at of based on the dynamics of our track.

**Q. Coming off of the Indy 500, you've been in the shadow of a high-marketed event. There's noise online about the series still promoting things coming off of that, not promoting so much going into this weekend. How does affect this race or it stands on its own?**

BUD DENKER: I think it stands on its own because of the



success you saw today, right? We did a lot of promotion in this marketplace, the billboards you saw around the city, social. We had a lot of partners that did advertising for it.

The other point as I moved around here, in certain areas how many more fans do you want, right? You can't put a lot more in those parking decks. Can't put more in the grandstands, which were sold out. Where do you put 'em on a 1.7 mile track?

The other part of our track is the riverfront, which is so beautiful. How many tracks do you have where you turn around and look at the riverfront, the walkway we have here. One of the best in the world.

It's a very unique place to be. You referenced. Monaco. It's just gorgeous when you look around you and the environment we have. We shouldn't take that for granted.

I'm satisfied with the track, satisfied with the environment, satisfied with the crowd. We had a concert last night that drew 10,500, free. We sponsored. Another by-product.

By the way, on Friday, the gala, we probably raised gross \$1.5 million. In the last nine years we've given away \$9 million to charity.

THE MODERATOR: Smokey Robinson was the grand marshal today.

BUD DENKER: He looks great, doesn't he?

THE MODERATOR: Looked great in a fire suit.

BUD DENKER: Very cool. Also the Detroit Lions in the chalet today.

**Q. Has there been any thought of having this race in any other spot on the calendar to make way for an oval immediately after the 500, or you plan on sticking with this?**

BUD DENKER: Michael can add onto that. Really the biggest reason why we have it this week is because of if it went one week longer than this week we would lose our sponsor chalet activity. School is still in session in Michigan, in the Detroit area. Once they go to vacation next week, this place empties out and they all head north. We saw that for Labor Day weekend. The first two years with Labor Day weekend, it was hard for our sponsors to get people here because it was the last weekend to celebrate being up north.

We would lose all that activity, corporate activity, not all of it but a lot of it. People would be gone. That is the primary

reason.

Somebody asked, a couple drivers, can't we push this back a few weeks to give them some rest after a full month of Indy. I agree it's tough. We would lose our partners' revenue.

MICHAEL MONTRI: I would add being in the middle of downtown here, we can't just really move our date at any time. We have to lock those in years in advance with the city because there's a lot of planning that goes into this.

This is the weekend. Again, I agree it's a good question. I've seen a lot of those questions similarly over the years. I would say this, too. Indy 500 is the Indy 500. The fact that there might be an oval on the calendar the next weekend doesn't mean it's going to race the same as the Indy 500 or create that type of race. You never know what kind of race you're going to get.

I would say for those that tuned in last week for the first time for the Indy 500, then tuned into this today, they got an entertaining race on TV. That's what we're looking for.

**Q. Do you envision the free grandstand tickets being a thing going forward?**

MICHAEL MONTRI: On Friday?

**Q. Yes.**

MICHAEL MONTRI: Comerica is a great partner. Free pre day dates back to the first Grand Prix in 1982. That will definitely continue.

**Q. Can we expect the same two support series next year or a new banner behind you for '25?**

MICHAEL MONTRI: Same ones. Same ones. Bud talked about the size of our paddock. In all it's a fairly tight paddock. We can only fit so many. The INDY NXT Series we want here. It's great to have them. The IMSA Series is the next level of professional racing in the U.S. as far as sports cars. Yeah, we'll have 'em both.

BUD DENKER: Our date is going to be the date it is this week. This will be the same week we have next year after Indy.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much for your time. Thanks for all your hard work, your leadership, your vision. It was a labor of love. Appreciate everyone's coverage. Hope you enjoy what I think is the best media center on the circuit.

