

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Scott McLaughlin

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up with Scott McLaughlin, driving the No. 3 Team Penske Chevrolet, beginning his fifth full season in the NTT INDYCAR Series, coming off a year with three wins and five NTT P1 awards and tying his career best with a third-place finish in the championship.

All that aside, we want to know how fatherhood is treating you.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Great. Yeah, she's a superstar, little Lucy. Yeah, she started sleeping through the nights, which is good. So we put her down and we've got a pretty good rhythm the last three -- I'll probably jinx it now. We put her down around -- I'm going to say it, but we have the four B's, right. It's bath, boob, book, bed. We got told that, and it's a no-brainer. She goes down at like 9:00 and she wakes up at 8:00 or 7:30.

But I have made the mistake a couple times, and I've asked -- of waking up in the morning, and I've gone, geez, she slept through the night, and Karly goes, no, she didn't. So that's the drama.

But yeah, my wife, she's amazing. She knows it's important. I've got to keep training her, keep going, and that's the best part about it, is finding how we've both adapted to it.

Q. Moms are amazing.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, she's killed it. I was there for the whole thing, too. It was incredible. I cut the cord, got in there. It was awesome. I'd do it again. 40-hour labor she went through. It was crazy. Oh, man, she's an absolute trooper. Love her. Shout out Karly.

Q. Since you're a big football fan, do you think Bryce Young is panning out better now that he's returned at quarterback?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: 100 percent. The question is going to be is he better than CJ Stroud. Texans are in the playoff absolutely, but I thought Bryce and his throwing,

he's been really good lately.

Q. His upside is probably better than --

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I'm just glad we're sorted in that regard because we're not going to make an emergency QB situation kind of like the Vikings are looking at, or Jets.

Q. His upside may be better than the quarterback in this city.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, yeah.

Q. Having the same gang back together, three of you push each other pretty good. Sometimes you get along great, other times you may get a little ruffled with each other. But having that consistency at Team Penske, I guess that's one of the hallmarks of the operation. How important is that?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Well, it's very important to set foundations, and obviously we've worked together this is my fifth year full time with these guys. We've had our ups and downs for sure, but I think that's just normal for guys that are really competing at the highest level, and I feel like we've all got a chance to win a race week in, week out.

But it's certainly brought out the best in me. They're the best teammates I've ever had in that regard.

But yeah, you'd be surprised how good we work -- for how competitive it is behind closed doors like in the truck and stuff, we're very open book and everyone sees everything, and I think that's why we see ourselves pushing each other even harder.

Q. There's a lot said the last year, particularly down the stretch, about Will being in the title hunt, being second a lot of the time to Alex Palou who eventually won the championship, and you kind of quietly maybe to some extent overtook him in the standings over the last couple weeks of the year. You had the second season in a row where you're the top Team Penske driver in the championship. What kind of pride do you take in if you don't win a championship that year to still be the best among your teammates across a



17-race season?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, it's been a goal of mine even before I was at Team Penske. For me, I always want to beat my teammates because you don't want to be -- you have all the equal machinery, and that's just a common ground for any race driver.

But at the same time, it was a bummer for Will. I shouldn't have probably passed him at the end. He had a pretty -- misfortune in the last few races. But that is the sport we're in.

But yeah, I was really proud of our stretch, our homerun, run to home I guess you could in the last couple years have been great. I've just got to get off to a better start, and I know that. But I've got all the ingredients that I need to not only be the best Penske driver again but also potentially take that next step, which everyone knows is what I want.

Yeah, working really hard in the off-season, but surprisingly having the baby and stuff, it's been great to get away from it all, as well, and just focus on something other than racing for once.

Q. I think I remember you told us coming into last year that you really truly felt like you could come out and win this championship, and you got fairly close. But coming in winning now two oval races in the back half of last year, something that you hadn't done yet. Do you feel in any way even more prepared having gone through last year? Do you feel like you really know maybe even more what it takes as you kind of plot out your goals and how you approach the 2025 campaign?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, I think every year for me is such a learning deal, particularly from where I started in late 2020 to like now I'm a completely different race driver.

The mindset needs to change compared to other championships that I've been in, as well, because things can just turn on their head so quickly in INDYCAR.

I thought I had the ingredients to win last year, and I still think I did. I just hadn't won an oval yet. We were close. But now having won the oval, obviously that's given me a lot of confidence.

But I'd be lying to say that I feel any different to last year. I certainly feel like I'm in the same boat. It's just a matter of circumstances and me putting myself in different positions, and hopefully sometimes you've just got to have a little bit of lady luck, as well. It's just got to go your way.

I don't think that has been kind to us, but it's been kind in other places. We'll keep working, but I'm as confident as ever for sure.

Q. As you reflected on last year, are there ways that you feel like you could improve or the team could improve or maybe what are the missing pieces to put a championship program together?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, I look back at two races, probably Toronto. Obviously that was a teammate drama. But that was a race where I was probably in my head that I was just going to finish where I finished, but it didn't happen, and that hurt.

Then Laguna, where I made a move on Will which didn't need to happen, whether it was Will or whether it was Kyle Kirkwood. That was a move that I probably didn't need to make at that point, and I cost myself a ton of points for what I was ultimately going to gain if I made the move come off.

That was a big learning after that race, and I think from that race onwards, that's why I was probably most bummed about the Toronto incident, because I felt like I was in a spot where I had set up everything to be in a good position and just be satisfied with where I was finishing.

But yeah, you always learn, and I think that's what I can do better, is maybe just accepting the position I'm in and taking the points.

Q. You've arguably been improving each year you've been here, and that shows on the results. It looks somewhat similar to your time in Supercars where you got better each year, each year, and then that ended with three seasons in a row in the championship. Does that feel similar to you, and do you feel like you're on that cusp now?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah. It's funny you brought it up because I've said that to Ben, my engineer, a couple of times. I feel like I am in exactly the same position when I signed on with Penske in 2017 for Supercars back then. I feel like I've done a lot of my learning.

I think in 2016, as well, in Supercars I finished third in the championship and had a couple race wins, and I really felt like I could have that next step. And ultimately I didn't win that championship, I lost it on the last race, but I put myself in a really good spot.

I feel like I'm in that same mindset here. I feel like I've lost all my habits that I had in touring cars. I feel very -- with my fitness and all that stuff, my neck and stuff that is

outside of the car, I feel very comfortable with.

I also know a lot of faces in here. I know what this day is all about. I know what airports to fly into. It's just like so many different things that you come to a new place that you forget how easy it is.

But I feel a lot more comfortable now.

Q. We were talking in Nashville and you said your 3 team, you kind of felt like you were the Buffalo Bills of INDYCAR. A rowdy fan base, Thirsty 3s; haven't won the big one yet. Do you feel in '25 you're going to shed this moniker and this is almost a championship-or-bust type season?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, because the Bills are going to win the Super Bowl. That's my pick. I love Josh Allen, man.

Yeah, I feel good. Everyone knows I have fun and muck around and whatever, but I'm pretty serious obviously at the same time. But that's just how I go about my racing.

I think we certainly feel like we're on the cusp of something really cool, but at the same time what I talked to Bruce about, I've got two amazing race drivers as teammates with exactly the same opportunities, so it's about me trying to find the most out of myself as much as anything.

Yeah, I've learnt sort of things and bits and pieces that I need to learn from, but I'm going to have to evolve throughout the season like we all do to be there at the end.

Q. Have you studied the path to maybe win this championship? Alex won, five wins, won a championship; he wins twice last year. Will talked about maybe going back. He was maybe a little aggressive last year and wanted to go back to how he won the championship. Have you guys studied what's the right method, the right path to win this championship?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think you've just got to do it your own way. As much as you can plan and think about what you can do and what you can't, we all know the right path is just consistent results. With a few wins along the way. I think you need to win a couple wins. I think you need to win a couple times for sure. But consistency is key, and we all know that.

But you've got to eliminate those big bad results, and we had a few of them last year which really hurt.

Yeah, I'd probably say three. Detroit, where I crashed out

by myself, and then Laguna and Toronto. Regardless, Toronto, whatever, like I still crashed out and it cost us a lot of points, where Palou and Dixon were just from the back to the front and just cruised.

That hurts. But yeah, we can all learn from that and get better.

Q. All three of you guys talked about last year from Team Penske how much work you've done in the off-season and you were looking at maybe the short track oval program and the whole oval program, and we saw the results of that. I just wondered whether during this off-season if there's been something that you've been targeting as a team, whether it be road course or oval again, to keep that improvement and momentum going?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, I think the 10 car, Alex has been really quick on road courses over the last few years, so I think ultimately maybe trying to find a little bit of speed. I think our race pace is really strong, but our overall outright pace, places like Mid-Ohio or whatnot, need to improve a little bit.

But yeah, we had a pretty solid year pace-wise on all tracks, but definitely room for improvement. I'd probably say street circuit wise I'm highlighting Long Beach. I don't think typically I've been that strong there as other street tracks that I go to, so I'm circling that a little bit on the simulator.

And then yeah, obviously just continuing our work that we've done on short and superspeedways.

Q. Then looking at a place not too far from where you are right now and the fact that Penske took the clean sweet at Indianapolis last May and you took your first pole position for the Indy 500, that was obviously a very special moment. Going into this May, does that mindset become, we need to do the same thing again, more of the same? Does that linger in your mind, or is it clean slate, move on, new year type deal?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: A bit of both. I think we've got to continue to evolve and get better because everyone saw what we had last year, and they're going to be chasing that deficit, as well, particularly in qualifying.

But I think for me mentally as a driver, it was nice to run at the front at the 500 and lead laps and stuff that I haven't done before that put me -- I think it puts me in a really nice headspace going into it knowing what that feels like and the position I need to be in.

We had a mechanical sort of issue throughout the race last year with the clutch that really honestly hurt us a lot and took us out of that lead group, or at least those first few positions.

So knowing that mistake, fingers crossed, won't happen again, and we can know that we can race pretty aggressively at the front and I know what I need to do from a timing perspective.

Yeah, driving perspective, not going to try and change too much, but we definitely have to evolve as a team to get better because everyone is going to be chasing.

Q. You had Simon on board, as well, so that played a part for you personally, as well.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yep.

Q. One final thing. Obviously you're teamed up in a couple of weeks' time with an ex competitor, SVG. How does it feel to be in the same team as a former rival?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, it's funny, it's weird, actually. We certainly -- especially over here now, we go out for dinners and have beers and whatnot and hang out a little bit more than we probably did in the past.

But not that we didn't like each other beforehand, it was just awkward, and now we're sort of friends and teammates and excited for Daytona. I head to Daytona for The Roar, and then the 24. It's such a good start to the year, and I think we've got a really good car and a good team lineup.

Connor Zilisch is a superstar over here now, and then Ben Keating is probably the best bronze you can have. We've got a good shot, but it all depends on BOP and all that sort of stuff. I have full confidence in GM and Corvette that we can come with a really good package and give these European manufacturers a good go in our land.

Q. Scott, looking at the performance you put on at Indianapolis last year, taking the pole, leading that Team Penske front row lockout, as well as were it not for the penalty at St. Pete, let's say, the championship could have been firmly in your grasp. Looking at 2025, what would it mean more to be, Scott McLaughlin, Indy 500 winner, or Scott McLaughlin, INDYCAR Series champion?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I've always said the Indy 500 for me because -- it's similar to how I felt in Australia. It's not a disrespect not championship itself, but everything needs to go perfect on that one day. You have to have a perfect

race and make it happen, and ultimately that's what happened to us when we won Bathurst and then we won the championship.

But the 500 -- the championship itself, you can have a bad race and come back and there's a lot of things that can happen. Your competitors can have moments throughout the season, whatever, and look, that would be an amazing objective, as well.

But for me, the 500 one, the history of it, but also it's just an amazing race, and yeah, that's certainly what I dream about the most.

Q. From the Team Penske perspective, assuming the current trend continues, has the team identified anything that you as drivers individually need to do or on a team level to do to make even a budge toward the immovable object that Alex Palou has been over the last two years?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think ultimately we were as fast if not faster than him. It was just about putting together the year that he had. As we know, he's like a professor with half the stuff that he does. He's very good and very consistent and have a huge amount of respect for the boy.

But we're not overthinking it. I think there's also plenty of other drivers that are super good. I think Colton Herta had an amazing year last year. Without a couple of incidents he was going to be right there, as well. This INDYCAR racing is going to be so many world class drivers up the front every year, and we know that.

It's just a matter of focusing on ourselves and what we can improve. That's all we can control, and hopefully what we've done is enough.

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