

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Marcus Armstrong

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up our final session of the NTT INDYCAR Series content days, leading us off this afternoon is Marcus Armstrong, driver of the No. 66 Meyer Shank Racing Honda, beginning his third season in the NTT INDYCAR Series, of course picked up his first career podium at Detroit last year before the transition now to a different team, although the association with Chip Ganassi Racing still exists very much.

Tell us about the off-season. How much are you looking forward to 2025?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Looking forward to getting on track a lot, to be honest. It has been a good off-season. It's been productive in many ways. A lot of time in the gym and a bit of time at home with family.

But honestly, raring to go. Want to be on the track ASAP.

Q. New team-ish. You still have the association with Chip's team, as well. How much of that -- the transition would be pretty easy I would think, or maybe not as bad as other transitions may be.

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: It doesn't really feel like a transition, honestly. I stay with the majority of my engineers, so my lead engineer and the assistant engineers I've worked with previously at Ganassi. I know everyone very well, and obviously in theory it's the same car.

Obviously prepared by Meyer Shank Racing, but from a technical point of view, it's fundamentally the same as last year.

I'm hoping that there's a good form of continuity involved and we can hit the ground running in St. Pete.

Q. Is it true that Felix was your driver coach when you were younger?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: We've had a bit of a laugh about this because Felix helped me at a couple of events when I

was in Formula 4 fresh out of casting and he was F3 champion at the time with Prema and I was racing for Prema in F4, so he was helping us.

I don't actually remember a lot about his coaching, but --

Q. Made a good impression then.

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Yeah, I mean, I do remember him saying, oh, to be on pole at Monza you need to start the lap 3.5 seconds away from the car in front, something like this, because Monza is basically an oval with a couple of corners, especially in Formula 4.

I ended up starting the lap like .5 behind the guy in front and passed him into Turn 1, and he was like, what are you doing? I remember that. But we did do pole, so he must have done something right.

Q. Sorry I missed you when you were out at Hampton Downs the other day with your dad's Porsche. I believe the lap times weren't too shabby.

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Yeah, it was a quick trip. My dad is doing well. He's setting some purple sectors. He's the quickest dad out there.

Q. You've done a full season now in INDYCAR, so it's comprised of the ovals, as well, which was the missing ingredient. If you look back at those, how did you find that oval experience last year? I'm sure Indy was a slightly different kettle of fish, but the other ones you turned some serious laps on.

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Yeah, the ovals initially were quite daunting having not done anything on an oval, and in the end I sort of fell in love with it. I enjoy the challenge of not knowing what to expect, especially going from practice to qualifying, having never done a qualifying session at that particular circuit wherever we were going and having the track to yourself and just sort of guessing my way through it, I really enjoyed it.

Then obviously the racing itself seems like a bit of a -- it's a different sport. I thoroughly enjoyed it. And it obviously helps that I'm in a very strong car, as well. The Chip

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Ganassi Racing car was especially strong on some of those ovals. I feel like, as well, I sort of had all the right coaches involved with Scott, Alex and Dario in the room. It's a fairly big advantage from a normal rookie standpoint.

Q. Going to another coach now, especially when it comes to the month of May, by adding Helio into the mix, as well. That certainly must give the MSR and Ganassi relationship a lot of strength going into May. Dixon said yesterday it's the first time he actually would have considered Helio as a teammate alongside him. You've got the best of both worlds, haven't you?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Absolutely. There's a lot of good brains in the room from a technical standpoint. Good drivers, as well. Helio for sure offers a different perspective. He's a hilarious guy and I've really enjoyed the interactions that we've had so far.

We haven't properly talked about Indy yet, but I'm sure he's going to be offering some great advice.

Q. That crossover to (indiscernible) the synergy of Ganassi there, and I guess it's nice that you've got so many of your engineering squad with you. Has that made that transition, as you touched on, sort of seamless really, just a continuation of where you were but under another banner?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Totally. It's quite helpful to have that continuity because learning the references of a new race engineer and assistant engineers and understanding the way that everyone works, it does take time.

I think we worked really well together last year. We delivered some decent results. But I would say that in a general sense, we had the potential and speed to do some really good things.

I think that it's really cool, and I'm grateful that Chip and Mike Hull saw the potential in our No. 11 unit and sort of gave us another chance to work all together again.

I'm looking forward to it.

Q. Looking at the season ahead, taking Indy out of the equation, but if there's a circuit you're most looking forward to in the season, is there one that's stood out now that you've spent a couple of years in the States?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: I mean, I always enjoy the street circuits, the St. Petes, the Detroits, the Torontos of the calendar. If it was up to me there would be even more street circuits.

But there's lots to look forward to. I look forward to every single race weekend, especially now that I know what to expect. Last year I was kind of a bit -- I had question marks over the ovals because I had never done one before. The year before I was learning an entirely new car, a new tire, a new power unit, everything.

Now it's season 3, and it's quite reassuring that I at least know what I'm in for and can attack it.

Q. I just wanted to see how prepared you felt for the Indy 500 because looking back at last year you got the two weeks of preparation, but when it came to race day you didn't really get any race running at all. For you does it almost feel like you're a rookie again at Indianapolis or are you confident in what you learned without the race running?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: No, I don't feel like a rookie going into the Indy 500, despite the fact that we had the engine failure. Last year was difficult as a rookie because we had a lot of rain anyway. We didn't get a lot of laps.

But it's important to sort of go through the motions, as well. Like the whole month is quite jam packed, and even optimizing the schedule logistically, it actually makes a difference. And having done it, I kind of know what I'll do differently.

I was looking at my sleep data from May last year, and I'm wearing an Oura ring now, and in May I think I averaged like five and a half hours of sleep per night because we had so many sponsor events and just logistically it was a tough month driving up to Carmel, down to the speedway, et cetera.

I think this year it's going to be -- we're going to streamline it for sure, and just having done that, it's going to help a lot.

Q. I've been looking back at your F2 days in the off-season, and I believe three of your competitors from your first year are racing for the first time. Another three have done INDYCAR races in the past, and another two have tested INDYCARs but not raced. Why do you think there's been such a popularity trend from F2 drivers to step up to INDYCAR as opposed to pushing off Formula 1 options?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Well, I think the racing product speaks for itself. I'm pretty well-connected with all the drivers over there in Europe and I'm good friends with the majority of the guys that are in Formula 2 at the moment, and there's a lot of interest coming from Europe. Not only from F2 and F3 but also F1.

I think it's a phenomenal series where the car is an animal to drive. It's clearly down to the driver. Obviously it's a moving target for sure trying to optimize this car. It's a challenge, of course. But I think there's an attraction to this championship because of how just brutally difficult it is from a driving standpoint.

The car is an animal. It moves around, and you really have to grab it by the scruff of the neck, and all the drivers in Europe sort of watch it on TV and wish they were doing it. I know that for sure because they've told me that.

As well, it's a proper, proper championship where you have to train and you have to be fit and strong and it's a challenge physically. I feel like there's a whole lot of things that attracts the Europeans over here.

Q. What's it like working with Mike Shank as team owner? He's a pretty energetic inspirational type guy.

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: He certainly is. I've enjoyed it so far. Mike and also Jim have welcomed me into the team with open arms. Mike is a proper racer. Like he kind of strikes me as a driver if I didn't know any better. He's really got the bit between his teeth to have success, and that's what I really like about him.

It's racing and performance first; that's the priority. So far, so good. We're going to work together really closely. In fact, I'm going to go see him later in the week, as well, just to chat through things and try and speed up that learning process.

Q. As an alumnus of Prema, what are your thoughts on them coming over here with a full effort? It looks pretty impressive from what we saw at the launch last Friday.

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Yeah, I know them well. René and Angelina have done a good job so far, and I also know Callum and Robert pretty well, as well.

I'm sure you know I used to live with Callum and we used to share an apartment in Marinello, and Robert and I were teammates for quite a few years.

It's cool to have them over here. I think there's going to be probably a learning process for them, but they've got fantastic personnel and two good drivers, so there's no reason why they can't be up and running quickly.

Q. You were talking about scruff of the neck, driving the car, what INDYCAR is like. As the series moves to a new car in 2027, do you want it to remain the same? Is that what separates the series?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Are you asking me what I want from the new car?

Q. Basically. Would you suggest it remains tough to drive, scruff of the neck --

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: I think just by virtue of the tracks, the circuits are generally quite slippery and bumpy, it's always going to be -- you're going to have to drive with an aggressive style. It would be lovely if the car was a bit lighter, I think. Lighter, a bit more downforce. Fundamentally lighter.

I feel like the car that we have now, even if it was in pounds, but let's say 50 kilos lighter, it would be a pretty cool, pretty amazing car to drive, especially on street circuits. Maybe a lower center of gravity, as well.

I feel like we have tons of power at the moment, especially with the hybrid unit. There's a lot of torque down low. Even sometimes in races when the tires are off, it feels like your wheels are spinning in fourth gear, especially at Detroit.

The power unit side is okay, I would say, from my point of view. But yeah, I'd love the car to be lighter, a bit more downforce, maximize the ground effect, bigger diffuser, and lower center of gravity, maybe a bit further forward weight distribution. But I imagine they know exactly what they're doing.

Q. You nailed it last year, but who's your Super Bowl pick? I think you had the Chiefs-49ers last year.

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Did I? Well, let me think. It's a good question. We were just talking about it now. I was going for the Packers and they're obviously out. But young team; they're a year away.

My pick to win the Super Bowl --

Q. Not necessarily win, maybe the two teams. Then if you want to give your pick, go ahead.

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: No, I'm pretty firm. I think it's going to be the Lions. I think as well we were talking about it before, but I think they're going to be healthy just at the right time.

It's going to be interesting to see this game this weekend, the Commanders and Lions because I don't think they're going to punt one time. They've got two very aggressive coaches that are just going to be going for it on 4th and 8.

If I was coaching the Commanders right now, if I was Dan Quinn, I wouldn't be too happy about it.

But I think with a mobile quarterback for the Commanders it's going to be difficult for the Lions because I think they struggle a bit with that, especially with their injuries on the defense.

But their offense is reasonably healthy, and I expect to come right just around the time of the Super Bowl, so that's my pick.

Q. Now that you're with an Ohio team, I'm curious if you have a college football pick for Monday night, too.

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Well, I'd literally have a gun to my head if I don't say Ohio State.

Q. What's a street course you're looking forward to the most going into this year? I know you had the podium at Detroit earlier with those circumstances.

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Well, the one I'm looking forward to most, frankly, is St. Pete because it's the first race of the season.

But from a general driving point of view, Detroit. I always seem to love that event. Despite the fact that we were on the podium last year in Detroit, I just enjoy that whole event because you obviously come from a very busy month, and Detroit is quite laid back in comparison.

And it's a circuit that I gel with. It's very bumpy and interesting in many ways, but the whole vibe of the event is great. Walk to the track every morning, sort of low key, not a huge amount of media commitments. Then we've always had a strong car there, too, so that helps.

Q. Also FOX Sports coming on with the INDYCAR coverage for the next couple years, how much does it mean to you that James Hinchcliffe and Townsend Bell are going to come back, but also that Will Buck is going to join them and be part of the garage for the next couple seasons going forward?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Well, to have Townsend and Hinch back is amazing. I think they're an awesome duo. And Will I know very well from my European days, and he's a fireball of enthusiasm. I think he's going to be great for the series. He loves INDYCAR racing. Naturally he's come over here, so obviously he loves it.

But every time I've seen him, spoken to him, he's raving about it, talking about it. Follows it very closely. He's also quite the fun on the Sunday evening after the race, as well.

He's going to be great. He's going to enjoy the American culture a lot, I think.

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