

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Tuesday, February 25, 2025

James Hinchcliffe

Will Buxton

Townsend Bell

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. As you know, this weekend begins a new television era for INDYCAR, the NTT INDYCAR Series and INDY NXT by Firestone. The Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg presented by RP Funding is the first of all 17 races to be featured on FOX, and that number becomes a record 19 when you add two more appearances during qualifying for the 109th running of the Indianapolis 500 presented by Gainbridge.

The INDYCAR Series is the only premier motorsports series in North America with all races broadcast on network television. Exciting times.

Joining us today, the booth for the upcoming broadcast. Will Buxton, award-winning broadcaster and New York Times bestselling author who returns to the FOX family after beginning his network career on SPEED Channel some 15 years or so ago. Will, thanks for joining us.

WILL BUXTON: Lovely to be here. Thanks for inviting me.

THE MODERATOR: Townsend Bell, veteran of 10 Indy 500s and champion sports car driver in his own right. Townsend, thank you.

TOWNSEND BELL: Thanks, Dave.

THE MODERATOR: Last but certainly not least, James Hinchcliffe, six-time race winner of the NTT INDYCAR Series and scoring a total of 18 podium finishes. Hinch, thank you for gracing us with your presence today.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Always a pleasure, Dave. Happy to be here.

THE MODERATOR: One another note about pit reporters this season for FOX. You can expect an announcement, I'm told, on that in the very near future.

Will, let's start with you. A lot of talk about this for a long time it seems. How much are you looking forward to getting going this coming weekend?

WILL BUXTON: I can't wait. I'm absolutely champing at the bit. I've spent the last couple of months thinking about nothing else. I have done about as much research as it is humanly possible to do.

You can't see behind me because I've got this stupid function on my camera that seems to zoom on my face, but my library of books behind me is almost exclusively INDYCAR books. My daughter actually bought me a history of the 500 book for my birthday, which is really, really lovely.

I have crammed about as many statistics, watched about as many races as it's humanly possible to do, and now I just want to get there. I just want to get to St. Pete and start calling the action.

It's going to be such an enthralling season. There are so many fascinating storylines for us to follow and hopefully a burgeoning growing audience that we can introduce to the fastest racing on earth, what is for me the greatest racing on earth, and bring them along for the ride.

Q. I'm perusing around behind you. Is that an old Target Chip Ganassi firesuit to your left?

WILL BUXTON: It is. That is Giorgio Pantano's suit from 2005. So Giorgio is a good friend and was always for me one of the greatest lost talents, I think, of his generation. I was looking for some Pantano sort of old-school merch on eBay one day, and I saw this suit, and I'm like, it can't be. So I bought it for a stupid amount of money and I took it to him because I thought he'd want it.

The first thing he did was he unzipped it, gave it a sniff, and said, yeah, that's definitely my suit. Then said, give me a pen, and scrawled all over it and signed it to me. I was like, no, I was giving it to you as a gift. He said, no, I'd rather you have it. Yeah, it sits in pride of place in my office.



Great driver, and actually Scott Dixon noticed that in a video that I did the other day from my office, and he said, whose suit is that, and I said, it's Giorgio's, and he goes, oh, man, Giorgio was quick. He's like, I loved racing with him. Doesn't get much higher praise than that.

THE MODERATOR: Townsend, we'll turn to you. I know you guys had a rehearsal not too long ago, certainly not uncommon when it comes to television. What was the chemistry like? How much do you look forward to continuing that and growing on that this weekend?

TOWNSEND BELL: Let me just start by saying I'm not a huge Giorgio Pantano fan. He spun me out of my -- I was running top 5 in my first F3000 race in Imola, and he took me out in the closing laps.

WILL BUXTON: He sees it a very different way.

TOWNSEND BELL: Oh, let's get the video out. Let's get the video out. Anyways, I digress.

This whole FOX thing has just been amazing. I didn't know what to expect coming into this deal. I've been broadcasting, as you know, INDYCAR for 13 years. This will be my 14th season covering the sport that I love so much. But it's been unbelievable, not only how thorough they've been in preparation. I mean, Pam Miller is our coordinating producer. She's been 24/7 on this thing for six months, and no stone has been left unturned.

Rehearsal was fun. Will and I know each other for many years but have never really worked together formally short of me giving him a ride in the two-seater at the speedway spontaneously a few years back. James and I, of course, have been working together a lot the last few years.

But it didn't even feel like rehearsal. It just felt like three guys that sort of know what they're doing that are going to sit down and work together for the first time, and it felt like the chemistry was instant. It didn't hurt that we've all known each other for a while. James and Will have worked together on the F1 side.

Just going back to the FOX thing, I'm just so pumped. They have so many bells and whistles, drones and graphics and fun and edgy stuff that we're bringing right out of the gate at St. Pete. It's going to be a blast.

Of course INDYCAR never disappoints. We've got a field that is so deep and competitive. Just to finish in the top 10 is a massive achievement out of the gate in this series. I'm fired up and ready to go.

THE MODERATOR: 27 cars, 11 teams for the first time in

a while, so the field is stacked, to your point. Hinch, let's build off the thought of some of the innovative ideas. Certainly FOX is known for that in its many sports properties. What are some of the differences fans will see beginning this weekend?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I just want to open with saying thanks for being here and that I really have no opinion of Giorgio Pantano whatsoever so I'm kind of a neutral party on that one.

I think what's been so impressive in the buildup to this week, and it's amazing that it's finally here, when you think about all the behind-the-scenes work happening with the FOX crew, is there are no bad ideas. We are encouraged to throw any and every idea out there, and Pam, who Townsend mentioned, is not afraid of trying anything, of running things up the flagpole. The number of things we've gotten approved that I never thought we would get approved, it's shocking and amazing and very exciting because, to Townsend's point, the product on track never disappoints, and based on what we've seen so far, the pressure is now kind of on us to make sure the show lives up to that.

Like I said, the racing is so good, but everything that we've seen out of the preparation from the FOX side has been phenomenal, and we just can't wait to get going.

Q. For Will Buxton, INDYCAR is a uniquely American sport with deep roots in the United States but it has a heavy influence of international storylines. How are you able to convey both on the broadcast?

WILL BUXTON: That's a great question. I think it's our job to hero the drivers, to tell their stories, to make people care about them, whether they come from the U.S. or they come from outside of the U.S.

They all have unique stories to tell. They all have unique backgrounds as to where they've come from, what their objectives are and the influences that will be affecting them throughout the season.

We also have, as Dave says, 11 incredible teams to tell their stories, as well. My overriding hope and what myself, Townsend and James will be doing this year, we want people to care. We want them to feel an emotional attachment to these drivers, whether it's a love or hate relationship, that when they go to the line, when they roll to green every Sunday, folks sitting at home care deeply and passionately about who they're watching.

It's storytelling, and that doesn't matter what championship you're talking about, what country you're talking to or



about. It's storytelling, and it's getting people to care about these incredible gladiators, these incredible daredevils who do this amazing thing that I've always wished that I could do but have never had the skill set to be able to do. They always say those who can do, and those who can't talk about it.

I'm very happy to be talking about it. That's the goal. That's the objective.

Q. With your history in Formula 1 with -- you're part of the Formula 1 paddock in many ways. What is the viewpoint of INDYCAR by a lot of people in F1 because in the United States we always get the feeling that they don't necessarily give it the credit that many of us do.

WILL BUXTON: I think INDYCAR is motorsports' best-kept secret, and that's because nobody in any paddock anywhere in the world will admit what they know to be the truth, which is that INDYCAR is the greatest racing on earth. We all talk about it; it doesn't matter what paddock you're in, whether it's the World Endurance paddock or the Formula E paddock or the Formula 1 paddock. Everyone knows the greatest form of racing in motorsport is INDYCAR, but they can't ever go on the record about it because they'd be down-talking their own championship.

I think for a lot of F1 drivers there's a fear associated with INDYCAR, and I think that's twofold. One, they see it as quite scary. They see ovals as being quite scary.

Two, they don't want to turn up and get shown up. Fernando Alonso, one of the greatest of his generation, one of the greatest of all times, qualified and ran well in his first 500; second, didn't even qualify. That's a huge embarrassment for any Formula 1 driver considering leaving Formula 1 and coming over to America that doesn't quite consider themselves to be at the level of Fernando Alonso, if he can get bumped, any of them can get bumped.

I think there's trepidation on a couple levels there for them, and it's great when you see drivers that do come over and want to give it a go.

I know talking to Marcus Ericsson when he was in Formula 1 and since then, the one thing he was looking forward to was learning to get to drive ovals, and he was more excited about taking on the ovals, and obviously that's shown now. He's now an INDYCAR 500 winner.

But for some of them when they come across from Europe, we see it, year in, year out when someone comes over from Europe they don't do ovals the first year and then they get swept up in the electrifying nature of not just the racing

but the event that is the Indianapolis 500, and by year two, it's absolutely top of their bucket list.

Q. Your two analysts in the booth have been known to engage in some spirited debate. How much are you encouraging that, and at times are you going to feel like you're going to have to referee?

WILL BUXTON: Oh, yeah, I see it as like marriage counseling, I think. Listen, they have a tremendous relationship and a tremendous -- what I term as banter in the booth. It's something that I have listened to, that I have viewed as an INDYCAR fan for many years.

I'm very mindful of not stepping on that or not taking away from what they have and that very unique relationship that people have come to know and have come to love.

My job will be, I guess, trying to get a word in edgewise.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I think he summed it up perfectly.

Q. Loved all the energy of all the FOX promos, the stuff that landed today on Instagram with a new promo there. With it on network, you're still fairly restricted on the buildups you can have. I think it's 15 minutes on Sunday; is that correct?

TOWNSEND BELL: Sounds roughly right. I think we're live at 11:30 eastern and green flag is just after noon.

THE MODERATOR: Live at noon eastern and I think green flag is 12:29, something like that.

Q. I know you guys love to make your features, particular with the F1 TV stuff, Will and James. Do you think you'll get a chance to make features for maybe outside of the broadcast with what FOX are doing on YouTube and social media? Do you think there's a chance to do those kinds of things?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I mean, look, I think, like I said before off the top, nothing is off the table. I think there's a lot of great ideas floating around. Certainly Will brought some over from his experience over on the F1 TV side, and there's already some cool things that are going to look and feel a bit different about different shows throughout the weekend, not even necessarily just the race broadcast.

But we ultimately are here to tell stories, and we're here to really highlight the drivers. These are the gladiators that are out there doing battle, and it's our job to let people know how fierce it is to do what they do and how impressive their skill set is.



I think you're going to see maybe a little bit more of that type of thing, and I think we've got some creative ways that we're going to work it into not just the race day broadcast but whether it's offline on social or other shows throughout the weekend.

WILL BUXTON: If I can add to that, you'll have already seen we're broadcasting the warmup. That's going to be very, very different in terms of how we do that show, but in terms of shoulder content, I think something that FOX I think would be very much open to, but also you've got to look at what Penske Entertainment have been doing this year, as well, how differently they're utilizing social media this year and their push into that.

I think that's been very, very noticeable, right from the start of 2025, how much they're pushing the historic storytelling, how much they're pushing the personal stories, the personalities in the sport, and I think with FOX and with Penske Entertainment and INDYCAR together working in that same direction, I think it's a really promising time.

Q. A lot of what FOX has seemed to be doing is about the promotion of the drivers as opposed to sort of the promotion of the series and promoting personalities. From your perspective being in the driver's seat before, what do you sort of see of this promoting the drivers as sort of a priority for the series, for Townsend and Hinch?

TOWNSEND BELL: It's a great question. It reminds me a lot, going way back to my rookie year and car at the time in 2002, there was more driver focus, promotion on the personalities. I love what FOX has done, not just to tell the driver stories but the way in which they've done that. To take a 30-second spot, and in 30 seconds really try to show you who Pato O'Ward is or who Josef Newgarden is or who Alex Palou is, I thought they did a brilliant job. It was high product value. They certainly deployed those spots in the highest possible visibility around the Super Bowl.

I talked to Pato O'Ward, in fact, this morning about that, and he said it was like he won the Indy 500, the amount of text messages he got. He said, I heard from girls that I hadn't heard from in 10 years that were watching the Super Bowl that texted me.

I just love that approach, and I think we have so many characters in INDYCAR outside of those three, and they will reveal themselves on Sunday and throughout the season. But it's a great start and a great reminder of why we should all care, and I think FOX has just done an awesome job out of the gate.

I'm really pumped about that. I think it's the right approach. It's the reason we watch the key characters in any main sport, whether that's football or basketball. I was joking on a FOX call earlier this morning that I only just now learned about the "Mad Hungarian" in Major League Baseball from the '80s.

But those characters, they reveal themselves. We celebrate that, and as Will said, we're there to spotlight those personalities and all of the dynamics around them as it happens.

We're never disappointed at St. Pete, so I just can't wait to see what happens.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I think he pretty much summed it up. I sat in 11 years of preseason meetings with various INDYCAR management and ownership and got told every year, hey, the focus is to make the drivers stars, and every year we came up pretty short on executing on that.

By contrast, what we've seen out of FOX so far has been exactly that, to the point where -- I was speaking to Josef, kind of in the same vein as Townsend was touching on with Pato, he says he gets recognized more walking down the streets of Nashville now than he did after winning his second Indy 500. So that just shows you how much this is working.

I've met people that are from Indianapolis that are very casual observers. They maybe watch the 500 every year and that's it. Ran into one at the airport the other day saying, man, INDYCAR is killing it right now. Those commercials are great. I think I want to go to a race other than Indy this year. Never done it. He's grown up in Indiana, he's 40 years old, and for the first time he wants to go to a race outside of the 500.

The commercials are working, the approach is working and that starts with the drivers. We're not tuning in to watch cars go in circles. When you think of when NASCAR really hit its big peak in the kind of early 2000s, that was largely due to a lot of the efforts from some of the people at FOX and really making those drivers stars, your Jeff Gordons and your Tony Stewarts and your Jimmie Johnsons.

It all revolves around the characters putting on a show, and I think it's a really good angle to take. I think it's a great approach.

It's just the beginning. We have a lot of work to do, as Townsend said. There's more than three great personalities in this series, but we're starting somewhere, and hopefully we can grow it from there.



Q. I've spoken to Will about this already, but for the two of you again, what do you think the FOX package will bring from a viewership experience, maybe for the viewership experience in race for people watching? What might be different to what we've seen in previous years?

TOWNSEND BELL: I think just a whole lot more in terms of, I'm going to call it, bells and whistles. Let's just take drones, for instance. We'll have drones at St. Pete for the first time. Who knows what we'll get at the end of the day from that, but it should be awesome.

St. Pete in particular, if you just think about the final corner that leads on to the front straightaway, the runway there at St. Pete, for so many years we analyzed different racing lines through there. Do you kind of come in early and fire big entry speed and kind of double apex there? Do you come in with late apex, square it off to get down the straightaway?

All of a sudden now we're going to have some tools to help us tell that story a lot better. I can't imagine how cool it'll be to have a drone following side-by-side action there.

It's that aggressive -- James mentioned this earlier. Pam Miller and Jacob Ullman and the whole gang at FOX, they're just open to ideas and suggestions and they're willing to try just about anything, so much so that I think I have to be a little careful now. I'm always the one throwing out, hey, I've got this crazy idea. They're actually doing it.

So it's fun. They're willing to try it, and I like that aggressive, edgy approach. I think you're going to see a lot from a graphics standpoint in terms of how things are shot, but I think it's also important to remember that for 13 years with NBC, we worked really, really hard to get the race storytelling right, and we had to improve that year over year over year, and I don't think that's going to go away. That's really important to me, as well, and I think everybody was pretty universally complimentary of how tightly we tried to stay on top of the action.

Hopefully it's the best of both worlds, this kind of big new promotional push with bells and whistles and making sure we get the critical storytelling right in terms of how the race plays out.

Q. For Will, and I would love to hear the opinions of James and Townsend, as well. Will, given your experience in covering F1, you've seen the introductions of new formats such as the sprint race or even the reverse grid for the feeder series. Would you be interested in seeing INDYCAR try a similar format some day?

WILL BUXTON: Great question. I don't think INDYCAR needs it, to be completely honest. Those kind of things were brought into Formula 1 to try to spice up the action, to try to bring an extra element of excitement to the weekend.

I always liked the idea of a reverse grid race in Formula 1. I thought the sprint race should be a completely reversed grid in championship order. So the person who was last in the championship starts first and then see the fast guys try and make their way through because traditionally Formula 1 has struggled to see as much overtaking as it might have liked.

That's not an issue in INDYCAR. There are so many passes that it's difficult to keep up with the action that is going on in INDYCAR without the need to throw in any gimmicks like that.

No, I just don't think it needs it, is the honest answer.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I'll re-tweet that. It was done for a reason in F1 to kind of help an issue. I don't think INDYCAR has that issue, so I don't think we need to look into that sort of thing, to be honest.

TOWNSEND BELL: Yeah, I triple that wholeheartedly agree that the format that we have builds towards the moment we all get excited about, which is the start of the race. I think sprint formats -- Will said it, it's gimmicky and it takes away from the magic of the moment, which is the three-day build to the green flag on Sunday.

I think we're in good shape on the format we have.

Q. Guys, do you think INDYCAR's popularity is a question strictly focused on promoting the event and FOX is doing an incredible job, or is it necessary to create more excitement, too, among fans with social media, activation at the events, and new, fast, exciting loud cars and other aspects, too?

WILL BUXTON: Listen, so you've got to leverage social media. We're in an age where it can't just come down to broadcast. You have to make best use of every single facet that you have. That goes as much for FOX as it does for INDYCAR themselves, and I think both arms of this push are completely aligned on that.

I was part of that initial push in Formula 1 when I started to work for Liberty eight years ago when they developed a digital department for the first time and saw firsthand the massive difference that was made by that digital media push. A lot of people put the growth of Formula 1 solidly down to drive to survive. That was a part of it, but the root



of it all came from a huge digital media push.

Now, the digital landscape has changed exponentially over those eight years and it exists in a very different place today than it did back then and it's about staying on top of trends, staying on top of how it is growing and making sure you're in the right place at the right time and talking to your audience in the right way, and that's something which our digital team on FOX are very on top of, and we're going to work together with the NTT INDYCAR Series to make sure that we work together in that respect.

I'll let the racing drivers talk about the needs for the car.

TOWNSEND BELL: Yeah, I think at the other end of the spectrum, you've got the marketing and the promotion and all of that, but your pizza dough has to be the best in the world. You just can't get around that. We have that with good close racing.

I think there's a huge opportunity over the next few years. You've probably heard discussions of the new car that's coming. I'm fascinated to know and influence wherever possible the raw fundamentals of what that car is. That's power, that's weight, and that's sound.

Those are universal identifiers for INDYCAR. It should be wicked powerful, intimidating. It should be worthy of watching one car by itself on the racetrack. That's the greatest spectacle in racing.

When 33 of those cars grid up next to each other or 27 at St. Pete, it is something that you have to see because it's that over the top, that extreme. That's been the history of our sport for 100 years, and that trajectory has to continue.

Great question. I think you need the world's best pizza and great promotion and marketing on top of that.

Q. Certainly Hinch is a diehard fan, Townsend Bell is a diehard fan. I was never on a flight until six years ago when I traveled from Brazil to the U.S. to fulfill my dream of seeing the Indy 500 from the grandstands, and today I am honored to be an announcer for INDYCAR in Brazil, so it's incredible. When we see people excited about some F1 races, with all the respect we think, oh, nice, but that is like a Tuesday morning in INDYCAR, or stories like Alonso winning the championship in the last race by just one point or champion Alex Zanardi losing his legs in a terrible crash and then winning the Paralympian gold medal, are these stories in your vision big enough to be applauded around the world like something like Lauda versus Hunt or Ford versus Ferrari or are we maybe so fascinated that we are overstating what we love?

Welcome to INDYCAR, Mr. Buxton.

WILL BUXTON: It's a great question, and part of the reason I wanted to make the move over to broadcast INDYCAR is because I agree with you. I think the stories, the racing drivers, the skill set, the sheer ability and just the wonder of what INDYCAR drivers do, it should be globally popular. It should be globally supported. It should be up there with the greatest championships in the world because I truly believe that it is.

I want to tell those stories. We all want to tell those stories and to have people around the world recognize the brilliance of these drivers. That's our job is to stellify them and put them on this pedestal and make people fall in love with them. We will do what we can to do that.

Where the championship goes in the future, listen, our job is to grow it primarily and initially in the United States and then let's see where it goes because hopefully if the viewership keeps on increasing, the championship can move, not just back to the position that it held in the 1990s, but we all want to say it go way beyond that, way above that, to a level that it's never seen before, and that is all of our objective is to make this thing bigger than it has ever been.

Q. I wanted to ask this one for Will. With your huge fan base in F1, I'm sure you're going to be bringing a lot of fans over with you from F1 to INDYCAR, so what differentiates the Indy viewing experience from the F1 viewing experience overall?

WILL BUXTON: I hope so. I hope they come across. I got loads of messages saying we're really going to miss you and I've tried to reply to as many of them as possible saying you don't have to miss me, just come watch INDYCAR.

What they're going to find when they transition over to watch INDYCAR is thrilling racing and a championship where the driver makes the difference, and that is the biggest selling point, I think, for INDYCAR. We go into this season and upwards of 10 drivers have a real shot at the championship, and that's before you even look at the outliers and the people who could spring a surprise. There are at least 10 genuine contenders for the title.

When we roll to green every Sunday, there are 27 drivers in that field who can take the victory, and you cannot take your eyes off it for a moment. We all know that.

I hope that -- and I keep saying this to people. Watch one INDYCAR race, and you will be hooked for life because there is no racing on earth that is this exciting.



I truly believe there is enough time in the day and enough room in people's racing hearts that you don't have to be an either-or fan. You don't have to say, oh, I don't watch INDYCAR because I'm an F1 fan. No, come on. If you love open wheel racing, there's enough time to watch both. You can watch the Grand Prix, go and make yourself a cup of tea, come back, watch the INDYCAR race. Fill your Sundays with racing. That's what I would love to see.

I truly believe that if you just watch one race, you'll come back for every single one because it's about the driver, because the driver makes the difference, and on any given Sunday, any one of those rock star gladiators behind the wheel can take the victory.

That's why it's so brilliant.

Q. I wanted to ask, we all know you had some fun with your fan base and your viewers over the years in F1. Especially with F1 there's a majority of European viewership, so I wanted to ask, how are you planning to win over your new American audience? Do you have any specific plans in mind?

WILL BUXTON: I'm terrified of that. Listen, all I can do is be passionate about the sport that I love, about these incredible racers, these incredible teams, and with the help of Townsend and Hinch, make it make sense to people and tell these stories. That's what we're here to do.

I'm not going to try and deliver things in a certain way that I think is American. I'm not going to polish myself up and sit behind a glass desk with a headset on and a tie. I'm not going to sort of be that American broadcaster because that's not me. I will talk as I talk, and I will talk about racing as I love it because that's all I can do.

Together with James and Townsend, that is our job is just to talk about how much we love it but to make it not preachy. Ultimately it's about sitting down in front of the television or wherever you're going to be watching this race and feeling like you are at a bar with your mates and you're just talking about racing. Ultimately that's what we want to do is bring people along for the ride, put our arms around them and make it feel like we're sitting on the couch with them or we're sitting in a bar with them and we're just enjoying the race all together.

That's it. My only plan is be passionate, be excited, and hopefully bring everyone along for the ride.

Q. James, you've raced in Indy. I believe St. Pete is home to your first INDYCAR victory if I'm not wrong. How special will it feel to be back here as a FOX

commentator for Indy?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Well, this event is one that everyone in the INDYCAR paddock really enjoys coming to. It's the first race of the year. It's kinda that first-day-of-school feel. We say it every time we go there.

But the event is a great one because the city really gets behind it. The fans really show up. It is more than just a motor race. There is a real atmosphere at that event, and it's been going on for over 20 years now. So it's really gaining a lot of traction as one of the longest running races, and what long races have is a lot of history, and that's what drivers are really drawn to.

You think of the big races people want to win, it's obviously the Indianapolis 500, over 100 years of history, the Long Beach Grand Prix I think we're coming up to 50 years of history, this one we're going to be 30 pretty soon. Those are some of the hallmark events to win. So for me to have won this one was a big career high for me, and coming back every year, it is special, because it is the first race of the season. It is the scene of my first win in the INDYCAR Series, and it's one that everyone is, like I said, just excited to get the season kicked off after a long off-season, and there's no better place to do it than St. Pete.

So to be going back with FOX is something that I'm incredibly excited about because of all this buildup that we've seen for the year and all the bells and whistles we have to play with, like Townsend was saying. It's going to be a special year to be back there.

Q. Townsend, I wanted to ask you, can you tell me about some drivers or any particular team developments that you're especially interested in analyzing at this St. Pete GP this time around?

TOWNSEND BELL: Yeah, my mind instantly goes to McLaren. This relationship -- I was talking with Nolan Siegel yesterday about this. What's it like to be a fly on the wall for him a bit in terms of watching Christian Lundgaard, who's a super confident kind of steely, cold, hard-focused guy coming in confident in his abilities but also in a new race team where he knows that he needs to do what he can to grab the baton and help that team continue to advance with a super popular undisputed team leader like Pato O'Ward. Those two personalities to me are going to be fascinating to watch. They've only had a chance to work together at a recent test in Sebring.

That's one that I have my eye on.

In terms of some of the other drivers out there, Kyle Kirkwood and Colton Herta and Marcus Ericsson, that



whole group is still sort of gelling and coming together. How does Kirkwood sort of respond after finding consistency last year but maybe not the same high points that he had the year before. Colton Herta, man, what a finish to the championship last year to come second with an amazing move and get his first global win in Nashville. I'm excited to see that pick up.

There's a ton of stories there, but those are just a few that I've got my eye on coming into this weekend.

THE MODERATOR: Will, you brought up what you're wearing. Is this like a coat-and-tie thing on Sunday? What can we expect in the booth here?

WILL BUXTON: I'm going to have to keep that a surprise. You're going to have to tune in to find out.

Listen, the guys have been cool and have said that we need to dress like ourselves and to bring our personalities. FOX, as the guys have been saying from the outset, we're about doing things differently, about bringing the excitement and thinking outside the box.

Yeah, we're going to be us. Listen, we're not going to be in shorts and flip-flops, but we're going to look cool, no two ways about it. No two ways about it.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, everyone, for joining us. A very quick friendly reminder that the first NTT INDYCAR Series practice of the season, first telecast of the season this Friday at 3:00 p.m. eastern on FS1 and coverage of the Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg presented by RP Funding begins at noon eastern this Sunday on FOX.

Will, Townsend, Hinch, this has been a lot of fun. Thanks for doing this today.

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