

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Thursday, May 22, 2025

Will Buxton

James Hinchcliffe

Townsend Bell

Press Conference



KEVIN LEE: Good morning. Let's officially get things started for the 109th running of the Indianapolis 500. My name is Kevin Lee. The first time FOX has been the broadcaster of the Indianapolis 500 with an exclusive agreement that includes all of the NTT INDYCAR SERIES races.

We have the booth with us here. Townsend Bell, James Hinchcliffe and Will Buxton available for your questions.

Let's start, Townsend, with you. You and James both did this race, qualified for it 10 times, finished in the top 10 three different times. You led a lot of laps. As you sit here throughout the month, still as an active race car driver, Daytona 24 Hours, is it kind of tough not to say I want to be out there competing a little bit?

TOWNSEND BELL: First, good morning, everybody. Thanks, Kevin.

I don't think I will ever stop thinking... Deep, deep in the back of my head there will always be a little twinkle if somebody called that I could still do the job around here.

I don't know if that's misplaced or not, but I had a call like that, as you said, in January to go race at Daytona, the 24 Hours. I hadn't raced for three years. I had about two weeks' notice. It turned out to be a fire drill on all kinds of fronts, in addition to being a fire drill at home simultaneously (smiling).

I told Kyle Kirkwood that I wouldn't mention to anybody that I was quicker than him as my teammate, but I didn't think that would be fair, so I won't go there (smiling).

No, it was super fun for me. It just doesn't take much for me to flip that switch and go full racer mode again. When I come here to Indy, I think part of the joy for me to commentate in the FOX booth and analyze is I really try to

put myself in the cockpit in those moments.

When we go to an onboard, you all have seen the FOX Driver's Eye view that we're running this year, we have the crystal clear, most accurate and realistic picture that I've ever seen. This is my 14th year of broadcasting INDYCAR racing, but I've never seen something so clear and so realistic. That is exactly what it looks like to be in the cockpit of these cars with the FOX Driver's Eye.

It really pulls me out of the booth and into the cockpit. I feel like I'm in the car and I'm thinking as the racer, how would I adjust the car.

I've always had that ready-to-go at-a-moment's-notice mentality, even though I may never, probably won't race a car again, certainly not an INDYCAR.

I think that never leaves us as racers. I think that's why I enjoy the job so much. I think that's also why I really connect with Mario Andretti specifically as a guy who said, Hey, I never retired. He's been driving the two seater, has that youthful exuberance every step at, what, 85 years old.

I don't think that ever leaves you as a racer. If you really love it like we do, you are in the back of your head ready to go. Danny Sullivan, he probably has some of that twinkle as well.

Great question. Great to be back. Super excited to be part of this FOX team.

KEVIN LEE: James, FOX has brought their biggest and brightest talents to support the announcers. You and Townsend have worked together. I've worked with you before. Luckily you have worked more with Will in the last few years on Formula 1 broadcasting. How has that helped that transition as you work on your chemistry together?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Morning, everybody. Thanks for all being here.

Yeah, FOX did bring all their best and brightest to support the three of us. Lord knows, we don't qualify in that category.



It's been great. That's been one of the best parts of this experience so far. I've had three years working alongside T Bell on the INDYCAR side. Working with Will for three years on the F1 side. I was the common denominator in the middle.

I think the three of us have managed to gel very well very quickly. I think it didn't take long for us to find a good cadence and balance in the booth. As you guys know, that's such a huge part of these broadcasts, putting on a good show for everybody.

The fact that we don't mind grabbing dinner together in the evenings is a bonus as well. For me, it's been an very easy transition in that sense, working with two guys that I enjoy as people and broadcasters. Hopefully coming across well in the broadcast as well.

KEVIN LEE: Will has been here before, worked with us about a dozen years ago or so. I know your passion for this event. I have a lot of questions, but I think I'm going to put a quarter in the jukebox and let you go about what you're thinking as you get close to calling your first Indy 500.

WILL BUXTON: Well, good morning, everybody. Just to echo what the other guys have said, thank you so much for being here.

I was nervous before rolling into this weekend. Now sitting here where the drivers normally sit, this is probably the most nervous I've been staring out at all of you. I'm not used to being here, I'm used to being there.

I don't know what Sunday is going to hold. I have been very fortunate that I've done a qualifying week here before, but I've never been to a 500 in my life. Seen it on TV. I know that that can't give you a full appreciation of what this is.

I actually went to the Speedway museum yesterday with my wife and daughter and stood in that incredible exhibit of the front row of the grid where you have the experience of race day. Well, some part of the experience of race day. They've already got the three cars from this year there, which is so great.

Back home again in Indiana, playing the national anthem, I'm not going to lie to you, the hairs on the back of my arm stood up and I got a bit emotional. There was one tear. So I'm going to be in pieces I think on Sunday when this actually happens for real.

It is the most tremendous honor of my career that I get to

call the Indy 500, that I get to do so alongside two friends, that I get to do so with friends down in the pit lane. Having these two guys alongside me has made my transition far easier than I ever considered it would be.

But the gravity of the moment, the gravity of the responsibility is not lost on me. I know how much this race means not just to this championship or to the people of Indiana, but to the people of America. Having a Brit call that race, I don't take that lightly. It's a huge responsibility. I just don't want to let people down.

KEVIN LEE: We've loved your enthusiasm.

Questions for Townsend, James or Will.

Q. Townsend and James, in relationship to Kyle Larson, the two accidents that he had, how does a guy like him go out, knowing how knife edge these cars are this year, and not think about that on Sunday and focus on the race itself?

TOWNSEND BELL: I mean, you have to ask Kyle more specifically his mentality. I think he sort of half joked in the medical center after his most recent contact that he's seen both ends of the spectrum. He was pushed into the wall and spun into the wall. The balance is somewhere in the middle.

I think that's the key. There are still several drivers in this field that have not crashed here at Indy. The hard part is you don't know until you do. You don't know where the limit really is.

Scott McLaughlin is a great example of that, dancing right on the edge on Saturday. Sunday it bit him hard. Colton Herta has had three in the last four years. He has a lot of experience, is a winner on an oval in spectacular fashion like he did in Nashville last year.

I think for Kyle Larson, it is an even steeper hill to climb because he doesn't have the benefit of tire slip angle existence all season long with an INDYCAR. He's just popping in for this one event. So his knowledge base on feel is pretty limited.

Even Takuma Sato coming in and impressing as a one-off driver has many seasons of INDYCAR racing under his belt, on Firestone tires. At the end of the day, this is what this is all about, it's the communication between the tire and the track and the driver, understanding that feel and those subtleties, the nuances of changing in the cockpit to adjust around it.

How is Kyle going to do that? I don't know. But he's lived



it now on both ends of the spectrum. That can't hurt. I think it only helps Kyle, frankly, having both of those incidents.

Fear doesn't really factor much into the equation there for him. He looks very at ease at the risks and the speeds that are out there. But now he's got the point of reference of both ends of the spectrum, both understeer and oversteer, going too far. That seems really valuable to me for his adventure coming up this weekend.

KEVIN LEE: He told me when he got out of the care center he gets over things quickly, he forgets things.

Q. The challenge of doing six-hour long practice sessions and seven-hour long qualification sessions, how difficult is it to be mentally sharp, to be smooth, to be articulate and relevant in your commentary?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Were we those things?

WILL BUXTON: I have no idea if we were those things. I'm hoping that we were (smiling).

I think it's ultimately the same equation for the drivers and teams. It's preparation. It's feeling the moment and being at one with what's going on around you.

I hope we were able to bring a level of insight and introspection into what was going on, thankfully to these guys sitting next to me who have done it, lived it.

Some history, some stats, some fun bits, a bit of levity through it all because you can't broadcast for six hours a day without having a giggle. When the moment got serious, to be there and call it as it happened and hopefully bring some of that excitement with it.

Ultimately I think what we're trying to do with the broadcast is to make the folks at home feel like they're in the booth with us, that's it's just a bunch of mates sitting around chatting about racing, as if we were at a watch party in a bar sitting on a couch with them at home, answering any questions they might have.

A lot of the questions they might have are the questions I will have, particularly if they're a new viewer. For me this is all new. Sometimes I'll ask a question that might sound very basic, but I'm conscious in motorsport there's a lot that we take for granted. We're immersed in it, we're in the bubble, right?

The only time I've heard the word 'use your tools,' that's here. You don't hear it at Monaco, at Le Mans. You only here is at the Indy 500. What does that mean? What is a

weight jacker? Fast jacker? My hope is to bring those things out which we might take for granted and relate that.

Most of it's about getting on, being friends, bringing it to the people at home.

I don't know how you feel about that. That was the key for me, the 40 hours we were on air.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I honestly thought he were going to say Twizzlers and espresso.

WILL BUXTON: And Twinkie's.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: And Twinkie's. He has discovered Twinkie's, which is neat.

WILL BUXTON: I don't have a brand ambassadorship by the end of the month, something has gone wrong.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: It's the preparation. We've been lucky that this race kind of falls mid-season so we've had enough time to learn a lot about the drivers. We've spent the weekends walking the podium getting to know the people so we can tell those stories.

We're ultimately storytellers at the end of the day. We all have some level of relationship with every driver in the grid. That helps.

Will, I have to give him a ton of credit for the insane amount of reading, note taking and research and studying he did in the buildup to this whole season. To May specifically, he came out with the more obscure tidbits during the lull in hour 18 of the weekend.

WILL BUXTON: So much good stuff to use.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: So much (smiling).

That means we had a lot of action too, so that means we didn't have to go all the way into the vaults of your research.

With T Bell and I's experience here, our job is as Will said to inform the viewer what's happening. This place is an exciting place. Always seems to be something happening. Even though we had 39 hours of on-air coverage, hopefully it all came across relatively informative and relatively entertaining.

TOWNSEND BELL: I come from the 'grip it and rip it' school. I like to react to what I see and what's happening in the moment.

To James' point, I mean, this week was a great example where we just never -- nobody could have imagined the way this week played out in a number of ways.

I think one of the best things about the role that we get to play is that we react in real-time. There is no amount of preparation for what happened on qualifying weekend.

So to Will's point, we are guys sitting there watching the race, in your living room with you, for you, and celebrating everything that we're experiencing in real-time.

That's always been my goal, is to make this as genuine and relatable as possible for the viewer. I feel like we tend to hit our marks on that front.

Q. Townsend, you were here as a driver, analyst in the previous network. Jack Harvey was in that role. What is going through his mind now? He believes he has the best of both worlds by working for FOX and driving the Indy 500.

WILL BUXTON: He's probably hoping we just don't keep calling him Hollywood.

TOWNSEND BELL: He's adopted to new nickname this month, which has been fun.

I think what I'm really happy about for Jack, the racing driver this month, is that I haven't seen him once except in Gasoline Alley as a racing driver.

I think that's a really important element because I remember trying to do both too much, and finishing Carb Day practice and being out on pit lane in a fire suit for the network, entertaining, covering the pit stop competition that I wasn't a part of, then waking up Saturday morning and being totally gassed, like knowing that was a mistake, that I was trying to do too much.

I never did that again. I always went into pure racer mode and stayed in racer mode. What I'm really happy about is that FOX has been amazing for all of us, but especially with Jack, knowing this is his time to really go focus and lock in on being a race driver.

I think that's excellent because it would be easy in your first year doing broadcasting to feel this obligation like he has to be more than, and he hasn't. I'm really pleased for him that he's been able to totally focus on his job as a driver.

Q. Will, with all the hours you've been on the broadcast, what is the maximum number of espressos that you have had?

WILL BUXTON: Before lunch or after lunch (smiling)? In total for the day? I don't know, maybe like five or six. It's not a lot. Six (smiling).

I like caffeine. The weird thing is at the start of the season they asked us do we have a rider for the commentary booth, which I've never been asked for in my life. All I asked for was water and Twizzlers. It was Townsend that insisted on the espresso machine. I think I've made more use of it.

The weird thing is that James doesn't like coffee, but Hinch will insist on an espresso before we go on air.

Yes, the espresso is all Townsend's doing.

TOWNSEND BELL: Californian (smiling).

Q. How do you think the race is going to run with the hybrid this year, with all the tools that we talked about?

TOWNSEND BELL: I really think that we're in for an incredible treat and a bit of an unintended benefit of the hybrid as the car is significantly more difficult to drive. That's what you hear from all the drivers.

If you look at the crashes that we've had this year, if you go back to the open test, Takuma Sato's crash there, all the way through to Kyffin Simpson, Marcus Armstrong, Colton Herta, Scott McLaughlin. These are the result of a car that is a little bit more of a handful.

It's been difficult for drivers to adjust around the balance of the car. Everybody seems to be reading from the same sheet of music, which is it's more difficult to drive. Anything that puts a premium on driver talent determining the winner of the Indy 500 is a good thing in my book.

I know that wasn't part of the original design intent, but it has to me made the challenge of conquering Indy this year even greater.

So full credit to those that qualified at the front and to those that are going to race at the front on Sunday. They will have earned it.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, I think when you look at some of the incidents that we've had with the way the cars are handling now, to go fast you have to be even more on the edge than normal. The crashes that we've had have been fast cars, Ganassi, Penske, Andretti, McLaren. These are the big-name guys that are having these incidents because you have to really have the car on the edge to be quick. I think that sets it up for a very exciting

situation.

Then you look at how qualifying played out. We have cars to a certain extent out of position, both maybe higher up than you would have expected, some starting further back than they maybe should be. That always is a recipe for an entertaining race.

I still think that maybe on par with the kind of difficulty of the cars to drive right now, the next biggest factor is going to be the weather. If we have a cloudy, cool day, that's a nice, cool racetrack, and that usually leads to more grip and better racing.

I'm excited. As long as the rain stays away, I'm totally fine with overcast and 60 because that's going to make the conditions even more fun for the drivers, which makes it way more fun for us.

WILL BUXTON: I've spoken to a lot of the drivers obviously over the last week and a half. I think what's fascinating for me with the hybrid, the two guys occupying the top two positions on the grid, one of them in Takuma has a lot of experience with INDYCAR, but not with the hybrid. The other has never driven an oval in his life. Both were able to find the feel with the car, able to drive around that extra weight at the rear, and put it in the top two positions on the grid.

Robert was talking the other day that he and Takuma were doing something the others weren't. I asked him about that yesterday. He said they were running way more downforce than anybody else. They got to a place of comfort with the car and were able to extract more from it with fingertip feel than necessarily trimming out to the max and leaving that rear of the car feeling quite loose and quite sketchy, being able to almost take it over the limit, which I found really interesting.

The thing with the hybrid utilization, we've been talking about it all the way through qualifying, is how would drivers deploy. Almost everybody came down to the same methodology during qualifying of where they would deploy usually with the a slow trickle over the lap. Takuma was a bit different.

The fascinating thing now is how do you use it in the race. Obviously there's no push to pass. If you're in a group, you may be able to re-gen by lifting, then have that burst coming out of the corners, utilize on the straights, wherever you want to. But everybody is going to be pretty much in that same position.

If you're the lead car, you don't. It may work a little bit like DRS does in Formula 1 that if you're the lead car, you don't

have the advantage, but the cars behind do. The race leader may find themselves susceptible to being passed. Once they're back in the group, they get the ability to recharge and utilize it.

This is a step into the unknown that not one of these 33 drivers have experienced before. That I think is fascinating for how this race will play out because none of us know and none of them know.

KEVIN LEE: Thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports