

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Jacob Abel

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joined by Jacob Abel, driver of the No. 51 Blue Oval SK Honda for Dale Coyne Racing, 12th pick in the group two, obviously back in a car after the month of May. Just your thoughts about being back in a car and back at the racetrack and getting back into a groove again.

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, it's awesome. I think I've never looked forward to going to Detroit, Michigan, so much in my life. It's good to be here. It's great to be back in the paddock. Got a bit of a weekend off last weekend, not necessarily by choice, but yeah, used that to really focus on this week and try and prepare for everything, and feeling pretty good about it.

We didn't have exactly the pace that we wanted this morning, this afternoon, but we have a good ideas of where that is and how to find it, and feel pretty confident going into the rest of the weekend.

Q. Obviously some changes within the organization, as well, heading into the weekend, some very familiar faces. How much of a positive impact could that be for you guys?

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, it will be awesome. I think those are two names in the motorsport paddock that are very, very legendary, Michael Cannon and Mike Culver. So excited to have them.

I don't think it's anything against the two guys we used to have. Learned a lot from them. They had so much experience in this industry. But I think unfortunately there was a change that did need to be made after Indy. It obviously wasn't great for us to both be battling to even get in the show in the first place.

I think we'll see the benefits pretty quickly, but it also will take a little bit to kind of -- everyone to learn their new positions and work into the system. But yeah, looking forward to it, and it's come at a good time. We get super into the season, start going weekend after weekend racing, so excited for that.

Q. Can you talk about the differences maybe braking-wise, brake zones going in, such a tight track from the NXT car and then now graduating into the INDYCAR and kind of what you learned as far as your reaction time around this course?

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, I think the INDYCAR, believe it or not, is a little bit easier to drive around here because everything is much more refined in terms of the dampers, the shocks and all of that, as well as the engine mapping with Honda and Chevy both competing against one another to try and make it the best, whereas INDY NXT is only one engine manufacturer.

Yeah, it is a little bit easier to drive. Obviously it is faster, though, so there's a little bit of a learning curve there, and I don't know this car as well as I knew the INDY NXT car. So it'll take me a little bit longer to get up to speed, but at the end of the day, it does feel a lot better around here, and the bumps do feel a little bit less.

Q. Seems like 1, 3, maybe even 7 are passing zones. Is that what we're going to see coming up on Sunday?

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, it's going to be interesting. Watching the races back here in the past, all the passing zones and the restarts, which in the past there's been a lot of them, yeah, it'll be interesting.

I think Turn 3 is definitely the biggest passing zone for sure. It's a long brake zone. It's a very unique brake zone. There is a line through the brake zone. You start on one side of the track, you sort of drift to the other side of the track. That can lead to some surprising passes.

I got caught out a couple of times there last year in the INDY NXT race with guys popping last second, stuff like that. Maybe you'll see a little bit of that, but I think that's definitely the biggest spot, the number one spot.

Q. What was the process like in you putting last week and the last two weeks behind you to focus ahead towards this race? How long did that take and what was it like?



JACOB ABEL: You know, it was tough. It was a really weird thing. But yeah, it's behind me for sure.

I think the thing that helped me and helped me get through it was the team and all the people there. Rinus is the most supportive teammate that I've ever had, and he's very, very helpful, both on the confidence side, as well. He was very reassuring to me. He was right there in the position with me. He was very helpful in that.

Yeah, everybody always asked the last week, how does it feel, has it set in yet that you're not racing in the Indy 500, and I kind of told everyone the same thing. It's that, to be honest, it hadn't set in yet that I was racing in the Indy 500 because it's been a lifelong dream of mine. I've always watched those cars on the grid there and watched that race as a fan for the last -- over a decade.

It truly hadn't set in to me yet that I was going to be racing in that race. Hopefully that day will come. But unfortunately it was more difficult, but it was very similar to the past few years of just sort of being a fan.

Q. Do you feel like you learned more not being in the race about racing it than if you would have been out there?

JACOB ABEL: No, I probably would have learned more in it. That's just the nature of it. I feel like I've been fortunate enough to kind of watch in every different aspect of that race. When Abel Motorsports was in it, I was really able to shadow RC through that and everything. I was ready to go this year. I did feel truly ready, and that was part of the bummer of it, because we spent so much time during the week working on our race car in traffic, kind of getting up to speed, blending with the group and all of that, and it was all sort of just for nothing.

But I think regardless it's going to be great experience for the future. I'm going to show up there next year hopefully as a rookie again, and I'll be a pretty qualify rookie at that.

Looking forward to it, and yeah, hopefully one day.

Q. Ox it's been a little bit of a challenging start to the season just generally, but what do you feel hasn't clicked in the opening races of this rookie year and maybe what the big lessons have been for you early on?

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, I think honestly, the biggest part of it is just trying to put together a weekend from start to finish. We've had a couple races where we didn't have mechanical issues or anything happen to the car, and it's just being able to maximize when that time comes. I've

been very, very conservative with everything, especially the weekends we've had issues, which has unfortunately been quite a few of them at this point.

Yeah, just trying to stay positive as much as I can. I think learning the technical side of things, the in laps, the out laps, pit stops, hitting your box, all of that is important. I think I've learned a lot, even though the results haven't really showed or really haven't even been there at all truthfully.

Yeah we're just gathering building blocks. I've had some good stints, some good points at times in races, and it's just trying to kind of hang my head on those and learn what I can from those so that once we do piece it together, it'll be good and we'll get some good results.

Q. Obviously looking at the engineering reshuffle that you've had, does that provide almost a bit of a reset? Will that help to remedy some of the specific things that maybe have been shortcomings so far?

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, absolutely. It's relit a bit of a fire in me, as well. Just kind of a bit of a fresh start. I think you see it in the whole entire team; the attitude this weekend is different.

At Indy, at the 500, as a team collectively, we kind of hit an all-time low. Fighting against one another to even just make the race is a place that no team wants to be.

I think the whole entire team from Dale on down has realized that, and it's kind of lit a fire on all of us to really go out there and succeed and turn things around.

Hopefully you'll see that this weekend. I'm certainly ready. I've never been more excited to get back into a race car than I have for this week. Yeah, just trying to maximize everything. Obviously it's a very tough track out here in Detroit, but yeah, just trying to put everything together and hopefully have a good weekend start to finish.

Q. Anything stand out about that first engineering meeting that you had?

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, Michael Cannon is obviously a legendary guy, right, so it's just trying to soak up everything that you can from him.

Mike Culver and I have worked together before, so we kind of hit our stride immediately and get into things. But yeah, I think you just see the motivation out of everyone. Those guys come in, and there's a big pressure about it. They want the results to immediately be better because it makes them look good, and they want the team to succeed.

I think they both have a vested interest in making everything better, and I think this whole weekend just from the start has just felt different. It's just felt -- everybody is more motivated. Not saying we weren't motivated before, but it's just like, there's this new fire from top to bottom in the whole entire team.

Q. Jacob, piggybacking on the engineering front, because you've worked with Mike before, you're in the middle of a learning curve with getting adjusted to an INDYCAR every weekend and at tracks that you haven't raced at before in an INDYCAR. How much does his communication level, y'all working together in the past, help you lessen that learning curve?

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, it's a lot. We've only worked together a couple of weekends, so it's not like we're best friends. We are friends, but we're not super close. But yes, it does help for sure. It's not a complete stranger that I'm talking to. We all kind of have a no-BS attitude out there. We won't sugarcoat things. I don't want them to sugarcoat things with me and I won't do the same with them. It definitely helps that we have worked together, kind of breaks those boundaries down and helps us hit the ground running, and hopefully we'll be good.

Q. When you undergo something like this, obviously in most cases for an entire team going under an engineering restructure, there's a gelling period, and sometimes that can delay what the results are. I know you want results immediately, but how much does this maybe alter certain expectations you wanted to have from this rookie season? Does it delay it in any way or does it raise it because you know the level of engineers that both these guys are?

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, I mean, to be honest, right now there's really no expectations. Part of me feels like my INDYCAR season hasn't even started yet just based on how things have gone for all the different weekends. Obviously I do have experience now with a lot of different things, but we really haven't had a race result at all yet, which is super unfortunate.

But yes, so expectations will kind of come as the season goes, but for now, it's just trying to take it as it comes and get through a weekend kind of issue-free and then we'll build the baseline. Hopefully this weekend whatever happens happens and then we'll have expectations moving forward. Then we'll have a target. But for now, it's just let's go out there, let's just execute as much as we can, run all the laps in the race and get however many pit stops done and get across the checkered flag with no issues, and we'll be happy.

Then once that happens, then we can really go into goal setting, trying to get results throughout the year.

Q. With these changes, is the car better off the truck? Do they have better ideas or different ideas when it comes to dampers and wing angles or is it more once you just had your 52 minutes on track, are they making better decisions or better moves and changes throughout a practice?

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, I think, again, Ed and John, who were our old engineers, are not bad engineers by any stretch. They've won races at every single level and been very successful. I think where these new guys come in, Mike and Mike, they have recent experience, so they're able to have a better baseline. There were times in the past, five, six races, where we did have really good cars. I think you saw Rinus maximize that with results. I think at Indy we had a pretty good car.

I think the biggest thing is rolling off the truck a little bit better. I think that's going to be a huge thing throughout the whole year.

Q. Was it dusty for you the last few laps?

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, you couldn't see anything down the back straightaway.

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