

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Scott McLaughlin

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Scott, I know you had travel issues. Welcome to the frozen tundra of Indianapolis.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Coldest I've ever been in my life. It's beyond a joke how cold it is here. I love Indianapolis but in the summer.

It's beautiful, though. Like you fly in and see the snow, it's pretty cool to see.

Q. What are you looking forward to in 2026?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I guess you could say it's a bit of redemption in some ways. It was a terrible year on my part last year. I felt like we left a lot on the table.

Then obviously Indy is the first one that comes to mind, but there was a lot of things that I sort of did last year. Looking back at Nashville, dropped that race from the lead; Detroit, hit Nolan; we were in a good spot.

There's things I've got to tidy up, team has got to tidy up, but I think we've had a really good off-season, and honestly, the morale on the team is so high and so excited right now.

There's so much want to be back to where we want to be consistently, and I think there's a refreshed sort of focus which has been really cool to be a part of and see. I'm really, really excited and just ready to go.

Q. Josef was asked earlier about adding David Malukas to the mix. What do you think could happen there?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think he's done a lot of hard work. He's been very -- I give him credit. He's been at the shop a lot. He's at the sim. We've worked together really well on the simulator, and I think our simulator is in a really good spot right now from just a correlation and able to push us forward over the season.

It's been interesting sort of getting to know him and work

with him and what he's brought to the team from other teams and stuff that I've learnt, as well. It's been good. It's only just a start. But he's doing everything that commands respect from anyone.

Q. Having a new teammate for the first time is also a big change but also a new spotter this year. You obviously bring in Mr. Hunt, who is very experienced with Colton. How do you work on that relationship quickly knowing there are four races in the first month of the season, not a lot of off-season testing? Is that something where Phoenix is even more important, not just a new track but trying to get that chemistry and camaraderie and communication down?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, that's a nice thing to have, David to come into my team. It all sort of was a pretty crazy few days trying to work all that out, including ringing Colton to make sure that he was clear that I could actually take him because I didn't want to take him off a buddy, to be honest. But David is a great guy. I'm wishing Adam all the best when he goes on his adventure because he's on a pretty wild year this year.

The Phoenix test couldn't come at a better time for me just to narrow those things down.

I actually saw David in Daytona last week, and he was there with Jimmy Vasser's team, and I think we sat down for half an hour, an hour, basically just running through what I like, what I don't like. But I'm also very open to the idea of him bringing his expertise of 20 something years in the sport and me trying to learn something off of -- me and Adam were a new relationship. I hadn't used a spotter before and he was new to spotting, as well, so this is an opportunity for me to learn off someone that's been in the game for a long time, worked with some amazing drivers, and ultimately hopefully make my oval program even stronger.

Q. How important was being in a car last week at Daytona? You can't replicate that in a simulator. We saw half the field there running the 24 Hours last weekend?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, I think people that don't do



... when all is said, we're done.®

it or whatever, that's a personal choice, but I certainly like doing it just to get everything going and warm.

I raced Suzuka in September, and that's been a while in between as well, so it was nice to do that and then head to Daytona, which I just love that race.

I love racing, just to do it. It was fun, and honestly, the GTD category was so competitive and I had a blast.

Q. With IMSA not having any conflicts with the INDYCAR schedule, are you going to be doing any more endurance rounds with DXDT or any other teams in IMSA, or is that it for this year, the Rolex?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Not with the DXDT, but there's a couple opportunities out there maybe. But I sort of -- the season is really busy around the time of Sebring and then Petit, it's right around my daughter's birthday so I've got to make a decision of what I want to do there.

Certainly if it was a top class I'd probably think about it, but having competed in both the events now including winning and P2, it's something I would only consider if I was in the top class.

Daytona is the start to my year and I have a blast doing the 24 Hours, but it's something that I'm really focusing on what I'm doing with INDYCAR stuff.

But I'm looking at other events throughout the year, Spa 24 Hours, Suzuka again. Try to do that again it's still a lot in the air right now what's going on.

Q. What about going to Tulsa in January? You mentioned on Twitter you might be looking into that.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: No, I didn't say I was looking into it.

Q. But you want to go.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I don't think I'm allowed doing that, but I enjoy watching it. I enjoy gambling on it. It's a lot of fun.

Q. Would you want to go if you were allowed?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: There's no weight restriction, so I feel like I'm already at a disadvantage. There's no weight -- like Santino is 120 pounds. I'm 185. And I don't know how to drive on dirt. I would like to for sure. I think the experience would be cool. But I'm pretty certain I'll be like in the end, man.

Q. If Shane asked you, would you?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I would go if he goes. But I don't think I would be allowed. The minute I was a sprint car owner a few years ago, Roger said, don't get any ideas, so I didn't. So I just watch.

Q. I wanted to ask you about trying to bounce back both as a team and individually this season from last year. What do you feel like needs to be different in 2026?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Look, I think what is different was already happening last year. I think it was just a matter of putting everything -- I think all the pieces were put in place last year, and we found our mojo towards the end of the year. Personally I need to be better for sure.

But I thought our pace, and certainly throughout the year, there was times where -- Gateway we were probably on for a podium; Toronto we were probably on the right strategy, be it that one we were on the same strategy that Pato was on and our wheel fell off. That was a mistake by us.

I thought we had genuine pace, but it just wasn't enough. I thought my start to the year last year was strong, but there's one guy that won five races in a row, and we somehow needed to combat against that, and that's ultimately up to us to just execute.

I think for me, I'm just focused on executing and seeing what will happen.

Q. Josef talked about changes to some minor structural things throughout the off-season. What changes have those been and what effect might they have?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Not a huge amount has changed basically since August really, or since we ended. It's just we've brought in Raul, who's now my engineer, and then my spotter changes. But yeah, I don't know what he's...

Q. This was something you and I spoke about in Daytona but I think it's important to get in front of this room. Your name is always brought up with NASCAR. I think you would want to try it but it wouldn't be a full-time thing, right?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: No, I don't really have much of an interest of going full time in NASCAR. I love INDYCAR racing, and I love being a part of this sport.

You never say never for sure, but at the end of the day, I'm so focused on what I'm doing here in INDYCAR that until



success happens and until things happen or I'm satisfied, then I don't really see much on the outside.

But from a full-time perspective, no. I think if I was Connor Zilisch's age and something came, maybe would I think about it? Yeah. But now I'm 32 years old and got a kid at home, and I don't know if I'm interested in being away 38 weekends a year. That's just a personal choice.

Not that I disagree with any of those guys. It's just they've grown up doing that all the time, Blaneys, Bubbas, all those guys who are great friends of mine.

But right now I came over here to INDYCAR because I wanted to be a part of the 500 and the lifestyle of racing 18, 20 weekends, and I'm excited about that.

Q. I know you haven't had a lot of time with David as your teammate yet, but introducing him into the team obviously with you and Josef being longtime members of Team Penske, what is that like to get the three of you on the same page and work on team chemistry together?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: The three of us haven't been completely together a huge amount. But I find it's going to be pretty seamless. I think the way we've had some debriefs post-event, post-year, that included David, as well, has been pretty seamless.

Will obviously brought a lot of experience, but at the same time we've got a guy coming in that's been in a lot of teams in the recent past, which is I think really important. He's brought a lot to the table already.

I think the camaraderie and stuff, that's just going to happen naturally. I feel like myself and Josef, we work really well together. Same with -- I imagine David is going to be pretty easy to work with from what I've heard and seen.

I think it's going to be pretty seamless. I really am excited, not only to work with him and Josef but my own group, as well.

Q. To follow up on what you said about NASCAR, one of the tracks that would have likely been the place where you would have gotten a test or an opportunity, the Roval. They're not even going to use it anymore. They're going back to the oval. Does that even diminish the possibility of you ever competing in one of those races anyway?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I don't know. I don't know.

Q. It would have been easy because you live in Charlotte and it's at Charlotte Motor Speedway.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, but planes are a wonderful thing, too. I can fly. But yeah, I don't know. Look, we've been -- we've joked about it. He's like, Van Gisbergen us going well; we know you could have a crack with him. I know that Roger would like to see me do it and whatever and people always hassle him and stuff, but ultimately we've got so much here to work on.

Yeah, I'm just very happy doing what I'm doing right now. Honestly, yes, if he came to me tomorrow and said, do you want to do a NASCAR race, I would do it because I just love racing. I would race a fucking wheelbarrow if I could; you know what I mean? So I don't care. But I love the sport. I love being a part of it, and we'll see how we go.

Sorry, I didn't mean to swear; I'm just right into it right now.

Q. You've risen in the hierarchy a little bit with Will's departure now; Josef is the elder statesman; you rise up in the ranks and you've got the kid. None of that matters to you anyway, but just the fact that it's a different dynamic on the team and you can play a bigger role personality-wise or just leadership-wise with the team, do you feel that responsibility a little bit?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I mean, I just feel that this is the first time in my career that I haven't been the youngest teammate.

I see what you mean. Look, I'm so focused on what I'm doing right now and improving my craft. But I definitely feel like this is the first time -- I feel like I say this every year, but I come into this now where I feel so at home. I walk around this place, I know everyone.

This is my sixth INDYCAR season. I did main series Supercars in Australia for seven season, so I am nearly the same amount of seasons I guess at the top in motorsport in open wheel in Australia.

I just feel comfortable where we're at. I feel like I've got experienced and I'm using some of that to my best ability.

Q. This year in Milwaukee hard to believe it's going to be your 100th start in the series already. Do you feel more at this rate more of an INDYCAR driver than a Supercars driver now?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, look, I've definitely forgotten a lot of the traits. Not forgotten, but it's going to be like riding a bike. Jumping in the Corvette at Daytona, a lot of



those memories of driving a touring car and traits that you need to be fast in those cars, like that came back pretty easily.

But now when I get into an INDYCAR I just feel very comfortable. I know what my seat feels like. I know what I want out of the car. I know how much front wing to ask for, just little things that 95 starts ago I had absolutely no idea what it was.

I think it's kind of crazy that it's come up so fast, but at this point I'm still having just as much fun as I had when I first joined the category in 2021, and that's a testament to the sport. I have a blast. The people in it are great people. Yourself, I feel like the fans. It's just an awesome environment. I'm just excited to keep building, and hopefully we can have a successful year.

Q. I know you talked about SVG a lot, but you and Bubba came close here the last few years. Where did that relationship start, and could it be a unique feat that he won the last race on the oval and you could win the IMS oval?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: The magic of Coors Light brings people together. We were having a couple beers at Blaney's, and I feel like we've just been friends ever since.

Bubba is a great dude. I think we had a kid at the same time, so we were just voicing out with each other about the tough times and the good times and we sort of went up from the moment the pregnancy was announced to now having the kids, we sort of grew in like a little brotherhood, so it was kind of cool to lean on him and him to lean on me.

I felt like I was so proud of him to win at Indy and I would love to have that feeling, as well, and I know he would want that for me, as well. He's a good dude. He's one of the most kindest people I've met and welcoming people I've met, and I feel like he gets a bad rap on social and a lot of people are hard on him, but he's just a really good dude.

Q. A question that's come up quite a bit today is the Phoenix test, but looking slightly further ahead than just the test, the actual race weekend, talking about running two lanes, how influential is the NASCAR rubber going to be with the INDYCAR rubber?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: It's going to be interesting because I feel like I felt it was very different at the IMS road course when they ran and then we ran after them. I do remember that vividly, that it was a little bit of a feeling difference in the car after that.

So it's going to be interesting when we hit the ground after

a NASCAR practice or whatnot, maybe before or race or something. I'm going to have to really think about that for the balance and not maybe overthink it midway through the race that my car sucks or something like that. It's about trying to get it in the window if it's not good on the Goodyear rubber.

It's going to be an interesting weekend. I'm excited to be there and see NASCAR in the flesh but also race in front of some of my buddies from there, as well. It's going to be interesting.

I'm wondering how it's going to race. I hope it races okay. Watching back old races, it looks tougher than it has in the past, but I feel like INDYCAR have done a really good job when they've gone and done tire tests at other places or aerodynamic tests, and hopefully we can get that racing better.

I just love racing ovals, so the more ovals for me is the ticket.

Q. Obviously with the test coming up, the repercussion of the two types of tire rubber you're not going to be able to simulate at all, but the high line is important part of the INDYCAR story, if you like. It's important to rubber that in, isn't it, or get a handle on running there?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Well, I think the good thing is that NASCAR goes up and down the track all over the place, so you know the track is going to be somewhat clean regardless of what rubber is on it, so that's important.

I think we've got more of an issue from the way that our marbles build up, they build up a little bit more so over the stint so it tends to ice in some spots. If we can somehow keep that second lane open. Whenever we have a second lane open on an oval, the racing is incredible. So hopefully we can make it happen just like it did at Gateway, which I think it's going to be a very similar race to Gateway, my personal opinion.

Q. I asked Christian Lundgaard this earlier. We know there's a new car coming, but this car has been around for a long time. Every time we get to this time of the year we're talking about how we're going to extract more from it. What actually can you extract from this now that it's at its lifespan?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, look, there's just so many -- also, you look at the amount of team changes, so the personnel that goes between teams, the data and the people that take setups everywhere, everyone knows what everyone is doing within reason. But there's so much in



the damping and the philosophies that each team go about, and obviously with Firestone the car constantly sort of changes, and this year the tire seems to be similar to what we've had last year, so that's kind of nice to sort of go into the off-season and know exactly what we need to focus on, but every other team has the same thing, as well.

We're trying to polish something that's been around for a long time, but that's what makes it so competitive. I am looking forward to a new car, but I think this has been a great chariot for us so far.

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