

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Takuma Sato

Conor Daly

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joining us now, Conor Daly, looking to qualify for his 13th Indianapolis 500. Third quick today. Obviously very quick throughout this two-day test.

Obviously Dreyer & Reinbold big focus, this is the Super Bowl. Do you feel like you knocked it out of the park the last couple days?

CONOR DALY: Obviously we know how it is testing: you don't really know. No one shows up here to not do any work, you know what I mean? Everyone is trying, trying to learn, trying to figure out things when we get to May.

Yeah, I mean, clearly every day we kind of just went out and were fast. That makes life easier on me 'cause we weren't like we're going to be P1 every day. We had a list of things we wanted to do. We got through our list, a lot of lists. That's what it's all about. If we're fast while doing that, then awesome.

THE MODERATOR: Maybe a little validation of all the hard work the guys have been through the last several months.

CONOR DALY: Yeah, I mean, they haven't done anything since May (smiling). The race car hasn't rolled since May. We've come out here and the car's really fast. I can kind of feel that it has a little bit of that natural speed that you want and that you desire so badly here at the track. Even those last two runs I think were real telltale signs. Takuma, Santino, Palou and Pato, that's a pretty solid group of people. It felt like we were able to tow up better than anybody else. I was like on the 20- to 30-lap tire window.

It did feel pretty competitive. I kind of struggled in the middle of the day with the balance of the car. Encouraging signs for us. Just thankful that the team once again proves that they do a great job.

THE MODERATOR: Takuma, have a seat. Two-time Indy 500 winner. Looking to qualify for his 17th 500 next month.

Welcome back. Always good to see you back at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. What is your grade on these two-day test for you?

TAKUMA SATO: Very happy. Very productive two days. I think it's a statement to every single team was a similar feeling that fortunate to have a good weather. It's been a little bit, like, nervous in overnight, torrential rain. Really good condition. IMS did a good thing to prepare for us. Exit turn two very good. We knew it from test. It's been a pleasure to come back IMS and make us really happy.

In terms of our team, over the course of the winter, I think the team did a really, really good job. Now four cars, meticulous quality control, build spec is very, very good. Everybody is happy.

Me specifically, back in the car after six months absent, still happy place to be. Yeah, it's been a very positive two days.

THE MODERATOR: Open it up for questions.

Q. Are you two proof that you don't necessarily have to run the full season to be fast at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway?

TAKUMA SATO: I think there is a bit in there. If you do the full season, there is something, of course. I think this place, I mean, Conor had a similar feeling, too, but I think you have muscle memories. Experience does matter in halfway, shall we say. Plus we have this two-day open test, five days in practice before the qualification, which you don't have luxury of the practice for any other single weekend.

If we had similar, I think anybody came back as a spot race I think can be more competitive. But Indy 500 is doable because of that.

CONOR DALY: Yeah, I think it's probably harder on the crews and the folks that maybe don't quite do it full-time. That's tough, I mean, just thrown right into the Super Bowl, let's get everything perfect all the time. That's hard.



For us, I think it's just second nature. Experience I think is super crucial here and super important and super helpful. For me, I'm ready to go now. I will take every practice day possible because that is always helpful. I think it's super helpful for all the crew members, as well.

Q. Conor, even though you'd love to be able to run every week, to come here, be among the fastest, do you ever sit back and say, I still got it?

CONOR DALY: Been trying to prove that a while. I enjoy what I do. Very lucky to be here, very lucky to have a chance to do it. I obviously think I'm driving better in my career now, especially after last year.

Yeah, we're ready to go. We come here to try to win the race. I think the team is doing a great job. We've got a lot of information this week. Great partners in Kingspan and Arco. To be with Chevrolet, feels good in May. Yeah, we just got to do it one day at a time.

Q. What is the level of satisfaction after this open test compared to the one a couple years ago?

CONOR DALY: I think it rained two years ago, so I did like three laps. I feel like we have a book of knowledge now compared to two years ago.

I have seen what they did in the off-season, right? Compared to what we had in '24, we had a pretty good shot at being in the front of the race in '24, what I've seen them come back with, that should be fun, you know what I mean?

I hope we get a chance to keep making it better every day. I think we have really strong car already. I think everybody else is going to show up with a little more juice as well when we get to May.

Q. The pit stop that you show on Instagram, the engineering meetings and everything like that, discussing setup changes, how has that been over the last weeks and months?

CONOR DALY: I mean, there's a lot of chatter and a lot of discussion. You can almost overthink things. At some point you have to be, We're ready to go. We can talk each other's ears off, but until you get to the track to start proving what you've done in the off-season. We've done all our homework, done everything we feel is necessary to show up prepared. We demonstrated it over the last two days. We are going to do the same thing when we come back for day one of practice.

Q. Graham mentioned when you came here in the fall, you had a little bit of a difficulty feeling the rear, kind of something he had experienced last May. How did your car feel these last two days versus the fall?

TAKUMA SATO: I think there's something related with conditions, a lot cooler. Obviously last year Indy 500 was a very, very cool race. I think in fall was colder. With minimum amount of the cars was running, no rubber left. Was certainly a little bit nervous. Kind of we knew it.

We had some experiment, as well, although there was a really, really test for INDYCAR. I specifically did a test for the brake system, which I'm really happy, really proud of that that we introduce the super spec. No (indiscernible). It's a fantastic brake. I'm really happy with. INDYCAR did a good job.

Come back here, I think in open test we brought exactly same setup from the fall test. The nervousness was gone. You can tell the Graham was a lot happier yesterday, as well as this morning he was super happy.

I think back in the shop engineer did a great job, as well as the mechanics did a great job. Particularly 75 crew was very limited, as Conor said. Preparation for the getting good people, quality people, is biggest challenge for one of the challenge. From that point of view I think the team did a fantastic job.

Q. What is it like to work with Mick Schumacher? I believe you stood on the podium with his father.

CONOR DALY: That's crazy.

TAKUMA SATO: It is fantastic. It is fantastic to see Mick. You can see there is a lots of DNA from his father. Michael Schumacher was everybody's hero. I was fortunate enough to go wheel to wheel with Michael Schumacher. But it's a phenomenal experience.

Seeing his son Mick, the way he speaks, intonation, down on earth, great guy, is exactly like his father. Obviously Mick wanted to be Mick, not Michael's son. Of course, I respect that.

But seeing that, really happy to see him. Look, I mean, he is now really quick. Only second day for the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. We had lot of good discussion. Really happy to work with him. Great win from outside for our team. I think everybody respect that. Very happy, happy. Happy memory with his father here, too.

Q. Conor, from the cheap seats, it looks like you have a rocket ship. Where do you think you're going to

stack up once everybody shows their hands?

CONOR DALY: I mean, honestly I think we'll be pretty similar. It's not like worlds will change when we come back here in May. Ganassi will show up with their Speedway cars, some other people will show up with their Speedway cars.

For the most part, yeah, mountains don't move from now to May. You might be able to find a few small things here and there. We also will get better. We know immediately how to get better. I think that's kind of what excites us most.

Again, like I mentioned earlier, the last two runs were really encouraging just with heavy fuel, having tires degrade. Being able to run close to some good cars, that felt ideal. But I kind of already know what I want differently. I think my engineer does, too.

Again, a lot of notes to take from here. Again, the setup book is massive at this place. You could go through so many different things to find kind of what suits you exactly right. I think that's what our plan is.

Q. I know you had a couple Indy 500 wins in the past. How did those years compare to how you felt mentally and emotionally, physically this year's open testing? How are you going to transition to the Indy 500?

TAKUMA SATO: I think the biggest challenge, as I said, I think the environment you get for the team. Both '17 with Andretti Autosport and the 2020 with Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing, both I was in regular basis. I have my guys full season, full preparation, everything, where the last few years, although I had a really good shot last year, which boys did a tremendous job as one-off guys, but we picked lots of people from outside, they did a really, really good job.

It's a little bit the way you prepare the car and the team is a little bit different. Like Conor mentioned, too, pit stops is extremely important here. To have some good relationship and cooperation is extremely important.

All in all I think we have a very good the people together. Have a great shot hopefully once again for this year. I have no worry about it.

Q. Conor, compared to the past races, how does the transition feel emotionally, physically from the previous races up to the 500 and the Grand Prix?

CONOR DALY: I think INDYCAR is in a great spot. The ratings tell a story. If you've been to any of the races so far this year, which I have as a spectator, it feels awesome.

There's a ton of people. Everyone seems to be jacked up about INDYCAR. I don't know how you can ignore that. It seems to be a really good progression.

Obviously the Indy 500, we're going to have a really strong field once again of so many cars that can probably compete for a win.

As a race fan, which I have been all year, I've enjoyed it. We've had some great races, we've had some not-as-good races. That's kind of what motorsport is. You can't have one that's always like every race isn't going to be the best.

I've been really pleased with what I've seen. Everyone seems pumped at the race weekend. A lot of people that have been to a first race weekend for them, which is really cool. I love to see that.

Q. Takuma, talk about how your car felt in traffic. I saw you leading a pack. In traffic and leading the pack...

TAKUMA SATO: Yes, I would say I'm really happy, happier than the last few seasons. We were able to build very fast car to do that in single lap or by yourself in leading the pack. Certainly our weakest was in the race. Certainly not the strongest car. From that point of view we came here with kind of different philosophy. Super happy to see that is starting to working.

We are still halfway to what we want, but I think it's certainly much better. In the pack already day two, not even May yet, I think this is the best preparation I ever had from the years with Rahal.

Leading the pack is different. Today in particular we have to protect engine, too. As you know, we have to have same engine entire month, including today. We have some protection. From that point of view it's very difficult to leading, especially with good people behind. One lap is the maximum you can do.

Q. Takuma, how does it feel to come here? I assume your ribs are good, you're not getting shots every day. How much more comfortable do you feel compared to last May?

TAKUMA SATO: I have a lot of faith to the team. Team did a really great job. Last day after Indy 500, yesterday we virtually agreed to do it. Now obviously we need to have lots of documents and stuff like that, contracts, sponsorship, et cetera. We need to sort it out. We announced it just last month. We know what we are doing.

Even last fall, even out of the contract, when INDYCAR



want to meet, team is prepare. You can see, how can I say, relationship between team and myself as the best ever.

Feeling that people trust me, I trust them, and we exchange lots of technical information over the course of the winter. That's why we came back here and feel very comfortable. Made a massive progress.

Q. Health-wise, the ribs?

TAKUMA SATO: Please don't mention again (laughter). No, I had broken rib. Already forgotten that.

Yes, I had a big moment. Health-wise, here we are. I'm happy. Very healthy.

THE MODERATOR: Takuma, did you get a look at the fox out there?

TAKUMA SATO: Geez, yes.

THE MODERATOR: What were you thinking?

TAKUMA SATO: I couldn't identify what it was, but it was something in there. It's not a car part.

THE MODERATOR: It was moving.

TAKUMA SATO: I couldn't see the moving because we went 230 miles an hour. It was something, how could I say, more like a natural thing. It's (indiscernible), too. It wasn't a part. It was right in the middle of the corner. Very fortunate that we both happily come back home (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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