

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

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### Sam Schmidt

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Once again, good morning everyone. If you haven't heard it yet, welcome to the world famous Indianapolis Motor Speedway as we launch another great month of May. Certainly a busy day with qualifying and INDY NXT by Firestone race 1 coming up later today.

We're starting the day in a very cool way. It's great to be joined by Sam Schmidt, driver, championship-winning team owner, and now author added to that list. A sheepish kind of smile coming from you.

After a career that spanned nearly 30 years, Sam's memoir, *No Finish Line: A Racer's Journey of Passion, Perseverance, and Purpose*, comes out Tuesday, May 19. The countdown is on. I can't wait to read it.

Sam, welcome. Tell us about the motivation and what it feels like maybe to have this so close to being out there and fully baked and everything.

SAM SCHMIDT: Thanks, Dave. It's been a long time coming. Thought about it over the years, and life happens, as we all know. Between the team and the foundation and everything else going on, just never found the time. That ended up being a blessing because really the last 10 years have been such a story in and of itself.

Now is the perfect time. I've got two young grandkids under 3 years old and effectively passed on the team and focused fully on the foundation. We really focused hard in 2025, kind of cleaned it up over the winter, and here we are.

The motivation, I think, first and foremost, was the family story, the family legacy. Now that I've got the grandkids, it's a totally different situation, right? They say that, everybody tells you that, but it really is.

My parents are 82. They're still going hard, still very much with it. In fact, their contribution was huge because they remembered so many more details than I did. Now we've got them on tape, all those kind of video moments and stuff for future generations, see where it all came from.

I think the second layer was the DRIVEN Neurorecovery Center, and we're looking to pop up a bunch of those around the country. For future generations, the ability to look back and see where it all came from and why it exists in print, in audiobook, that kind of thing, it was a second layer and really just documentation.

THE MODERATOR: You mentioned the book focuses on recovery, the lessons learned from that. Your recovery centers, one of those in nearby Carmel on the north side, those of you not familiar with Indianapolis. All proceeds from your book go to the foundation. Maybe just speak to the significance of the work and really the purpose and a little bit of background on that, Sam.

SAM SCHMIDT: The people that have read the entire story didn't realize just how organically interconnected it all became. Between my paralysis, the safety innovations in the cars, nobody getting paralyzed until Robert Wickens -- and I think everybody will agree, if you watch that video, he's lucky to be alive, but not for all of the incredible investments in safety and equipment and advancements that have been made over the years.

Obviously we've been in the thick of it from everything to Dan Wheldon and Robert and several others along the way that you never hear about. We're always the first call. When Kevin Swindell got upside down and Shane Hmiel and all of these other people in the industry, what do we do, where do we go, time is of the essence.

We didn't plan it this way, but organically because of the investment that people have continued to make every May at our gala, we learned a lot, and that translated to Shane and to Kevin and stuff actually being able to walk with hand canes, and ultimately Robert. He had a lot of compounding other issues, so we couldn't get him upright as quickly as we would have liked.

Once again, a guy who is absolutely told a month after his injury like you're not going to walk again, dude. Number one, we said, well, we know a little bit now. Number two, you don't know Robert Wickens. To see him walk with hand canes, get married, three kids, and now a



championship IMSA driver, truly full circle and a poster child for, if you do the work, anything is possible.

The only thing we know that is clear in this book, if you don't do anything, nothing will happen. So we say that a lot. Even more than that, it's got the motivational side, it's got the recovery side. A lot of people didn't know my dad was paralyzed when I was 11 racing, and they said he'd never walk or talk again, which he does both fine. So just all of these things and how it all accumulated.

Also, there's a lot to talk about on the business side, just relationships and partnerships. Man, we were three balls, two strikes, down five runs in 2012 when I get a call out of the blue literally from a 303 number in Denver saying, would you like to drive again? That was Arrow Electronics calling me to drive that first Corvette ultimately. Look at what that's turned into 12 years later on so many levels.

So there's business, there's family, there's great times, there's really bad times. It was tough. It was not easy to write. But I think the flip side of that is what I really didn't understand going in is how much I would really enjoy taking the time to reflect on the last 50 years and extract as much as I could out of the memory. Man, did that really happen? There's a lot of that.

THE MODERATOR: How emotional was it to put all this together for you?

SAM SCHMIDT: It was tough. Again, we had hours and hours. I had co-writer Don Yaeger, super guy. He just finished Dion Sanders, and he's got 14 or 15 bestsellers. His primary purpose was to extract the information from the depths of our brains. I think he did a really good job. It's all taped interviews, which we retain and everything. We did that a lot of times in a group setting.

So having my kids listen to my parents' stories for hours and hours on end, it was just kind of magical. It was all very much worth it. But there won't be another one.

THE MODERATOR: One's all you need?

SAM SCHMIDT: One-and-done.

THE MODERATOR: Think of the audio recordings that will be passed on from generation to generation because you've got a story that's worth that.

SAM SCHMIDT: Another just -- I mean, there's 15 cool things, but one of them is they said, hey, man, you want to do the audiobook? What's that entail? Well, you sit there for eight days and read the book. I'm like hell no, but my son did it.

And his voice -- I went back after the audiobook was done, and I had just watched the ABC interviews after Vegas in 1999, and I'll be darned if his voice doesn't sound identical to my voice in 1999. It's just super cool.

THE MODERATOR: You mentioned the Corvette. 2014 was the year that you were able to drive around here. The car is up now for auction, I believe next Friday, is that correct? At Indiana State Fairgrounds, Mecum Auction. What does that car mean to you, and what's it going to be like to see that car cross the auction block?

SAM SCHMIDT: Yeah, continuing relationship with Arrow and everything they've been through. We all, a group of five people, four engineers and myself, went to Estes Chevrolet in December of 2013. The VP of Corporate Social Responsibility slapped down his American Express and bought the car. We drove it over to the race shop and started working on it. Five months later, we did 107 here.

There was a lot of trial and tribulation. It was like the old days of just getting your hands dirty and how are we going to do this? There's no way in hell this is going to work. We're not going to make the timeline, and then you make it. So that's a story in and of itself.

Then that car was probably the most prolific car because we went the 107, came back the next year, went 152. It's one of the cars -- it's the car Mario was driving when I raced him. The car went to the Hong Kong Tech Park, it went to the BOSS Training Grounds. It traveled the world for about three years.

Then it went to the Smithsonian. It's won a ton of awards on technical advancement. Then the Corvette Museum for years.

I'm just not driving anymore, so they said, how about we auction it for the foundation? Just another testament to their generosity and their partnership and everything they want to do. We hope it brings a lot of money. It's a 1 of 1. And just like your cell phone has advanced tremendously in 12 years, so has the tech on the car. So it's all obsolete, but it was the first.

THE MODERATOR: Pretty cool. A piece of history for sure. Open it up for questions here.

**Q. Hi, Sam. Two questions for you. The word motivation was used a few times here in the conversation with Dave. From the Motorsports kind of view, would it be an interesting motivation to work as a consultant with the car you designed at Dallara and the racetrack design to make those race cars and tracks**

**more safe, put in your experience? My second question is after your accident did you ever get in touch with Frank Williams? You had a similar life and accident, not in a race car, but in a road car?**

SAM SCHMIDT: I'll try and answer the first question. I'm not sure I completely know what you're asking. The bottom line is I think it's not a secret that those first Indy Racing elite cars were bulletproof to a fault -- the heavy gearbox, the heavy bellhousing, sort of overbuilt and did not allow for enough sort of impact cast-off.

So yeah, maybe, I guess, we often joke about the Halloween costume at the INDYCAR banquet on the Disney Cruise where I was a crash test dummy. I unfortunately got beat out by Al Unser and his wife, but we won't go there.

Since my accident, everything from seats to the headrest to the gearbox to the bellhousing and all that stuff was unbelievably worked over, and it continued to evolve with several iterations and ultimately the DW12 and onward.

I think there's always been an incredible amount of collaboration and hard work behind the scenes, from the George family funding the safer barriers back in the day in Nebraska to yellow light systems and other things along the way. It's completely collaborative. Terry Trammell and -- I mean, these guys have been at it for 35, 40 years, head down trying to make cars safer and trying to advance.

If it was perfect and it was easy and there was no risk, everybody would do it. It's definitely come a long way, but there's been some unfortunate situations where it didn't. Now the Aeroscreen, I think, is a huge step forward. I think we've already seen that and the casualties it's avoided.

Second question? Yes, thank you. I do have a picture in the book of I'm pretty sure it was the first year of the GP here where we were in the garages, and I believe I was outside the Williams garage, and Derek Daly came up and said, hey, would you like to meet Frank? I said that would be huge. It was 2000 because I had not started the team yet, whatever month that race was here.

We spent about 15 minutes just talking to him about his renewed motivation, continue on. A little different situation. He was already involved in the business and team owner and all that stuff before he was paralyzed, but he could have easily hung it up and not gone back to racing after the paralysis.

It was a great conversation, and I continued to stay in touch with him and his kids throughout the duration of our team's existence.

Clearly, then you just pay it forward, right? I still talk with Shane about his interest in dirt track racing. And Darrell Gwynn made my life a helluva lot easier when I started my team because he had already had a top team for five years when I got paralyzed. So when I was thinking about starting an INDYCAR team, I was lucky to be able to get him on the phone for hours, how do you travel? What do you do? He saved me a lot of heartache and a lot of mistakes by just letting me know all his -- everything he learned.

It's somewhat a club that nobody wants to be a part of, but once you are, it's very genuine and very helpful. There's no secrets. It's like how do we do this? Of course Robert's been a new inspiration to the masses.

**Q. I remember in 2017 when you and Mario competed out here, and he said that he was nervous as hell, quote. What were your emotions like that day? I do really believe that might be one of the most epic moments I've ever seen out here.**

SAM SCHMIDT: It was in so many ways. It was a bit of a joke to start with. Everybody knows how fast he is and prolific and with it and still can run circles around a lot of these guys, but I never had a chance to race against him in my career.

So I jabbed him at either Long Beach or somewhere, hey, man, like -- actually, I think I did a demo at Long Beach in the Corvette, and we got him over there and showed him everything. He's like, man, this is unbelievable, blah, blah, blah, and he's like let's go race. Let's go heads up. He was all in, of course. Mario would love to race anything today.

But the funny part is -- I almost hate admitting it -- but I thought I was getting one over on him because he drove the car -- it's a 2014 Stingray that's being auctioned. We had just gotten a 16 ZR6 with 200 more horsepower, and it's like I'm going to kick his ass because I got 200 more horsepower. Well, I was until he completely cut the last corner and beat me to the checkered flag by cheating.

I said, man, I thought I had you covered. Of course in the car, if you turn your head, it turns. So I couldn't see him cutting the corner until I got around the corner. He just chuckled and said, you can't out-cheat an Andretti. You should have known it was coming. Had I studied him a little more, I should have known exactly what he was going to do.

Those moments, I mean, there's -- I hate to say it, but there's hundreds of them in the book. Serendipity to racing

up Pike's Peak and spending three years driving this car with Robby Unser, talk about colorful, man. It's been a journey.

**Q. Did it take an extreme level of discipline to learn not to turn your head to look out a side window when you're driving that car?**

SAM SCHMIDT: Single toughest thing because it's very intuitive. Of course now it's just gotten more and more advanced to where you can really flog the hell out of a car with the system, and it's very redundant and very bulletproof.

Yeah, your entire life around this place, and really in any racing environment, you're taught to look a long way ahead because you're a football field a second and you're constantly looking ahead. In this car, you can't do that. It's the opposite. You have to be laser focused on where you're going until you want to change direction.

And that's where Mario jokes, because he got in the car with the system on, was headed down pit lane, and you have somebody in the right seat that's like a takeover coach or something if you have a problem. So that guy said something to Mario. He of course goes, what? The car was headed towards the inside pit wall like now. Luckily the guy on the right was quick enough to grab it and keep it off the wall, but he's like holy 'expletive' because it's just a natural thing to look at the guy and say, what? That got his attention real quick.

He said it was about the most stressful thing he'd ever done in his life for at least four laps.

**Q. When did you decide you want to be an INDYCAR team owner?**

SAM SCHMIDT: Probably one of those things I should have thought about a little longer than I did. It was really the fact that at the time of my accident Sheila and I had been married seven years, averaged about 200 days a year on the road, racing, testing, Firestone testing, et cetera. Then I got injured, and we did the six months in St. Louis in patient rehabilitation.

Went home. We were probably there about three months and nurses and PT and just people coming and going. Everybody who knows Sheila knows -- now it's 33 years, crazy -- but she said you need to find something to do because this is driving me nuts.

You have to have a hard think. This takes -- it's a conversation I have with hundreds of people every year that are newly injured, like this is going to take you two

hours minimum every day to get out of bed. What in your life are you passionate about enough to make that worthwhile? For me it's always been racing.

I couldn't get back into driving, so to me the next best thing naively was, hey, let's just start a team. You look at Chip, you look at some of these guys, shoot, they can do it. Why can't I do it? It is way harder than anything I'd ever done in my life. It's not just putting the right people in the right places. It's the resources. It's the equipment. 85 percent of what makes you successful on the track is out of your control.

It's been awesome, don't get me wrong, but it was probably a little too spontaneous, I don't know. Davey Hamilton talked me into it.

THE MODERATOR: Blame Davey. You made a lot of special memories, met a lot of special drivers. It's ironic you're here on the Grand Prix weekend which is really cool, right? Very cool.

Every time I think of you, I think of your buddy Arie Luijendijk, who said, if you don't know Sam, you don't know Schmidt. You were a bad ass driver, and you're still a bad ass.

Good luck with the book. Can't wait to see it.

SAM SCHMIDT: We've got some copies up here. I know Diana will be floating around next week with more copies. The book comes out the 19th. Obviously we're hoping to sell a lot of books to motorsports, but the goal is to transcend that beyond with the driven mission because there are so many people in this world, and that is the travesty, that is the battle -- the book talks about racing being my motivation, but DRIVEN is my passion.

I got six months of rehabilitation, my home was converted, I had a van, put my head down and went to work and I've been paying taxes ever since. That is the way the system is supposed to work.

The shocker with Robert's deal, even with professional athlete insurance with Robert, they were going to prematurely cut off his rehabilitation. It's like what the hell is this? I found out pretty quickly that this level of injury with the best insurance, you're now going to get four weeks of rehabilitation, and they send you home. There's no adaptation; there's no van. Your family, your life's blown up. It's a 65 percent divorce rate.

It hit me like a ton of bricks in 2018 that, fortunately or unfortunately, I'm uniquely qualified to try to take on the problem. Then McLaren came around, and it was like the

perfect storm. There are so many scenarios the last 30 years where, Arrow included, where I didn't drive the bus, I didn't open the door, but we had to walk through the door.

That's what we have to try and change now because everybody here, your insurance rates are ridiculous, but when you need them, you can't have it. You don't get the benefits. That's when you've really got to beat your chest and be vocal about it. Most people just don't know to do that. We're spreading that word from here on out.

THE MODERATOR: It's a lasting legacy. Let's raise some money for the foundation. Great to have Sam here.

By the way, once again, No Finish Line is available. I know he's got a couple books there. If you'd like one, holler. But presale now through all major online book retailers. Hits bookstores again Tuesday, May 19th, and you can pick up a copy on the IMS bookshop.

SAM SCHMIDT: Real quick, on samschmidt.com, we have the whole month's schedule. We'll be at bookstores around town, up north, selected souvenir stands around here and this weekend and fall race weekend signing books and all that stuff. Samschmidt.com has the whole schedule.

You can't miss my wrapped vehicle out there. Look at me. Look at me. It's pretty obnoxious.

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