

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Takuma Sato

Rinus VeeKay

Scott Dixon

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are moving on to row 4. Starting 12th, he's timeless on the oval, led 51 laps last year, the 2017, 2020 winner of the Indy 500, 17th Indy 500 start, Takuma Sato. Starting 11th, wasn't that long ago when he set the record for the highest starting spot by a teenager when he started fourth in 2020. Old man at this point, Rinus VeeKay. Starting 10th, equally as timeless as Takuma, the 2008 winner of the race, Scott Dixon, 24th Indy 500.

Gentlemen, here you go. Row 4. We were lamenting earlier because after the post-qualifying penalty, you would have been a part of the second oldest Indy 500 row. Instead you get to hang out with these guys, both winners at Indianapolis at one point.

TAKUMA SATO: I'm 49. Helio is 51, I believe. Ed was in the middle. There was definitely oldest row. Now I jump in with you guys (smiling).

RINUS VEEKAY: I'm bringing down the average a bit (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: How much are you looking forward to a couple hours of race time tomorrow?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, that will be nice. Hopefully we can get something in, even with, like, the shorter practice day on Monday, it's just nice to kind of shake that qualifying weekend off and get into race running.

The conditions are consistently changing as well. It will be nice to get a bit more race running in. Would have loved to do a little bit more during last week. Looking at the weather now, we should be good for at least one or two hours. I'm excited.

THE MODERATOR: Cooler temperatures, which is what

you practiced in Week 1. 24, what is the difference between 24 and race No. 1?

SCOTT DIXON: I don't know. I think the race No. 1 is much easier 'cause you just don't know what to expect. You don't know what to expect, what's coming. You know way too much on your 24th one.

It's changed throughout the years. I think every year is definitely exciting, where you start, weather conditions, the car. It's the same car for 15 years, but it's gone through such changes with the Aeroscreen and hybrid.

I'm super excited. As most people comment, this is the hardest week where you talk about the could have, should have, would have, what is going to happen, what you're going to try to avoid. Everybody is excited to get to tomorrow. We'll see how it goes for pit stop comps and all that stuff.

Can't wait for the parade with the family and kick off the race.

THE MODERATOR: Open it up for questions.

Q. Takuma, how much do you embrace helping younger drivers as you have more experience here?

TAKUMA SATO: I think it's a good thing, isn't it? I think it's the name of the sport. Mixed up of the different generations. Certainly in this row you can tell, Scott, most experienced driver in INDYCAR, me trying to catch up, and him up-and-coming, sharing incredibly close speed together.

The driving style are a bit different, but end of the day we all respect each other and try to make the hardest race. That's the fans basically make this show incredibly successful.

Yeah, I think I'm privileged to be back here. Very happy to be back here, as always of course. Building, like Scott said, up for the favorite day on the Carb Day. There's lots of things happening. Certainly race day, hopefully the weather stay dry.

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Q. You speak about the fans. You're the only guy to win without fans at Indianapolis.

TAKUMA SATO: I know (smiling).

Scott and I, we both share the same feeling, that we done the best we could for the race, for the show.

SCOTT DIXON: Definitely not the same feeling (laughter).

TAKUMA SATO: He was not very happy. Of course not.

I mean, again, as a winning 500, no matter the condition, no matter which year, I think it was very special.

Only thing was missing the fans, 350,000. Was just empty, gray, lonely track. That was only downside. We appreciate with Roger Penske and the INDYCAR to be able to launch international race. I think we were one of the earliest during the pandemic. In August race, first time in history, no spectators first time in history. We made the buzz. That's why bring me back to feel it again because in 2017, I mean, all the excitement. I missed to actually feel it. I remember, but it was just very crazy.

I really needed to sit down and, wow, this is incredible achievement. That sort of stuff I'd like to feel again, yes.

Q. Scott, starting on the inside of row 4, is there a difference between starting on the inside or the outside, no matter which row it is?

SCOTT DIXON: Not really I don't think. I think I've started inside, middle and outside. I don't know. Most people probably favor the outside, to be honest, just because you can kind of make a few moves a little bit easier, you got maybe a little bit more room.

I honestly don't think it really matters. You just want to get through the start cleanly, obviously have good options. I think for all of us, if you could start on the front row, inside of front row is obviously the best situation. Then there's also a lot of cars behind you.

Yeah, I don't think it matters.

Q. A big night for you tonight, induction into the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Hall of Fame. Another title for you. What does that mean to you within your career to know this place has acknowledged what you've done?

SCOTT DIXON: It's a huge honor. The timing is tough (smiling). I think I probably would have liked tonight off.

Honestly, it's a huge honor. To be the first inducted as an active driver is exceptional. Maybe they can change that rule back for people in the future.

No, I'm looking forward to it. I wouldn't say I particularly love those events. I don't really like talking about myself or being talked about.

Definitely embracing it. Got a lot of friends and family in town. Looking forward to getting through that and on to tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Do you know who's talking about you yet?

SCOTT DIXON: I don't yet. I'm guessing Doug Boles.

THE MODERATOR: I didn't know if Dario was going out there.

SCOTT DIXON: Dario has been talking some shit.

THE MODERATOR: I could see this go from a toast to a roast.

SCOTT DIXON: I'd been roasted many a time, been called lot of things (smiling).

Q. All-time lap leader here, only one Indy 500, how painful is that?

SCOTT DIXON: Well, I guess the simple answer is this place doesn't owe me anything. I think I'm very fortunate to get one.

I think it shows I'm pretty crap at leading the right lap.

No, it's been a dream, all of it has. Hopefully it continues for some time. Yeah, it's one of those stats that it's a stat. It sounds cool. But trust me, I'd rather have more wins.

I think there's crazier stats, right, three or four-time winners have led less than 20. I don't know what that is.

THE MODERATOR: There's a lot of weird stats.

SCOTT DIXON: I think you'd be more successful winning four in 20 laps.

Q. With all that, have you learned over the years just the cadence in which to manage this race? Do you manage it differently than you used to now?

SCOTT DIXON: I think you're forced into that. I think every race is different. Trying to work on the car, obviously

get a clean start, not take too many risks when they're not needed I think is a big factor.

Throughout the years you'll see the races finish a lot of the time the people fighting for the win are not who you thought. Last year was a big shift. There were probably three, four, five really big cars that were really dominant at the start and weren't there at the end.

Again, I think what I keep saying is that you can have the perfect race and still it will just give you a shot at trying to win here. It's extremely tough. There's so many things out of your control. You just got to take it as it comes, man. You got to be on your toes and quick for change.

Q. How important is it to have the trust of the drivers in front of you and behind you at the start the race?

RINUS VEEKAY: I mean, it's nice knowing how the Indy 500 has been at least from my previous six starts. Everybody knows the race isn't won in the first lap, the first corner. You see a big difference compared to road courses, street courses, even short oval races, because everybody knows it's 500 miles.

It is nice. It's just important knowing there's one less variable that you don't have to watch your mirrors every time. Like Scott said, most important just to stay out of trouble. That's rule number one around the Speedway.

Q. Takuma, you coined the season as a year where you had unfinished business where you had a strong performance last year. Put into perspective the work and preparation it's taken for you and your team to prepare for this year's Indy 500.

TAKUMA SATO: A lot of driver feels unfinished job, other than the winner last year (smiling).

Yeah, we all focusing that we try to improve ourself. As a consequence, like Scott said, it's out of control that you can't do it. But you need to be there, grab it when you have a chance. To be able to do so, you have to be competitive and be strong, fast all the time, stay out of trouble. That's certainly the key.

But, I mean, short program is not easy program. I was out of the car for half year, then jump in the car for the full testing, which was very fortunate back in the car, then another five months off doing nothing. 11 months out of the competition. Now it's going to 230 miles per hour into turn one with 33 most competitive drivers. It is not easy.

Scott, we racing each other 16 years now. I can't believe it. Sometimes we had disagreement, but most time I think

we have the great respect.

Sometimes it's a bit difficult, like the first time. There is certainly the situation that I go for side by side with a guy who I never raced together. That time I have to be a little bit maybe cautious. I believe everyone is on the huge level of they respect each other. Somehow we have some trust.

Then the preparation is all about dynamic of the teams and all about the details. I know every single mechanics down the INDYCAR team doing meticulous job, we know that. There is certain area that just extra spice, have little extra kick, that's what sometimes we need it.

That's motivation, very driven. The trust, once again. I'm fully proud of my No. 75 boys, as well as the Rahal Letterman Lanigan team. Fully supportive of what we're trying to do.

We're here to correct unfinished job. I think as everybody does, that makes the sport so competitive.

Q. Rinus, you look at your history in this race, you usually qualify pretty well, but drop positions throughout the race. What do you feel you've learned to gain positions going into this year?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I mean, this has always been one of those races that you have to win, right? My first five shots at it, discounting last year, I had one of the fastest cars with Ed Carpenter Racing at the time. I always felt like this is a place we had to win where we had the car. I put a lot of pressure on myself.

I had this expectation on myself that I've got the car, now I've got to win the race. And then it's places, even off track, like coming into pit lane, where I get greedy. There's things that happen that you shouldn't be too greedy in pit lane. It's a straightforward thing.

The 500 last year we didn't have the pace. We had to work in a different way to find pace and make passes happen.

I'm super relaxed this year. I don't feel like I'm expecting anything from myself except maximizing everything I do inside and outside the car, just like the other 17 races we do this year.

I want to have a shot at fighting in the top five. If I maximize, I'm confident I can do that, the team can do that. They're really fast in pit lane. At that point the Speedway decides what happens. Maybe we do finish fifth, maybe we have a battle at going for the win.

Yeah, as long as I can just decide my own fate and stay

clean, have a good race, race hard, and build up this race toward the last 50 laps, that's going to be my goal.

I learned earlier this year, in Phoenix, there's some moves you shouldn't make, some things you shouldn't make that early in the race to stay in contention.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, guys, for coming up.

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