

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Michael Montri

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Looking forward to some discussion following the 36th Detroit Grand Prix in the city's history here this afternoon. Obviously an exciting weekend, great weekend in terms of weather, attendance, action on track.

Joined by Michael Montri, president of the Chevrolet Detroit Grand Prix presented by Lear. Your thoughts initially after the checkered flag, what we saw today, what you saw through the whole weekend, and kind of what this meant for the city of Detroit.

MICHAEL MONTRI: Yeah, I think just like the first three iterations of this race back downtown, it was clear throughout the entire weekend what this event has become in this city. It has become a cornerstone of the kickoff to summer here and the entire city embraces it.

The turnout all weekend long was strong. We don't have any real attendance numbers at this point, but it was clear just walking around here on Friday, Saturday, and then of course today, what a great turnout it was. Not only that, how much interest there was in the event and the lead-up. I think it's a cornerstone of the city, and it's fully embraced.

Q. As we think back on the action on track this weekend, exciting racing from IMSA WeatherTech Sports Car championship, INDY NXT this morning, and obviously what we just completed here with the NTT INDYCAR Series.

Some of the key stats from today's race, 173 on-track passes, 172 passes for position. One of the most interesting stats here that we just uncovered, 30 passes within the top 5, which is the second most all time in Detroit Grand Prix history, only trailing race 2 of the double-header in 2013. So a lot of action up front.

Talk about the circuit; as we've seen, as we've gone along, the competition seems to get more and more intense. Seems there's much more action as we've seen on this track. Some of those changes that I know have been made over the course of the year have helped facilitate that.

MICHAEL MONTRI: Yeah, one thing is for sure, it's always exciting here, and obviously the passes, again -- it's interesting, there were 173, you said, 173 total, 172 passes -- that's just below where we were last year. It was 181 last year. If you think about the number of passes for position, to have basically the second highest ever at 172, it just shows how competitive the NTT INDYCAR Series is and what a competitive racetrack we have.

It's interesting, the circuit when we set it up back in '23, we weren't sure where you could pass. We knew there was a big hairpin turn in 3, but now people pass all over the place. To see somebody go for a pass in 4 and 5, something as we were setting this track up I never expected, but clearly the professional drivers have found a way to get by each other, which is key.

We do a lot of work each year, as I'm sure you all know, to make the circuit smooth, to get it back to racing condition. Our winters here are pretty rough, and this past one was rough. So we grind, we repave, we fill all the things that you need to do in a city street circuit, but particularly one in the cold climate.

Clear that everybody has a good time out there and enjoys passing each other.

Q. I think one of the things that makes this event unique is the community engagement, the community element of this. There's not many races, sporting events overall where half the circuit venue is open for free. But not only that, engagement with the students. We've got our Correspondent Club kids who are here, a shining example of that, the artwork we see on the track, the fact that we've got so many community partners that are engaged in this event, talk about how that makes this a little bit different than any other race we go to.

MICHAEL MONTRI: Well, I don't know if it's just limited to a race. How many professional sports anythings can you just show up and watch for free. Let alone the amount of free viewing. 50 percent of the circuit at least is open all along the riverwalk, all along Hart Plaza. You don't need a



ticket to get down Woodward, where we have all the Meijer Fan Zone and everything else.

When we moved the event back to the city, we did not want to put a fence up around the whole thing and charge its own citizens to get in. We wanted it to be inclusive. We wanted kids to come with their families, with their parents because when we talked to the community, when we talked to the businesses, we heard a lot of nostalgia when we talked about bringing it back downtown.

They remembered being here with their parents, with their grandparents. Their mother worked in the Ren Cen and they came down to watch the race or whatever it might be. I'll tell you, it was a very easy decision that we need to make this thing inclusive, and we found a way to do that by opening up all of these areas.

We still have great viewing for the race enthusiasts. We still have great viewing for the folks that are coming down for the street party up on the rooftops, the tailgating, all of that. Still have great viewing for those that really want a premium experience.

But if you want to just experience it, if you just want to come down and check it out, bring your kids for literally free, other than the cost of getting there, however you might do so, it's available.

It's certainly one of a kind on the INDYCAR circuit, but I can't think of any other professional sports that that's true.

I'll be honest, when we announced that back in '23, we got a little criticism. I deal with the -- on my INDYCAR side I deal with all the promoters, and I think they were a little nervous people might start thinking all the racetracks were going to be free. But I assured them that, first of all, we're a 501(c)3. We're intertwined with the community here.

It's, in my opinion, at least in this market, a great way to grow the sport, and I think we've seen the positive impacts of that over the course of the three years now that we've been downtown. All of those displays that are lining Woodward all the way up to Campus Martius, those weren't there the first year. We didn't expand that far up. But over those first three years and into this one, now the fourth, we've had more demand for displays, interactions, people that want to come down and put those up to get in front of the people that come to this event.

That doesn't happen without that base of free attendance.

Q. We talked a little bit about the on-track action. Of the four street races that have taken place on the NTT INDYCAR Series schedule this year, 173 on-track

passes here today at Detroit ranks as the leader amongst all the tracks, street circuits this season. Continuing to lead the way. Obviously the on-track competition continues to shine. The community engagement continues to shine.

I think we've seen this event grow from an attendance perspective. Over 150,000 people over the course of three days. Since we brought the event back downtown, all time high last year of about 156,000. Tracking into the weekend it looked like we were up.

Talk about for the third consecutive year, the success of this event downtown.

MICHAEL MONTRI: Yeah, you just nailed it. It just says that it continues to become popular. Again, I said earlier, it's a little more anecdotal, but it felt more busy on Friday, felt more busy on Saturday.

We do have the proof in the increased concession sales, increased merchandise sales for this year. Don't have final numbers on any of that, but it is clear that the event continues to grow.

Q. I know one of the things I've heard questions about what the future holds here. Talk to us a little bit about that, where we stand with the agreements that we have in place and knowing that this is not the home of General Motors any longer but it's still a very important place to the city and a very important place to this race.

MICHAEL MONTRI: Yeah, I think the future of this race is -- we've already kind of talked about it, in that it is an engrained part of this community. This is not an event that has been here for three years. This is an event that has been in this city since 1982. It is part of this community, and it will remain a part of this community. We have stakeholders that are right there with us, making sure that this happens well into the future.

Bedrock, who is going to own the building whenever that takes place, General Motors, who currently or just recently sold the building, I don't know where that is in the transaction process, but my point is that we are very close to General Motors, obviously, but we also have a great relationship with Bedrock.

We obviously did the table. We've had a number of discussions on what their plans are. We know at least currently their plan publicly and as far as I know all the plan is to do something -- remove those two towers that are closest to the river right in front of Atwater. That is not going to happen until after our event in '27.

We have had a number of discussions on what happens after that. They don't believe, and I'm pretty sure that it's not going to impact our race at all in 2028, either, and after that, we'll see what we have to do to continue to make this race happen downtown.

But I can assure you, just like it has in the previous 36 runnings, it will happen. We might have to adjust some things. We might have to adjust where the paddock is, where the pit lane is where the race is, but I can assure you that this is a firm cornerstone of the events in this community, and it will continue.

Q. Michael, when this race started and you had drivers and you also had some media members that said, oh, it's not going to be a good course because they can't pass, it's too short, but nobody talks about that now. When you see that, how much of a sign of progress is that? And also how good the racing was, because the first year we would have yellow flag after yellow flag. We had a lot today but the first 10 laps were pretty clean.

MICHAEL MONTRI: Yeah, look, I think the drivers learn how best to race on this circuit. That first year we had some adjustments. We changed where we do the restarts. The original green flag was always on Jefferson as you head toward Turn 3. Subsequent years we did the restarts all on Franklin. I think that helps. Everybody doesn't wad up in the hairpin trying to pass.

When you look at it from a 2D map, which is what a lot of the media and a lot of the general public and a lot of the racing enthusiasts looked at that first year, yeah, it doesn't look very exciting. But you don't know the elevation changes. You don't know all the things that the drivers have found out. You can't really tell when you look at a pencil drawing on a map, you can't tell how wide the circuit is in certain areas.

You have to drive the circuit. You have to understand the racing. Quite frankly I'm not a race car driver, right, but it seems to have worked. Had a record number of passes last year. Obviously we're the highest of any street course this year.

I think it's a really unpredictable, exciting race circuit it's turned into.

Q. I have a question concerning the program. You have INDYCAR, INDY NXT and IMSA. Is there any more room in the schedule to add another race series or maybe a celebrity race into the program?

MICHAEL MONTRI: Yeah, the challenge we have here is the lack of paddock space. That is our biggest challenge. It is a very limited paddock. Right now if you went and asked any of the teams and series, they'd probably say their No. 1 wish was that we had a bigger paddock. We really don't have the room to squeeze another series in here.

Quite honestly, I was talking to some officials earlier today, and IMSA, for instance -- the other NTT INDYCAR Series that they share with us, a weekend, is Long Beach. INDYCAR went long in Long Beach and because of all the other series that were on the track, it really hampered IMSA.

Here, even though we went a little longer during qualifying yesterday, it didn't hamper IMSA because we had some flexibility. We didn't have another support series to cram in there.

I think if you asked the series, they'd say more paddock space but they'd also say, even if you had it, we like the number of series, and we like the number of series that are here now, too.

Obviously NTT INDYCAR Series and INDY NXT are core to our growth and our demo here, but it is phenomenal having the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar championship here. That has become a real treat for our local and national guests on Saturday.

That grid walk yesterday, I've never seen a busier grid walk here than what was out there yesterday. I was talking to John Doonan, and the talk was about is it too big, more than how do we get more people out here.

We are really happy with the series we have. We have long-term agreements with all three of those, and they will continue to be here.

Q. Obviously your Detroit Grand Prix has a contract with Chevrolet GM. Nevertheless I had during the weekend some talks with people from Stellantis that came over from Italy that would like to be involved in this Grand Prix. Do you think there is a possibility?

MICHAEL MONTRI: Yeah, look, we have historically had a number of OEMs involved here. Chevrolet is our title sponsor and will remain our title sponsor with the partnership and the contract and everything else. But we have had other OEMs involved here. We've had over the course of the years on Belle Isle and downtown, obviously Honda is the one that comes to mind most prevalently because of the INDYCAR Series.

But we've had other OEMs, and I think what Honda and Chevrolet are seeing now as the NTT INDYCAR Series continues to become more popular is other OEMs are interested and tapping in. If you look at Arlington, we had Toyota down there as part of the weekend. They were a big sponsor in Arlington.

To be clear, we're not looking to add another OEM sponsor here to that level, but as far as hospitality goes, as far as involvement goes, we're happy to listen.

I know who Stellantis is. I grew up in southeastern Michigan.

Q. With the construction and whatnot that could happen here, what are those conversations like to make sure you're covering all bases between you, the city, the buildings and INDYCAR as well?

MICHAEL MONTRI: They're great. Honestly, first of all, all of us currently work together to make this happen. Any street circuit in the downtown area, it's not just the promoter coming in and saying, hey, we want to run a race here. It takes so much coordination. It takes a ridiculous amount of coordination to make these events happen in downtown environments, and the fact that this one has been here since 1982, everyone is bought in here. No one wants to go in and say, hey, it's not that important to this community or hey, it was great but now we're changing the building but now -- it's always been, hey, here's our plan, how can we make it work for everybody, how can we make sure that the Grand Prix is here for a long, long, long time. They've always been very collaborative, very transparent, very open to how we're all going to work together to make it work.

Q. Have there been any talks about scheduling-wise if this is going to be something that you guys are dead set on continuing to do the week after Memorial Day?

MICHAEL MONTRI: This event in this city works -- one of the reasons it works is because it's the kickoff to summer here. It is the weekend after Memorial Day, and that's why it works -- one of the reasons it works here.

It was back in 2007 and 2008 I think it was Labor Day Weekend. I'll tell you, each market has its own little idiosyncrasies. This market and Labor Day, not a good weekend to have an event. It's the last weekend that their northern cottages -- they're all spending it up north, and it's really tough.

You have to have ticket sales, but you also have to have sponsorship sales, and sponsorship sales are somewhat dependent on hospitality. If they can't get their clients and

customers to come to an event, they're not going to buy a suite. They're not going to buy hospitality.

This weekend for this event is very, very important.

Q. Regarding improvements that you see, whether it's the track or track side coming up, anything catch your mind that you're thinking about possibly improving on?

MICHAEL MONTRI: Let me get my notes out and we can go through.

I think as I've said 800 times during this one, we're in the fourth year here, and we have made a ton of improvements since 2023, but there's still so many more that we can make. I think my team has done a great job in making those little improvements each year. We'll continue to do it. You can walk around the entire facility and say, what we thought might have worked there didn't quite work out how we thought, so let's change it, let's move this here.

I have a full notebook of that stuff, and every Tuesday after each checkered flag flies, the team gets together and we talk about what we're going to change, improve, and do better for next year, or hey, what worked, what do we not need to change because it was perfect.

So I have a big notebook of that. I'm sure Merrill does, as well, and the entire team will get together on Tuesday and we'll talk about what we're going to improve for next year.

Q. Is there one in particular that you can share?

MICHAEL MONTRI: Probably nothing that would interest this room, to be honest with you. For me, it's little things. Hey -- nothing that's going to interest this room.

THE MODERATOR: I think one of the things we didn't touch on is the sponsorship, the partnership support at this event. Since it's been brought back downtown, even on Belle Isle, really tremendous support from the corporate community, the local sponsors. Over 90 sponsors again this year, almost unheard of in this environment. 10-year anniversary for Lear this year, continuing to build a relationship with Chevrolet, talk about that and what that means for this event.

MICHAEL MONTRI: I mean, if I said that we had more sponsorship revenue than the Indy 500, would you believe me? That's the level we're talking here. The community and corporate support here is what makes this event happen, bar none. It always has. We're a 501(c)3; we're not here to make a profit. We are here to provide a great opportunity for the community and the city, put it on the

postcard for the country and the world on what Detroit can be, and we are so fortunate to have General Motors be our main sponsor for Lear for 10 years now to be our presenting sponsor and for all of those folks up in the suites to be supportive of what we're trying to do here.

The rooftops continue to grow. We've had corporate support on all of the rooftops now. They continue to grow.

The team provides a great experience, and the event is so unique. The way this community embraces this event is very clear to all of those sponsors, and they want to be a part of it.

Yeah, it is a phenomenal point that this race doesn't happen without all those sponsors contributing. It takes a lot of money to put a street circuit on. It takes a lot of money. Without those sponsors, it doesn't happen.

We typically sell signage packages and suites well in advance, so we didn't know NBC was going to carry the IMSA race until after we had sold some of those, so it's a nice bonus for the folks that came in early, and we were able to tell them, hey, you get kind of a two for one this weekend. It's always great to be able to give them a little bonus.

THE MODERATOR: The community engagement, I think we talked about it last year after this event, the relationship that we have with Boys and Girls Club of Greater Detroit and Correspondent Club that we have been able to foster and some young minds that are interested in what you guys do, what everyone does in terms of media coverage and we've got a great crop of students that we've worked with this year. One of the students has a question.

Q. You know that we have multiple capitals with BGC&D, one of them being social capital, which is human connections between industry professionals and peers and things of that nature. When seeing young people like myself in the grandstands, on the rooftop, what does that tell you about the next generation of INDYCAR racing?

MICHAEL MONTRI: That's a great question. I'm not sure if I'm intelligent enough to follow along.

No, that's a great question. It again goes back to kind of how we've deliberately programmed this event since we came back downtown. We want to see folks your age. We want to see folks from every different neighborhood, every different nationality, every different interest here because it's not just a race here. It's a street festival that happens to have a race going on. There is something literally for everyone if they want to come down.

On one rooftop we had a DJ with kind of -- I'm sorry, a live band with a beer hall kind of setup on center garage. These are all in addition to the incredible views you get. Then on another rooftop we had the Henry Ford museum with a historical display with a couple of Model Ts up there. It really runs the gamut of what we have on display.

Then when you walk up and down the Meijer Fan Zone and Hart Plaza, there's all kinds of stuff to look at, whether you're interested in racing or not. DTE was out there with an energy display, PNC was out there with a community display. Then you had actual race cars on display.

It's just a phenomenal thing. To your point, what it says to me is that this event, this sport is going in the right direction. If we can attract people of all ages, people of all nationalities, people of all geographic origins, we're doing something right.

Q. A few months ago I asked how you guys went about implementing new ideas and new plans. After the race weekend, what are you doing with the changes you see? Are you looking for the future, what you can change for the future, or are you just taking in all the new changes you made and seeing the fruits of your labor?

MICHAEL MONTRI: Well, it's a little bit of both. You make some changes and some work and some don't and then you make notes of that and move on. A number of things that we thought might work and didn't. Nothing that materially impacts the event, but it might impact kind of a subconscious effect, I would say.

You might not know everything isn't quite right if you're attending in a certain area or you're walking on a certain walkway. But there's a better way to do it that will have a subconscious positive effect on whoever is walking that path or whatever it might be. That's how we try to think about things.

It might not be a bad experience per se, but let's try to lift it up so it's even better. When you get enough of those over the course of a weekend, if you're an attendee, that add up, you show up and it feels right, you don't know quite why, but it feels right, that's what makes an event great.

You want to take all of the -- you want to smooth out all the customer impacts across the event, the way they're finding the walkway so they can get to their seat without having to think about it. All those little things that you don't maybe necessarily register if you're an attendee, but you sit down at your seat and you're like, whoa, that was easy.

I think we take a look at all of those things across the course of the event.

Again, this is back to your question, but we have a new merchandise location this year. Doesn't seem like a big deal. But we did really well out of that merchandise tent behind the suite structure there in the paddock. We've never had one there before. We've heard a lot about people saying, oh, this is so convenient before I had to go to Hart Plaza or new street or over a bridge to get merchandise.

A small thing, really no huge deal, we didn't have to reengineer anything, we just put a tent up to do it. But people that had never been here before didn't realize that was kind of a new add and for people that had been here before, this was a new team that we didn't have to walk down to Hart Plaza or take the shuttle down to Hart Plaza. It's a lot of little things I guess is my point.

Q. Sounds like it'll really be more of the same through '28 but there might be question marks in some way for '29. How specific can you be about what might change about the track or anything else?

MICHAEL MONTRI: Yeah, I can't because I don't have any idea what this building will look like in '29. I do know that at least if it goes on as they plan to do it now, when they remove the two towers closest to the river, they'll do it in a way because they're going to retain the other three towers, that they're not just going to blow it up. They can't. So it'll be taken down very carefully, and it will contain itself in the area where it's taken down.

Because of that, they don't know what Atwater is going to look like post-'28. But again, the long-term plan is to put a park in between -- at least this is what they're saying now, a park somewhere in between where the middle tower is at the Ren Cen and the river and really have a nice green space in there.

There's going to be some form of road. It might not be a vehicle road 365 days a year; I don't know. But I think we'll figure it out one way or another.

Cities change all the time. Cities -- it's good. Look, it's growth. It's development. All those things are good. All those things are positive developments, especially in Detroit, the way it's growing.

Our job is to adjust and grow with it, and sometimes we have to adjust. We'll see. I don't know the answer to that.

Q. I want to go back to what you said earlier concerning your improvements. As the Detroit Grand

Prix is just a temporary racetrack, not like a speedway or road course, permanent improvements can be done in a closed area. Are your improvements not limited by the city authorities, for example, when the race is going on? Police will say traffic must flow travel free, and I think that must be one of the biggest challenges?

MICHAEL MONTRI: You're right. Any traffic changes, traffic pattern changes have to be engineered by -- stamped by an engineer and approved by the city. Again, we can't just come downtown and tell people they're going to have to go left instead of right now.

You're 100 percent right. We have to come down and work with the city and traffic engineers to make sure we have the right traffic plan. That's kind of my point, that anything we do downtown, there are so many stakeholders involved that we're not out here running wild doing whatever we want. Everything we do is very planned out, very thought through.

Sometimes it works, sometimes it's not the best. But we can go into next year and alter that traffic plan if something didn't quite work.

I'll tell you, one this year, there's always a graduation on Sunday morning at the Aretha, and quite frankly, both of the organizations, Aretha and us, need to do a better job handling that traffic next year and just managing the traffic flow because this year didn't work. Whatever the changes that were put into place didn't quite work as well. It wasn't anything huge, but we can do better, I think.

THE MODERATOR: Appreciate all your attendance and the way you view this event. I think the success of this event is due in large part to the leadership of you and Bud Denker. Thank you.

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