

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Scott McLaughlin

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Back to Road America this weekend. Our driver this weekend drives the appropriately sponsored XPEL Team Penske Chevrolet. Scott has an average finish of just over eighth. Currently sits seventh in the championship off of strength of three top fives, and five top 10s so far this season. Off the track we're a little shocked that he's not wearing blue and orange a few days after the New York Knicks won the NBA championship.

Scott, thanks for doing this. How much championship gear have you purchased over the last couple days?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: A huge amount. A huge amount. We were at Game 4, me and Karly, which was amazing. Yeah, we went straight to the merch shop after that and bought so much stuff, way too much stuff. But it was worth it.

So happy they got it across the line after such a long, long time. Just so happened to marry a girl from New York. A match made in heaven.

The Knicks championship was a very good warm-up for what's going to be a pretty big weekend with XPEL. This is their race entitlement deal. XPEL Grand Prix. I'm the XPEL guy. Excited to go to a track that I love and win the race.

THE MODERATOR: No pressure then. A heck of a date night to take her to a Knicks Finals game as well.

After a week off, clearly the championship is back at it. A couple top 10s at Road America, podium 2024. A mixed bag for you at that track. What kind of a challenge is ahead of you this weekend?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, I felt like the last two years we've led the race at some point. Just the way the strategies have worked out, it just hasn't been ideal for me.

But we've always had reasonably fast cars. I guess you could say the past three years we led the race. It's a track that requires a lot of strategic mindset, especially if you

have a yellow at a different spot. Sometimes you can be caught out regardless of your track position. People can take the yellow, may not, gamble on that part. It's going to be interesting how that works out.

Always a track that I've loved ever since I came to INDYCAR. Feel like I go well there. Excited to get back there and give it a crack.

THE MODERATOR: Open it up for questions.

Q. Midway point of the season, how would you maybe assess where you've been this year in comparison to last year?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I mean, from the 10 perspective, it's nice we've had a couple wins for sure. I'd like to be one of those guys.

It's been a pretty solid year. I think it's probably taken me a little longer to gel with my new engineering team, with Raul and stuff. There's been plenty of good spots, as well, where we've made a lot of improvements in different areas.

Since May, we've really started to gel well. I see a lot of light at the end of the tunnel for our relationship. That feels really good.

From a driving perspective, I feel like I'm driving really, really well. Things haven't quite gone our way in some spots, outside of the Detroit sort of thing with Will, which I'd love to have back. I think that's the one race where we probably let one go. I felt like we've really extended ourselves and taken results when we could have at most races. Solid year.

We were just talking about it the other day. I'd give myself so far a B minus probably, B. But from the perspective we want to be a little bit better, for sure. As a team, we want to keep winning races. We're working hard to do that.

Q. About the reduction on the hybrids this weekend. What effect do you think that will have in the race? Do you think that was the right call?



SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, I don't really know. I know the limit got turned down. We practiced that on the sim. It doesn't really change the way I go about it, or at least our strategy in terms of when we push the button, when we don't. It's an overall lap limit.

A lot of people get paid a lot more money to decide that. I just drive.

Q. You say it's a B minus you would give yourself for the season. There is a bit of a gap back to the championship lead. Where do you assess some of that deficit might come from? How are you going about trying to claw back that deficit?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, I mean, I think the Indy GP was a bit frustrating. We didn't qualify well. Got caught up in some stuff. Damaged our car. We couldn't really execute that well.

Detroit we let one go.

I felt like St. Pete we had a car that could have won, for sure. It's just the way the strats worked out as well. We've been in position, been there or abouts to execute. I feel like we have. It just hasn't really gone our way or we haven't had the outright pace, which we're working on at the moment.

Especially between myself and my new engineer Raul, who has been fantastic, I enjoy working with him. We're trying to find that special sauce.

Countless days at the simulator. The way we're working, a couple test days coming up here which is going to be big for me moving forward. I think that's going to be a big thing.

Look, I think it would be a high grade if I won or got a couple more podiums. At the same time it's not a bad grade, I don't think, because I think I only passed school with B minuses. I was never an A grade student. I'll take the pass grade and move on.

Q. About not winning a race, getting on a couple years now. When you are used to winning before coming over to INDYCAR, and in INDYCAR, what effect does that winless run have? How do you manage the agitation?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: For sure, I'm a racer, I'm competitive, I want to win. At the same time, like, it is what it is. We've had chances and we've had speed to do it. That's all I can ask for. It just hasn't quite gone our way.

Sometimes it's like this. I've had this before in my career where I've gone 18 months, two years without a win. It's part and parcel of doing it. I feel like deep in my mind, I do, I'm executing as well as I can. I feel like I'm driving as good as I ever have.

It's just the competitiveness in the series right now is super high. When you have a chance to have a crack or have a win, you want to take that.

That's where we probably haven't executed in the last year and a half in terms of taking the chance to win or maybe it hasn't worked out in that regard.

I think we've been right there, thereabouts. If we can keep being consistent, keep putting ourselves in that position, I'm sure it's going to open the gates.

Q. If I put my meteorology hat on, it looks like there's a significant chance of rain throughout the weekend. Do you like running in the rain? How does that change your strategy?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: No, for sure it throws a bit of a wild card into everything. I'm from New Zealand. We run a lot of racing in the rain. I love driving in the rain personally. I always look at it, it's the same for everyone. I just got to get in the car and accept what we have, hopefully do the right thing at the right time.

No, I've driven there in the wet before, which is probably a good thing. Most people have, I think. You always have a little bit of a shower here or there at Road America at some time. It's nice to have some experience there in the rain, so it's not going to be a complete wild card.

Yeah, sure, love driving in the rain. Sort of take it how it comes. It's the same for everyone.

Q. I was curious, you talked about earlier in the season how excited you were to have Tim on your box to call strategy. How has that evolved since the start of the season?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, I mean, first time for me working directly and having him on the radio. I've actually had to tune T.C. up on a couple of things, how loud he's talking, what I want to hear at different points. He's really receptive to that.

As a stand, I think we really started clicking. It sounded like it started clicking around Long Beach. The first couple of events we had St. Pete and Phoenix, it was a little bit interesting at those points. A couple little teething problems. Nothing that we couldn't manage.

I felt like we had the right guy there. Just managing it, along with Dave Faustino, who I hadn't worked directly with since I've been at Penske. I worked alongside him when he was engineering Will.

I think right now he's been really receptive from feedback, where we can improve. T.C. has been great. He's a natural leader. Lead our team for so long. Really am enjoying it. It's just a matter of getting used to different people on your radio or the way they speak, how they adapt in different situations.

It's been fun. For sure I'd be lying if I said it's been taking longer than I thought it would have for sure. Lucky, I haven't had much change besides moving from Supercars to INDYCARs. This is probably the biggest change I've had since that period.

Q. Where do you feel like the program is at? Do y'all feel like y'all are there and it's a matter of missing on a call here or there? Are y'all right where you feel like you need to be or is there still something y'all are striving to capitalize on?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: No, I think we're moving 100% in the right direction. Honestly, I truly believe that.

I think the way that I've seen the team work, the structured meetings, a little bit more going on now, the way the three drivers are working, the engineers, it's as good as I've seen it and been a part of. I think it's all we can ask.

Ultimately right now we're probably in the most competitive era of INDYCAR racing for a very long time. We've got a car that's been around for a long time that everyone's got an idea of. People have gone to different teams and taken different thoughts and processes to other teams that have been at other teams. A mixture to the point where everyone is just hitting a high level. So you need to nail it each time. That's not just me, it's pit stops, strategists, all that stuff.

I think from a program perspective, I'm really excited. Jonathan is doing a fantastic job. Travis, Ben Bretzman and Dave, from leadership perspective as well. I've full of confidence.

As I said, there's a lot of light at the end of the tunnel there. Just excited for the new era of INDYCAR to come here in the next few years.

Q. I wanted to ask you about the race coming up in Washington, DC come August. What do you think about the circuit, the racetrack, then the event itself?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, I mean, I haven't seen the track outside of the top view that everyone else has seen. It's going to be a short track but around some pretty iconic buildings. I watched the UFC event on the weekend. It was pretty amazing, the flyovers. Very American, which was very cool to see.

I can't imagine what our event is going to look like. A lot of people signing up, over 150,000 people have signed up for tickets for the lottery, which is amazing. Going to be a pretty cool event.

From my perspective, newly announced citizen of the country, call this place my home, I'm excited to do it in a pretty pivotal market or strong, amazing city in terms of DC and what goes on there in terms of the whole country let alone the world.

Excited to put INDYCAR on the map there.

Q. I want to ask you about David Malukas. We saw the emotion he had after Indianapolis. You've had those types of moments yourself. Did you and Josef reach out to him apart from maybe how you would interact with him in a normal week, help get him through that?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Outside of what we saw him at the track, talked to him in debriefs and stuff. At the same time every person's different the way they go about it. If he reaches out or wants any help from either of us or anyone in the team, he's always got it.

I think you have to let a guy like that digest it how he wants to. We're always here for him regardless. He's a teammate, someone that I've enjoyed working with so far. I think he's doing a great job.

At the same time I think he's a big boy as well. He's got to get through that himself, go through those ups and downs. He's young. He's 23, 24, whatever he is.

I remember having a very similar thing happen to me around that age. It's just one of those things. There's only so much people can say to you. You just have to get on the horse and get on with it.

That's up to him to sort of sort out, but he's always going to have support.

Q. The lap length there is probably the longest in the entire season. Does that change strategy and thoughts because so much can happen on the other side of the circuit when you're out there?



SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Look, it's a long, long lap for sure. We've seen in the past the overcut be a long strategic thing instead of the undercut. That's a little bit the warm-up procedure.

If you can stay in touch with the leaders, save a little bit more fuel, it has worked in the past. I'm not sure that's going to happen this year. Especially the way the yellows have been falling at Detroit, a little bit more abrupt way, I think that's going to be interesting how much risk people take in that regard.

But yeah, for sure you got to think about it on your warm-up lap, the way you prep the tires, because it is such a long lap and you want to have as much (indiscernible) in the tire throughout the whole lap, not just the first part.

It's a different thought process the way you go on about it. At the same time it makes testing and practice a lot more crucial 'cause less laps you can complete.

Q. We've got about 12 weekends of racing left this season, nine events. It's where the championship can turn itself upside down. This period of racing, you can do a lot of things, can't you? It's a rapid fly for not only you the driver but for the team and everyone involved week on week?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, no, for sure. It's going to be a busy couple months here. A lot of tracks you can get yourself in trouble or really turn things on its head.

The idea is to be as consistent as you can in this period. I feel like we're well and truly still in the game if we can get a couple results here or there. All it takes is a couple events.

You look at the 10 car on the weekend with the problem he had with running out of fuel. That stuff can completely derail a championship if it happens too many times.

The idea for us is to just keep ticking along and keep executing as well as we can and take what we can get, ideally being consistent with a couple wins I'd love to have happen. We'll just take what we can get.

Q. Six years since you made the transition to the United States. You talked about how this season has been a big period of change. When you reflect on your switch from Supercars to INDYCAR, what was the biggest lesson you learned there?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: That's a good one. It's crazy how long it's been and how fast that's gone.

I guess you could say I was really proud of the

never-give-up tenacity I showed in that period to, like, learn the race car. It was a lot harder, a harder first year than I initially wanted. Obviously paid back in dividends.

You can never doubt hard work. Even going through this period now where I haven't won for a little bit, I'm working as hard as I ever had to get back to that position.

I think that's what I learnt: there's a lesson there in terms of just being able to work as hard as you can and the spoils will come eventually if you don't think about it too much.

I think the hardest thing outside of that was learning the touring car, then the INDYCAR, the aerodynamics, all that stuff. I think it was more just the consistency after that, trying to be as consistent as I could be on ovals, street courses, road courses, short ovals, the whole deal. That's what makes INDYCAR so exciting.

Q. Another Supercar driver, Shane van Gisbergen, is in NASCAR. Talk about how your relationship has evolved? Are you going to be keeping an eye on him this weekend?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, for sure. We've always got along, but it was always a little bit awkward in New Zealand or Australia. We are arch rivals for so long. Now it's a little bit easier to support each other.

Yeah, for sure, I was actually just texting him today. He wants me to go and watch him race remote control Sprint cars or something like that at his house. I was like, I'm taking my daughter to an Elmo concert. We're on different wavelengths when it comes to that (smiling).

We've been good friends. Texts me before each race. I think he's going to be fantastic this weekend. I think they're at San Diego. It's a new track for everyone. I think he'll be very strong. I'd be surprised if he didn't win it, to be honest.

Q. There has been a lot of changes internally for the team. In a more external factor, you obviously have a new teammate, David Malukas. He's fit into the whole Penske environment comfortably. As someone who is one of the more established drivers on the team, is there any kind of perspective shifts that a new teammate prompts you to have? Has he encouraged you to look at things a bit differently?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I wouldn't say look at things differently. But it's nice to see his data and analyze his driving a little bit more. I did that a little bit when he was in the AJ Foyt car last year. What he was running last year was basically what he's running this year, same engineer

and all that stuff. It was basically good to have a look at that sort of stuff and see how he goes about his craft.

There's for sure some things I've taken on board since he came to it team with how he drove the car, engine settings, anything like that. He's for sure been a positive guy to have around, a positive driver in terms of talent, how fast he's been.

I think both me and Josef knew he was going to be quick straight off the bat. We just knew what he had. It was up to him to just execute that. He's done that with flying colors.

Enjoy having him around. Like you said, it's a fresh perspective. A little bit of a different perspective from what we were used to with Will. He was an older guy, a lot more experienced. At the same time I think they have their pros and cons, the pair of them.

Q. We're obviously entering a critical part of the season. Looking back at the season so far, has there been a weekend where you thought the results didn't necessarily reflect the pace that you and the team had?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, for me I think Detroit was disappointing not to get a podium there or a solid top five. We were fast all weekend. We were fastest in Q2, didn't quite get it in Q3. The car was super good. Felt like I was driving well. Walk away from there a 19th place...

It's part and parcel of how it works out in INDYCAR sometimes. You can't rest on your laurels. That was the one races I probably want to have back.

Outside of that, I think we've been pretty solid.

Q. Big picture, I'd venture to say Alex Palou has left the door open more than the last two years. How close do you feel as a group with Penske to challenge in the second half of this season for that championship? What's the biggest goal you want to improve upon in the second half?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, I think 100% it's still wide open for anyone really. I think for sure from my end I'd love to close the gap down a little bit more. There's so many opportunities for good and bad to happen for any car or anyone. I think you'd be silly if you were writing off the championship right now.

I think we just got to focus. We have a couple ovals coming up. An oval where we have two races at in Milwaukee. That could be a big points weekend if we have

a very solid car and execute there.

Yeah, there's so much. New tracks coming up, Markham, Toronto. We have the Washington, DC race. There's so much wild cards here in this last half of the season.

Like I said before, if you just execute and get solid top fives and win the odd race here or there, get podiums consistently, it's probably going to be the battle of who doesn't make the most mistakes.

For sure Alex is an amazing race driver, super fast, always there or thereabouts. As we can see, cracks do start to appear eventually. The problems that he had at Gateway, that could happen again at some point.

Obviously we'll just keep doing our thing and executing and hopefully get ourselves back in contention.

Q. Game 4, what was the coolest part of that experience for you?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Just being there. The vibe of the place was insane. It was like the loudest arena I've been in in terms of just how it went about.

Honestly me and my wife, we were super positive the whole time. It sucked at halftime. We were chilling out, just going, They just have to come back. If we get it back to this score, we'll be okay.

No one could have thought they could have come back all the way to that point. Nearly had the lead with two minutes to go.

Just insane. So lucky to have experienced that. Very privileged to do that. I think the coolest part was obviously the tip-in at the end. Everyone was just like, Brunson missed it. OG came from nowhere and tipped it in.

We watched highlights till like 3 a.m. Mom and dad in New York. It was awesome.

THE MODERATOR: Did anybody leave at halftime or was the place still full?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I don't know. Thankfully I got my tickets for nothing through Verizon. The people that bought \$5,000 tickets weren't going to leave anytime. This team is crazy.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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