

Indianapolis Motor Speedway Media Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Takuma Sato
Scott Dixon
Rinus VeeKay
David Malukas
Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up day one of practice for the 106th running of the Indianapolis 500 coming up a week from Sunday, Takuma Sato was the quickest, 228.9, just got Scott Dixon in the end before the checkered flew at 227.768 for the driver of the No. 9 PNC Bank Honda. Thanks for coming up here. Tell us about your day.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, day was pretty good I think for all of the Ganassi cars. They rolled off well, trying to get through the test. For us the day was definitely fragmented a bit with just how the schedule was, but beautiful weather, great to be out here and happy with the car.

I expected a lot of people to go fast at the end, but it looked like just Taku, so that's a big -- it's day one. We'll see what the rest of the week brings.

THE MODERATOR: Do you have a good grasp of what to work on now perhaps going into day two tomorrow? We'll see what the weather looks like, but does that help establish a plan now that you've got this under your belt?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think we've always got more stuff to test than actual getting on the car and running it. The good thing is with five strong cars, we've been able to move through it pretty quickly. Some always driver feel, so you want to check them yourself just to make sure it's how you would like it.

Yeah, I think as the week progresses, we'll get through the meat of it, and I think for all of us it's really just running in traffic as we saw the majority of people today. Last year it was interesting to see when people switched to qual trims, like we had a lot on Thursday, which was kind of bizarre last year, so we'll keep an eye on that. But yeah, car feels strong, but always room to improve.

Q. Your start to the season, a little slower than probably you'd want it. I just want to know what you're feeling right now.

SCOTT DIXON: It's been pretty horrendous I think in some circumstances. Honestly some were pretty big mistakes that we did as a group that should have never happened. That's probably two of them. And then I think we got into a bit of a weird snowball effect here on the road course, and honestly we just changed way too much stuff, and when you do that, you just miss the balance, and with how tight the competition is right now, then you're going to be out to lunch, and we definitely were.

I think the cars race really well. We've had really strong races when you look at the competition of the field. It's just really been the qualifying effort where we've either made mistakes or got ourselves into a bit of trouble.

Nice to shift gears here at the speedway, and I expect that to continue once we leave here, as well.

Q. You've been doing this so long; do you get frustrated or down or are you able to just sort of work through it?

SCOTT DIXON: Oh, no, I definitely get frustrated. I swear a lot. But that's just because we're all competitive. Yeah, it's always tough. Been in this position before. It's nothing new. We'll turn it around and we'll get on with it.

Q. Honda really showed some life today; did you question where they were or were you confident you were ready?

SCOTT DIXON: Again, it's day one. I don't think we've seen anything from anybody yet.

Q. I see a lot of Hondas up there?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, which changed toward the end. I don't know, I wouldn't look into that too much.

THE MODERATOR: Joined by two-time Indy 500 champion Takuma Sato, driving the No. 51 Nurtec ODT, Dale Coyne Racing with RWR, Honda, as well. Takuma, you bested Dixie there at the end, so obviously a good day for you guys.

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TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, Scott was always on top of the day today, but no, we had just a big tow in the last lap, so I guess happy. If you have a new tire I guess anybody can do that. If you have a (indiscernible), but I'm pretty happy that I went.

To be honest, the morning wasn't as smooth as we wished. We had to go back to the garage and check up a lot of things because there was some things we were not very happy with. In the end in the afternoon it was pretty quickly, turn around the speed, good speed, and getting more comfortable.

This 51 car, very happy, and it seems like 18 car is also very happy, so I think Dale Coyne Racing did a great preparation with the cars over the winter.

THE MODERATOR: Also joined by the driver of the No. 21 Bitcoin Racing with Bitnile Ed Carpenter Racing Chevrolet, Rinus VeeKay with the top Chevrolet today. Good day for you guys, as well?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, very good day for me. We started out pretty strong, very happy. Of course this morning was a shorter session, so we just did all the baseline stuff and then we started running a lot this afternoon, and I feel very good in traffic. I think really at the 500 you've got to be comfortable with your car, and I'm really comfortable.

Yeah, I think that the team has made great improvements over the day, and yeah, I'm just very happy.

Q. Scott, like you said, it is only day one, but your rookie teammate was third fastest today. Were you impressed by Jimmie and did you have much interaction with him on his first full day of practice?

SCOTT DIXON: I actually haven't seen Jimmie too much today. It's kind of weird, I think all of us were going back to the garage at different times.

Kind of what I expected, to be honest. He was quick at the test. He feels obviously a lot more comfortable. I think he's done a really good job each time he's been here. Yeah, he was fast. He was fast all day.

Q. He was saying during his interview that he was trying to get a sense of the low trim versus high trim settings. Can you elaborate on that, what it's like to be working through that, trying to figure out how to make your car good in traffic here?

SCOTT DIXON: Maybe they're trimming out already? I didn't know that. No, they should be just in race trim.

It's probably more of him just getting used to the traffic and understanding the flow and then also I think the biggest difference for us here is probably the washout that he's not used to from the Cup side.

I think a lot of it here is just the timing, how to time the pass and make it into that. I know they were focusing on just running in traffic as much as possible today and getting used to that.

THE MODERATOR: Also joined obviously by the driver of the No. 18 HMD Dale Coyne Racing with HMD Honda with David Malukas who comes home seventh in this practice session. Good day for you today? How would you describe it?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yes, very good. Starting off the day initially, speedway car, everything kind of getting worn in, braking in, and kind of getting used to the feeling, taking it slow, but going into this afternoon session we're kind of figuring out where the balance was, and no-tow laps and while following, as well. The car handled very well, and it seemed to be very quick, so I am very excited to continue the rest of the week here.

Q. Scott, following up on an earlier question, you were talking a little bit about kind of the difficulty in finding setups and going through weekends this year. I know you have so much experience, your team has so much experience. Where have some of those troubles finding your way through a weekend come from? Is it personnel changes or anything else unrelated to that?

SCOTT DIXON: Two of the three were probably just big mistakes that shouldn't have happened, and then here was more of I think we just, again, got out of sync and changed way too much on the car every session, so it was just different.

Yeah, I think we just kind of need to reset, calm down and get back to it. I think the road course tire for me has been sensitive at many tracks in the past couple of years, especially once we put the canopy on the car. My driving style is not -- I don't know, I just find it a bit trickier than maybe some of the others.

Q. Is that reset really easy to find when you come to a place like the Indianapolis Motor Speedway oval, have so many days to practice to ramp up for the 500, a place where you've had so much success in your career?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, look, it's a totally different environment. It's a different structure, different track time

and obviously a totally different circuit. So yeah, any track is different; you've just got to move on. And your weekend, depending on how it starts can be totally different, as well. Yeah, good time to reset.

Q. I know we're used to seeing you have so much success. I think it's been 18 races since you've won, I think dating back to early last year. You've been close a couple of times. Is there anything over this stretch that you feel like has led to that, just close calls that haven't gone your way, or anything beyond that?

SCOTT DIXON: It's always tough. As I said earlier, we've been here before, and it's just part of racing. Yeah, things could have gone totally different at many places and many tracks throughout the year, and honestly in the last sort of year we've made some pretty big mistakes, as well. We should have kept close on it. It's not easy, it's never easy, but that's the fun part of it is trying to beat the competition, and right now the whole spread of the field is extremely tight. Just got to get better.

Q. David, you're the fastest true rookie here since Jimmie has been here before with the stock cars. There's obviously a lot of intensity in driving a car around here at 220 plus miles an hour. What's been the difference in intensity from the open test in April to now the first day of official 500 practice that you've noticed?

DAVID MALUKAS: Well, one thing that Takuma also mentioned at the two-day test was everybody was over the line and in the tow, the overall speed was just a lot quicker than what it was now. Obviously also the tow was also just much longer. I realize there was a lot more strategy on time to time runs and get runs because there was so many big slowdowns happening which for me was all brand new compared to when we did the two-day test.

Q. You also had experience here with Indy Lights cars a long while back. How much did that help you that you can recall in your memory bank to practice today?

DAVID MALUKAS: Well, yeah, I did do last year around Indy Lights back in 2019, and it definitely helps just more of at the two-day test, just going in for the first time I know -- I kind of know my way around here, but obviously just make everything times ten with speed and grip.

But no, overall, yeah, it definitely helps, but at that time it was also kind of a bad team, bad car, so we had some struggles back then. Of course any laps, any time always helps.

Q. How much have you been able to learn from

Takuma over the last two weeks getting ready for this place?

DAVID MALUKAS: A lot, actually. I've watched many videos, and he keeps giving me tips and also giving me motivation, especially after that Saturday race going away from ovals. He congratulated me because he said it was a very tough race.

No, I wouldn't want any other teammate, especially for my rookie year. Takuma has been very helpful.

Q. As fans and media we all look at that big mile-per-hour number. What should we be looking at on the first day of practice like this to say, all right, this guy is going to be strong during the race weekend, this guy is going to qualify well? Is there anything we can look at that we don't see on that number?

RINUS VEEKAY: I think what really stands out, it all depends who is on which -- like who's on new tires, who's on older tires. But I think if you look at the guys, like who can follow closest to other guys, I think that's probably the best indication of who's fast and who's dialed in in race trim.

Q. The common theme today is it's just opening day, it's just the first day of practice. Obviously Fast Friday is when you do the qualifying trim, but what day this week would you say is the most important to get ready for the race?

SCOTT DIXON: I think every day is important. The thing with today is that it's not feeling like the race, like people are getting out of the throttle or they don't want to lead. So there's a lot of shifting that goes on.

But as you mentioned, it's really how closely cars can run. Even though sometimes it depends on fuel loads and tires at the time and things like that. It is always difficult to really understand. But I think you can see the good teams and driver combos and things like that throughout the week, and all the time it's the usual suspects that are pretty strong as far as teams go, and then maybe Thursday and Friday everybody will switch to qual trim.

Q. Then when you do group running how much does it help to have five cars that you can run with going out there in a group?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, it should help. I think the first few days is always tough because you're running back to the garage to make changes, so I don't think we even got a group run today where all of us were going, but hopefully later on in the week that will work out well.



Q. Rinus, do you and Ed already have your eye on qualifying this weekend? Do you guys feel confident about that?

RINUS VEEKAY: We do feel confident. I think Chevy has made good improvements, but we haven't really done any qual sims yet. I think in race trim we already look pretty fast in a straight line and everything. Yeah, I think with ECR we're always good in qualifying, so I think it will be no different this year.

Q. Takuma, I'm just curious, you're in an interesting position this year of sort of being a mentor on top of a teammate to David being a rookie. I'm curious what that's like from your perspective and kind of helping him find his way as he's a rookie this year.

TAKUMA SATO: Well, yes. David obviously has been great. He obviously is a rookie driver, inexperienced at the 500, so we don't have the luxury to have Scott like or Andretti for example. We don't have that luxury. But at least I was there and knowing what needs to do, and then David is quickly up to speed, like he was top of the rookie, as well.

I'm very happy, happy we're working together. We're spreading the program and we're trusting each other. We don't run each other together yet, but we feel pretty comfortable with. So next few days will be extremely important. Every day is important, of course, and then let's see how much we can pull out the speed. But in the race will be very different, so we need to study a lot.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for coming up. Appreciate it. Scott Dixon, Rinus VeeKay, two-time champ Takuma Sato, David Malukas. Thanks, guys.