

Indianapolis Motor Speedway Media Conference

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Marco Andretti

Conor Daly

Simon Pagenaud

Press Conference



MARCO ANDRETTI: It was quite easy actually. I had a moment on the slippery apron. That was the only thing that caught my eye that was different from the past, but as soon as I got out on the track I was flat. Yeah, year off, I had a question what it would be like, but it was easy to get up to speed for sure.

Q. Marco, Sunday is supposed to be 80s. Do you set your car up for today for the conditions, or do you look more ahead and maybe deal with the car today knowing it might be better Sunday?

MARCO ANDRETTI: Yeah, you just nailed it because the old me would have had the car trimmed for today and trying to go for P1, but we were actually trying bigger wickers and trying to nail the car for 90 degrees. It actually might rain Friday, so the next time we're on track might be the race.

I think we're ready for that and those conditions. I think I actually welcome those conditions because it gives me more of a shot when it comes down to car balance than if it's just speed. Unfortunately it might take both speed, luck and balance to win this race, but if we get luck and balance, we can have a pretty good shot.

Q. Marco, when we talked to you last week, you talked about how much happier and content you are now in your life. You've got little problems in qualifying; it doesn't go your way; are you still able to have fun here?

MARCO ANDRETTI: Yeah, absolutely. Honestly from the wind tunnel to the test to qualifying, I knew I was going to qualify there, so I'm not upset about it. You just know what you have as far as a draggy car goes, and that's what you have.

Q. Well, you had a headache on your warmup lap.

MARCO ANDRETTI: Yeah, but that run would have been screwed anyway because we had a big plenum explosion, so that run was going to be bad anyway, and we knew we were going to be able to run again. At the time we didn't because the rain was coming, but we got lucky to at least move up a few rows there. I had all the track position I want but I think I have the car to keep it if it materializes.

THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up this two-hour practice session on this Monday before the 106th running of the Indianapolis 500, we do expect Simon Pagenaud and Conor Daly to be on their way up here, but let's begin with the driver of the No. 98 KULR Technology Curb Honda for Andretti Herta Autosport with Marco and Curb. Marco, eighth quick, top 10 in that practice session, 77 laps turned. Did you get everything out of the day that you were hoping to?

MARCO ANDRETTI: Yeah, I just want to make sure I get out of here before Conor gets here, but yeah, other than that, yeah, I think we're pretty happy. I think we just need track position to materialize at some point in the race, whether it be strategy or a caution or just trying to get in there.

I think in traffic we're really good. It's just when you get to the back of a huge string of cars, everybody is kind of just at the mercy of lifting because you get a run and you pop and then the guys ahead of you has the tow to keep him there.

You just have to be patient. I think I have the car right now to be able to hawk everybody in front of me and just wait until they make mistakes, and I think that's how you pass from third on back.

I'm really happy with the race car. I'm underwhelmed with the speed still. We are what we are there. I'm just looking to try to nail a balance and carry more throttle than 32 other guys.

THE MODERATOR: First time up here, so we'll get the obvious question out of the way. Just being out of the car for so long and hopping back in earlier this month, was there any rust? Was it like riding a bike, get back in and let's go?

Q. Are you comfortable, or at any point do you start feeling that pressure that comes with being you at this racetrack?

MARCO ANDRETTI: I'm very comfortable at this racetrack. No, I mean, the pressure is what I want to put on myself to try to win this race. So I don't care what my last name is; I want to win this race.

Q. Marco, you mentioned a plenum explosion. Is that officially what happened to the engine during your first qualifying run on Saturday?

MARCO ANDRETTI: Yeah, yeah. We had to change the plenum for the second run.

Q. How much did that set you back?

MARCO ANDRETTI: Well, we would have been like last row if we didn't run again. It set me back because conditions changed a bit, but this car is going to go as fast as it's going to go in qualifying. That's why in the test I was sitting up here saying the same thing. I was like, I kind of know a second lap out after sitting out for a year, well, here we go again, it was two years in a row with the car. Then rewind three years and second lap out, I go, we're going to have a shot at pole. You just know right away if the car is fast or if it's not.

But the race is different, and it's definitely different when it's 90 degrees, so looking forward to that.

Q. Did you end up speaking with Takuma?

MARCO ANDRETTI: He's the nicest guy in the world. No, he sent me a paragraph apologizing, and he said, once they told me you were coming, I thought it better not to move. I said, well, yeah, that's probably good because I was hoping he wasn't going to go left and then we actually crashed on our qualifying run. Yeah, I had to start that run a little slow, but that wasn't the issue with that run.

Q. Last year was your first year not being a full-time driver, getting used to just doing SRX and then the 500. Are you doing anything different this year to prepare for Indy compared to last year?

MARCO ANDRETTI: Not really. You could wake me up out of my sleep and I'll go drive the speedway. I love it here. I think this is the first year that I was actually cold for a year because we finished 2020 going into '21, and that race was in August in '20. Yeah, this was as cold as I've been, and I don't feel behind anybody or anything.

Q. Are you looking to do another INDYCAR race later

this year, or is this going to be it for you?

MARCO ANDRETTI: Road courses would be tough to jump in when those guys are at the top of their game, but I don't know, I mean, this is my bread and butter at this place and this is the one that pays.

Q. Could you tell in a two-hour session like this, and again, 77 laps, could you tell maybe what the characteristic of race day would look like, how it might play out or what you need to do to make sure you get up front or maybe stay up front?

MARCO ANDRETTI: Yeah, it's going to take some strategy. The tires are pretty robust, and I told them if it comes down to the end, I'll run more laps on these tires. Just talking about different scenarios. You don't really know -- when it's hotter, it's going to expose the car more, which like I said, I like because I think we have a margin there. The car is pretty good.

It's just a car speed issue. Like I think I have to carry more throttle than others for the same result. But that's what we've got.

Q. I think I heard on Peacock last weekend that your dad is going to be your strategist again. How did that come about again? Is this something that was like, let's try this again, or have you talked --

MARCO ANDRETTI: No, I think it was a no-brainer. I think he's the best to do it honestly. He sees the race as good as me, from Nazareth last weekend with Colton, but yeah, he sees this race, and he's a really, really good strategist.

The two of us work a lot better nowadays than when I was a rookie and didn't think Dad knew anything what he was talking about. Now he definitely doesn't because I have more starts than him here. I'm about to.

Q. Have you watched Colton and Bryan get along and did that play into this, how they're getting along together?

MARCO ANDRETTI: No, I mean, their mannerisms are a little different than the Andrettis. They're pretty even keel. We're very passionate is what I like to say.

No, like I said, I think the difference is back when I was a rookie, it didn't affect Dad and I, it affected the people around us, and we would be animated on the radio and go to dinner like no problem. But other people would make mistakes because it brings the energy so high, and it brings -- now it's even higher.

But I think it was affecting other people more than me back then, but now I think they laugh at us. It's like they smile and they know that when we're going at each other it's because we want to win this race.

THE MODERATOR: Two-thirds of row six on race day is here. Simon Pagenaud will start 16th in the Auto Nation Sirius XM Meyer Shank Racing Honda, 10th quick today in the 83 laps that he turned, and Conor Daly will start 18th on Sunday in the Bitnile Ed Carpenter Racing Chevrolet, seventh quick for Conor in the 96 laps that he turned.

Conor, start with you. Two hours, did you get everything out of that?

CONOR DALY: Yeah, I think that was the most I've done in two hours here ever. We did three full stints, so that was a lot of information gained for us, which is nice, and we felt great. Car was really strong.

I thought we did make more progress than I expected honestly. It's been really hard to pass here all month just when we've been doing race runs, and today still is hard, but today felt honestly good for us. Yeah, I was pretty happy.

THE MODERATOR: Simon, how was your afternoon?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, good. Same as Conor. Just a lot of work done. Really good session. However, the conditions are quite -- it's telling you it's going to be great, and it's not going to be great because it's going to be a lot warmer, and as soon as it gets warmer, that's making things a lot more difficult on the tires.

I'm reserving myself on this one. I think a lot of people are going to feel great today.

Q. Your game plan today with Sunday being hotter, today being cooler, do you set your car up today based off the conditions or do you look ahead based on your setup today?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, for me I just wanted to get my balance right to be able to feel people the way I wanted to feel people knowing what I needed for the race. But certainly with the temperature going up, the downforce level changes, so yeah, it's still a tricky one. I'm trying to process the whole session in my head right now. There's definitely a lot going on with -- you saw a lot of people with different level of downforce, some people running way too fast in the front. So it's difficult to gauge yourself against those guys doing stuff like that.

But yeah, I'm expecting something a lot different on race

day.

CONOR DALY: Yeah, I mean, there were a lot of different levels of downforce. With the cool temperatures, we saw it in qualifying, cool temperatures equal massive speed. Everyone felt like a hero I'm sure at some point today.

I mean, you also still have to be the best in the conditions, and so today there were a few people that looked better than others and there were a few people that were definitely struggling. As Simon said for sure, it is going to get warmer, but also Indiana weather, heck, I have no idea what's going to happen in the next seven days. We obviously could get rain on Carb Day, we obviously could not.

I feel like if we did get rain on Carb Day we'd be happy where we are now. We just wanted to get through the tires today, how are they going to react 28 laps in, 30 laps in, because if you can take advantage of the end of the stint, that's really powerful.

We'll see what happens, but I think our car was quite consistent today, but again, we don't want to get too far ahead of ourselves because of conditions. Every day seems to have been different so far this whole month.

Q. Conor, are you going to be making a return to the Snake Pit prior to the race? If so, are you going to be taking any guests, maybe like a Jimmie Johnson, rookie, first time out here? Thoughts?

CONOR DALY: Yes, I'll be going over there. Jimmie Johnson, I don't know. It would be great to see him over there. I did text him late last night. I said his new nickname is Jimmie "Drift King" Johnson, but then he responded at 6:45 this morning saying that his name was "Diaper Changer" Johnson. That sounds less exciting than what I came up with, but he is a dad of many children, so I get it, and I don't know if he'll be in the Snake Pit.

Q. Simon, any interest in joining Conor out there?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Absolutely not. After the race, yes. Before the race, no.

Q. The entire top 5 are Honda, 11 out of the top 14 are Honda. Does that inspire any additional confidence for you?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, first of all, big congrats to Honda for qualifying. Obviously lots of speed, and it was a thrilling qualifying against Chevy. Obviously that's what you want to see in the sport is two manufacturers battling it out.



To me the speed compared to last year is just crazy to see the improvement, so hats off to the manufacturers. We don't say enough, there's a lot of work that goes behind the scenes, keeping improving pure efficiency and power. I'm just really, really happy for everybody at HPD and all the work that they've done.

It's definitely looking at all the red stuff, the red logo, it gives me confidence for sure, so it's a great thing, and everybody is working so hard right now to cover this amazing race.

Q. Conor, how does your car feel this year compared to last year at this time?

CONOR DALY: Well, it's hard to compare because the track is just entirely different this year. But I feel better today than I have in the past, but also can't get ahead of yourself. So we'll see how the track conditions change. I think we've got what we need. It just depends on making the right call for downforce for the race and really just judging the conditions properly.

Q. You've worked with ECR for a while now. You're now full time with them instead of popping between camps. Does this year feel different to you given that situation?

CONOR DALY: I mean, yeah, it feels good. We obviously missed it in qualifying and we definitely needed another run, but these things happen. I know we have a really good race car, and this team knows how to be up front here, so it's a long race, and there was a lot of people that started towards the back last year that ended up towards the front. We can definitely do it, and we're very, very confident in our program.

Q. Have you figured out anything else about the bamboozle on --

CONOR DALY: No, no, there are still guilty people around the paddock. I don't know who it is, but I question everyone.

Q. Why is it that Callum Ilott is in all the photos of the hot tub? I have to ask.

CONOR DALY: He's the only one who hangs out with me every night, so I don't know. I've hung out with him a lot. He just comes back and he's like, oh, looks hilarious, and I was like, thanks, man, I appreciate it.

Q. How has it been interacting with him as a rookie?

CONOR DALY: I think he's a really good driver, honestly.

All the rookies here are really talented. I mean, Jimmie is a rookie, I guess, and he's quite talented.

But Callum has been good. Kyle is obviously a future superstar for America, and yeah, there's just a really, really good group of young guys, and they're also just good dudes, I think, which is cool.

Q. Obviously the disappointment of qualifications weekend, you'd like to be closer to the front, but what kind of confidence do you take getting right back out there today, finishing in the top 10 today and knowing, Conor, like you said, it doesn't matter where you start, we've seen guys win from all over the field?

CONOR DALY: Yeah, I think today -- I love the Monday practice, honestly, especially if the weekend went awfully like I did -- I performed awfully myself, so I think when you get back out here and have a great day, it just reaffirms -- we know this car is good. We know the team has done a great job of building these cars. They're super fast.

I might not have executed myself over the weekend, so it's nice to jump back in here instead of waiting until Carb Day and hoping that it doesn't rain. I feel great. I love this practice day, and just the fact that we get to drive is awesome.

SIMON PAGENAUD: It's great to get practice, especially with the rained-out day we had. It gives you a chance to feel the kind of race configuration which is very different to qualifying. Yeah, just the conditions, you've just got to bear in mind how different the conditions are going to be and what you're going to need to adjust for it. That's where experience I think is going to have a big play in it.

Q. You know what it takes to win here; how do you make up that track position when you know it's going to be difficult to pass? Does it come down to strategy, timing and maybe good luck?

SIMON PAGENAUD: There's so many details that comes to these races. I'm not going to open my book in front of Conor here, but there's a lot that goes into it from basically the mechanics and pit stops and there's so much about it.

We'll regroup tonight, look at it all and try to guess what we're going to have Sunday and try to bring our A-game. But at the end of the day it's about the team, the driver, everybody, the strategist bringing their A-game on Sunday to put it all together.

Q. Last year before the race even though Penske had a disastrous qualifying you sat there and said, I have a really good car, and you delivered. Have you got that

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

feeling this year about being able to come through the pack?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I felt today, I felt like, okay, it's close to where it was last year. The only thing that I'm questioning is, like I said, everybody had different level of downforce, so I didn't have -- I couldn't gauge in my eye clearly what downforce the guys following me had and was that normal for me to get that run or not get that run.

Obviously in the race if it's hot, everybody is going to be pretty much on the same downforce level, as high as you can get. Then that will change things.

This is the only question I have at this point. Like I know how good the car is in the corner, which reassures me. I know where I'm at, and that's good. But it seems like there are some really fast cars out there on the straightaways, so we'll see -- we'll wait until Carb Day.

THE MODERATOR: Have a great rest of the week and we'll see you on Friday for Carb Day. Thanks, guys.