

NBC Sports Group Media Conference

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Mike Tirico

Danica Patrick

Dale Earnhardt Jr.

Leigh Diffey

James Hinchcliffe

Townsend Bell

Press Conference



I was watching qualifying during the week while I was in Baltimore at the Preakness and then yesterday, and the job that Diff and Hinch and Townsend and the rest of our INDYCAR group does is just so great, and they're so locked into every story, and it's great to be able to be around some of the best in the business and share this amazing event.

I look forward to that and any questions anyone might have, but I'll now hand over to Danica.

DANICA PATRICK: Hello, everybody. Thank you, Mike. So well spoken, as usual.

I'm really excited to be back. I've been myself also watching, and so many exciting things happening at Indy this year. Some sad things, obviously, with Graham, but Foyt is having a great year, and with a great run for the pole yesterday, I think there's just going to be a lot of really great storylines, which is always great.

But I think this crew is just a really good crew, and I thoroughly enjoy an honor to work with Mike each and every year. Dale and the play-by-plays, you guys are incredible. Like Mike just said, you guys were so locked in and just did such a great job with everything throughout the weekend.

Just hoping to bring just a little sprinkle of insight here and there and really just get the fans amped up and ready for the weekend.

There's just something -- I was watching yesterday, and my sister texted me and we were texting back and forth about various different things going on, and she just said, it's so cool, and she said, I wish you were still out there because I loved watching you. But she said, there's just something very special about Indianapolis, and there's a feeling.

I think that that's just something kind of undeniable when you become a part of it, whether you're watching it and you can feel it, but when you're there you can really feel it.

I just hope I can convey that to the fans that are at home, just the magnitude of the event.

We also said, my sister, I said, when you are in the car,

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, everybody, for joining us today. This will be NBC Sports' fifth Indianapolis 500. Coverage begins on Sunday, from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. exclusively on Peacock, and then at 11:00 a.m. NBC and Peacock will have more pre-race coverage before the green flag drops a little later on.

Joining us on our call today is going to be Mike Tirico, Danica Patrick, Dale Earnhardt Jr., Leigh Diffey, Townsend Bell and James Hinchcliffe.

Let's begin the call now, and we'll start off with our host, Mike Tirico.

MIKE TIRICO: Thanks, Chris. Good morning, everyone. I'll be brief. I've come to love my Mays at NBC with the Kentucky Derby and the Preakness and then the shift from horses to horsepower and getting to cover the Indy 500.

As someone who lives in Michigan and has spent a quarter of a century in the Midwest, I know what tradition and big events like this mean to the folks who share that part of the country. There's nothing like the Indy 500. I'll never forget standing on the grid with Danica and looking forward and backward and seeing people as far as the eye could see. It's a perspective I never thought I'd get the chance to experience, and now it's one I crave and look forward to and was reminded of when we were there last year in person.

Dale and Danica have become friends and colleagues over the last couple years. I look forward to the time with them.



obviously it either is one or the other, it's either calm and easy or terrifying. When you're watching, it's all terrifying. I thoroughly enjoyed yesterday.

DALE EARNHARDT JR.: I'm just lucky to be able to come back and enjoy this event. It's been a really great treat to be there over the last couple of years, and Danica mentioned the atmosphere and environment, and it's really electric, and there's a ton of tradition and history, but there's also this sort of really cool, modern feel to it, especially when you get close to the race cars and the technology, and the passion that the fans of INDYCAR have for their series and this race is endearing.

I feel very fortunate to have the opportunity to be there to experience it and will try my best to convey what I'm seeing and feeling. But I look forward to an awesome weekend, and I know the booth is going to do an amazing job showing everybody how great this race is.

LEIGH DIFFEY: Good morning, everybody. Thanks for your time. The overwhelming feeling is just of excitement because this particular month of May is the first one that has felt like it did pre-pandemic. Just the enthusiasm from the fans and just generally around Indianapolis, just that feeling is back, which is really nice, frankly.

The crowd numbers have been up over the weekend. It was very encouraging over the two days. Really good numbers. There's just a wonderful feeling of positivity in the air.

Yesterday we saw firsthand just the real drama of live sport at either end of the field, with Alex Palou, series champion, winning his first Indy 500 pole, and just what that meant to be the first Spaniard to do that, and at the other end of the field, had one of the most famous names in racing in a Rahal missing out, and just a crushing -- talking to Graham this morning, he just said he's never felt anything like that.

That's the full impact of this event, the importance, the significance of this event.

Then you can fill in the storylines in between. We've been spoiled already. We couldn't be more -- we wish it was tomorrow. We wish it was today. It's going to be a great week.

To see the unbridled just raw passion from Townsend and Hinch in the booth, to know what every one of those drivers was going through over the past two days leading into the greatest spectacle in racing this weekend, you know how real it is, you hear it in their voices, and we're lucky to have Mike and Danica and Junior back, and we've got our family, got our team together for what is now NBC's fifth

Indianapolis 500.

Ready to go, and T-Bell, I know you are, too.

TOWNSEND BELL: Absolutely, thanks, Diff. I think one of the reasons that the crowd was bigger than it's been in the last 10 years over the weekend is that the fans love to come out not only for the tradition but for record-setting speeds and drama, and we had all of that over the weekend.

This is the fastest front row in history, the fastest pole speed in history, and the closest front row. I think that's what made it so exciting is these razor thin margins between first, second, third, and frankly all the way through the field. In fact, this is the fastest field of 33 in history, and that's what Indy is all about is pushing the limits, how fast can you go, new records set, and it was so exciting to be part of another great qualifying weekend.

Our incredible team at NBC that's behind the scenes is working to produce 60 hours of live coverage between Peacock and NBC. It's humbling what they do. Diff and I worked maybe 20 hours Friday, Saturday and Sunday, but certainly not 60 hours, and we're led by an incredible team, including John Barnes and Renee Hatlelid.

Our statistician, Russ Thompson, who's up there for every one of those 60 hours, he attended his 60th Indy 500, or is attending his 60th Indy 500. A lot of great stats, but it's all about speed and drama, and we were not disappointed, once again, and I think we're going to have an incredible Indy 500 next Sunday.

James, take it from there.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Thanks, Townsend, and thanks, everybody. Not a lot left to add. Certainly we've been spoiled with what we've seen on track so far. All the stories have sort of been touched on.

I just want to mimic Townsend's comments about all the hard work from everybody at NBC. That 60 hours going on over the month is an impressive feat. I know the fans are very appreciative. The Tweets that were streaming in as Kevin and I were doing practice, just thanking everybody for making the effort to put all the practice sessions online.

It was on the background at work and all that sort of stuff, those stories were really fun to hear, and then obviously, like you said, the drama that we've seen so far has been incredible, and I just feel so thankful to get to enjoy this race and this new role.

Getting to do it a handful of times as a driver is obviously



super special, and now being able to call my second one with the NBC Sports crew is phenomenal. It's great to welcome back Mike and Danica and Dale, and I'm excited to share the booth with the two guys that I've been doing it with for the last year and call my second Indy 500. Thank you, guys, for the opportunity.

Q. This may be an odd question to start, but I want to ask Townsend, James and Danica, putting together a story of the best Will Power stories, quirky, weird, funny, and I wonder off the top of your heads if you can recall some of the funny stories that you might have from your times around Will Power.

TOWNSEND BELL: Thanks for the question. I'm scrambling to think of some. I think for me, it really just comes in his unique mannerisms. We joke at his wide and trance-like stares sometimes, both in moments of speed and performance but also in sort of humor.

When I think of Will Power, I think of those transfixed eyes, certainly when he won his first Indy 500 and just the passion and rage, frankly, at that moment.

But also on a personal note, just anytime I have a conversation, sometimes I'm looking at Will and I feel like I'm speaking a foreign language because I'm not sure if he understands anything I'm saying.

But that's what makes him special. He's such a unique character, one of the most talented racing drivers that I have ever had the pleasure of racing against, and if you've ever seen some of his performance data and speed traces, especially on places like street circuits, he does things that are seemingly inhuman.

A special guy. He's a friend, and yeah, I'll always think of those eyes. I hope that helps.

DANICA PATRICK: Yeah, sure. The first thing that comes up, and I think I remember showing this video not that long ago to somebody I was talking to, and I don't remember the premise of it, but basically it was -- oh, I know it was it was. It was about driving in wet conditions or challenging conditions and how hard it is, and it was about Loudon.

I think it was my last year in 2011, and it was -- watching back the clip, everybody was like, why on earth are we going green. It's raining out. It went green, and I spun. Like I barely got on the throttle and spun, and everybody started spinning on the front straightaway, but there's an awesome clip that shows Will Power's reaction because I'm pretty sure this had a negative effect on the championship. He crashed and he flipped off the stand, like the timing and scoring stand where everybody is at, where Barnhart is at.

It was a great view, great picture.

But also, I remember just like from a personality standpoint how also humble he is and how my first win in Japan was also -- I think it was his first win, too, and it was in Long Beach -- no, it was after Long Beach, and it was all in the same weekend, and I think maybe my friend Hayley asked how he did, and he was like, I won. I remember hearing the story, and he was just so sweet.

So he's just such a nice guy, but he's kind of crazy, too.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I'll jump in on a story that kind of echos a little bit of what Danica said and the humility of a guy that's had this kind of success. It was my rookie season in 2011, and we were -- the race in Brazil, I'm pretty sure he won it, and we were flying out on a Monday, and we were sitting there at the airport and just talking about the race and congratulating him on it, and remember, this is in an era when Will was winning like four to six races a year. It was just sort of assumed that he was going to be winning a handful of races and fighting for the championship.

He looked at me and he said, yeah, man, you know what, you just never know when you're going to win your last race, so you've got to enjoy every one of them. It was like, yeah, but you're Will Power; you're going to win a lot more races. He goes, you just don't know that.

It always kind of -- it kind of caught me off guard at the moment. I thought he was just being kind of goofy and stupid, but at the same time, it's a very true statement, and it just showed the humility of a guy that was absolutely dominating the sport at the time and was still just so thankful for the situation he was in, appreciative of the opportunity that he had been given, and doesn't take a single day for granted.

It's so cool to see how he's -- after his first championship and then having a couple tough years, questioning his own drive to want to do this again, sort of rediscovered himself, came back and won the championship last year. It's kind of always stuck with me. He's a much more philosophical guy than I think a lot of people might think, and as Danica said, the humility there is very impressive for someone that's got his CV.

Q. Danica, I'm doing a story about women at the Indy 500, and of course there will be a female driver in the field again this year with Katherine Legge, but a cooler story is it'll be the first time the defending Indy 500 winner has a female team member with Angela Ashmore being part of Marcus Ericsson's crew last

year as the engineer. That's kind of indicative of how many more women there are across the paddock. Seems like every team has done a lot more hiring, a lot more gender diversity. I know Penske Entertainment and Indianapolis Motor Speedway have talked about more women in their ranks, as well. I don't know how many races you get to anymore, Danica, but I'm wondering, have you noticed that? Not just maybe in INDYCAR but like across the board in racing. Are you seeing that it's not just about women drivers that we're talking about now, but it seems like across the board there's more gender diversity?

DANICA PATRICK: I guess a little bit. I wasn't really around Formula 1 a lot until recently, but you definitely see women around the paddock. The Sky Sports team that I'm on, there's a woman that was part of the strategy for one of the teams that is now doing the broadcast stuff. You see a little bit more of that, and obviously Naomi is part of that broadcast.

In NASCAR, sprinkled in here and there. I can't say that it seems like a dramatic change.

But INDYCAR I think in particular has probably had the most amount of women filling positions in everything from obviously driver, which I think at its highest, and you can correct me if I'm wrong, it was maybe five of us at one time at the 500. It might have been somewhere around 2009 or 2010-ish. So there's been many drivers at one point in time, but then there's also female owners, women on the crew, putting together predominantly female teams.

I think INDYCAR takes the trophy for the series, top-level series, that has been putting the most into giving women their opportunity.

I guess I can say that that felt the same for me. I feel like my time in INDYCAR felt -- I felt like I got a really great shake at it, and I drove for great teams. But it's kind of like a stock market; it goes up, it goes down, it goes up, it goes down, and its trajectory-wise tends to be going in an upward fashion, but there will always be these lulls. We can go from five women in the field to none, or one this year, but the fact that it's more normal is still an uptick from where it used to be.

Q. That is exactly the angle I'm doing is obviously there were no women drivers last year, and as you said, there had been five at one point. But it seems like across the board there's more than ever in the paddock. I know when you grow and have success that it was about performance, it was about your results, that everything else is sort of a byproduct of that. But a lot of people I talk to point to you as being

a big part of this, the if-you-see-it-you-can-be-it sort of thing has filtered its way through. Do you have any thoughts on that? Do you ever think about that? Do you think about the impact you had there?

DANICA PATRICK: Well, I'm super flattered by that. I think by not thinking about myself as a girl or using women as a benchmark for anything, it's probably what gave me my level of success.

But in all of history, in all aspects of life, there will always be the four-minute mile people. There will always be people that do things for the first time, and people need to see it, and then it enters the collective or the zeitgeist, and then all of a sudden you see more of it right away.

Whatever level of contribution I had to that, I'm honored. I was not the first woman to come along but the first to do a few things.

Happy and proud to have my part in history.

Q. I had a couple for the booth with James, Townsend and Leigh. From what you guys have seen on track so far this month, especially in qualifying, how do you see the flow of the race will be, similar or different from years past?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, I think certainly with the added downforce options that INDYCAR brought to the speedway this year, we're in for a good race. We saw this trend in Texas where we've had some difficult races the last few seasons, we showed up with some added downforce and it really did help the cause. From what we've seen in practice, I think cars can definitely follow a lot closer. Even though it's still not easy to pass, I think we've made that window a little bit wider and opened up the opportunities a little bit further down the line.

From everything we've seen, how close it is and how fast it is and now how close they can race, I think we're going to see a very similar sort of race to the first half of last year and then hopefully one just as exciting at the end.

TOWNSEND BELL: Yeah, I agree with James. I think it's going to be fiercely competitive, mainly because there are some teams on the rise in the field -- Danica talked about AJ Foyt Racing. Absolutely incredible performance in qualifying. But that performance starts with preparation and a commitment to excellence that frankly goes back to probably October of last year when the teams really set the course for their off-season development, specifically to perform well at Indianapolis.

You've got two AJ Foyt cars that look incredibly fast that

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

frankly would not have been in the picture in terms of expectations even a month ago, and then you add in Arrow McLaren that have come with a four-car team, also crazy fast race cars, on top of the establishment, Penske, of course, Ganassi, the Andretti teams.

Then you've got smaller programs. Just like at Dreyer Reinbold Racing with two cars that easily qualified, or Juncos Hollinger that comfortably made the show, not without a little bit of drama.

You pack that all in, the flow of the race is oftentimes really determined in that first stint. Does it go green for 40 or 50 laps to start this race, or is there kind of high drama and big aggression at the start that puts us into a cadence of maybe more yellows than we've seen in the past.

I tend to think we're going to be more in that dramatic first stint where there's going to be some contested moments at the end of these long straightaways at the speedway, Turn 1 and Turn 3, maybe even on the start, principally because you've got so much high expectation coming from the middle of the pack with two Penske drivers, Newgarden and McLaughlin, starting further back, Ed Carpenter and Will Power, who we already talked about. These are cars and drivers expecting to be at the front and to be there early, so I'll be watching big moves at the start and see what the resulting drama looks like.

LEIGH DIFFEY: I think the other thing we keep into consideration, too, is this has been an eventless practice and qualifying period. There has been no major incidents, yet there's been some engine issues and there's been some brushes of the wall, but there hasn't been that one moment, which is quite rare to go through a month of May and not see it like this. So is this the saucepan with hot water in it that's about to bubble and tip the saucepan lid off? Like is that amount of pent-up energy, is that going to be released here somewhere?

I think adding to what Townsend and Hinch said, don't forget about Team Penske. They don't enjoy what's happened in qualifying and not being in the limelight, so they're going to be ready come race time, as well.

Q. Given that you know the Rahal team extremely well, they've had a difficult time yesterday with Graham, obviously, how do you think they go from what happened yesterday to preparing for the biggest race of the year?

DANICA PATRICK: Yeah, that was heartbreaking. I watched that just with my fists together going like, oh, I just know the pain. I have been there before with rain conditions and various different things, and you just -- and

also just having so much empathy for Graham, to be the driver that he is and then to not be in it. I texted him and just said, everybody knows your talent, and this just happens.

I said that the speedway shows no mercy. There was a point in time when Penske didn't make the field.

It's just one of those places that when it's not there, it's not there. He had so much poise. I didn't hear Bobby talk at all. I'm not sure if he did. But Graham had so much poise, but yet so authentic, and I think he handled it incredibly well.

There's a very common saying, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger, so I'm sure that that will be the case. But Bobby and his team have been extremely successful, as I've been a part of some of that, so I'm sure that this will give them the kick in the butt to figure it out, as I'm pretty sure they have some very talented engineers on the team right now.

But at this point in time, all you can do is buckle down and try and fill your head with the most positive things you can and get a good race car that gives you confidence. That's the best thing they can do for their drivers at this point in time is to get a car that's steady in traffic and comfortable, and that usual goes a long way on Sunday.

Q. Mike and Dale and Leigh, as guys that cover a number of big events outside of motorsports and INDYCAR, how do you put the scope of the Indy 500 into context, and is there a first memory you have or a "holy cow" kind of moment in terms of when that struck you, being at a big event like the 500?

DALE EARNHARDT JR.: I came from growing up around NASCAR races and thinking that the Daytona 500 was the greatest thing and the biggest thing going, and while I'm very proud of that, when I walked out through Gasoline Alley on race day for my first Indy 500 and saw -- I know that the race cars are out on the front straightaway but you couldn't see any of that because of the people.

There's just the enormity of just the size of the crowd, the interest of so many people, like-minded people in one place at one time, it was just incredible.

Standing down there with the cars on the grid and everybody going through the traditional processes of the pre-race leading right up to the moment the drivers kind of shoo everybody away from the cars and the drivers get in, I had seen nothing like that. I had never been around anything like that in motorsports.

I think being in a pace car leading the field, it looked like jet fighters floating right across the top of the racetrack. There's this really odd, incredible energy that comes from specifically before the start of the race from the field of cars. There's so much preparation that goes into getting to this moment, and here they are getting ready to be turned loose for the very first start of the race, and there's this anticipation, excitement. There's this hope that things are going to -- they're going to prevail individually. All of that sort of radiating off of the field and they're pacing around that racetrack.

When you get that close to it, if you ever have a chance to ride in a pace car or anything like that before a race of that magnitude, that's where you'll feel it.

That's two moments right there, I think, that I'll never experience again anywhere else, and there's countless others as you move around the racetrack throughout the day.

LEIGH DIFFEY: Well, I always think about large events, and NBC Sports being the home of the Olympics here in the States, we get to go to different countries and different venues, and it moves around, and then you have all of the respective sports and different venues. It's not one concentrated point at any one time.

Then you have the football World Cup which changes venues, and then you have your different sports, different iconic events like the Super Bowl or the AFL Grand Final or this past weekend with the Premier League with the title being decided, never in the same spot at the one time; it always moves around.

But this is such a concentrated tradition that you get sucked in by the passion and the history and the ritual and the respect that the people have for the ritual. It's just so addictive, and it drags you in.

Then you never forget the first time that you stood in a corner and watch an INDYCAR take one of the four turns at speed, and you don't know whether to giggle or to be afraid. You're excited. You are blown away. You're amazed. It's a feeling that never leaves you. There is nothing -- it doesn't matter what anybody says. There is nothing like this event on the planet.

You may go to an event that has 65,000 people in a stadium, or you may be lucky enough to see 100,000 people in a stadium, but to be at a sporting event where cars are going over 200 miles an hour and there are more than 300,000 people in one spot at one time, it's not hyperbole; there's nothing like it in the world.

MIKE TIRICO: I'll add two quick anecdotes. I mentioned the one at the beginning of the call. My first time with Danica at Indy before the race got started when we were all sitting on a set right before we entered Turn 1, I couldn't believe we were there and I couldn't believe looking in either direction how many people there were, and there were people as far as you could see.

The big-sport perspective is lucky enough to be on the field, helping hand out the trophy at the Super Bowl a few times, and host the opening ceremony for the Olympics and call football games regularly in stadiums that have 70,000 or even in my college football days, the Michigan stadium has 110,000 people, and this is three times that. That gives you just a sense of the scale.

What I love about how large it is is how personal and individual it is, as well, because when we had the pandemic year, that place was so eerie, so silent, yet all you heard from folks were, well, I've been to 43 in a row, and I don't want my streak to end. It's a very personal connection with the community that I think no sporting event has.

For something this large to go house to house there in Speedway and in Carmel and all the places in Indiana really resonates with me.

The last thing I'll tell you is Dale Jr. and Danica have been in high-pressure, high-speed situations, and they're cool about all this stuff, and I get to sit on the pit box with them and watch the race.

Last year, I think there was a restart maybe with 25 to go. I think that was the restart. The two of them took out their cameras and they're taking a picture of the restart as it's coming. They're filming it or taking a still picture. I don't know which one. I've got a picture of the two of them taking a picture, and I thought, this is the damned coolest thing; these two have done this at the highest level, but they are caught up in what this is all about, and it's the scene and it's the cars and it's the moments that only Indy delivers, and that resonates with me still to this day, that even those who have been behind the wheel and in these moments like this still think it's cool.

That says to me how powerful the experience of Indy and the 500 together truly is.

Q. James, Graham was bumped from the race late in the session yesterday, kind of similar to the devastating fashion you were bumped in 2018. Can you relate to what Graham went through, and did you have any advice for him yesterday?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I can certainly relate. Yeah, I saw him last night afterwards, and basically went up and gave him a big hug and said, hey, man, I get it.

It really is one of the worst feelings on earth as a driver, sitting there in that car watching Jack's run, and I'm sure when Jack left the pits, he felt not necessarily confident, but I think like most of us, we were pretty skeptical that they were going to be able to go out immediately after a run and go faster.

Then as those laps started clicking off quicker and quicker, I'm sure he felt like the entire world was caving in, and that already small tight cockpit felt even smaller and tighter.

But as was already mentioned, the way that he handled it, in fact the way both drivers handled it was incredibly impressive, two very class acts there.

But I told him straight up, I said there's no words of wisdom here. I don't really have anything for you that's going to make you feel better because nothing is going to make you feel better, but just know that it's just a phase. Today is going to be one of the worst days of your career, but tomorrow is going to be a little bit better and then a little bit better the day after that, and eventually this will just be a story you tell to your kids.

But I certainly can feel for him and the anguish that he's got going on right now.

Q. For the drivers, Danica, Townsend and James, looking back on your careers at the Indy 500, what was that "welcome to the Indy 500" moment, whether it was good, bad or anything in between?

DANICA PATRICK: Did you say what was the best moment? I missed that part of the Indy 500 or Daytona 500.

Q. What was your "welcome to the Indy 500" moment, whether it was good or bad or anything in between?

DANICA PATRICK: Well, I suppose the ones that stick out the most from each would be, for me, it all felt very good, for Indy especially, showing up to rookie orientation. I had never worn nail polish, but for some reason, I think it was because it was so early in the month and I was flying there from Arizona where I lived, and that was the very beginning of the month, that was when we had a whole month there, and I had pink nail polish on, and there's like one of my favorite photos other than right after the race in 2005 hugging my dad. There's a picture of me putting my Hans device on with my pink nail polish, and I just have just such fond memories of that first time at the track and rookie

orientation and pulling into the pits every single time after I made a run and there being just 10 or 20 photographers right in front of the car.

It was just, welcome to Indy. It was like, this is a big deal, and you felt like it was.

Then the one that sticks out from Daytona is my first full season in the Cup car to qualify on the front row and have photos of me starting on the pole with the outside front row being Jeff Gordon, which was - sorry, Dale - my favorite driver when I was young.

I have a picture from when I raced at Charlotte Motor Speedway on the go-kart track on the inside with my sister and my dad at the race shop standing in front of the Rainbow Warrior car. That was one of those two where I'm like, wow, this is real life. This is so cool.

TOWNSEND BELL: I think one of the lasting memories from my first Indy 500 was strapping in -- well, strapping my helmet on as I stood next to my race car about to climb in for my first 500 in 2006 and for whatever reason, glancing up into the grandstands at the approximate location of where I sat 20 years prior, exactly 20 years prior as an 11-year-old boy watching my first Indy 500 in 1986 and realizing the achievement of just being there.

It was surreal. Some of you might know my story; I didn't have two nickels to rub together when I decided to drop out of college and pursue becoming a racing driver, and it just was an enormously powerful realization of that journey, and I'll always remember that, how special it was to be on the other side of the fence, and to almost see that 11-year-old boy in the grandstands was powerful.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: For me, it's interesting. Mine is a little different, I think, because when you come here as a rookie, everything is overwhelming. You're just so floored that you're really here and you're really doing it, and you go through all the things that you go through in May for the first time and you go through qualifying and you go through the parade on Saturday, then you have driver intros, then you do the whole ceremony at the start with the anthem and "Taps" and "Back Home Again" and all those things, and they're all so special.

You just sort of are kind of wide-eyed and trying to take it all in.

But for me, the moment that -- the real weight of the Indy 500 and the true meaning of it really hit me was when I crashed out of the race about half distance, and I crashed out, and I had gone out of races before in INDYCAR and lots of times in your career as a kid, whatever. I've never

had a feeling like that.

It felt so much worse, and you were almost like pleading with some higher power to just hit the reset button and go back 30 seconds so you could do something different and make a different decision. In that moment I just felt a way for all of my team and my sponsors and my family and just everybody that I had never felt with any other kind of DNF or anything like that or any kind of mistake.

I think that's the moment that it really struck me. It was when it all sort of disappeared, all got taken away in that moment, and it was very powerful. I never forgot that.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for participating and for joining today. Great call. There will be a transcript of this call available in a few hours on NBCSportsGroupPressbox.com or by contacting one of us in the communications department. Our coverage begins on Sunday, 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. exclusively on Peacock and then 11:00 a.m. on Peacock and NBC. Thanks, everybody.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

