

IMSA Media Conference

Saturday, March 16, 2024

Daytona, Florida, USA

Russell Ward

Indy Dontje

Philip Ellis

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Ladies and gentlemen, we're joined now by our GTD class winners in the Mobil 1 Twelve Hours of Sebring presented by Cadillac. Co-drivers Russell Ward, Indy Dontje and Phil Ellis.

Russell, start us off. Big, big win, back to back. How does that feel?

RUSSELL WARD: It feels great. We've been chasing this one for a couple of years. It's really awesome to be able to get it done.

THE MODERATOR: Indy? Thoughts on another win here, wig bunker at Sebring?

INDY DONTJE: Yeah, great (smiling). Like Russell said, last year we were quick and we knew we were also in the game. Unfortunately it didn't happen. This year I think it came together. I mean, team is doing such a great job. Also on the driver side, on the team side, mechanics, engineers. Yeah, everything comes together. We kept our head cool.

Really cool to win the 12 Hours of Sebring.

THE MODERATOR: Phil, a lot of momentum with Mercedes, four class wins in a row. What's going on there?

PHILIP ELLIS: I mean, as we spoke yesterday, I think the Mercedes-AMG is a great all-around car. Probably this is the track that suits us the most. A lot of medium speed corners, a lot of bumps. Super happy.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go to questions.

Q. Sort of the obvious question. After yesterday's disappointment, how did you approach today's race? What were your thoughts about your chances of coming basically from last to first?

RUSSELL WARD: We were used to it because the last three years we've started from last and have driven to first at some point (smiling).

We knew we had the car for it. We just wanted to keep our heads clean. We started off the season in such a great form winning Daytona. Our goal really was just to get the maximum amount of points that we could out of this race.

I mean, like Philip said, this track really suits this race car well. The Mercedes-AMG gives you a ton of confidence here. You need it at Sebring. A dangerous racetrack. A lot of chances to make a mistake.

The crew performed flawlessly. No mistakes on their part. Few mistakes on the drivers' part. Came out on the top.

Q. Philip, the last hour of the race, you were in the lead. Full course yellow after full course yellow, restart after restart with the Ferrari right in your wheel tracks. Talk about getting all those restarts right and managing to win by a slightly secure margin.

PHILIP ELLIS: Yeah, definitely not comfortable. I was actually hoping for the safety car to come out when I saw the Corvette standing in turn three.

Initially I battled with Elliott a lot as well in the Porsche in the restarts. He seemed to be fast as well. At that point we were trying to save fuel because we wouldn't have made it to the end on green flag racing. It was actually tough to keep the pack behind you and save as much fuel as you can.

That was a bit of a different ballgame compared to the last two restarts. I had the Ferrari behind me. Initially I thought I could pull a little bit of a gap on him, but probably the last 10 laps or so in the race he was pulling back on me.

A little bit nervous. I really didn't know how much else he had. Maybe he could have gotten to me. We certainly saw that we were a bit weaker in certain corners compared to other cars, which makes it a little bit vulnerable when fighting.

I think it helped with the GTPs coming through as well, opened up a bigger gap for me. I think it was a great fight

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with Elliott and Antonio. Happy I didn't have to go too much side to side with them.

Q. Philip, I want to ask you about the first lap of the race because there was a whole lot of melee happening in front of you. Talk to me about it from your perspective.

PHILIP ELLIS: I mean, it's better than being in the middle of the chaos, for sure. Would have preferred to be at the front. Being all the way back there, all you see is smoke and car bits flying around. It's a bit of hit and miss if you're going to hit any debris or not. We drove over some debris, but luckily it didn't damage our car or our tire.

Honestly the only thing you're hoping for is nobody else does a dumb move and tries to make up positions in the first lap. All of us at the back felt like we were pretty cautious and backed out of it trying to get through safely.

It wasn't too bad. We actually had the same situation I believe last year with a car spinning, which is a bit more hairy because it happened close in front of you and you didn't have time to react.

Honestly, from my point of view, it wasn't too bad. I'm sure some other guys in front of me had a worse time.

Q. The season started off pretty great at Daytona. Now you add Sebring to it. What does it mean to get this good a start for the team? How are you going to keep it rolling?

RUSSELL WARD: I think now we're with the car with the most to lose. We have such a big points lead on especially all of the full-season competitors.

I mean, it's just kind of in our hands to make sure we come out clean every race, capitalize on the most points we can.

INDY DONTJE: Well, I'm only joining for the endurance races. I think it's important that these guys keep their heads clean. They need to keep their nose clean and their heads cool, yeah, to get the championship.

For us, I think the next race is Watkins. Let's see where we are there. We didn't have success last year. I hope we can turn around that as well. It's all about grabbing those points and drive especially with your brain. I think we did that today, and we showed what we can do when we keep our heads cool.

PHILIP ELLIS: As Indy said, I think all of us have the speed to go to where we want to be. We just have to have clean races, not take too much risk like sometimes we did

last year unfortunately. I think we all learned from the mistakes, not only as drivers, but the team as well. It just matured into a more successful team.

I think as long as everybody pulls in the same direction, we'll be up there again.

Q. Starting from the back, change anything in the approach coming in?

RUSSELL WARD: I don't think so. I mean, especially in this series, you need some luck to win it. It's not all about outright pace. We've got some really, really smart guys on the pit stand making the calls. We capitalized on three yellows that got us up to the lead. We were in the lead by hour two.

For the endurance races, doesn't really matter where I start, in my opinion. It's always nice to start at the front, show the performance of the car, the performance of the team. At the end of the day we're here to win the race.

Starting at the back is better than starting at mid pack, what Philip said, because there's always carnage at the start.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, congratulations.

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