

# IMSA Media Conference

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Daytona, Florida, USA

**John Doonan**

Press Conference



NATE SIEBENS: Good afternoon, everybody. We appreciate you taking the time to join us as we prepare for not only the 2025 Mobil 1 12 Hours of Sebring, but we have the 2026 IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship and IMSA Michelin Pilot Challenge schedules going out to the world as we speak.

With that I wanted to bring John in for any Q&A that anybody has around this and anything else that we want to talk about as we head into the weekend.

John, over to you as far as just a couple of highlights on the 2026 schedule.

JOHN DOONAN: First of all, thanks for everybody making the trip. Sorry about the weather. We're thrilled to have so many people back with us from what was an outstanding 63rd running of the Rolex 24. Now we're going to put 73 on the board here at Sebring. Really pumped about the weekend. I think there's 230 transporters in the paddock, something along those lines.

Really continue to see our sport being healthy. People don't know about it unless you all write about it and tell people about it. We're grateful for that and the effort you all put into that.

As Nate said, we're thrilled once against, as we did last year, to give everybody a long runway to the 2026 season. This only happens because of the health of the sport, deep relationships with our track and event promotor partners that are excited to see the lift in attendance. As you know, 11 of 12 races last year were all-time record attendance for IMSA.

I can tell you we are trending towards that again for Saturday here. So the health of the sport, we're very excited about it and we want to continue to lift up the sport.

Doing things like this, in our opinions, give everybody from race teams to drivers to very important partners, our broadcast partners, and ultimately the biggest beneficiaries are the fans, to know that the schedule is intact and what we're going to do.

As you know, over the years we have tried to create stability, stability in partners with all of our long-term entitlement partners being with us into the 2030 time frame. Our partnership with NBC does the same thing in terms of stability. We believe the schedule and getting it out early does the same.

Also venues and dates are important cadence. What you see in the 2026 calendar are similar venues to where we're at today, with a bit of a twist. We're very excited about that.

NATE SIEBENS: We'll take questions for John.

**Q. Can you talk about that twist with Road America becoming a six-hour race. How long has that been in the works and what does it mean for the fans and IMSA?**

JOHN DOONAN: Yeah, it's no secret, I spent a lot of time growing up at Road America. My time there, my excitement and passion, the time I spent going through the beautiful forests up there, that's a personal passion.

From a business standpoint, we want to create excitement and newness for our fans, primarily for the race teams. And what Road America has done as a facility to provide fan experience, no different than any of our other promoters trying to do it.

Every round of our championship is important. It's no doubt that every single weekend the teams are trying to reach the podium and the competition level is at the highest of all time.

In talking with Mike Kertscher, his entire team at Road America, probably for the last I'd say 18 months or two years of saying at some point we'd love to bring an endurance round to your facility. Had great conversations with Doug Boles and Roger Penske of wanting to maintain an IMSA event.

What you're seeing is newness and excitement for the audience, the fans, and tremendous flexibility with the promotor partners to say let's shuffle it up a little bit.

Also candidly the season ender at the Motul Petit Le Mans



gives a nice cadence to the calendar. Rolex Sebring, mid-season at Watkins Glen with the Salem six-hour, first weekend in August at Road America, then the teams have another 240 before they go to battle at Le Petit.

I'd say the last 18 months to two years it's something that we've looked at.

**Q. Six Hours at the Glen has been moved back.**

JOHN DOONAN: Yes.

**Q. Can you talk about that and that's the spot for 24 Hours. We don't know their schedule yet.**

JOHN DOONAN: I appreciate you asking that, John. We've been super sensitive to not putting anybody in a difficult spot. I think there's maybe three 24-hour races in June in Europe. The Six Hour for probably over two decades or close to that had been that last weekend in June. We were sensitive to drivers, engineers, teams coming back and forth to try to do that.

This year, 2025, we moved the event, which we hoped to be on the traditional last weekend in June, ahead one week because of a network window with NBC. We're given so many network windows with our partnership with NBC. We moved it for that.

Lo and behold in '26 the network window they had was the last weekend in June, which moved us back.

In transparency, having discussions with the OEM partners, giving them a heads up, again this early schedule announcement means so much to us at IMSA and all of our partners. Now, everyone has a longer planning runway. I hope you all feel the same. You might not even be able to book flights this far out.

My hope is we're giving everybody a long enough runway that they can plan and making sure we avoid as many conflicts as possible.

This schedule doesn't happen overnight. There are a lot of all-nighters by our staff putting together the sanctioning agreements and working with our partners. The conversations, our great partners at the ACO, Pierre Fillon, Frederick Lubin from WEC, our partners in NASCAR no doubt, INDYCAR, just making sure that we're doing all the right things when it comes to not having conflicts as best as we possibly can.

**Q. With the race in Indianapolis, was it always the thought of taking it back to a sprint race or did you think of adding an additional endurance round? What**

**about other circuits in the country speaking of other venues to join the calendar in future years?**

JOHN DOONAN: Appreciate that.

I think number one on the endurance rounds we are keenly sensitive and aware of the budgets for the teams. Just adding an endurance round or an additional weekend is very difficult. I try my hardest, as does our entire staff, to keep our finger on the pulse of the budgets. Just adding another weekend or another few hours to a race is something that we take very seriously.

You saw that when we transitioned from Canadian Tire Motorsport Park with the full slate of classes. We probably had to give some relief somewhere. I don't like that for fans that don't see all the classes, but we do our ever best to try to move the Rubik's cube around to get it all to fit in the weekends and also to be sensitive to budget.

The idea of flexibility is key here. So we did a 240 at Indianapolis in 2023. We did a six hour in '24. We'll do another six hour, go back to a 240 at Indianapolis with being sensitive around the budgets.

In terms of other markets, I think we keep our eye out and we do get inquiries. We do survey the paddock, the partners, the teams about places that they would envision running at some point. We keep our eyes open to that.

If I were to say what market do you not race in right now that you wish you could, I'd say the Pacific Northwest would be a really exciting place for us. High-tech market up there, especially in Seattle with the companies that are there. A huge car culture in that part of the country.

At the same time I'm super sensitive, as are all of our staff, that when we go to the west coast we're going to do it all in a west coast swing. We cannot ask people to go out there for an event, come back, go out there, come back. That's why you see the Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach followed by the visit to WeatherTech Raceway in Laguna Seca in relatively simultaneous weekends so that people can leave their equipment out there, potentially leave their people out there and make one west coast swing.

It's decisions like that that we're trying to make those things very methodical and with sensitivity to the teams and to the partners that want to activate at these events.

**Q. In turning it into an endurance round at Road America, you see all the campers at Sebring, that would actually help draw in more interest being the location that it is.**

JOHN DOONAN: Big-time. I appreciate the question because it's right at the heart of what these natural terrain road courses mean.

Frankly, Mr. Penske and Doug Boles, they opened up camping at Indianapolis, too.

Walk the Grid Walk either at the Pilot Challenge, Alan Jay 120 tomorrow, or at the 12 Hour Grid Walk on Saturday. More families, more parents walking with their kids holding their hands, earmuffs protecting little ears. You're starting to see the next generation come out.

I think one of the things through the pandemic that really gave us a boost, besides convergence and all the things, is the idea you can come to an IMSA race and pull your family road car, your camper, right up to the fence and have the action right in front of you.

The fan attendance that we've seen at these venues is I think a big spark to bringing out families.

Road America, amongst so many other places, has put the infrastructure in place. My hope would be that we burst the seams of space there, like they have been the last several years by putting a six hour.

As a little boy, again, not to make it personal, but I went to Road America with my family and we camped. I think that experience reminds me of why we love this so much. I'm super pumped to be able to go there.

As a kid, it was a 500-mile race at Road America for decades and decades. Hopefully we'll make 500 miles in six hours. I think we'll maybe do more than that.

**Q. Do you see additional benefit with it being in the midwest, an area where people are used to traveling?**

JOHN DOONAN: There's absolutely no doubt. Summertime in the midwest is so beautiful, as is March here, or January in Daytona Beach or Sebring.

We want to follow the weather patterns as well in everything we do. Knock wood, I don't think it's rained during the race since I've been in this role at the Rolex 24. So I don't want to jinx it, but I'm hoping we keep the good weather mojo going.

Yeah, it's so nice. I'd be remiss if I didn't mention Motul Petit Le Mans is a pillar for us, huge partner for us. They came on in additional ways to make the Road America event a six-hour event. They're super excited. You mentioned summertime up there. Think about all the power sports, boating, jetskis, when it does get cold and

snow, snowmobiles. I think it's an opportunity for Motul to further engage with the consumer market that loves to go to the lakes up in Wisconsin and that type of thing.

**Q. Wayne Taylor is keen to get the message out that IMSA is the best we've ever seen it. I realize you're a biased guy, but at the same time you've had this perspective of many years of seeing sport. Can you comment on Wayne's take?**

JOHN DOONAN: I appreciate Wayne's perspective. I one thousand percent agree. I've been going to IMSA races since 1979. Wayne has been competing in them since '91 or '92, somewhere in there.

I'm just incredibly energized by the spirit of what's happening around endurance sports car racing, sports car racing in general. The number of single-make championships that have full grids, that are training the next technicians, mechanics, engineers, ultimately drivers and race teams that might grow. Full grids there.

The Michelin Pilot Challenge, other announcements related to that coming this weekend which we're excited about of extending those platforms to make sure that the manufacturers and the families and the teams that compete there have stability, as well.

There hasn't I don't think been a more exciting and more stable time for this segment of our sport. The manufacturer partnerships that you saw in 1981 to 1993 with GTP, pale in comparison to the number of manufacturers we have involved in the top level now.

Genesis, of course, has put a stake in the ground, they're coming. Ford announced back in January that they're coming. I think there's some other additional announcements coming down the pike here in the next few months.

What a moment. It makes my hair stand up that we're in these moments where people believe that this is the stage that they want to perform on.

As a young boy, I dreamed of seeing more and more. That's now a reality.

**Q. INDYCAR announced their Texas race today. The change in the Sebring date, was that part of that process?**

JOHN DOONAN: Exactly. Those conversations with Mr. Penske, with now Doug Boles, with Michael Montri, we're trying to make sure that we avoid as many conflicts as we possibly can.



NATE SIEBENS: As a note, the Sebring race is traditionally the third weekend in March. This is the third weekend in March next year.

JOHN DOONAN: Yeah, look at the tower, the graphic. It's really special that we can promote it in that manner because that's always been what it is, so...

**Q. Mid-Ohio is returning as a standalone.**

JOHN DOONAN: Yes.

**Q. Was there consideration for any other venues?**

JOHN DOONAN: There sure was. That type of venue and that type of weekend are increasingly important to us. With the car counts what they are, as I said I think there's close to 230 transporters in the paddock here, we have to have space to accommodate more single-make operation events. We have the VP Racing SportsCar Challenge. On a weekend where we can feature Michelin Pilot Challenge is exciting.

We'd love to get back to Lime Rock. We had deep discussions with Dickie Riegel and his team. You're 100% right, we're doing the one at Mid-Ohio. I thought it worked incredibly well last year. We want to continue to look at those weekends where we can feature Pilot Challenge and some of the others. It makes a really nice operation and event for the promoters.

**Q. You're not ruling out a potential second standalone?**

JOHN DOONAN: Yes, 100%. We've looked at it. We're considering it. No promises, but it's something we have to keep our eye on.

**Q. In terms of the class structures for classes at each race for next year, it's the same format as this year. Are you open to making potential changes if there's a different demand for certain classes?**

JOHN DOONAN: Yep. We've had stakeholder meetings with the GT folks, with the LMP2 teams. Obviously very keenly aware of budgets on the GTP side.

Yes is the answer. We want to continue to study and evolve and look at the venues, what space is available, what the stakeholders want in terms of competition and what venues, so...

NATE SIEBENS: One series that is not here this weekend, IMSA VP Racing SportsCar Challenge, a three-class

format, introduced the GT3 cars at GTVX. Talk about that platform.

JOHN DOONAN: We're super excited about that. For anyone that know my past, growing the next generation of drivers is really important. I feel like the VP Racing SportsCar Challenge is exactly that. The LMP3 cars, I love 'em. You could call that series, even though they're 45-minute sprint races, a mini WeatherTech where you got multi-class racing, gives drivers and teams the opportunity to compete who may aspire to be on the WeatherTech SportsCar Championship grid.

We're working with the LMP3 manufacturers to continue to try to find ways to grow that grid. Injecting GT3 in there is think is really important. All the manufacturers that have GT3 cars have a business model now. As we bring EVOS to that category, what an awesome way to allow the previous season's GT3 cars to continue to be relevant.

I think that's important for the OEMs, it's important for the teams. Now multi-class racing like that I think creates some exciting opportunities for us.

**Q. The news that Indianapolis is becoming a sprint round, are you still confident that Indianapolis will be a long-term component of the IMSA calendar in the years going forward?**

JOHN DOONAN: Yeah, I think in every discussion with Doug Boles, with Roger Penske, they want to continue to be part of this. We want that iconic circuit on our calendar.

There's no doubt things can change. At this moment, we have a long-term promotor agreement with them and that's our goal.

**Q. Expanding on the Indianapolis point, could you expand a little bit on why the decision was made to make it a sprint round rather than an endurance round.**

JOHN DOONAN: Yeah, I think a lot of factors. One is keeping the schedule exciting and fresh. Had that conversation with Doug and Roger, as well as with Mike Kertscher. Mike would love to have a six-hour here. Doug and Roger, would be okay if we switched back to a 240? You have those conversations with the promoters. You have those conversations with the race teams looking to have freshness in the calendar.

The sensitivity about budget, which we talked about, is we just can't add another. If you had a 240 at Road America, you can't plop in another 3 hours and 20 minutes. It doesn't pencil for the race teams. Hours on the engine, hours on the components, more tires, more fuel. It's really



It was a lot of healthy discussion. The beauty also for stability is we have long-term sanctioning agreements with all of our sanctioning and event promoters. These folks have said that we want IMSA. We've had said we'd like to bring IMSA to you. That just creates a lot of stability. We want to keep it fresh, no doubt. We're looking at other opportunities. But that stability I think is really important for everybody's health of the sport, so...

NATE SIEBENS: John, we appreciate you coming in. Congratulations on the schedule. We'll look forward to an exciting remainder of the Sebring weekend and 2025 season before we kick this one off next January.

JOHN DOONAN: Thank you.

In closing I wanted to make a comment about all of the outlets here. I think everyone is keenly aware of what we've done with establishing a new podcast. Matt Yocum is doing an awesome job up in the Concord production center hosting the IMSA Endurance Hour. I had a conversation with John in advance of the season. Our vision with that is to not just add another one, but to help lift up the ones that exist.

For those who have watched the first couple episodes, at the end we remind everyone to take in Double Stint. We remind everyone to tune into Steven and Graham and Marshall This Week in Sports Cars. We remind everyone to take in the content that you y'all are creating.

For me, that's rising tide lifts all boats in this sport. Every one of you is doing an incredible job of telling these stories. We have to lift each other up.

I'm really proud of that, not just because we added another venue. Our fans are taking in the content. I'm sure you're seeing the traffic on your sites, other outlets, [dailysportscarracer.com](http://dailysportscarracer.com), [motorsport.com](http://motorsport.com). Everything that you are doing is generating more excitement.

This sport doesn't get to the moment that it's in without all of us pulling together. So sincere thanks from myself and all of my IMSA teammates because the OEMs come and they participate, the teams come and participate, but it doesn't happen, no value gets created without you all helping us tell those stories.

I hope you know how much I appreciate it personally. Let's keep building this thing together.

NATE SIEBENS: Thank you, John.

