

MOTOR SPORTS | INDYCAR PREVIEW

Scott Dixon seeks milestone 7th championship

BY JENNA FRYER

AP Auto Racing Writer
BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — Scott Dixon looks around the IndyCar paddock and sees drivers half his age acting like A.J. Foyt even if they've never crossed the finish line first.

They are young and brash with the same swagger of "Super Tex," the winningest driver in IndyCar history.

"Most of them rock up these days feeling, you know, it seems like they've won everything in the world already, you know?" Dixon said Friday. "You definitely see the changing of the guard, which is always interesting."

The Iceman isn't ready to pass the torch anytime soon. Dixon begins his 21st season in IndyCar with Sunday's season-opening race at Barber Motorsports Park in pursuit of Foyt's all-time marks.

The six-time champion needs just one more title to tie Foyt's record of seven and his 50 career victories trail only Foyt (67) and Mario Andretti (52) in the record books. Will Power and Sébastien Bourdais at 39 wins each are the only active drivers even remotely in Dixon's class.

And yet those trophies and numbers and his two decades of dominance don't drive Dixon the way they once did. Don't get him wrong — he loves to win. But losing sticks with him a whole lot longer than a victory celebration.

He led wire-to-wire last year in winning his sixth title, but those celebratory moments were fleeting.

"It's nice to have victories but it's not something I really dwell on too much," Dixon said. "The hard part is always all the things you remember the most

of the close misses. I think that's the part of what drives you. I don't go to bed thinking about how great it was to win a sixth championship. But I do go to bed thinking about how close we lost the Indy 500 last year. That's what keeps the fire strong."

Dixon is now in pursuit of motorsports' magical number: Michael Schumacher and Lewis Hamilton both won seven Formula One titles, while Richard Petty, Dale Earnhardt and Jimmie Johnson each won seven in NASCAR. Foyt is alone in IndyCar.

But time is not on Dixon's side.

He turns 41 in July and although he has won two of the last three championships, he has never won back-to-back titles and guesses he has five good years left in his career. Team owner Chip Ganassi

noted that Álex Palou, the 24-year-old second-year IndyCar driver, was the fastest of the four Ganassi drivers in pre-season testing and might very well be the one Dixon has to beat this year.

Dixon thinks he is up for the challenge and finds that much like Tampa Bay quarterback Tom Brady, who at 43 won his sixth Super Bowl in February, he's in the best physical shape of his life. His cardio and strength training has evolved over the last decade, and he said he doesn't have a great gauge on his reaction speeds "because I still pass my tests, so that's a good thing."

His biggest challenge, he's found, has been time management since he and wife, Emma, decided to expand their family last year. They welcomed a third child — their only son — a decade after starting their family.



Driver Scott Dixon, left, and team owner Chip Ganassi celebrate after winning the NTT IndyCar Series Championship following a race in St. Petersburg, Florida, in October.

Kit Dixon has been an eye-opening adjustment after two daughters because every crash, bang and fall creates a momentary panic only for the toddler to bounce back up and get back on his way.

"He definitely loves adventure and has a pretty high pain tolerance," Dixon said.

"It's very different from the girls."

This weekend will be the first race for father and son, a moment Dixon can't wait to share with his little boy.

"I took him to a go-kart race once and his eyes were popping out of his head, so I'm really looking forward to taking him out and showing him cars on the track," Dixon said. "I think this is going to be a very fun year for our family."

Track

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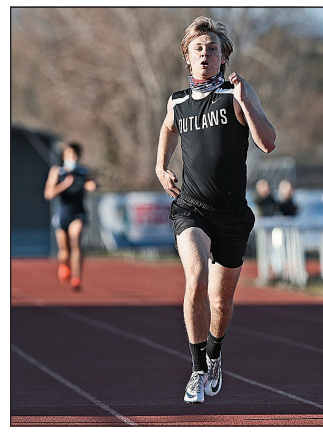
The hope is that there will be similar events for Class 4A spring sports.

If he does not get the chance to compete against the state's best for a second state title, there is a new goal that Anderson is chasing. He is running toward the number 49. A successful senior season to him ends with a time under 50 seconds.

Anderson is close and believes he will break it this year. His personal record is 50.04.

"It takes more grinding and putting in enough work," Anderson said. "I really believe I can put in that time."

Crook County ended up winning the Ice Breaker Thursday. On the girls side, Crook County finished with 282 points to win over Sisters (111), La Pine (59) and Culver (34). For the boys, Crook County recorded 194.5 points to finish ahead of La Pine (137), Sisters



Ryan Brennecke/The Bulletin: Sisters' Brody Anderson nears the finish line ahead of his competitors while running in the 400-meter dash Thursday in Prineville.

(95.5) and Culver (65). "It felt really good to be back out on the track and have kids competing," said Crook County coach Ernie Brooks. "Great weather and great competition. It was great to be back out there together again."

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Olympics

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"They typically come to at least one of our sessions at the Olympics," Ledecky said ruefully. "I know this year it probably won't be able to happen."

With coronavirus cases surging in Japan, the prospect of canceling an Olympics that already has been pushed back a year was raised again this week by a leading politician.

Toshihiro Nikai, the No. 2 person in the ruling political party, was asked during an interview if cancellation was still an option.

"Of course," he replied, adding that if the Tokyo Games piled on to the misery already wreaked by COVID-19 "there would be no meaning to having the Olympics."

But the swiftness with which Nikai backtracked and a bunch of other powerful officials jumped in to say his comments were off the mark only solidified the reality that these

games are going forward — no matter what happens in the next three months.

"There are a variety of concerns but as the Tokyo 2020 organizing committee we are not thinking about canceling the games," said Seiko Hashimoto, who heads up the Tokyo organizing committee.

But Hashimoto acknowledged that Nikai has a right to be concerned, and that sort of thinking is right in line with a Japanese public that has polled as high as 80% against holding the Olympics during the pandemic.

"His comment has reminded us of how tedious it was for us to feel confident or be fully prepared for delivering the games," Hashimoto said.

Though there will surely be socially distanced fans in the stands — Japan has allowed people to attend sporting events since last summer — these Olympics will essentially be a made-for-TV event.

Everyone from the athletes

and coaches to officials and the media will be on virtual lockdown during their time in Japan, restricted largely to the stadiums and arenas where the events are held and the rooms where they will lay their heads at night.

That is good enough for the International Olympic Committee, which relies on international broadcast fees for nearly three-fourths of its revenue. Besides, TV is the conduit through which nearly everyone except a lucky few gets to experience the games, so a cancellation would leave a giant void in the summer programming schedule.

Frankly, it's understandable that Japanese officials want to press forward, considering how much the country has laid out to prepare for the world's grandest boondoggle — at least \$15 billion officially, with audits suggesting the actual figure might be twice as much.

And, of course, the athletes desperately want to compete,

no matter what restrictions are placed on them. This is a moment that usually comes around only once every four years, and they've already had to tack on an extra year of training, preparation and expense just to take part in the Tokyo Games.

When a British newspaper suggested in January that the Olympics might be canceled, U.S. gymnastics star Simone Biles likely expressed the mindset of her fellow athletes. "I'll basically do anything at this moment," Biles told NBC. "Whatever they say they want us to do, I'm in 100%, because I've been training so hard, and I've just been so ready."

Sadly, no matter how the IOC tries to spin it, everyone in the Pandemic Games will be walking on eggshells until the flame is extinguished on Aug. 8.

Only then can the celebration really begin.

Or, more likely, nothing more than a giant sigh of relief.

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