

IndyCar Media

Conference

Saturday July 30, 2016

Simon Pagenaud

Will Power

Josef Newgarden

Ryan Hunter-Reay

Charlie Kimball

Graham Rahal

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with our Verizon P1 award press conference. Start with Charlie Kimball, driver of the No. 83 Tresiba Chevrolet for Chip Ganassi Racing, who will start fifth in tomorrow's race with a lap in the Firestone Fast Six of 1:04.3644 seconds.

Charlie, talk us through the whole qualifying sequence. Obviously everybody is concerned about rain, the weather, changing conditions. Take us through your day.

CHARLIE KIMBALL: Yeah, I think everybody was looking at radar, crystal balls and Ouija boards as much as possible. Ment there was quite a lot going on. The nice thing -- well, one of the challenges for us being in group 1 is we're going on a track that's pretty green as far as Firestone rubber, having just had an F2000 race, so we went out, and it took a long time for the tires to come in and for the grip to come and lap time to come out of the Firestone alternates towards the end of group 1 there. And then we watched the second group, group 2 in round 1 go, and everyone went straight away on alternates, and some of them, a lot of them did two runs, two sets of alternates.

We knew if it stayed dry, we had a set of stickers to try and make it into the Fast Six.

I thought we'd shot ourselves in the foot two or three different times in that second round because we went out on used reds, used alternates, and then came in after two laps and hadn't really done a solid lap time, had done a decent time but not a good enough time. I think we were 10th or 11th at that point, and put stickers on.



Well, the challenge was I went back out and trying to get the stickers up to temperature, it was raining harder and harder, so I wasn't sure that we'd made the right call, but the last lap there in round 2, I think it was a 64.40, was spectacular. To me, it was not a perfect lap, not even close, but it was a big push, and they said, all right, we made it through to the Fast Six, and then at the end there, we kind of misjudged timing. In fact, we'd planned on four laps, and the fifth lap turned out to be my fastest. We were lucky to get that last lap and made the most of it, and pretty happy with fifth.

THE MODERATOR: We'll welcome Josef Newgarden, driver of car No. 21, the Fuzzy's Ultra Premium Vodka ECR Chevrolet, qualified third today, 1:04.1200. Charlie was talking about the changing conditions, the possibility of weather moving in. Talk us through your whole qualifying day.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it was really exciting actually. I was nervous in the second round because we were debating new or used reds. I think everyone was when we went out for that second group, and no one really knew what the rain was going to do. It looked like it was going to rain and then it didn't, and then it kind of did.

So we ended up going out on scuffs because it looked like everyone did that. I struggled on the scuffs on that round. I couldn't really get a lap time that well. And then we came in, we put on new tires, and it started raining in Turn 4, and I was like, well, we just shot ourselves in the foot. I thought it was over after that, and then it dried up. The next lap it dried up. I kept going. We got a good time, we got in the Fast Six, and then we did a pretty decent job of getting to third. I feel good about where we're starting now.

That's a great spot for us, and we should have a great view to try and challenge the two Penske guys for the whole race. They're going to be tough to beat. I mean, they're really, really good around here on their tires, and I think that's what it's going to take, kind of like Barber. You have to have good longevity on your tires to be able to race those guys really hard for a full stint. That's where we got beat in Barber, so we've got to work on that tomorrow morning, but if we can do that, then I think we should have a pretty good day with Fuzzy's Vodka.

THE MODERATOR: Seated next to Josef, driver of No. 28, the DHL Honda for Andretti Autosport, Ryan-Hunter Reay, who qualified fourth with a lap of 1:04.3265. Same question, take us through your tire qualifying process today.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: It was interesting, especially when it started sprinkling there in the back because the patches through 4, 5, 6 started to get pretty slick. Out of nowhere you just have massive snap oversteer. It was tough to predict every time you came through what it would be, how much you can get away with. Those sessions like that as a driver put you on edge, but they end up being the most fun because you're kind of searching around looking for that grip.

But I'm just really happy to get everything out of it. I had to strangle that car's neck today to get everything out of it, and this has historically been a good track for us. We've qualified very well here in the past, raced well, and it's nice to be back at a track where when you get it out of the car, it's going to reward you, unlike the past two weekends where it's just been a bit of a nightmare.

Hopefully we'll continue off where we left at Road America and Detroit, third and fourth there. Hopefully we can continue there and get that DHL Honda up front. It would be great to have a great result for Honda here this weekend at one of their home races.

Q. Josef, you didn't test. What was J.R.'s baseline and did you need to make the car much different than when he tested here a couple weeks ago?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: You know, actually it was Spencer's baseline. J.R. was full tilt on kind of the aero development assistance for IndyCar kind of experimentation stuff, so he didn't make any changes, he just ran the car with different aero configs.

I was mainly here with Spencer trying to figure out what he needed, getting him up to speed, and you know, I was kind of -- we actually got through our test run that I would have gone through if I was here last week just with Spencer, so it was nice to have him in the car and experimenting with -- he gave us good direction to start with, and then we just kind of built on that this weekend.

I don't think it was too bad of a hindrance. I think we were able to get through what we needed to. I would even say Spencer was a huge help this weekend. He didn't get the qualifying I think he wanted today, but he's been getting faster each weekend. He's got the car control, he's just got to figure out what he needs from the car and what points, but he helped me a lot this weekend just with a couple different areas of the

track. He was really quick, and I think he's doing a really good job.

You know, a lot -- I guess just to answer your question, he was the big help last week for test day.

Q. Scott Dixon is normally Mr. Mid-Ohio here. He didn't make the Fast Six. He's going to be starting back in 12th. Is that a big surprise to any of you?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, I saw him coming out of the pits like super late. I think they just misjudged it from what it looked like. Charlie might know better, but it looked like he just came out late and missed it.

CHARLIE KIMBALL: I was shocked. We were sitting there, and it's like, okay, who's in the Fast Six Dixon, I was like, Dixon...they're like, no, no, Dix didn't make it, and I was like, to me it just doesn't -- around here, it's abnormal, which makes me really nervous for tomorrow because when Scott drives angry, he drives really fast.

Q. Can you add your expertise to that question?

WILL POWER: What, Dixon? Yeah, he just went out too late, basically.

Q. I mean, are you shocked he's not --

WILL POWER: Yeah, obviously, yeah. He's always so fast here, you would expect him to be vying for the pole. But yeah, it was a tough session because it was sprinkling, you could almost go, well, I'm going to pit because it's not going to go any faster. But yeah, you've got to stay out there.

THE MODERATOR: And we'll welcome Will Power, driver of the No. 12 Verizon Team Penske Chevy to the podium here, qualified second, 1:03.9381. We've talked with everybody about the changing conditions, the possibility of rain getting out there, some sprinkles. Take us through your entire qualifying session today.

WILL POWER: Yeah, it was just like mayhem, you know, not knowing what tires to use, and everyone went out on reds so we went out and did one lap on blacks and came straight in for reds. It was just a mixed-up session, and it was tiring as hell because you had to run every single lap like -- the Fast Six, I took a lap to take a breather. It was crazy.

Yeah, good to start on the front row. Going to be pretty long day, 90 laps around this joint is tough. See what I can do.

Q. For people who don't understand how difficult it is behind the wheel of an IndyCar around this place, the level of commitment and the physical side, too, what do you think you're doing heart rate

wise?

CHARLIE KIMBALL: I think I'm 190 out there for sure. Full-on sprint. I just wish there was a way to communicate that, it would be great, because that's the biggest thing about this place, especially with the aero configuration we're running now.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: And the commitment, you talked about that, through 11 and 1, it goes wrong, it's going to go wrong big because we're doing 150 miles an hour through Turn 1 just about, minimum.

CHARLIE KIMBALL: And nearly flat.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah.

CHARLIE KIMBALL: It's as close to flat as I've ever seen.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: No, it's actually funny, I come into the pits and everyone gets plugged in their intercom when they get into the pits, and I'm a little embarrassed because like I'm out of breath. I can't talk. I'm like, I'm sure everyone is the same way. I'm like, all right, give me a ticket. You honestly can't breathe. It's like you just ran a sprint for a mile and tried to do an interview. It's really, really tough, and you're just worn out. Like Charlie said, I bet my heart rate -- I run a high heart rate. I bet my heart rate is 190 just pegged the entire time. You're blistering out there.

Q. How could you show that?

WILL POWER: Your heart rate and breathing, I guess breaths per minute.

Q. Ryan, you mentioned the changing weather conditions this morning. In case we have similar weather conditions tomorrow, how difficult would it be to put up a proper strategy for your team?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: How difficult will it be to pick a proper strategy? It'll be very difficult. I mean, you're always guessing when it comes to weather, especially at a place like this where it's going to fall off fast, even with a light amount of rain. It's going to fall off -- it's going to fall off fast with even a light sprinkle.

It's tough to pick the right strategy, and everybody is looking at their weather maps, and it looks like it's 20 minutes away and it's sprinkling, raining here, so you really can't predict it too well. It's difficult at any road course, street circuit, that way.

THE MODERATOR: We'll welcome our Verizon P1 award winner for the sixth time this season, eighth time in his career, his first at Mid-Ohio, Simon Pagenaud with a track-record lap in the Firestone Fast Six, 1:03.8700 seconds. Simon, the guys have been talking about the changing conditions, the possibility of

weather moving in. If you could just take us through all three of your segments of qualifying.

SIMON PAGENAUD: It was a tricky qualifying for sure, especially Q2 because we were out there and all of a sudden there were some drops in Turn 4. It got slippery, a little slippery, but not enough to really pit. There was a lot of communication with the time extension; is this going to hold or is it going to keep raining a lot. They said just stay on track and we'll see the last two laps if you can go for it. And they said, just go for it. I didn't see any drops, so I went. But it was a bit sketchy for sure.

Q3 was awesome with Will. What a battle. The car was just -- the PPG car was really hooked up today. Thanks to Team Penske. They give us the best equipment out there, so congrats to all of you guys for being in the Fast Six.

THE MODERATOR: We'll also welcome Graham Rahal, driver of the No. 15 Steak & Shake Honda, qualified sixth, 1:04.4697. Again, the changing conditions, sprinkles here and there, talk us through how your session went today.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I think it was good. You know, Will and I in group 2 -- well, I'm not sure Will did, but we had to use two sets of reds right away because we thought it was going to rain, so we went out on reds and then ended up using two sets in round 1 but group 2.

So then from then on out, we decided we couldn't one of the sets. We only did two laps on one set and we decided to put that away for the race, so we put three runs on that other set, and we knew in Fast Six we weren't going to be that great. But we felt that from a strategy standpoint it was important to have them fresh for tomorrow, so we're looking good from that angle.

Yeah, it's a physical day. It wears you out around here right now, these speeds. It takes a -- for me, some mental reprogramming of the mind around here this morning and stuff when you see the times. Your brain is not telling your throttle foot to go yet, and you have to.

It's been a lot of fun, and tomorrow is going to be a long day. Going to be a tough day. Everybody is going to be worn out, and hopefully we can get a win again.

Q. You're talking about the heart rates, also talking about coming into the pits trying to catch your breath. Was it the same thing for you?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah. Pretty much. Montoya and I were talking about it yesterday, and he was saying when he comes into the pits he has to undo his belt to

breathe. That's obviously a different problem. But for sure I felt the same way. It is so hard to like catch your breath, man. You stop and everything starts dripping, and it's crazy.

Actually in the middle of the day in the heat I had a visor fogging up, which I don't know if I've ever seen. The other part, too, the worst part about it is when you stop in the pit lane, all the heat from the radiators come up, right, and it's just like you're stepping into a sauna after that, and then they're asking you for a full-on interview for feedback.

Q. I think I heard that the drivers in general like most of the field has actually eclipsed the track record, which might have been Dixon's from last year, and I'm just wondering what's different this year? Is it the car, the aero kits, improvements in the engine over the season, from one season to the next? What makes this track faster now, and are you having to use different gears than you would have had last year? It seems like the level of commitment is much higher through some of the turns.

WILL POWER: Yeah, it's just the update in the aero kits and probably a little engine, as well, they keep improving. Just amazing the speed we carry in these fast corners now. Thinking how late you braked before, and is just -- like the grip here is just insane. We do need power steering (laughs). It's just at that point where you can hardly turn the wheel. But yeah, it's a lot of grip.

GRAHAM RAHAL: I would say the other thing is the teams keep elevating their game. Obviously you look at the drivers in the field, this is the most competitive field anywhere in the world. Every time you show up to the track, there's no longer -- we were talking about it yesterday, if you look back at '08, '09, you could drive a race and probably win it at 80 percent, and today you just can't. Everybody is so talented, you look at the depth of it, you've got to be on top of it, pushing the limits at all times, and then you find -- you obviously find time in that way.

Q. Let me compare this to something else. You're making it sound like one of the hardest qualifying sessions you've ever done. Is there anything else that comes to mind that kind of compares to this?

WILL POWER: There isn't, because this track, it just keeps getting faster. The fuel load comes down, the grip goes down. It's not like Barber where you just do one lap. There's other tracks that are just as tough physically, but this one you've got to keep going all the way to the end. That's what kills you.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, physically I would say

no. It just keeps going quicker and quicker and you can keep gaining lap times by committing further into the corner. It just keeps rewarding you, and then when you do that, like Will was saying earlier, you do two sets in round 1, two sets in round 2, and then the Fast Six, it's just like you're just constantly going after it, so it never really gives you a chance to catch up.

CHARLIE KIMBALL: And there are other places that are just as big a challenge in different ways. Running at Detroit and Toronto, as rough as it is, is a big, physical challenge, but in a different way. I think here it's just pure commitment and pure power compared to anywhere else we go. I'm hearing Watkins Glen is going to be pretty physical, too.

Q. Graham, how much would a win here two years in a row really get you back into the game?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, to be honest, it would just get us back in the game. I mean, it would mean a lot to me. Clearly everybody knows that. But this year, I feel like we've been more competitive, far more competitive than we were last year.

But you know, for whatever reason, you know, nothing -- I don't know, none of the bounces have seemingly gone our way this year, where last year they did. That's just the luck of racing. That's part of racing, but we've just got to keep our heads down and keep working hard. We're not that far out of this thing. The change-up of the top 5 let's say, we can still get there pretty easily, but at some point we've got to get a bounce to go in our direction, and hopefully it's tomorrow.

I feel like I've got a pretty damned good race car. It's been consistent. We threw a lot at it yesterday afternoon. Since then it's been pretty solid. So we'll have to see tomorrow.

Q. And also what your driving uniform represents, not only to you but to the fans here at the track. Does it inspire you to go out and do great things?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Oh, I suppose. I don't know, man. Everybody will say when you race at home it's always special. Will got to do that obviously down in Australia, which was fun, and Chuck when we go to California a few times a year, but it is a special thing to do. It's great to come back here.

But this place means a lot more to me than just a racetrack. I grew up here, and this is a place I spent many, many days running around terrorizing. I just love this track, and yeah, the Buckeye stuff is fun. Most of all, it's fun to do something and do different marketing ideas, and last year the helmet was a great success, so how do we take it to the next level, so decided to do this. It also raises money and we're auctioning it off for

the Automotive Center of Research at Ohio State, which is one of the top engineering schools in the country, and we need to support that. Everybody would say here from an engineering level, we're always looking for young talent, but the engineers it's key, and we've got to keep these guys interested in IndyCar racing, so anything we can do to tie it in is a good thing.

Q. If you win, are you able to do the 1 in Ohio?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I don't think so. No.

Q. Pit stop strategy wise, like three years ago Charlie won by just going quicker than everyone else but stopping three times.

CHARLIE KIMBALL: It was a shorter race, though.

Q. Have you sorted it out so that you guys have to go hard all the way through or are you going to be cruising?

WILL POWER: Yeah, they basically eliminated -- before you could almost do it with two stops, but now you can't. Everyone is on the strategy that Charlie went with. I think everyone will be on the same strategy, just a matter of when you call it. The biggest problem in this series is the pits closing, and that's the risk you take. It's got to change, honestly.

Q. But we won't have a Long Beach situation again, everyone is just trying to --

GRAHAM RAHAL: I don't think it's possible anymore. I mean, you'd be saving like mad. The biggest thing here is the yellows, you know. That's going to dictate the strategy. You know, I wouldn't anticipate a lot of yellows but then again, it is physical, and you might see guys just making mental errors. If it's hot tomorrow, it'll be tough.

Q. Simon, you mentioned you're struggling with your lower back. Can you take us through that a little bit, how you're feeling?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I'm struggling. But this morning the pain was 10 out of 10. I didn't know if I was going to be doing qualifying to be honest. But the doctors took good care of me, and I managed to get in the car, and once the adrenaline got in, it was better, but I'm really struggling sitting here, so we should get done pretty quickly here. I'm kidding.

Q. Simon, could you just clarify what happened with your back?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I didn't want to get into it, but okay. Thank you. No, I pulled -- we don't know yet what it is exactly. I was in Turn 1, the third lap in on Friday, and then all of a sudden it was like somebody jammed a knife in my back. I've been struggling to drive, honestly. I haven't been doing much, letting my

teammate get the car sorted, and I've been trying to rest as much as possible. But the doctors took good care of me and tried to have the muscle relax. We'll see what it is on Monday. I guess I'm going to race anyway, so we'll see.

Q. A 90-lap race tomorrow. Some races we might expect yellows to occur, but if there are no cautions tomorrow, how are you guys going to get through 90 laps?

WILL POWER: Yeah, it's going to be tough. I mean, it was all green at Barber -- where else? Actually Long Beach it was all green. Yeah, we've had a couple of them this year. Yeah, it's hard. It's funny, though, the first 20 laps is when you're starting to think, how am I going to do the whole race, but then your body gets into a rhythm, and it seems to get easier for whatever reason. But yeah, the first -- sometimes at 15 in, you're like, how am I going to do this, this is bloody hard. That'll be the case around here for sure.

Q. Do you have an appointment on Monday or do you just mean after this race you'll see on Monday what's going on with your back?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I don't know what to say. I'd say we took care of it and we'll see what it is on Monday. I'm not dying.

Q. You don't really have an appointment on Monday?

SIMON PAGENAUD: No, not yet, no.

Q. Simon, you've pretty much tripled your career total in poles this season alone. Talk about -- when you look at it in those terms, talk about what that means.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, I mean, it's awesome. It's exactly what you want to do when you join such a power team. Team Penske is incredible. They provide us the best equipment, and my engineer is awesome. We have so much history together since 2010, so we carry a lot of knowledge, and we try to fine tune it every year. We're getting to that point where now on Friday we're pretty much ready for Saturday qualifying, and then we work on the race car, as well, a little bit, but we know exactly what we want.

Also I've got to say Chevrolet is going an incredible job with the engine and the aero kit on the road course. But we have the whole package, and personally I'm certainly driving really well right now, so it's all in the mind. It's rough, that's for sure.