

# IndyCar Media

## Conference

Saturday August 20, 2016

## Mikhail Aleshin

## Josef Newgarden

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and begin our Verizon IndyCar Series post qualifying press conference. Joined now by our driver starting second in tomorrow's race, Josef Newgarden.

Josef, this is your best career start at Pocono. A pretty good start. You've been strong on ovals this season. Take us through qualifying.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, we've been good here. You know, I think we were good last year here, too, when we qualified and raced.

It's tough being second. I think, first off, just congratulations to Mikhail and Schmidt Peterson Motorsports. They were obviously very tough to beat. They looked strong in practice. They showed that in qualifying. I think it was going to be tough for us to get them.

Yeah, I feel like we did have an opportunity. I think what we rolled out with, we rolled out to the grid with setup-wise on the car, maybe would have been enough. You never know. I mean, you'd actually have to go do it and prove it.

I think we might have had enough if we stuck with our original settings. I was pushing the team really hard to change that at the last minute. We were watching the qualifying session progress. Just wanted to add a little bit. I think a lot of people were kind of all over the map. Maybe if we didn't do that, we would have had enough today. I feel like it's kind of my fault.

Still good with second. You can't be mad about that. We got a good spot. But you like those small victories. Pole is a small victory. Love to be able to do that for your crew. It's tough when you're that close and you miss it by so little.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously this year you have the win at Iowa. You had a really strong performance at Indy, great performance at Texas until the very end there. What has been the turnaround for you on ovals this year?



JOSEF NEWGARDEN: You know, I don't know if we've had a big turnaround. I think we were second place last year here. Pretty good. Second place at Iowa last year. I don't know if I'd call it a big turnaround.

It's certainly been a nice progression. Places where we've been, for instance, I think we qualified here fourth last year. Places where we've qualified fourth or fifth, we've just moved up a little bit. Places where we finished second, we just kind of finished first. That's what you want to do each year. I think that's been a nice progression for us.

We all have great oval cars. All of us at the month of May we were strong throughout. Texas would have been another great race for us. Disappointing we won't be able to run there. That's another spot we would be good, too.

I think it just speaks to the performance of the team. In general, we have good racecars, but we have very good cars on ovals, too.

A nice little progression, that little bit of bump in performance.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Josef.

**Q. Josef, you mentioned setup. Your teammate Ed is in row number five. Setup-wise are you running similar or identical cars?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: We're slightly different. I think we have some different preferences on the car. Overall we're pretty close from a global picture. I think some fine-tuning details are different between us. We like a little bit of differences, yeah.

**Q. Josef, looks like you got a little bit of cloud cover right as you were getting ready to go out. Can you talk a little bit about how much that maybe helped you.**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It kind of looked like it was getting cloudier throughout the qualifying session. To me it started out somewhat sunny, then just got more and more cloudy as the session progressed.

Yeah, I wouldn't be surprised if it got a little bit quicker. I think that can generally help you with track

temperature around here. Really any oval, as you get to the middle of the day, you start to get a little bit of clouds, drop the track temp down three to four to five degrees, it's always a little helpful for grip and sometimes for speed.

Yeah, I wouldn't be surprised if that helped me at the very end just slightly.

**Q. Are you even going to go to Texas or take the weekend off? How hard is it going to be to take that in?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, I guess the way we're running it, technically I'm in the hospital. I'm going to try and lay pretty low during the weekend. I'm going to be there supporting the team. Obviously if it stays the same going into next weekend as it is now, I'm going to hope Ed wins the race.

We're restarting lap 71 or whatever it is. I'm in the hospital. I'm going to hide under the covers and watch the race and support Ed.

**Q. That being said, should you go out and win on Sunday, how odd will it be for you to not be in a racecar the week after you had won a race?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I mean, I don't know if it will be odd. I've kind of just accepted it.

Look, you have to look at this two different ways, right? If Texas just played out, I would have been crashed out of the race. That's what it would have been.

If you look at it from that angle, that if the rain didn't come, they finished the race, this would have been a done thing, right?

It's only odd because it's never happened before. This is so unprecedented. That's the only way it makes it kind of odd, you know.

So if you look at it the first way I've said, it's not that weird. I already finished where I finished there.

It is tough coming back later. It's very different. Everyone's going to have different stuff, probably different setups. They're going to learn something. Guys that weren't good before might be a little better now, different engine, different tub. From that angle, it's a little strange, yeah.

**Q. Do you have a contract for next season?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Not yet, man. I hope I get hired. I feel like I say that every year. Goal number one is getting hired. I'm serious, you know. If you get hired to drive a car professionally, that's already a big achievement. That's goal number one.

Where it's going to be, I don't know. I've got a great team right now. I'm really happy with Ed Carpenter Racing. I hope we can win this championship. I think it's going to be very difficult for us, but it would be cool if we could do that. That's kind of my sole focus right now.

**Q. Josef, what type of race do you expect tomorrow? Last year's was very intense. You were seven wide at one point on a restart. You went from fourth to first on the opening lap. Do you expect the same type of a race tomorrow?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I don't see a huge difference. I think similar to the Indianapolis 500, the big change for us is the dome skids obviously. That's been the largest difference between the cars from last year to this year on this specific track. It's the same thing as Indy.

If you look at Indy as a reference, it wasn't too dissimilar of a race from '15 to '16. I don't think you'll see a big difference here. I think at the start it's going to fan out pretty good. You get that because of the drag. You have such a long drag from the start/finish to turn one. When we're all bunched up, you're going to fan out pretty wide still.

I got to think you're still going to see some guys saving fuel at the beginning. You're going to see some people moving to the back of the pack. Then as you get towards those last 50, 60 laps, it's going to be really hectic with movement at the front.

**Q. Josef, you had a pretty young start to your driving career. You're one of the younger stars in the series. Have you ever thought about what you might have done, what future career you might have if you weren't in a racecar? Secondly, are you optimistic about still being a contender for the title even though you're going to miss Texas?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Are you asking what would I be doing if I wasn't driving a racecar?

**Q. Yes.**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Geeze, I don't know. It's a great question.

I'll tell you this. I consider JR Hildebrand a very smart individual. I asked him the same question, Did you ever think about what you were going to do?

JR told me he didn't really have an idea either. He would have done something different, obviously. But I think for us drivers, when you get an opportunity to potentially make this a career, you put everything you have into it. You just kind of have to. It's such a short

time in your life to make it happen, why not go for it? That's kind of what I did.

I'm not sure what I would be doing. I would hope I'd still be involved in racing in some aspect. I think a lot of guys that aren't driving, if they think about the fact they weren't driving, I think they'd try and be in racing still. I don't know. I'm not sure I have a great answer for that.

With regards to the championship, I feel confident that we still have a shot. But we got to win out. We got to have a really good race here. We got to be really good at Watkins. Sonoma is obviously the most important. We've got to win Sonoma.

If it all goes according to plan, even with Texas, yeah, I think there's a possibility. And you never know, IndyCar might change their mind. There could be some magical thing. We go to Texas, and they're like, For the fans, we're just going to restart this whole race over. Maybe it's going to be awesome and I win Texas, too.

You never know. We got a week. We got a week to talk to them still, right? Everyone feeling that in here? Yeah. All right! Not really, but I'm feeling it. That's what matters.

**Q. Mikhail wins the pole today. It seems that every session this year, his confidence level has gotten more and more. How legitimate of a race driver has Mikhail become?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think he's super legitimate. I think it starts with his team. He's with a great group. I know them pretty well. I got to drive Lights for Sam, not for Rick, but for Sam. I think they have a great team.

James shows that. He's a great driver, too. Shows they have a great group.

I think for Mikhail, he's a great driver. He's pretty daring, particularly on ovals. There's not a lot that spooks him, which can be unnerving when you think about it. At the same time it's very good for being able to get the most out of a racecar.

I think he's a super talented guy, great car control, really nice, super nice Russian guy. Not saying that Russians aren't nice, but I think he's a super nice guy in general.

So I think he's a great driver. As you said, he gets better and better the more seat time he has. That's kind of how IndyCar works. You get more seat time in this series, the better you get. I think you're probably seeing a bit of a product with that with him.

**Q. This morning two of the most qualified drivers in the field both had incidents, Juan Pablo Montoya, Ryan Hunter-Reay. Ryan didn't get a chance to qualify. How unusual is that, that the defending winner of this race isn't going to be able to qualify and has to start at the back?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, it happens, right? I think we were all surprised with how many wrecks we had this morning. But it's all part of it. I think it shows it's been a little bit trickier today. I think everyone was really scratching their heads in qualifying with what they needed. Probably not everyone laid it all out on the line. Even me. I'm a victim of probably not laying everything out on the line today because of the way the day went.

I think it shows that it was hard today. If you didn't see it in qualifying specifically, I think it was hard to put two laps together and make a fast car around here this weekend.

**Q. You just said a minute ago to keep your chances alive in the championship, you have to win Sonoma. How hard will be the pressure in Sonoma?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I feel pretty good about it. I think I got a great team, as I've said. But the pressure's not on us. The pressure's on Simon and on Will at the moment to be really good and maintain that lead.

You look at it both ways. For those guys, you could also say the pressure's not on them, if you're them. But I think they're in the tougher spot. They got to be perfect throughout. We can kind of go out and attack, not make stupid mistakes, I should say not take unnecessary risks, but we can afford to get a little bit more aggressive than those guys.

If it all works out, it can still work. We can potentially win the championship. So I feel good about it. I feel pretty cool going into these last couple races.

**Q. Josef, starting second, you were second at Indy, second at Iowa, is this a place where you can be at least okay with being second on the grid or do you still hate it?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think the tough thing is they're small victories, right? It's great for the crew. It's great for the engineers. It's great for the driver. Everyone loves the small victories, poles, fast laps. You like to be dominant in the series.

It's nice if you can get those, and it is tough when you qualify second. We have to have qualified second like 10 or 12 times within the last four or five years.

It's not a bad thing, but it is tough. You want to get those small victories. We just missed out, so... It is what it is at this point. But I think for this type of track, with the race tomorrow, I'm not dissatisfied about starting up front. It's a good place to be around this track.

THE MODERATOR: Josef, thank you very much. Good luck tomorrow.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Thank you, guys.

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with our post qualifying press conference. We're joined by our pole winner, Mikhail Aleshin.

Mikhail, it's been quite a journey for you over the past couple of years, getting back into the series, now able to reward yourself with your first pole, and reward your team, as well. Talk about your thoughts and feelings capturing your first career pole.

MIKHAIL ALESHIN: Well, it's obviously very difficult to explain what I feel now. But it's a lot of emotions definitely. Maybe you cannot see it with my Russian face, but it's true (laughter).

Well, I'm very happy for the team first of all because we've been through many things. We've been through some very difficult situations at the end of 2014. They supported me then. Then I came back last year for single race, last race in Sonoma, and finished in top 10.

This year, I mean, we had some good things, some difficult things - races, I mean. I think the last part of the season been really good, and we had really good progress. Just the whole team all together, me, everyone else.

It's a team sport here, for sure. Every tiny thing is very important in the end result. So I'm definitely very, very happy to be here.

THE MODERATOR: That being said, it is a pretty long race we're having tomorrow, a 500-mile race. How much will it help you starting up front? At the end is it all going to get mixed up because of the length of the race?

MIKHAIL ALESHIN: I think the main help starting from P1 is basically a confidence for everyone, a confidence for the team, I mean, because we know that we're fast, we know we can build a car to be in P1 here.

But obviously the race is a little bit different thing. The setup will be a little bit different up there. The whole

basically story is different.

As you said, it's going to be a 500-mile race. It's going to be pretty long, pretty difficult. But I'm sure it's going to be a lot of fun at the same time.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Mikhail.

**Q. So far you are the most successful driver from Russia. How supportive is your country with IndyCar? How come we don't have Russian media here?**

MIKHAIL ALESHIN: First of all, we have some driver in Formula One, which is also successful.

About the media? Well, I can tell you, first of all, IndyCar is covered by two Russian channels, two Russian sports channels. One of them is called Match! Arena, the other called Viasat Sport. I mean, people are watching it. The more they watch, the more popularity there is. IndyCar, obviously, is a very, very exciting series. It's very competitive. Every race there is something new. There is a lot of fighting on the track. Basically it's really hard to know who's going to win the next race.

I think that's the most important thing in the sport and the most important thing in the show. When you watch some of the championships, motorsport championships, you already know who going to win, or at least which team going to win. That little bit not interesting to watch, isn't it? IndyCar is not like this. I think that's why the people like it so much.

**Q. Mikhail, for a guy who hasn't won a pole, what was it like watching the other contenders go out there trying to better your time?**

MIKHAIL ALESHIN: Oh, it was very hard. I mean, I knew that I had two good laps. I knew I that couldn't do better because, like, we had couple of moments in turn one, first and second lap especially, but I just kept it flat. You know, I just decided I just going to keep it flat and that's it. Doesn't matter what going to happen. Then we just going to see what will happen the exit of the turn.

Obviously it worked this time. I just knew that we just couldn't do any better at this moment. I knew even if we not going to be P1, we going to be up there, we going to be at the top somewhere. I was just happy for the team because from the first lap, the car was just at the edge what we needed there, so...

I knew we're going to be up there, just didn't know where exactly.

**Q. Mikhail, you almost won at Mid-Ohio. You were**

**close to winning at Mid-Ohio if it wasn't for a bad pit stop. What has been the difference all of a sudden? Now you're on pole. Is there a change in the team or is it just you getting more confident in the car?**

MIKHAIL ALESHIN: I think it's all together because we have some new team members this year. I haven't been in the championship last year. So all together, you know, needed some more work, needed to have some work together to understand better each other.

I think we came to this point. Now we can see a really good and effective progress in last couple of races. I hope that this pole position is definitely not all what we can show to you.

**Q. When you ran here in 2014, I think you finished seventh. What is it about this place that you seem to have taken a liking to?**

MIKHAIL ALESHIN: I mean, it's hard to say. It's very, very difficult place to drive. It's very difficult track because there is, like, three turns, and they're all different. They're not the same at all. So the car never going to be perfect on this track. If it's perfect in one corner, the other one is going to be horrible.

So the key to this track I think is just to build the car that is going to be, like, let's say in the middle everywhere. Then you can drive for 200 laps. The key of the success in 2014, I wouldn't call P7 success, but it was not too bad for first time and first year on the ovals. So the key there was that the car was pretty good, you know.

When you're driving the oval and the car is good, it's much easier than opposite. On the road course or street course, if something is not good in the balance, you can live with it. On the oval, if something is not good in the balance, or if something is wrong, then it's just a disaster.

Let's see what brings tomorrow. But if we going to have a good car, we're going to be very competitive, that's for sure.

**Q. You have been very good on the ovals since you came to IndyCar. Oval racing is obviously not your background. How do you think you've become so strong at running the oval races?**

MIKHAIL ALESHIN: I just love it. I mean, I heard some of my colleagues from Europe that came over here and tried IndyCar, they told me that I going to hate the ovals because it's just completely different thing, completely different idea compared to what you normally do in Europe.

But obviously I came over here. The first time I tried, it

was test. Actually I loved it straightaway. I felt that it's just so interesting. It's very intense racing, you know, on the ovals. You need to think like two times faster than on normal tracks because you're just going a lot faster. That's definitely what the racing should feel like.

**Q. What is the relationship like between you and James? I know James was saying that you have a rather dry sense of humor. His sense of humor seems to be right out in the open. How do you play off each other?**

MIKHAIL ALESHIN: Relationships?

**Q. With your teammate.**

MIKHAIL ALESHIN: I think they are good, you know, definitely. James is an open guy, as you said. We've been working together for all the year, you know, sharing all the information. So we don't have any secrets because, again, you can see, like, the whole team's progress in the second part of the year.

I think the key to that is just to work together. It's only two of us in the team. If we going to hide something, it's not going to be good in the end for both of us again.

Definitely, I'm enjoying working with him. We definitely have some good fun.

**Q. How has your team become the top-performing Honda team again this year?**

MIKHAIL ALESHIN: I think that's question to the team really. From my side, it's just because the team is the best Honda team at the moment. The guys are just doing great job. They just doing great job. I very proud of the team that I'm competing for.

**Q. You just said a minute ago that this track is quite difficult because the three turns are different. That means setup-wise you work with a compromise on the setup.**

MIKHAIL ALESHIN: Exactly, that's what I said. It's not possible to have a car perfect to this track like everywhere. Like, let's say, even in Indy, you look at the four turns on the Indianapolis speedway, they look similar or same. But even there they're not because of the wind difference, for example, different wind directions.

But here at this track, besides the wind directions, all three turns, they have different banking, different angle. This track is a nightmare for engineers, I can tell you.

**Q. You said when you're driving your car here at Pocono that you try and find the middle of each of the three turns on the setup. Describe what happens to your car over a fuel stint in terms of how the car changes and what you can do inside**

**the car to adapt.**

MIKHAIL ALESHIN: Well, it all depends again on the setup. If you mean, like, which balance change you have during the stint? That all depends on the setup. It all depends, because depending on the setup, you have different tires are wearing more or less.

Let's say you can have a setup that has a good front at the beginning of the stint, but it's eating too much front tires, and end of the stint you going to have a lot of understeer, and opposite.

To change this situation you can change the setup or you can work with your tools, which everybody going to work in the race. You have a weight jacker. The weight jacker is the most efficient, definitely. That's what everyone going to work with. That's the only thing you have there really.

THE MODERATOR: Mikhail, congratulations, good luck tomorrow. Thank you for coming in.

MIKHAIL ALESHIN: Thank you.