

IndyCar Media

Conference

Saturday September 17, 2016

Roger Penske

Simon Pagenaud

John Mendard

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We have Roger Penske, John Menard and Simon Pagenaud. It's great to be here. It's great to be back at beautiful Sonoma Raceway for the 2016 season finale as we crown a champion coming tomorrow afternoon. It might be the gentleman on the far side. You would like for it to be the gentleman on the far side anyway.

Not that we're looking ahead already to the 2017 season, but we kind of are as well. It's great to announce that Menards will be sponsoring the No. 22 and Simon Pagenaud for 10 races in 2017, which will obviously include the 101st running of the Indianapolis 500.

The first question for Roger here. John has partnered with your team this year, as his company wanted to get back in the sport, get involved in exciting racing. You go back to April, it was originally a three-race deal, including the Indy 500. Here we are several months later, it turned into a five-race deal. First of all, the commitment that John has shown to the IndyCar Series, but to your team as well, Roger.

ROGER PENSKE: As you know, John and I have raced against each other for many years. I think his first time at the speedway was back in 1979. We've had to brush shoulders in the garage area for a number of years.

As the hundredth running came up this year, we connected and talked about certainly a potential sponsorship at Indy. I think the fact we added the road race there, the success that Simon had there, winning that race, which was a terrific kickoff to the hundredth running race event, then we had a great car there.

Didn't get to the point where we wanted to, did we, John?

We kept in touch with John. I think his goals are similar to ours. We have a business. We use the business as a common thread to promote our brands.



When we looked at the 2017 season, as we added races this year, we said, Why don't we try to put something together more meaningful for 2017?

Today, as you know from a sponsorship perspective, to find the right sponsors, have the right integrity, want to support the sport, it's difficult. I think that we're very fortunate to have someone that understands it. He understands we don't win every weekend. Hopefully we have a record that is meaningful as we go forward.

John, I just want to thank you for the support. I know you've built a great relationship with Simon. I think Simon was a big part of this. If the driver connects with the sponsor, it makes a big difference. We talk about being a great driver. We talk about the technical understanding. But there's a third piece to the stool now. That's the communication and the ability to commercially be savvy with the sponsor.

I think Simon certainly gets an A plus. He's a champion as far as that is concerned.

Obviously he's put himself in a terrific position going into this weekend. I've never been to a racetrack knowing I've won a championship. The problem is I got to be careful what I say to either one of these guys. In the back of my mind, I know what should happen, but I'm not going to say what that is here today (laughter).

So, John, thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Roger, to have this locked up so early going into the 2017 season, knowing the bright yellow Menards colors will be on the side of Simon's car for 10 races next year, how exciting is that for you?

ROGER PENSKE: The one thing I like about it, you know where the car is. That's one thing people say. In fact, the other drivers see it when he's coming up.

No, it's great to think that we can look forward as we put our sponsorships together. As you know, we've tried to maintain sponsorship over long periods of time. Some of our relationships go back 25 years. Hopefully this will be one that will be long-term.

THE MODERATOR: John Menard, what has your

experience been like with Roger? It's great to have you back, great to see a familiar face in the IndyCar Series. To team up with Roger, obviously Simon here on the verge of winning a championship tomorrow, it's been a tremendous year for you, as well, hasn't it?

JOHN MENARD: I've found it certainly to be more pleasurable to be a part of Roger's team than trying to beat Roger's team. It's more enjoyable.

It's been an exciting year. We had just a great month of May. Started out with a win. Got all frustrated during the race a couple of times. But it turned out really great.

We're a Midwestern-based company. To be out here in California is fun. But the real heart of what we're doing is in the Midwest. It's been a really, really good fit for our company.

THE MODERATOR: You really didn't ease into it. You got the Grand Prix of Indianapolis out of the way, and you're on top of the podium at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

JOHN MENARD: That was sweet, extremely sweet. I thank Roger and Simon because they did an amazing job.

THE MODERATOR: To be making this announcement here this weekend as we're talking about championships and whatnot, how exciting is that for you, to launch this thing for 2017 now?

JOHN MENARD: It's like a fairytale, isn't it really? When you think about it, you can't make this stuff up. All of a sudden this gentleman from France just ignited the IndyCar racing world. It just took off and he has become a legend almost in his own time.

We'll have to see how tomorrow goes. It's another whole day. Anything can happen.

THE MODERATOR: Simon Pagenaud, what has it been like to have the bright yellow Menards colors on your car throughout the course of the season? This is a brand that has been around motorsports for years and years and years. A lot of people know all about it.

SIMON PAGENAUD: It's been incredible to actually be the driver, to drive this very special livery. This car has been at the speedway for many, many years, even longer than I can remember. I remember obviously very special drivers like Tony Stewart, incredible results from that car. That car was always fast at the speedway, always on the pole or front row.

For me, being able to be part of this incredible livery, is

very special. I feel very honored to be that driver. Luckily we got a win out of the way right away at Indianapolis, which was very important to John, very important to Roger, and the whole team as well. It was an incredible start of a great relationship.

Like Roger said, the relationship with John has been growing all year long. We just hit it off right away. We just ended up liking each other really quickly.

This is the kind of dream relationship. Like Roger said, then comes the partnership relationship. Team Penske has this incredible way of doing things with partners. It's not just sponsorship, it's really a partnership where it's a business-to-business relationship. I think that's where it becomes interesting for any sponsors or partners to be with us at Team Penske.

I just couldn't be more proud to be in the middle of all this. Making John happy when we win races is what it's all about. Super excited.

10 races is a lot. For a driver to have such an opportunity to have a livery on the racetrack is going to help myself to be more known around motorsports and also in the whole world. So I'm very excited about it.

THE MODERATOR: Already a career year for you. To build on the relationship with you and John and Menards for 2017, I know you can't wait till 2017 gets here. Time is of the essence.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I can't wait to finish 2016, let me tell you (laughter). This one has been a long wait. I want to finish this one, then we go to 2017.

But it's certainly been an incredible season. With all our partners on the car, we've had PPG, three wins with PPG, one win with Menards. Hopefully we can get another one with HP. It's been incredible.

Obviously 2017 I think there is more coming from the 22 team where we've unlocked a great potential this year. I think there's even more to unlock for the next few years coming. I see that we have even more to do. So far it's been rolling really well all year.

But, yeah, it's going to be an exciting one next year, but let's finish this one off.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open the floor up for questions.

Q. John, a business question for you. What's a little bit confusing for me in a positive way, you seem to be sponsoring European drivers in IndyCar. Why do you pick up European drivers? Why not American drivers?

JOHN MENARD: I mean, we ran Tony Stewart, for example. He's almost too American (laughter). Gone through a couple, okay? We've had other American drivers. Certainly Gary Bettenhausen comes to mind as being on par with Tony. Robby Gordon.

Let's face it, there's a lot of very talented people in Europe, as there is in Brazil, as there is in America. I think it's great that the Indy Racing League has a variety of drivers. I think it makes it a much more interesting sport because they do.

Q. Is there any chance of switching from 22 to 1 should you win the title? Would John like that, or Roger?

ROGER PENSKE: I was going to say earlier John has already looked at a picture of the car with the No. 1 on it.

JOHN MENARD: No. 1 is great. No. 22 is great. I just think when you're in the winner's circle, that's the greatest.

Q. What was the situation on settling on 10 races? Roger, did you already have commitments for the other races next season or did John just not find that those other seven markets were places he needed to have a sponsorship?

ROGER PENSKE: No, we had commitments for the other races. We have PPG and HP Enterprises. When you think about world class brands, we really have the best.

Those other sponsors will be associates on the car and vice versa as we go forward. We try to tie it together as one unit.

Q. John, do you think you'll see Simon in the No. 22 or No. 1, whichever it is, on the flyers in the stores? Is that coming down the road?

JOHN MENARD: Yeah, we're going to try to make some sort of connection. I don't know if he's going to go for the bobblehead idea very much, but we're working on it (laughter).

Q. John, how different is the business climate now coming back in IndyCar after roughly a 10-year absence? How do you like where IndyCar is going?

JOHN MENARD: I think IndyCar is on an upward trend now, for sure. I think that they are to be commended, the people that are running it right now, because I think they're doing a great job.

It's not easy right now competing for attention in the sports world with all the things that are going on, all the different new sports coming in. To see IndyCar having

some growth, having really successful races in the Indy 500 this year, Elkhart Lake was just a tremendous race. Only thing that could have made it better is if you would have won it. There's been some wonderful races and wonderful things.

We're really excited to be back as part of it. We're honored to be part of it.

Q. John, I remember watching the announcement when you became the sponsor of Simon's car from the Indianapolis Motor Speedway museum. I was wondering if you became very interested in the team and Simon because he finished second at the first race at St. Pete and then won two races? Did this come together this year right before Indy or were there plans in place for a while?

JOHN MENARD: Well, it's like a lot of these things that go through your head. Thought about it for some time. I mean, I think the hundredth running of the Indy 500 had a lot to do with it because you get all nostalgic. Gosh, you'd really like to be part of it. Roger was gracious enough to have an opportunity where I could be part of it.

The fact that he also had an up-and-coming driver and team that needed sponsorship, it all fell in place. It's like one of those things when the moon and the stars and everything lines up, ready to go. Away we went. The rest is history, as they say.

Q. Roger, a question about this weekend. All of the championship contenders seem to be from the Penske group. They all said they want to win this championship on your 50th anniversary in racing. What are your thoughts on that?

ROGER PENSKE: This is a special year, no question about it. It's hard to think that we're sitting here with the championship really with Team Penske. We're trying to determine is it Simon or Will. I never realized we'd get in that position. It's an amazing feat. It just shows you the strength and depth of the team. Helio has a chance to potentially finish third if he has a good run. He looked strong yesterday, at least in the practice session.

You put these together. 50 years is a number. Last year we didn't really think about it. All of a sudden we've had a lot of notoriety. We appreciate the support of the media during our 50th year.

Certainly the performance of the team, we've had probably 16 or 17 wins when you cross the different venues that we have. Will go down as probably one of our best in 50 years if we can win this title. We also have a chance with two guys running in the Chase. We'll see how that works out. Brad starting out with

four wins, we'll see what happens.

To me, the Indy 500 and the hundredth running and being the 50th, as John said, lined everything up. The only thing we didn't do, we didn't get the job done there, which is always disappointing. There's always so much hype going into Indianapolis, whether it's the 50th for us, or the hundredth. When you walk out of there at the end of the weekend when it's over, you say, All that effort, then you have to wait another year before I get a chance at it. That's why that race is so special.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations, Roger, John Menard, Simon Pagenaud. Thank you.