

IndyCar Media

Conference

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Simon Pagenaud

Helio Castroneves

Will Power

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by Helio Castroneves.

I know that you really wanted your second pole here at Sonoma. But starting second, next to a teammate, is not that bad. How did your qualifying strategy work out today?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: It was very good. I have to praise Jonathan and Roger obviously. We really play in a different way. We had little issues in the morning. We found the problem. Then we went really strong.

It's always tough when you come back thinking, Is this a problem or not? We felt it right away on the first qualifying. The Hitachi Chevy was really dialed in. I didn't have quite the way I wanted, especially when you put the reds. The car was, like, moving around.

We were eager to take a chance. Since it was the last race of the season, we saw some of our competitors in third place already being on the back. We took a chance, and it paid off to be P2. I can't believe we missed the pole position.

Great job for Simon. I kind of knew in the back of my head he was going really fast, doing six-two every time he put the red tires.

We did everything we could. I prefer win tomorrow than actually win today. That's what we're focused on. But great effort for Team Penske, 1-2-3-4, to show that we work together, push each other. Here we have the results.

THE MODERATOR: The first time Team Penske has qualified 1-2-3-4 since St. Pete.

We are also joined by Will Power.

Will, starting fourth tomorrow. You have all teammates in front of you. Your thoughts on qualifying today?

WILL POWER: Yeah, we just really pretty much didn't have it all qualifying. Just thereabouts. I think we've been like that in practice, as well. Just hanging in there. A top-six car. Same in qualifying. Definitely were worse on the red tires.

But, yeah, I mean, that's all I could do in qualifying. That was everything I had and the car had. I think we have to look at my braking. Had some braking issues. Very much different brake bias than these guys. Might be something there that we're missing, yeah, because we just haven't been there.

It's a long race. I think it's going to be a race of degradation. It's going to be really interesting the way the tires go.

THE MODERATOR: It's also a track that you've seen a lot of success on with three wins in the past. Does that give you extra confidence heading into tomorrow?

WILL POWER: Yeah. I mean, it's different every year. It's funny. Some years you struggle at a track. I've struggled here. I've been good here. I've been mediocre. The year I was struggling, I won. I think that was 2013.

Yeah, we'll see how it plays out. It's actually a lot of stops. I think it's going to be a four-stopper. That makes for a lot of interesting stuff to have strategy-wise. Last thing we need now is a straightforward race because Simon will be tough to beat if that's the case.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Will and Helio.

Q. In the grand scheme of things, it's just a point for the pole. As we saw last year, a point can make all the difference in the season. How tough is it to not get that one point today?

WILL POWER: Well, I just meant that it was impossible to have the scenario where he would have to finish fourth. Take that away now. If he finishes fifth or better, he wins the championship.

Yeah, that was the aim for us coming into this weekend. But ultimately didn't have the pace. Honestly need to win the race to win the championship, and he has to have a bad day.

Q. Will, you mentioned you had braking issues. Is it maybe related to heat? Also, the scenario is you have to win the race tomorrow, and Simon sixth or worse. We saw earlier at the GT race that overtaking is not so easy here. Do you think the race can be won with a good pit stop strategy?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I think that's what it's going to be. I think it will be very difficult to pass.

And the braking issue, it's just such a different brake bias to all my teammates. They're all around the same. I'm massively different. But, yeah, it's not an issue, it's just trying to work out why we've kind of struggled this weekend.

Q. Helio, I know you were the only driver that went out in the Fast Six with new tires. Will, you went out with blacks. What was the strategy there?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: We took a chance. We were thinking about it when we noticed some of our competitors on the top three, when they were a little bit off of the top six, we thought, Well, let's take a little gamble and see if we save the red tires. We took it. It paid off.

It was amazing. I noticed that I was third. The eighth guy was the same 10th. It was six people in the same 10th. So it was a big risk. But we were the first one to be on that 10th, so it paid off.

We put the reds on in the end. The only thing we might didn't do, we fueled the car a little too much for two laps instead of just one. But in the end of the day, I think Simon had a little bit quicker car.

In the reds, my car wasn't the same as the black, for example, because I did pretty much the same time in both black and red. Plus, like I said, it was a little bit on the neutral side, my car. It just didn't do it.

To be honest, it paid off. Starting the front row here. Hopefully tomorrow we get the W.

WILL POWER: The blacks, yeah, that was our only play really. We did two laps on the reds in the first session because I made a mistake. Decided to continue on and do another lap. I had a one-lap set of reds, which I did the first run on. The only thing we could do were the new blacks, which were almost better than on the reds. Our car was better on the blacks than the reds.

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

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Thank you.

WILL POWER: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by our points leader and polesitter, Simon Pagenaud.

Simon, a lot of the unknowns for this weekend are over. You know you're starting on pole. You know you secured that extra bonus point. How are you feeling heading into tomorrow?

SIMON PAGENAUD: It feels great. Most importantly up until now there was no thinking about the race, no thinking about the outcome. It was all about raw speed. Obviously the Penske car has been amazing. We certainly prepared really well in practice. Everything went perfectly all weekend so far.

It was about preparing the car for the red Firestone tires, which we know I'm always more comfortable on those tires, so I can always extract a little bit more from myself.

We had good balance on the car. The first lap, put the red Firestone tires on. I went on the radio and said, Wow, this is going to be good. We were able to replicate the lap time every time. Unbelievable that we could actually replicate the lap time in the Fast Six with used tires.

Certainly I did everything I could by challenging every high-speed corners that I could. I was on the edge, but it was a really good lap.

Super proud of these guys. The guys on the 22 team, seven poles this season, four wins. No matter what happens tomorrow, it's been an incredible season.

THE MODERATOR: You set the track record in segment one of qualifying. This is also your best start here at Sonoma. Things have been improving even though you've had great results here before. What do you feel has changed or evolved?

SIMON PAGENAUD: First of all, I drive a Penske car. They're pretty good cars, let me tell you this. And also I had the time to develop my car into what I like.

Last year was one of those seasons where it was a transition. We found at the end of the season what I really needed to go find a little bit more.

The Chevy aero package is also suiting my style really well. In addition to that, we've been able to find some little tricks on the setup. I'm just able to just think about driving and not really think about anything else.

These moments, as an athlete, you try to improve every time you go out, improve the little details. I'm

working such a tight window of operation on the details, you're working for five hundredths of a second here and there. That's what happened at the end.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Simon.

Q. Quite the weekend for you. We wake up this morning and we learn about your extension with Menards for next year. You take the track in the afternoon and somewhat steal pole position.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I was P1 in every session. I didn't steal it.

Q. What is your mindset going into the race tomorrow? Fifth or higher and you win the championship. How do you approach this?

SIMON PAGENAUD: That's a really good question. It's tough. Let me tell you, it's a good position, but it's also a bad position because I can't control what's going to happen behind, when people are going to start to pit. I can't see what anyone is going to do. I'm going to go through turn 11, and people can pit behind me. I can't control that.

We are going to have to be the leader of any strategy really. We're going to have to have a strong discussion tonight on what we need to do to make sure we don't take risks, because we're not in position to take too many risks on strategy, but also that we can secure it. That's the biggest thing.

Q. On the strategy, Will Power was just here and he said he's thinking degradation is going to be a major factor tomorrow, maybe it will be a four-stop race. Do you see that as a possibility?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think there will be degradation. The cars always degrade here. The tires here suffer a lot. There are so many hairpins and traction out of the corners. We have a lot more power than we used to. More horsepower right now. It's asking a lot of the tires. It's an old tarmac, as well, with a lot of dust on it, so it creates a lot of wear.

We did a long run in practice two yesterday. I said that's the best car I've had here in terms of degradation. In that sense, I feel comfortable with what I have. It's hard to know who is going to be strong and who is not going to be strong. There will be cars that were not good in qualifying that might be good in the race. We'll have to see.

Q. What is the one thing keeping you up at night about tomorrow that you're worried about?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Strategy. I really am worried about that. Strategy is just an outside factor that we can't control. I've had issues this year, some mechanical issues. What if it happens again? Can't

control that. That would be so unfortunate.

It is what it is at the end of the day. Strategy, as well. A yellow that comes at the really wrong time for me. Like I said earlier, I think we need to err on the safe side, even if it's to finish second. I think it's okay as long as we win the championship.

But today I just think we just, again, showed strength. That's what it was all about, to show if we are to win the championship, we deserved it on many points.

Q. It's going to be a fairly late start and a late finish by West Coast standards. Any part of this track when the sun is setting that glare becomes an issue?

SIMON PAGENAUD: It's been fine here. It's when you come back, sometimes you see the sun. Late when we come here testing, we finished at 6:00. That time of the day, it should be okay. Shouldn't be a problem. Sometimes there's some weepers as well at the exit of turn 11. I think the track may have fixed it. So we'll see.

But that's something you always need to look for during the race.

Q. The scenario is you have to finish fifth to win the championship tomorrow. Nevertheless, I think one of the unknown factors, there are factors uncontrollable for you, especially traffic. Do you already have set up a little plan or thinking of how you deal with traffic? Under this extreme heat, it's not only stressful and exhausting for you, but also for the technical equipment, engine, brakes.

SIMON PAGENAUD: What was the first question?

Q. How you deal with traffic.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Sorry?

Q. When you overlap cars, did you work out what to do?

SIMON PAGENAUD: No, we haven't talked about it because up until this point it was a matter of getting the points for pole position, starting at the front, then decide. It would be completely different if we were 15th or 8th or whatever. So obviously now we can sit down and really review all the plans.

We've talked last week about it. We've had some interesting discussions, some things that we have thought about that Ben didn't think about and Kyle didn't think about. It was actually a good interaction. We're going to talk about it tonight and see what we want to do.

Like I said, it's difficult to take any risks tomorrow.

Q. Is there technically a possibility to cool down brakes and the engine, for example, during the long race?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think it's fine because the wind is not too hot. There's some air. It's not as bad like it used to be at Houston, for example, where there was no air.

So the brakes can actually cool down on the straights. As long as you're running, it's okay. It's when you stop in the pits where the engine has a heat soak. But we stop so short, that should be fine.

Again, I can't really worry about these things. I just have to go.

Q. You talked about now that you know where you're starting from you can sit down and discuss your strategy. Is that with just Ben your engineer, or does Kyle and Roger get involved?

SIMON PAGENAUD: No, it's mostly Kyle and Ben, and Carlos Gutierrez is also playing all the strategies in the background. He's always on my radio during the qualifying session. When I come back to the pits, I always ask him questions. Am I good in the corner of seven? Am I better on the exit? He's always looking at numbers. He's really fast with his computer. Really quite incredible. He helps bring information to the timing stand.

Kyle and Ben decides what Kyle wants to do, and Ben reinforces what Kyle wants to do. It's been an excellent group this year.

But I'm very involved with the process. Roger is not really involved. It's funny, I think Tim Cindric and Roger really don't want to get involved since it's been working so well. They have to take care of their own strategy. When you have four cars, it's actually difficult to deal with everybody. You really just have to focus on your own job.

THE MODERATOR: Simon, congratulations. Good luck tomorrow.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Thank you.