

# IndyCar Media

## Conference

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# Simon Pagenaud

## Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by our 2016 Verizon IndyCar Series champion, Simon Pagenaud.

Congratulations. I can tell you're excited, happy. You're already reaching for the wine. But just your thoughts on how the race played out today. Especially what you were thinking when you knew Will had an issue and you realized you truly captured the championship.

SIMON PAGENAUD: It was a great and interesting day really. The HP car has been phenomenal all weekend. It's been actually an easy weekend for us where everything, like, just played out really well. The test that I think we had about a week ago really helped us to get prepared for this race.

Leaving the test, we were not the fastest, but I knew for the red Firestone tires in qualifying my car was really well set up for it. I left with quite a bit of confidence.

Yeah, the race today, I decided to take the best start I could. My opinion was that if I was aggressive at the start and try to leave the crazy mess behind me, I wouldn't get hit or anything like that. I tried to take my future and destiny by being aggressive and going as fast as I could.

Clearly we had a phenomenal car, I think very dominant car today. We could do that while saving fuel at the same time. We kind of covered everything we needed.

The only thing I was really worried about the whole time was having a yellow fall at the wrong time. I was just really worried it could go in a different way. The whole time I was quite worried about that.

I was driving really well. I was keeping the Firestone tires really well underneath me. The car, again, was incredible.

Obviously I saw Will slowing down, which I wanted this fight to go all the way. It was a bit of a relief, I have to say. I feel sorry for his luck today. But I've had my fair share of bad luck this year, too, with mechanical issues.



I think it's fair to say it was a fair fight. We both fought one and two for a while. Must have been a good show. I hope it was. But then when I saw him slow down, I thought, I think this is really good.

That's one thing that I've been doing pretty well this year, just trying to keep my emotions at a very steady level, without trying to go crazy on the radio saying, Wow, we're the champions. I kept it cool. I then started to think, I can go race, have fun, unleash the beast inside and just go for the race win. If I need to help Helio, I will. If I need to help Ryan, I will. They were not in a position to be helped. So I just did my race.

Graham was really strong at the end. He gave me a bit of a threat. We saved enough fuel at the end to be able to push the last two laps and get a good gap.

Incredible day. I think this was the most dominant we've been. I didn't feel like we could let that one go. I just enjoyed driving today. Was an incredible day.

I think it just shows the strength of the 22 team for the whole season. I'm also glad we finally won with the HP car. That's the only car we haven't won with. They were getting anxious about it. I'm glad we got that one in the bag.

Most importantly - sorry I'm a little long - what I'm thinking about right now is it's been a long career. You start, seven years old. You go through a lot. I remember my first race in France in a go-kart. It was raining. I had my visor open because I had the wrong helmet. I still have that picture at home. The ground I covered since is quite incredible.

I just feel so blessed to being a human that has been able to live his dream and get to this. I basically accomplished all the dreams I had. Obviously the Indy 500 is next. But this was my kid's dream, so I'm very emotional inside even if it doesn't show. Maybe it will show tonight a bit later.

THE MODERATOR: Not only have you clinched the championship and the race, but you scored the maximum possible amount of points you could have to secure that championship. In only your second season with Team Penske, you have spoken about how

confident you are in the equipment they deliver you. Did you have any idea so early in your career with Team Penske you've have the success you have had?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I hoped we would. Obviously when you join a team like Team Penske, they deliver the best cars. They provide you the best equipment out there. As a driver, it's your job to do the best job possible. Obviously when you're against Power, Castroneves and Montoya, these guys are the benchmark. It's about getting the most out of yourself because obviously we all have the same cars.

Last year was a learning curve as a team and as a driver also. I realized there were areas I really needed to work on, which I did during the winter. With my team, my crew, my Kyle Moyer and Ben Bretzman, we worked a different approach for this year. This approach has been basically the approach we've had with Ben since 2010. It worked out really good, so yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Simon.

**Q. Speaking of unleashing the beast, last year when you joined Team Penske, there were a lot of high hopes and anticipation for you. You were kind of a caged animal for whatever reason. Having gone through that season, how much more satisfying is it to get the championship after having endured all that last year?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, last year was tough. But it was unfair to imagine a transition would be that easy, especially with a new team. It's the first time, again, that Roger and Tim Cindric have fielded four cars in IndyCar. We had to assemble a completely new team from people that were working on other teams, people working on other cars within the team.

It's just like a football team. You have to make that chemistry, make sure that the chemistry is going to be the best. It took a while. It took us a while. It wasn't easy. It took me a while to get used to my new environment and know what I could do and could not do.

I think this year you saw more the package you saw at Schmidt, as well. I just did my thing and stayed focused on that. I think that's what happened.

**Q. Obviously this is championship number three for you in North America. First one got you into IndyCar, the ALMS title in '10. Did you think you'd be sitting here now going through what you've gone through, the journey to get back?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Like I said, it was a dream, but a very far dream. Gil de Ferran told me when he hired

me, You got to forget your dreams about driving in IndyCar.

I said, Yes, because I wanted to drive.

I quickly realized that it wasn't gone, and that I lied, which I did. But it was okay because he taught me a lot of things. I completed myself as a driver with him. I used that opportunity to drive sports cars with a lot of open regulation. It allowed me to understand better what racing is all about, not just turning right. There's so much more to it. I think it opened up my window of operation.

Having Gil next to me, being my Yoda, I say all the time, it's been pretty cool. It's just incredible when I look back that I've been able to accomplish this.

It's funny. I just feel so blessed. I mean, what a dream life. It's crazy.

**Q. Race-specific question. With the high heat, how was it physically today?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, it was physical. We didn't have many yellows. I looked at the dash, I had to check the number of laps we'd done, 40, not even halfway. I had to drink a lot, make sure that I stayed hydrated. I wasn't under much pressure. I can only imagine back in the pack it must have been much harder.

I was very hungry. I got hungry the last 10 laps. It was horrible. Oh, man, I got to eat something. So they actually give me a bar right after the race, my crew. I could only think about I was really hungry at the end of the race. It's crazy. It's the only thing I was thinking about.

**Q. Speaking on Thursday, you said you were not going to go on the defensive, you were going to go on the offensive. Was there a worry going in you might be too aggressive?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: I never thought about it. I just thought that it's been working. I think my aggressive side is different than some other drivers' aggressive side. I think my balance is just a little different in my head than some other drivers. I don't crash much. I think at some point you need to realize your qualities and your weaknesses. I think that's one of my qualities.

How do you push that limit just to the right level, that's what's tricky. But certainly this year I've been on the offensive mode. It's been working for me.

Certainly some races I've been more aggressive than others and it paid off. But today, honestly, I was

aggressive with the car to get lap time out of it to get away from people, but it wasn't about passing people and being aggressive that way. It made it a lot easier.

**Q. The season that Will had starting off missing the first race, to be able to get quickly back into the championship, and during the summer months four wins, two second-place finishes. From your standpoint, the race he gave to make this a points championship?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: His effort, you mean?

**Q. Yes, his effort after starting the season by missing the first race.**

SIMON PAGENAUD: I mean, Will is a tremendous driver. I'm even more satisfied to win against him. I always thought he was the benchmark of speed, especially in the IndyCar Series. But even since we raced since 2005, he was faster than Kubica when we were racing World Series Renault in Europe. Kubica went to Formula One and won Grand Prix. Will is one of the most talented drivers I have seen.

Obviously being able to win against him is big. But he's had a tough season. He's had some up and down. He's been a friend. We have a lot of respect. I think the respect is even more growing.

Yeah, he's shown a lot of strength year. Being able to come back like he did was incredible.

**Q. Thinking back to the night in January at the Charlotte Convention Center with all the drivers that have ever driven for Team Penske were on the stage, including yourself, and in Team Penske's 50th year of racing you win a championship.**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, the numbers look great, for sure. It's very satisfying that way. There were a lot of French people here this weekend, too, so I had to win, man.

But, yeah, it's certainly a big year for us. 50-year anniversary, win for the team, winning myself, my name is always going to be there. It's great to be the little thing I am in such a big team with such history. It feels great.

**Q. You mentioned the chemistry earlier. There's talk of maybe one driver leaving, a new one coming in. What are your thoughts about trying to keep things together? It's working well for Team Penske right now.**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Between teammates?

**Q. The drivers.**

SIMON PAGENAUD: The driver chemistry has been amazing. I mean Juan Pablo for me has been a huge

help on the ovals. Helio is just our dad, man. He's there making sure everything is going well. He's always happy. I admire the guy he is just for waking up so happy every day. And he drives better every year. It's incredible. But Will and I, I mean, we have a similar background. We push each other very hard.

All four of us, we have qualities, we have weaknesses. It's very interesting to see how everybody works. We work so well together. I don't think there's been any issues at any point between us. No dispute, nothing. It's really been one of the best years with my teammates, for sure.

**Q. At Barber, we talked about how much that win meant. This race that same year you wound up in Simona's driving suit. How goofy was that weekend looking back on that?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: That's funny, yeah. I didn't think about that.

Barber was a good place. I think I started last or something. My qualifying was bad. We finished ages behind Helio. I got a contract from Sam Schmidt really quick. That was really cool. I filled in for Justin in Mid-Ohio, then Simona here. This wasn't a good experience here. The car wasn't really good. We worked really good over the weekend. I don't know, we finished 10th? It was incredible.

It was not my favorite track up until today, for sure, just because it's very difficult here. It requires to be very careful with your tires, but also it's a different feel than most tracks. You can't really lean on the tires, you're just sliding all around a lot, which is now a lot of fun, for sure, but the car makes a big difference here.

**Q. They were talking late in the race about the glare. How did that factor in? How were you able to conserve on fuel?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, the sun was a little bit of an issue. Honestly I was on cruise control today. I don't even know if it was me driving the car. I just did my thing. I was just on cruise control, turning at the right point. Everything was going really well. It didn't really bother me at the end. I had nobody ahead of me so it was not an issue.

As for the saving fuel, yeah, I mean, I saved a lot of fuel. But I think it helped me save the tires, as well. At the end we were able to do a really good fuel mileage because we had so much pace in the car. We were able to push at the end the last two laps because we still had the pace in the car.

It was a dream day really in racing. You only get a few of those a year.

**Q. Every season has a turning point or a pivotal mark. Where was that this year for you?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think Long Beach was a very important moment, the first win with Team Penske. It launched us to that series of three. Barber was a great battle with Graham. Indy GP was domination like today. So I think that was very important moment.

To me the biggest point this season was when it was bad. Obviously we always see the good days. De Ferran told me, If you can have a bad day and nobody notice, that's when you can win a championship. Watkins Glen was one of those days, one of those weekends where I honestly had no pace. I didn't do a good job. I just couldn't find a way around this racetrack.

We still managed to be third in the first corner. We came out of a not really good qualifying, not really good car either. Despite all these problems, we still gained on the championship. So to me that was a very important point.

**Q. Back at Phoenix, you were happy with that result after the race. You thought that was a weakness and were happy to get that result that weekend.**

SIMON PAGENAUD: I don't understand what you mean by 'weakness'.

**Q. You'd come into that race thinking that short ovals were not your strength.**

SIMON PAGENAUD: That's very true. 2015 we didn't do good on the short ovals as a team. We really struggled. I think the evolution of the aero kit with Chevrolet, we worked really hard with them to try to understand what it was that was a problem on the short oval, which was also an issue on the road course. We had a lot of rear tire degradation. Chevrolet worked with us really hard on understanding that, understanding the aerodynamics.

I think that was the evolution. Also migrated toward a different setup on the racecar. Iowa, Phoenix. What other short oval do we have? Very strong, we finished second and second. I'm looking forward to Gateway.

**Q. You mentioned earlier you were able to save fuel. I think you stretched the fuel mileage till the end. How was this possible? Were you a bit scared you would run out of fuel?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: No. My strategist was telling me the exact number to accomplish to finish the race. I stick to the number as much as I could. The car was super fast, so it was easy to roll off the throttle. There's so much speed around this racetrack. That really

helped us. It helped us save the rear tires as well by being gentle on the throttle.

All in all, it was actually a good situation. I think Graham may have burnt his tires at the end. The last two laps we just opened it up. We had full power available. We had, like, nine overtakes. It was all good.

**Q. A business question. According to the IndyCar media guide, you made a wine cellar in France. Do you think your popularity will help you to open a wine business here in the Napa Valley?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: That's a good question. My dad has a wine store actually. Maybe I will head the business. I'm sure he will have a lot of people on the shop on Monday, so that's good.

But I don't know. Obviously Jimmy Vasser does that, Mario does that. I don't know. It would be great. For sure someday I'd love to do that. Right now I'm a little too busy to think about these things.

It is one of my passions. For sure someday maybe I'll spend more time maybe growing it.

**Q. When Rahal was catching you, did you feel you always had it under control at that point? Did you think he might be able to slip past? How hard would you have made it, considering you already had the title in the bag?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I was racing at that time. It was like, Okay, now I can go race, have fun. Like I said earlier, I could unleash the beast. It was actually a lot of fun.

But then Graham came back really quick on us at the beginning of the stint which concerned me because, I don't know, it's difficult to tell Honda fuel mileage compared to the Chevy. Suddenly I was like, Hmm, is he saving fuel, not saving. He caught me so fast, I told Kyle, I don't think he's saving fuel. What do I do with him, let him by, expect that he's not saving fuel?

They said, No, you're racing for position.

All of a sudden he slowed down. I think they realized he needed more fuel to finish the race. I think it helped me throughout the midsection of the stint because we didn't have to save fuel as he did.

Yeah, I think I was also concerned when he slowed down. I thought maybe he's trying to save even more fuel than me to attack me at the end. Fortunately we saved enough to attack the last two laps.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations. Looking forward

to next season.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Thank you, guys, for all the support this season.