

IndyCar Media Days

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Josef Newgarden

Media Day Presser



Q. Let's talk about, first of all, if you can maybe kind of recap your 2016 season and then talk about obviously what took place in the off-season and what you're looking forward to in 2017.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Sure. So we had a great -- we had a really great 2016 season, and it's going to be an interesting transition for me going to Team Penske now. I think in some aspects, it's a difficult move because I really enjoyed my time and I'm going to miss my time at ECR. I built a really strong foundation there with the people and with Ed, and even in the past with Sarah and Andy and Wink and Libba. It's a tough transition, but at the same time, I'm excited about it because from what I've seen over the last four or five months at Team Penske, I think it's going to be a really, really fun experience to try something new to work in a different environment, to learn a different environment, and then try and make the most of that. I'm very excited about 2017. I'm not sure how it's going to pan out yet. I think it's hard to predict, but I think we're going to have a pretty good going.

Q. You just moved your stuff to North Carolina, correct?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I did, yeah. Man, that was a chore. I don't ever want to move state to state again. I had more stuff than I realized. I don't know where people accumulate all this stuff from. I had way more clothes -- I need to go to goodwill and give some clothes away because I have way too much clothes, but it was a chore, so I finally got in last week and I feel like I'm going to be moving for the next couple -- two to three weeks before we get everything done, but at least I'm located down there now, which I feel good about.

Q. Does it kind of put a bow on your commitment to this new team, this new move and everything for you?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah. I think you have to. I mean, whenever you move organizations, you really have to be close to the group, particularly in the beginning, but I think overall, wherever you're working, I think you want to have access to the team, you want to have access to the people and vice versa. You want them to have access to you whenever they need you. It's pretty critical, I think, to be close to the organization. And yeah, I guess you could look at it that way, kind of puts a bow on the transition. I think it definitely solidifies it a lot more for me. I feel more transitioned now that I'm down there.

Q. Helio talked back in Miami about how quickly you've caught on speed-wise at the tests, when you jumped in his car and what have you. That said, we saw Simon struggle his first year a little bit at Penske but he had speed. What is the anticipation leading up to this year?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, you know, Simon is an interesting case because if you look back at it, Simon didn't actually have that terrible of a year in a lot of respects. The results weren't what they wanted. They'd finished outside the top 10 in the championship. When you look at it just from those particular numbers, then it wasn't a good season.

But from a speed standpoint, Simon didn't struggle the first year. It wasn't like he struggled for speed, so that wasn't the missing ingredient. So I'm hoping that's not a problem in the transition. I don't foresee it being a problem. You know, whatever else was a missing link, everyone has a different case, so in Simon's, for instance, they had to build a new team. He's talked about the difficulty of them having to add a team, different people. Sure, he brought over Bretzman, his engineer, so that was his continuity for him, but there were some other elements that weren't continuity. So that's his own case.

With me, it's going to be a different ball of wax. I've got an existing team I'm going to start working with on the 2 car program. They've been there and they've been in place for a while, so that shouldn't be as big of a shuffle from the team side. It's going to be more me learning how the team operates, gelling with my engineer very quickly. That's going to be the biggest difference for me is a new engineer, and then we'll see how it pans out.

But I think if there was anything to learn from Simon's, the team is kind of prepared to not let that happen again. You know, I guess to answer your question, it's hard to predict how it's going to go. I mean, I don't think anyone could predict how Simon's season went. Simon could have had a great first season, and it ended up working out in the second one. But for us is it going to work out in the first season? I don't know. I think all signs point that we could have a very good start to the season.

Q. Brian will be your engineer?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: He is, yeah.

Q. And Myron is your strategist?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't know how the -- I know Brian is my engineer for sure. We've been working together for the last four months. The rest of the team as far as all the crew, the strategist, I don't know if any of that is set in stone. I haven't been told that. I think they're still working everything out on all four cars, so if there's any changes to come still, they haven't released that yet, so I don't even know myself.

Q. What has surprised you or impressed you the most in your short time with the Penske organization?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think it's probably the working environment. I honestly was not sure what that environment would be like from the outside, and that's not a negative statement. I think there's a perception from the outside that everyone is very buttoned up, they have the black pants, everyone looks very crisp and clean. You know, maybe a little stiff from the outside. You get that kind of impression, not in a bad way, it's just you just don't know how everyone interacts together.

But when you get inside and you get to work closely with everyone, you very quickly realize how good of a working environment it is. It's really, really solid. I mean, everyone has great chemistry for the most part. I think everyone has a great attitude. I mean, you talk to anyone within the team, you need anything done from anybody, they're happy to do it. They want to do it. They want to make anything better for anyone within the team, whether it's a driver or it's another mechanic or it's another engineer. Everyone is willing to help out, and I thought that was just very shocking to me how well the environment was to work in.

It also excited me because it was kind of fun to go there. It's fun to go to the shop. It's fun to hang out. It's fun to go to the racetrack. We're very serious about what we do, but at the same time we have such a good working environment that it seems like it can breed a lot of success because of that.

Q. Any rookie hazing or anything? Do you have to carry Helio's helmet around or anything like that?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think probably the first thing was last night. It said on the sheet to wear black pants and a white polo, and I was the only guy that showed up in black pants and a white polo for a function that we were at. I was like, what the heck, guys, it said it on the sheet; why aren't we all wearing this.

It's the first time -- we haven't had much time to interact

to be honest. Yesterday the first time we've been together, all four of us, since October when we tested last at Road America. I think everyone has been so busy. Will has been busy with the birth of his child. Helio has been all over the place. Simon has been all over the place. He's been in France. I've been busy with the move and trying to transition. We've not really had a lot of time to spend together yet. That's probably going to start happening in February more.

Q. You talked about the question of going to Team Penske and the process there. What does Josef Newgarden bring to the team?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, I think from my side, I bring a different perspective. My perspective is probably similar to what Simon brought in his time. We were in similar situations I would say in that we were predominantly a one-car team for the last four or five years, and with that comes a unique learning environment. You kind of learn your own way of how you want to do things. I've learned through my own experiences how I want certain things in the car, how I approach a race weekend, and I've learned that with the ECR group, the SFHR group, the CFH group, whatever you want to name them, it's all pretty much the same group. But I've learned that in a one-car environment for the most part, and so when you go to Team Penske, they have an environment where it's very team-inspired. Everyone works together. I think that's what their strength is.

But now when I come in, I might look at something completely different than they've ever looked at it, and vice versa, they've looked at things differently than I've ever looked at it and are exposed to things I've never seen before. But it's always enlightening. It's always refreshing for either the team side or the driver side to see a different perspective on whether it's the way you run a race weekend, the way you run a session, the way you communicate or the way you like to drive the race car or the way you prefer the setup of the car.

I think I'm going to bring that difference and that unique experience as they're going to bring to me. It's going to be the same thing.

Q. I know you probably haven't, other than testing, really haven't measured yourself up against the other three drivers in the same equipment. What are you thinking? Who's going to be the toughest competitor on the team? Obviously you're going to want to beat all of them, but what do you expect for yourself going forward?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: They're all pretty tough, to be honest. You can't just say, oh, Simon is going to be the toughest guy to beat or Will. When we were at the Road America test in October was the first time I drove

the car and I drove with all the other guys, and even Helio was -- the first time I seen their data, it was kind of cool because it was like you're allowed to go in and sit down and look at the laptop and see what everyone just did. And that's fun. That's really fun to get to do that for the first time.

So you look at like Helio's stuff, and there was one corner where Helio just did something like stupid looking, but it was fast, and it was like faster than all of us, and you're like, well, why does that work. So it's surprising. Well, he just did something that I've never seen before, and it was very fast in a certain corner. So I think it's hard to say it's going to be one or the other. Helio has his strengths, Will has his strengths, Simon has his strengths and I have mine.

With that series, everything shuffles around so quickly. Helio could have a bad year but the next year he could just catch on fire and everything go his way. I think they're all going to be very, very tough. I think it's hard to predict who's going to be the best. If anything that's a positive. I think they're all very, very good and they're very open about communicating, which is going to make us as a team very, very strong. I think it's what's made them strong as a team in the past. They just have very good driver, very good engineers. They all communicate. They all push in the same direction, and that just keeps like raising the bar. Someone does this and someone does that, and the next guy does this, and all of a sudden you're up here. So that's kind of where they find their strength, I find.

Q. Is there any pressure on you going into the season, like a lot of expectations that people have?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Sure. I've got no excuses. This is my sixth year. I've been around quite a while. I'm not a rookie by any stretch. You know, I'll be in the best equipment from what everyone considers, and I've got a good team. There's not a lot of variables for me. Brian is a variable. The new working environment is. But on the whole, I should be pretty much ready to rock and go. If I'm not getting the job done, then I'll have to figure it out pretty quick.

So I think there's pressure there, yeah, which is okay. That's how it works.

Q. How big of a culture shock has it been going from a single car team with a part-time, shuffling drivers between ovals and road courses to now all of a sudden having three teammates and the stuff that Penske has?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, I think what I have to be careful of is that you can't get distracted by all the information. So there's so much more information now. It's like when you have a cable plugged into your

laptop. You just turn that cable into like a super cable, and there's like four times, five times as much information coming in, and I'm used to working with a certain set of information. Now I have so much of it to look at. It's easy to get distracted by that and start looking at too much and trying to change too much. What I have to do is I know what has made me successful in the past. I know where my strengths are. I know what works for me at certain tracks. I know how I like to approach a race weekend. I need to keep doing all that. It's not like that has to change.

Yeah, you can modify certain things here and there, but I don't want to go making wholesale changes the way I drive IndyCars or the way I race in IndyCar. I think if you start doing that, that's when you get lost pretty quickly. I just need to stay in my lane and stay true to what I know, and then modify little bits and pieces as time goes on where I can find improvements. But not overthink it is probably what I'm going to try and do.

Q. Do you have the ability to let it sink in going into the Indy 500 with Penske, the winningest team there?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Dude, it's all cool. Every day is cool with this group. Every day there's something cool that goes on. When it first -- when I first went down there and got to meet the whole team and I got introduced to the shop, it was very overwhelming because most of the shop was there for the introduction, and they have 425 plus employees. So it's just very overwhelming and kind of emotional just because of the magnitude of it.

But then it's every day, they're like, oh, no, we do it like this or we'll sort that out for you, we'll get this done. It's literally every day they're doing something that I might need or was thinking of, and it just happens, and you're like, wow, that is so cool the way this works out here.

So I guess to get to your point, yeah, the 500 is going to be very special, but I'm already like feeling that every month and every day. Like that just has never been a moment where it's not been cool with what we do and how we do it. Yeah, I'm sure it's going to be super special for the 500, but I don't think I'm going to feel that until we get inside the gates in May.

Q. You had the opportunity last week up at the North America international auto show in Detroit to sit at the roundtable with Jay Frye where the concepts for the new car were unveiled. Give us your thoughts on that and the way things at IndyCar are going.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, I thought Detroit was very fascinating for what they showed and what they tried to tell everyone with where their head is at, what their

ideas are for the next year and the next five years, and a lot of you guys were there in the show getting to see that firsthand.

I just think, to me, it's very encouraging. I actually love getting to listen to Jay. I like Jay a lot. I really like the management of IndyCar. I like all the leadership. I like the entire team that's working collectively to try and push this sport forward and try and create a map and a plan for the future.

Personally when it just comes to the car and you see the renderings and kind of their ideology of where they're going, they're doing a great job of trying to please everyone, and you can't please everyone. It's just not going to happen. There's too many hurdles that people don't know about or don't actually see when you try and make every little request possible. You know, they're not going to be able to satisfy every request.

But I think what they're doing is they're globally trying to hit most of the marks for whether it's the fans, the drivers, the teams, the partners, and I think they're doing it pretty gracefully. So I'm excited. I think the common kit is going to be cool. 2017 is still going to be a great season. Yeah, 2018 is going to be fun to get to, but I don't think that makes 2017 like a wash and we don't need to pay attention to it. I think it's still going to be a great, exciting season. But I'm excited for '18. I'm excited for the common kit. I think that'll be cool, and that will open up some doors and maybe provide a future path for more manufacturers like Jay had stated, and then just getting further down the road, how do we plan for the next car. That takes a lot of time, and they're planning for it and they're trying to make that happen as soon as they can, but it's going to take three to five years before we get there, and when we get to that point, I think there's going to be some really innovative and really exciting things to come for IndyCar.