

IndyCar Media Conference

Friday February 10, 2017

Simon Pagenaud Josef Newgarden Will Power

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll keep on rolling with the Verizon IndyCar Series media availabilities. Joined now by three members of Team Penske: Defending champion Simon Pagenaud, newcomer to the team Josef Newgarden and of course, Will Power, of course a Verizon IndyCar Series champion. A stout lineup here.

Simon, we'll go ahead and start with you as the defending race winner in the Verizon IndyCar Series, oftentimes that can put a lot of pressure on a driver. What are your thoughts heading into the 2017 season?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, it's back to -- we reset it to zero, so here we are, another year. Last year was fantastic, but we have to use what we learned last year to do even better this year. So I'm very excited. It's the first time that I've had the opportunity to actually capitalize on such a great season, so it was a good test today. Just trying to understand everything that we learned during the winter, going slowly test after test, and hopefully we can put the package together and come back and be strong for the race here.

It was interesting, we come here, the track is perfect right now, temperature is not too bad, and we're going to come back here in -- whenever it is, when is it, April?

THE MODERATOR: April 29th.

SIMON PAGENAUD: There you go. And then it's going to be very greasy, very loose, and it's going to be very different. So you need to be able to counter effect that. Good time so far. It's good to be back in Indy cars, too. I haven't driven since September, so it's pretty exciting. It's pretty fast down here.

THE MODERATOR: Topping the time charts for the first session was Josef Newgarden, making his kind of open test debut with Team Penske here. Josef, your impressions so far of not only this first session but also of your introduction to Team Penske?



JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, sure. Well, it's great to be back, like Simon said. I think we were both smiling before we got in the cars because we were so excited to be back at the racetrack just driving Indy cars again, so it's great to see everyone and get the season started here. You know, this is kind of the start of the season with everyone being here and testing out and getting ready to rock from a month from now.

Yeah, it's great to be going and fun to be with Team Penske. It's really been an interesting off-season for me, just I've not really wanted an off-season this time around. Normally you like a little bit of a break, but this year I wanted to get going immediately. So it's been a long wait. But I feel fairly squared away with the new operation and just trying to gel a little bit with the group, the Verizon 2 car team is all new to me, so they're not new to each other, so there's great continuity there, but I'm new to the group, so they're trying to understand me and I'm trying to understand them. I think we had a pretty good start to today. The car was really great off the truck, so we didn't have to do too much. We just got into our program and had a pretty easy start to the afternoon.

I think we're just getting better the more time we have together. My engineer is understanding me more and more when I say certain things and describe how I want the car or how much I need of one change. He's understanding a little bit better what I mean by that. We need more of that time, and I think the more we get, the better we're going to be, so it's been good so far.

THE MODERATOR: Joined also by Will Power. I know the start of your season last year was challenging for you with your health and then also missing the first race. What is this new start to the season bringing to you in terms of a refreshing outlook on starting the 2017 season?

WILL POWER: Yeah, definitely I'm hoping it's going to be better than last year. It's just good to start another season. I felt like we had a very good year last year, you know, it really went well the second half. Obviously the last few races were pretty disappointing. But we had the pace and won four races, which I was -- really didn't think I would last year.

Yeah, going to build on that. Got a change on the pit

stand with Myron Jon Bouslog -- I don't even know how you say his last name. Boss Log. So yeah, getting used to him, and I think, yeah, it'll be good.

Q. Will, this is your 10th go-around at Indy. You've had really good cars there, run well, but just haven't made it to the victory lane. Are you targeting that more so this year than ever before? Does it become a bigger hurdle for you as the years roll on?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I guess you could say time is running out. You get less and less chances at it every year you go. And it's tough to win now. It really is. I think in the past if you drove for Penske, you had a pretty high percentage chance that you would win the 500 during your time at that team. Now the field is so competitive, it really is -- it can be any one of 20 people. I mean, probably anyone in the whole field could win it. It's just a different style of racing. It's about putting yourself in that position for that last lap or last couple of laps to win it.

Yeah, we'll do our normal thing, work hard during the month, and hopefully have a really good car and have another shot at it.

Q. Josef, has your confidence increased more with oval racing after having won at Iowa, and it's not that important today, but you topped off the practice charts, or do you already feel comfortable racing at tracks like Phoenix or Iowa?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I mean, I think I felt really comfortable last year, and that probably -- that comfort went up really aggressively in 2015. I thought we had a really good year on the ovals, and certainly last year I thought we had an opportunity to win at a couple other ovals. I think Indianapolis was tough for us, but we had a shot at winning it. Just from a confidence standpoint, I've always felt good with where I've been out on the ovals. I thought we had great efforts with ECR last year and I felt amazing after today. It's pretty early to predict for this year. I think we need a little bit more time on the Team Penske side for me in the car, because we've got an amazing group as these guys can attest to, and I feel confident we can come out of the gate really strong and challenge for victories here at Phoenix, Iowa again, hopefully the Indianapolis 500. I think that's probably the No. 1 ticket on our list is being successful with the Verizon No. 2 car at Indianapolis, so hopefully we'll have a good month of May there, and that's what we're targeting for.

Q. Josef, what have been the biggest two or three changes in your life since joining Team Penske, and have you been to the Penske Racing Museum here in Phoenix, and if so, what did you think?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I have been to the museum. If

you have a moment, I would go check it out. It's pretty cool. There's a lot of great race cars in there. I got to go there a couple months back. We had a sponsor summit, so I got to meet a lot the partners with Team Penske and also see the museum, which was great.

You know, I don't have three big changes, but I can tell you, moving is not fun. I don't ever want to move -- I'm probably going to move again in my life, but I don't want to do it, so I don't know when it's going to come up again. I hope it's a long time from now. Simon knows the drill. He did it, too, and it's a big life change. You realize you have more stuff than you need. Like where did all this stuff accumulate -- and where did it come from? You see things that you don't remember from years back that you have. So I've gotten rid of a lot of items that I had. So that was a big life change was doing that, and actually moving to Charlotte reminds me a lot more of where I grew up. I'm from Nashville, Tennessee, originally, and I think Charlotte is a pretty similar environment to that.

It's tough leaving Indianapolis because that was my home for five years, but at the same time, I feel almost more at home in the Charlotte area.

That was a big change.

Other than that, I don't know if I've had any other big changes. Being with Team Penske has been pretty cool. Everyone says what's the coolest thing you've done there so far, and pretty much every day there's something cool happening that you didn't know about. It's a fascinating group. There's a lot to it, a lot of depth. I'm still figuring it all out. I've got more time to figure everything out I feel like with the group.

Q. Simon, ordinarily we see you run the Rolex 24 in the off-season, but you didn't do that this year. Was there ever an idea of doing that or did you want to focus exclusively on Indy car and not have any other racing over the winter?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, it's been a busy winter with the championship and all the appearances everywhere in the world. It was good for me to get some time off, stay with my family. That's something I really needed. And rest, as well, quite frankly. Physically rough season last year, too. So it was good to get some time off and recharge the batteries.

I went to Daytona, but for the first time I went as a spectator and actually enjoyed it very much. It was the first time I ever watched a race with my boss there, so that was actually very cool. I might do it again some day. But I'd rather drive. But this year I just didn't feel like it was the right thing to do for my program and for being pretty focused with Penske at attacking another title. So yeah.

Q. Josef, you're now with Team Penske, so you came from a good place where you thought you were going to do well. Now you're in a team that expects you to do well. How do you process that as far as your expectations for what you're trying to do this year?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I've had that question a little bit over the off-season. But to me, this is the way I feel about it: At ECR I felt like there was a lot of pressure to do well just because any group that you're with, everyone is working hard on the team and you want to deliver for the people on the team, whether it's your guys working on the car, it's the managers, it's the team owners, it's the partners within the group. So I don't think that's going to change much. That expectation to do well and to put your best foot forward and show that you're working hard and doing everything that you can as a driver to help the team, that expectation doesn't change, whether it's with -- honestly, with Team Penske, there's an expectation there to succeed, like you said, because of the history of the team and certainly the preparation and everything you get from the team.

But I don't think it's different than what I felt in the past. I think that expectation is always there regardless of what team you're with.

There's certainly a -- there's a different feeling that you get when you walk into the factory at Team Penske, if you will. It's not a race shop, it's a factory for sure, and you see all the heritage and all the success that they've had there. So there's a different feeling from that aspect. But the pressure to do well and to show that you're not leaving any stone unturned, I don't think that's going to change, so I haven't felt a difference from that standpoint so far.

Q. Will and Simon, talk a bit about bringing Josef into the fold, being that essentially last year's Josef was the fly in the Team Penske soup when it came to the championship.

WILL POWER: Yeah, I actually don't understand the question.

SIMON PAGENAUD: He was the fly in the middle of the Penske drivers. Now he's with us.

WILL POWER: It's great to have him on board, honestly. He was definitely the quickest guy out there that wasn't in Team Penske. To have him on board obviously brings a lot to the team. Yeah, I think his oval game is really strong, and I think that will help us, and he will absolutely be a championship contender. It will be a good inner battle, I think, within the team, and I want to be the one that comes out on top.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, it's great to have him on board, obviously. Josef deserves this chance. He's shown so much success and so much strength. Obviously when you do such a good job, you should get an opportunity like he did with Penske. Super happy for him because I know how he feels, and that's the dream of every driver, to get in this situation.

Now it's going to be his time, but yeah, like Will said, he's a pro on the oval, and that's probably going to be very interesting for us to see how he does it. We're going to take that from you, I hope.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, we'll all get better.

SIMON PAGENAUD: That's the game, and that's what's really cool about our lineup. The four of us always push each other hard, so it's going to be exciting.

Q. Josef, if you could just look back for a second instead of looking forward, your team at Ed Carpenter Racing, it was always kind of known as the little team that could, and how do you assess that operation and where it is as you left it? It's still a very competitive team. Ed does a lot with very little, so how do you feel about your time at Ed Carpenter Racing and the way that team is set up for the future?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, hey, look, I'll be the first to tell you that it's not easy to leave Ed Carpenter Racing. I know everyone thinks it's a slam dunk if you get an opportunity with Team Penske. But they're a great INDYCAR team. They've got a lot of great partners. They've got a lot of great people working there. And you can see -- it's only one session, this is preseason testing so you can't read too much into the times -- but they're going to be just as strong as they were last year, and they'll be a great opponent to us here at Team Penske. I think if you're looking for how they're going to be, they're going to be just as strong. I think JR is going to do a great job. I'm actually really interested to see how JR does. I'm really happy for him that he's back in the series. I think he worked really hard to get another shot with a great team like ECR, so you're going to see much of the same from them. They're going to be a very challenging opponent for us. But here at Team Penske I've already noticed where their strength is, and a lot of it comes from these guys that they have in the cars. They have amazing drivers, and they all work together to try and bring the whole team up each weekend, and that's a pretty hard thing to topple, so I'm hoping that's going to be a strength that I find as an advantage this year.

Q. Will, take a look at the leaderboard there just at

the names that are up there of the drivers. There's not any surprise person that we didn't hear of for five years and showed up to get a ride this year. This driver is not there, and you mentioned Josef deserves this opportunity at Team Penske. It seems that's happening more at INDYCAR now. Can you talk about the field?

WILL POWER: Yeah, when you look at the field, every single driver on that board can win a race in the right situation. Yeah, and the continuity is really good. There was a few years there where almost the whole field would change every year. The majority of the field.

I think that makes the competition tougher because everyone gets more accustomed to the cars and tracks and the whole system, and it's great to be involved with it. It really is. It's great to be a part of that competition and create a situation where these drivers become household names, as they should. I think continuity provides that, and I think INDYCAR is definitely heading in the right direction.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, thank you very much. We appreciate your time.