

IndyCar Media Conference

Friday April 21, 2017

Will Power Simon Pagenaud Josef Newgarden Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and begin our Verizon IndyCar Series available with three members of Team Penske who swept the opening practice.

Simon Pagenaud led the first practice and is also the defending champion of the Honda Indy Grand Prix of Alabama. Simon, how good does it feel to be back at Barber Motorsports Park?

SIMON PAGENAUD: It's such a beautiful place here. I like to call it a racing amusement park. It's quite incredible what they've been able to do with this place, and the layout is a lot of fun for us in Indy cars. We carry so much speed through the corners. It's also a place we test a lot, so we come back and the cars are pretty dialed in, so it's a lot of fun.

THE MODERATOR: We are joined also by Will Power, who is a two-time winner here at Barber Motorsports Park. Will is the most seasoned veteran on Team Penske. Why is it that it's so tough here at Barber Motorsports Park? Obviously, you have a great track record here. Why do you think that is?

WILL POWER: Yeah, you know, I've always felt good around this track, but I think the team has a lot of good data, and obviously everywhere we go we're competitive, and we win races. So, it's no surprise.

I think the Hondas are probably turned down a little bit now, so we're not sure where they're going to end up. So, you know, in the past it's been a good track for them and good that we're quickest in practice, so we'll have to wait and see.

THE MODERATOR: Joined also by Josef Newgarden, who received his first career win here at Barber Motorsports Park in 2015. I know this has to be a special place for you, Josef, also the closest place to your hometown. What do you remember about that first career win and what a relief it was to get that off your plate?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I mean, it was a great place to have a first win, being close to Nashville. I think here or Indianapolis you could say is the home track to Nashville, and people seem to gravitate a little bit more to Barber, a race that's a little bit easier to get

to. But like Simon said, this place is great. Regardless of it being considered my home track, it's one of my favorite racetracks we go to in general because of the track it is, because of the environment that they've provided here for fans, the track that they provide for the drivers, it really is kind of like a roller coaster almost, with Simon saying it's like an amusement park, it's like a roller coaster to drive in the race car.

So, I love this place. I love getting back here, and as Will said, we have really good cars. 1, 2, 3, 4, you can't do much better than that in the first session. If we could do that all week long, I think we'd be pretty thrilled at Team Penske, so we're going to try to continue our streak and see where we end up at the end of the weekend.

Q. It's going to be 20 degrees colder Sunday in the race than it is today, so at any point either in this morning's session or this afternoon's session, will you try a colder weather setup for the race?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, I think everyone is going to look at it differently, but I don't see us messing around with it too much. It's hot now. It's probably going to be relatively warm tomorrow compared to Sunday, so there's no real reason to test something in a forecast for 20 degrees cooler. I think we've got to try and figure out the race car when it's hot. It seems like it's a little more tire (degradation) that had than what we had at the test, so I think that's made it harder to get reads on the race car. I know I struggled a little bit in the session understanding some of the changes because the tire drop-off was bigger than what it was at the test, but it's about maximizing that one-lap qualifying pace, so for us I think that's kind of critical to maximize today, and then apply that tomorrow when we qualify, and then when we get to Sunday, we'll see what the weather shakes out. It could rain Sunday. You know, it could be rain all day, could be cloudy and cold. We don't really know what we're going to have, so I think the morning warmup will help us more so on that day.

WILL POWER: Yeah, I mean, I think race day is going to be very different. Obviously, it's a temperature that you can't really put a cold weather setup on. It's just going to be better, simple as that. The car will feel better.

Q. A lot of talk about this week, obviously, about (Fernando) Alonso racing at Indy. Can I get you guys' expectations about what you think he might

be able to do?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, sure. A

SIMON PAGENAUD: He's really excited so we're going to let him start.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, we wish he was running with us here, too. Look, I think just for me, and I think I would echo a lot of the other guys, I think we're all excited he's coming for the Indy 500. I admire him a lot for coming over and running with us. He's going to have a challenge on his hands coming up against the competition with IndyCar Series, but I think it's a great challenge for him, and it represents what the Indianapolis 500 is all about.

For us as drivers, we want the best in the world to come and run that race. That's what the race is all about, having the best in the world run it and compete in it, so just adding a guy like Alonso is a great addition for IndyCar, and I think it's going to be a great race for him, so we're all excited to get to May and see how he does.

If he was doing more races I think we'd be even more excited, so it'll be cool to see him there this weekend, I think he's checking out the action, trying to get acclimated to his new team for that month of May, and then we'll see what he's got when he gets on the oval.

WILL POWER: Yeah, I think he covered it. I mean, it's great for the series to have Alonso come, sure. Unlike Josef, I wish he'd do a couple more races. But yeah, that's going to be attract a lot of European media and just media around the world, so definitely helps put us on the map a little more. Not that the Indy 500 needs much more putting on the map, but it all helps.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I think it's fantastic news. Last time that really happened was Mansell. I was a kid and I remember when he made the jump to IndyCar. It really was a very -- it was very loud, I would say, as a move.

I think Alonso, two-time world champion in Formula 1 coming here for something he's not used to, I think it's very courageous. It's going to be exciting, I think, even for us just to see how he does, and he's going to bring an incredible following from Europe, from Spain, and Spaniard people are very excited about racing in general, so I think it's fantastic for IndyCar. It's a new era, I think. It really is going to help us grow even more. We're obviously growing very well right now, but this is going to be a big boost.

Super exciting. I just wish Hamilton and Vettel were coming, as well. Hopefully that will happen someday soon.

Q. Will, you've got one of the best track records here. It's become one of your best tracks. Can you

talk about what you like so much about this place?

WILL POWER: Yeah, it's a really nice track to drive on, very like a roller coaster, like the guys said. It's a cool place. I mean, the way they put on the race, the way they promote it is first class. If you looked at how you should promote and present a race, you'd look at this place. When you drive into the track, you're coming to a first-class facility.

But yeah, it's just a track that I like. I mean, you want to be competitive everywhere. I think with Penske we are. You have a chance to win everywhere. But yeah, I enjoy this place.

Q. In the first-year races Honda seemed to have a little bit extra on the Chevys, and even Dave Faustino said he was a little concerned about the Honda having a little bit of an advantage. Can you tell where that is? Do you see that on the straightaways? Are they pulling away from you guys, or where is the advantage if you're seeing one at all?

WILL POWER: It just seems to have both, very good torque and very good top end right now as we can see it in the sectors. But yeah, it's very interesting that they made such a jump in the off-season. It's kind of a little confusing that they could make so much power with not much you can do. Chevy is very good at responding, I can tell you that, and working -- we're working really hard with them and they're working very hard to come back with something good. They always do. I can assure you they will come back.

Q. Did they put an upgrade in their engine this weekend? Is that why you guys are first through fourth?

WILL POWER: No, I think what happened is that Honda has lost a few engines and really turned them down in practice.

Q. Simon, at the end of that first practice were you and Max having a bit of a go out there?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I mean, I'm last in the pits because of Long Beach. I leave the pits and I usually go, which is creating some issues lately. I'm going, but nobody is going. So, I'm trying to pass him, and he doesn't want to be passed. Yeah, he knows I'm there, though.

Q. Since we're talking about you guys being 1, 2, 3, 4 in practice, if it's running that way on Sunday, when do the gloves come off and you're no longer teammates?

WILL POWER: Straight away.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, we're not teammates, man.

WILL POWER: Yeah, I mean, you know, definitely you never want to take your teammate out. That's the number one rule in our team and pretty much every team.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I mean, I think we all try and take care of each other as best we can because we're a unit, and the most important thing for Team Penske is having a car and hopefully all four cars finishing well and as high up as they can, so 1, 2, 3, 4, that's obviously the best that you can achieve. It doesn't mean we don't race each other. We race each other as hard as we can, we just try and make it clean, make sure there's no incidents, and if there is one, then we'll probably have some repercussions, but we try and not let that happen. Try and keep it as clean as we can.

Q. Going back to Alonso, what do you think is going to be his biggest challenge coming to Indy? Is it the speed? Is it the low downforce setup? Is it the traffic? What's going to be the biggest challenge for an F1 driver like him?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: All of the above what you said. It's all very different from what he's used to, and I think it's impossible to try and forecast how he's going to adapt. Some guys adapt extremely quickly, and it's like they've been doing it their whole lives, and other guys, they struggle for a while, and some never get it, some never figure it out, and they just don't like it at all and they don't want to do it. So, I think it's impossible to say. I think Alonso has proved in his career he's a very adaptive driver. He understands how to figure a situation out and then apply the techniques that are needed for each given situation. So, I think he'll respond really well.

I think he'll have a good month of May, but it's going to be tough for him to figure out how to drive the car when it's trimmed out. It's going to be tough for him to figure out how to draft the cars, how to work within traffic, especially with a car that is more trimmed out in traffic. All those types of things are going to be foreign to him. Understanding the way the car feels and how it should feel from a race setup standpoint, it's all new to him, so I think it's all a challenge, and how he's going to react to it, no one really knows.

Q. Will, just going back to the track record, given the track record here, do you feel like it's a good chance to get your season back on track?

WILL POWER: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I want to have a good day. There's no need to get desperate. It's very early in the season. But just focusing on the job, man, just focusing correctly.

Q. (From track owner George Barber) Would one of you slow down enough for Georgina to drop into your cockpit for a couple of hot laps?

WILL POWER: Yeah, sure.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: We could put another seat on the side.

Q. I assume you all have seen Georgina?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I haven't seen her yet – (told it's the sculpture of the woman hanging from a bridge) oh, that's her name is Georgina? Yeah, we saw her at the test.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Is she still here or not because I didn't see her today. But she disturbed me the whole test. I couldn't make that corner anymore.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Is she still out there? Is she out there hanging around?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, what's happening?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Someone is following. No, yeah, it was pretty funny, yeah. It's funny how you get used to those things, though, because at the test you noticed it the entire day, you come back and you don't notice it anymore because you've seen it.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Somebody may have taken her on a date or something. I didn't see her today. I don't think she's here.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: She's got amazing stamina. Her stamina is better than anyone.

Q. Alonso said he wanted to drive in the 500 in order to do one of the crown jewels of racing, and he had talked about Le Mans and Monaco. Is that something you guys have ever considered, maybe trying something like that yourselves? He talked about how important it is to be a great race driver, you've got to try different things. Anything you guys have ever thought about doing yourselves?

WILL POWER: Yeah, if Brian or Williams or any of them want to call me up, I'll be in Monaco, seriously.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think for all of us, it's become harder in today's day and age to do this. Opportunities like Alonso has are more rare to find. I think that's why McLaren and Alonso are trying to seize it because it's a great opportunity to do it at the moment, and they've laid out why that is.

But for most professional drivers now, it's become so specialized, and I think teams look at that way. It's made it hard for drivers to cross over because teams look at it as a specialized sport. You're either a NASCAR driver, an IndyCar driver or a Formula 1 driver or a Le Mans driver, and there's some areas that have more crossover than others like Le Mans and F1 guys have more crossover, but I love to run everything, and I think these guys are the exact same way. We'd love to run more if we could, it's just more difficult in today's climate with the way the teams view everything. Hopefully, you know, opportunities like this I think will spark more movement.

I think with the Kurt thing, you could even look back at Kurt Busch doing it, I think that's sparked some more

movement and maybe of sparked kind of the Alonso-McLaren thing. Any of these type of movements are always a good thing. Hopefully they just add to potentially more opportunities for people doing more.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I raced Le Mans, so for me it was a goal to win Le Mans, and then my goal was still to go into IndyCar afterwards. Finished second there, so I'm going to have to go back and try to finish the deal. That's definitely a goal of mine in my career. The 500 is one of them. Obviously, Monaco might be difficult, I don't know. Might be too old now.

But yeah, there's some really cool races. Those three races are the top ones, so yeah, should be fun.