

IndyCar Media Conference

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Josef Newgarden

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are joined now by the winner of today's Honda Indy Grand Prix of Alabama, Josef Newgarden.

Josef, take us through especially the last laps.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's not easy to win this one. I mean, obviously, we got a little bit of help there at the end with Will. I don't think I now how it would have played out. Will had a great shot, was in a great position to win this race. To see him have an issue is always tough to see. I know that goes both ways in racing. I've had certainly days where it's not worked out for me like that.

Whenever you get opportunities, I think you got to seize it. We were in a great position to do it. We had a great car this weekend. Torn up a little bit yesterday with how qualifying worked out. Tried to get a little bit too sneaky, and it didn't work. Knew we had a fast car and happy we were able to get at least one Team Penske car up. All four of them were awesome. Happy for Roger and the group. Be able to check that off in the box, being able to contribute, I'm really happy for the team and happy to get this result for everybody.

THE MODERATOR: Is it important as a racer to win on all surfaces?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think it's important in the IndyCar Series. You have to be good everywhere you can. You can't have any weak spots. If you do you're going to struggle throughout the year. You definitely have to have a skill set at the road courses, street courses and short ovals, superspeedways. I haven't personally ticked off a superspeedway. I guess that would be the next thing to try to conquer.

I think we'll get there. I think with Team Penske, they have such great strength and depth within their organization, we should be able to be pretty diverse on our skill sets throughout the whole calendar.

Absolutely. It means a lot. I think it's really important in the IndyCar Series, it's the only way to survive, make something of a championship in this sort of category.

Yeah, it's critical that you're good everywhere.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Do you think you or your teammates impressed Alonso today?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't know. I'd be interested to see what he thought. I thought it was an awesome race. I didn't get to see it from the outside. From my seat it was pretty entertaining, there was a lot going on. It was fast, fuel saving, what tires were going to do, in and out laps, the whole thing. There was a lot going on inside the car on my side.

But I'm sure it was an entertaining race. If it wasn't, I'd be surprised. Normally the last couple years we've always had a pretty good race here.

Q. Your goal when you joined Team Penske was to win early and win often.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't know if that was my goal. You certainly hope you can win early and win often. I think my goal was to maximize our potential, my potential in the team as early as that could be.

It's not easy, you know, integrating into a new group. It's been pretty fluid for me just because Team Penske is a very easy group to join, I find. They're very open, welcoming, there's so much information to look at, the teammates are so good, it helps you kind of get on pace pretty quick.

There are a lot of differences I've noticed coming from ECR. The cars are very, very different. The car I drove today from a fuel standpoint was complete opposite of what I'm used to in the past. There's definitely things I've had to get used to.

As far as the group being what it needs to be to integrate well, you couldn't ask for a better team. They really know how to welcome you and give you everything you need to try and be successful and help contribute to the group.

Q. Your sponsor has been in the news a lot this week. Are you concerned they're going to have high expectations for you to win all the time that you have to wear their colors?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I told them, I don't know how rare this is. This is their first race with IndyCar, and they get a win. It's been very cool to have Fitzgerald on with us. They build some awesome trucks. If you need trucks, these are the guys to go to. What's even cooler, these are Tennessee guys. I'm from Nashville. They're not far away from me. They're like an hour east.

It's great to have those guys come down to Alabama and see a race and get a victory just kind of caps it off. I don't know what they're going to expect now when they come to the Indy 500 with Juan Pablo, but I think it's going to be a victory. They told me before I rolled out, We'll see you in victory lane. Okay, I know where to find you then.

I don't know what their thought process is going to be going forward. But it's been cool to have them on Team Penske.

Q. (Indiscernible.)

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Probably, yeah, you're going to see me cruising from Charlotte to California in my semi, look out. Fitzgerald is bringing it.

I don't know, these guys told me they were going to give me a Hellcat because I won the race. I was like, Are you serious? I don't know if I should tell that to people. No one's ever told me that, that they will give me an item for winning a race.

These guys are awesome. They're a great partner for Team Penske. I think they get the whole process of what racing is all about, trying to maximize what you can do in the racing world.

Hopefully we can bring them a little more success. Today was a great day. You don't get that all the time. I'm sure they're going to enjoy today and hopefully we'll give them a little bit more in the future.

Q. How good does it feel to win so close to home, winning so early in your career at Penske, only your third race, was does that do for your confidence?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, it's nice to get it out of the way. Look, there's always expectations in racing. It's not like I felt any more pressure. I think I felt the same pressure you always feel, Hey, look, if you're not getting it done, what are you doing in the race seat?

It always feels good when you get a win out of the way early. Whatever team you're with, it's nice to get it out of the way early, you feel like you've accomplished something, then you can focus on the next accomplishment for the season.

I feel good about it. I feel like it's gone pretty well so far. I only think it's going to get better. I feel the more time I have with the entire team, working with the teammates, working with my new engineer Brian, I think it's going to get stronger.

We need some time to understand what I need out of this team, and that unfortunately just takes experience together. You have to run race weekends, run at the track. The more you do that, the more you build up a rapport. To me I'm happy we were able to get something pretty big out of the way at the start and

hopefully now we can continue to try to repeat it.

Q. Talk a little bit about how you passed Scott Dixon. It was like in the last turn or so.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it was into turn 16. I think it's actually a great spot to pass people. I've always liked passing people around there. I think I got Hinch (James Hinchcliffe) there early in the race, too.

You know, I think I snuck up on him is what helped get it done. It was early on the restart. He was focused forward on the traffic in front of him. So was I. But I think I was able to capitalize on him when he wasn't looking, just got a nose in the door.

I tried to push him offline so he didn't have any grip. That seemed to work out. I got him offline and out of position enough to where I could take advantage.

I think to me it was a deciding factor of trying to win the race because then I could just focus on Will. It turned into a fuel battle at the end. We all had to save a little bit of fuel. I knew what Will had to save. It's unfortunate that Will wasn't able to see that to completion. He had an opportunity to win the race, too, it would have been a great fight.

That move with Dixon, it put me in position to try to win the race. We were able to seal that off. I think that move is really what got it done for us today, with everything else. That was the final blow to put us in position.

But it was everything. I think our first stop was really good and got us up to second place. The boys in the pits were awesome. Our strategy was awesome. Tire selection was awesome. When we pitted, how we did our out laps. That was good, too. That was kind of the final blow to put us in position to hopefully win the race.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think you hope you can be good everywhere. You don't want to have too many places where, Wow, you're really good here, but not as good here. You'd like to kind of just be good everywhere.

I think this track has always suited my style, if you will. Drivers have that. They have tracks that suit their driving styles a little bit more than others. This one has always been good to me for that. It doesn't hurt you have a great car underneath you. I think all four of the Team Penske cars were lightning fast this weekend. That helps, too. That was a big deciding factor of why we were strong today.

Yeah, it's been a great place for me. I love this atmosphere. It's not just the track that I like, but it's also the atmosphere that they create for the fans, just the scenery. I mean, if you're a fan coming to an IndyCar race, this is one of the best ones to go to. Walk around,

hang out, it's beautiful. It's so well-maintained. There's so much to do. Mr. Barber just does an awesome job for us. Puts a lot into this facility, keeping it up, trying to make it more fan-friendly. Regardless of how much I love the racetrack, it's almost a better place for fans.

It's nice that it's had a great race over the last three years because I think that's made it an even better place to go to. People used to think you couldn't pass here. The last three races we've had, they've been really good races. I'm happy about that because I love the track so much.

Q. How about the role that (Tim Cindric) and Brian (Campe) have played your development?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Those guys have been great. Brian, he's awesome. He's a great engineer. We work really well together. Just a great guy. Great guy in general. Great family. A lot of these boys at Team Penske, all of them are great people.

It's been nice getting close to Brian, understanding what he's done in the past, what I've done in the past. Like I said, we're going to need more time together, more experience at different racetracks to get better. But the positive thing is we are getting better, I think every weekend we are just getting better. That's good news.

Certainly with Tim, Tim is very calm. I mean, he's probably the calmest I've ever heard on the radio. Just very level. That helps me just focus on what I'm doing. He never has any highs or lows. Very steady on what we're doing, what the information is, where we need to be.

That helps me stay calm and figure out what I got to do on the racecar. It helps me transition from a racing standpoint, understanding how they run a race at Team Penske. It's not been too hard to integrate into their philosophy, if you will.

Q. Quick turnaround to the next race. How much of this momentum carries over?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think a lot of it does. IndyCar is a momentum sport. You have to be positive at all points with everybody. It's not just from the driving side, when you win a race you feel good. It's also the team. It's the 2 car guys. They feel good about it. They feel motivated. Everyone is calmer on the stand. It resonates with everybody. It kind of just brings a mentality to everybody that, you know, you got one under your belt, now we can continue to focus forward, not get too anxious during a weekend. That hopefully leads to less mistakes and more success. I think success definitely can breed success. It hopefully will help us going to Phoenix and keep the momentum rolling.

Q. (Question regarding Helio.)

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: He's going to be thrilled. These

guys are awesome. Helio, he's a spring chicken still. I don't know what he is. 41? Almost 42? But he's a young guy. I mean, you look at his data, you look at the way he drives the car, the way he interacts with the team, you would not guess he's his age. He is literally still a rookie driver, with the expression of exuberance. I mean, the guy is a team player. He brings this warm atmosphere to the team.

So I guess to answer your question, he doesn't seem like an old guy to me. He might be starting to grow a little more gray hair. I think he should stop dyeing his hair. I think he should go with the Silver Fox look. He's awesome, he's a great teammate. I'm sure he's going to be getting a win before too long. He's been knocking on the door these first few races. I don't think it's going to be long before we see Helio back in Victory Lane either.

Q. How much do you credit your tire strategy with your win today?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think it was a good call. We wanted to be different today. Kind of like qualifying. We wanted to do something different. It didn't work out in qualifying, but today it did. I think for us, it helped us move up actually, oddly enough in the first stint. I think the reds weren't that much of an advantage at the start of the race like they normally would be. You generally don't have as much grip in the beginning of a stint on the blacks.

Today, if you got through that first lap, the next couple laps you could actually be better. Certainly through the distance of the first stint, the blacks were much, much stronger. I think it was a good call for us. It helped us get off sequence and figure out how to race with these guys and beat them.

Going to the reds the next stint, it helped us close the gap. We came out a second behind Will. We were just racing one guy pretty much. Then Dixon obviously closed up, it turned into a three-way battle. That first stint of going blacks, getting off sequence, that's really what helped us be in a position to win the race.

It was a great strategy call I think for our team.

THE MODERATOR: Josef, congratulations. Thank you.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Thank you.