

# IndyCar Media

## Conference

Saturday April 29, 2017

# Simon Pagenaud

## Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with our post-race press conference. Joined now by our race winner of the Desert Diamond West Valley Phoenix Grand Prix, Simon Pagenaud. This is Team Penske's 450th win, their 100th win in open wheel racing on an oval. This is Simon's 10th win overall, and his first win on an oval.

Simon, congratulations. What does that mean to know that the Verizon IndyCar Series is all about diversity, now you have that diversity complete with an oval win?

SIMON PAGENAUD: It's phenomenal. I'm just as excited as I was in the championship. I think that's going to resonate to you.

I was very emotional at the end of the race there because I've been running after this. The desire to be good on ovals for me was really strong. I wanted to come to America and I wanted to embrace the sport, embrace the oval, and show that I could do the job.

But obviously, it took a few years. But, you know, unfortunately we don't race on oval that much. We only race I believe like five oval a year. When you don't have any background on oval racing, not even Indy Lights, it was difficult to learn the job and learn what it took to win a race on an oval.

So understanding the strategy, understanding placement of the car with the turbulences, compared to the guy in front of you, is very difficult to understand.

The biggest thing I think is to understand what the car needs to be like to be good throughout the race, give you the confidence to attack and be good in traffic.

I think today we had a phenomenal racecar, the best out there by far. The Penske cars I think were the best all weekend, but I think my car, the Menards car, was definitely a step above everybody else. I saw it very early in the race.

We were able to save fuel being behind Will, behind Helio. That helped us to stretch our window. We were a little lucky with the yellow that came out, but that's because we were able to stretch it, and it worked for us.

I take a little bit of luck after the start of the season. That was difficult at some points. But I am very, very, very excited, guys. I mean, it's just incredible.

THE MODERATOR: You mentioned traffic. You were surrounded by traffic, as was everybody, throughout the entire race. How did you navigate your way through it and maintain that lead?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I mean, yeah, my car was very good out of four. I was able to keep a very tight line. Obviously, as you saw, we decided to go with a very low downforce configuration to try to pass people. Despite being low on downforce, we were still able to follow really close in traffic. That's how we were able to make some ground.

A lot of the back markers were very cautious today, which helped as well. Overall the car was just phenomenal all night long. We kept with it as the track changed as well. That made a difference. I think the last restart also, having so many cars between me and Will helped. With pace, I was just saving the tires at the end.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Simon.

**Q. With your win tonight, it being your first win on an oval, you're essentially a threat to win anywhere. How would you grade yourself as becoming a very complete driver?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yes, that's the goal. That's my goal, is to be as complete as possible. I also look up to Dario Franchitti, I think was one of the most complete guys. Helio, as well. Dario has been a model for me for a long time. Obviously, my mentor Gil de Ferran. I can't wait to see the text I'm going to get on my phone tonight. I'm sure he'll be very proud. We talked about Phoenix last week together. It's been a great relationship. He's been helping me to understand this whole deal. Whether you're on speedway or short oval, it's very different. I won a championship without winning on an oval. Now if I can win on oval, it's going to make life different. That's very important to me.

**Q. You not only win your first oval race, but you win it at Phoenix, guys like Rick Mears, Helio, Hornish, guys from Penske have won their races. What does that mean, adding your name to the legacy of this team at this track?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Was it Paul Tracy's first win, too? Maybe it was Penske. I don't know, anyway. At least I didn't get fired as quick as him (laughter). He's going to love this, Tracy. There you go, that's my quote for tonight.

Yeah, what did you ask, sorry?

**Q. You're joining a lot of legends.**

SIMON PAGENAUD: I mean, I'm just super proud. To me, short oval is probably the hardest skill to have to win an oval. Obviously, Indianapolis is more of a chess game, being there on the longer race, 500 miles. But here it's very physical. You got to stay very clear in your head, despite being taxed physically, and also you need to keep up with the car very aggressively with traffic.

Indy's a little different. Indy, you have more time, you have more time to reflect on the previous corner or the next corner. Here it's very much a bullring. It's very difficult to get right.

**Q. In the early part, until lap 60 or 70, it looked like all the Penske cars were very equal. You could follow your teammates. At the end the gap was nine seconds. Is that because the traffic worked into your favor?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: No. When I was behind Will and Helio, or Helio and Will, I was just saving fuel, saving the tires. But my car was much better than theirs. I saw it really quickly.

They were able to be just as fast on new tires, but they had more degradation than I did. It was a matter of picking my time when I wanted to be aggressive and use up the tires, and other times I was just behind them saving fuel as much as possible. That's what allowed us to go longer. That's why we were able to get that yellow in our favor.

It's a consequence of things, starting with a really good car, then being smart with it, just staying behind saving fuel, then the yellow, and that made the race.

**Q. You mentioned this is your first win on an oval. Are you expecting now that Mr. Alonso will consult you for some very important advice?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Alonso asking me for advice? That would be cool. I don't know. I mean, I'm open to help him. Obviously he's not my teammate, so I don't know.

I'm very happy that he's coming. I think it's fantastic for the sport. People like you, Wolfgang, coming from Europe, are going to be very excited about the Indy 500. It's going to draw more attention from everywhere in the world, not only in America, to the race. I think it's phenomenal.

If he needs an advice, I'll give him one. But, you know, there's plenty of other drivers that can give him advice, too. He's got Ryan there, Ryan Hunter-Reay. Marco is really good at Indy. He's going to be just fine. The Andretti cars are really strong there.

He's going to be running up front. He should be just fine. I'm excited to see what he does. Is it Wednesday that he tests? I'm excited to see what he says after that.

**Q. You've always been very goal driven. You said, I want to achieve this, win this. Definitely have stages. That oval win is something you've been seeking for a while. Now that you have it, what's the next goal for you?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Indy.

**Q. Other than the 500? Anything driving-wise, skill set-wise that you think would be another achievement?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I think running in traffic for me has always been a challenge. Running so close to other cars at this speed has always been a challenge. I'm definitely getting better at it. There's still room for improvement there.

But I think for me my biggest goal is to win Indy. Being as complete as possible, being a threat every single weekend is what I want to be. I want you guys to remember me that way, being a threat every weekend. That's going to be my goal.

I think the way I prepared for this race was better than before. So now I've got a better way of doing things.

**Q. 450 for Penske as a team. Any special bonus for these milestones?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: I'm super happy with my contract, so... Nothing to ask (laughter). Maybe Roger wouldn't be happy to see I'm not such a good businessman.

THE MODERATOR: I wouldn't put that on the record.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Delete what I just said (laughter). I have to think about that one. Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Simon.