

IndyCar Media Conference

Friday July 28, 2017

Ryan Hunter-Reay Josef Newgarden

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Questions for Ryan.

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with today's post practice media availability. Joined now by Ryan Hunter-Reay, who finished fastest in today's overall practice session.

Ryan had his first-ever podium here a while back, and also has some great momentum coming from Iowa and Toronto.

Ryan, take us through your practice day and the things you're working on.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, that first podium was a bit too long ago. I guess it ages me.

Today, it was a good run. Car was good. We just made some improvements on it, made the right steps through the session, some session to session. We didn't test here a week ago, so it's nice to see we have the pace from last year, that we were able to roll in and improve from last year.

All in all, pretty good day. I have a lot of work to do tomorrow. We know everybody else is going to be improving. It's amazing if you look at the P1 session times, just how close everything is. There's no margin for error. So it's going to be that way again tomorrow.

Just happy to have a nice, productive day. Look forward to another one of those tomorrow hopefully.

THE MODERATOR: I know drivers say this a lot, but you mentioned that you rate this as one of your favorite tracks. What makes this course unique and challenging and a favorite of drivers?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Not only have I been coming here since I was a kid to watch IndyCar races, but it's a track I kind of first started in racing, Formula Dodge, Skip Barber, I've always loved the layout here. I remember my first laps around here, the undulating elevation changes and the constant flow to it. It really never stops turning. Even the straights have kinks and turns in them.

It's a great all-around racetrack. It's got everything you want in it. I've enjoyed it over the years. Like you said, my first big podium here. It's been good to me, as well.

Q. (No microphone.)

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: First, you have to get the car to your liking, right? You're looking at the tradeoff braking deep enough, then coming off the brake at the right time. This place is very sensitive to that, coming off the brake and getting on the throttle. If you get on the throttle a little bit too early, you induce too much understeer, the corner is done. It's that little window where you're transitioning from brake to throttle, getting the car set up just right for that. It's pretty tricky to get. When it does happen, it's a lot of fun.

Q. (No microphone.)

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Well, we had the pole here in 2013. I think we missed the track record by a couple hundredths of a second. At the time I knew it was a really good lap. I thought it was going to be a track record as well. A little disappointed we missed it by this much.

I've had some pretty good times around here in qualifying. In a racecar, you never have the perfect lap. You always think about, This could have been a little bit different. Could have had a degree or two of steering out here. Come off the brake a little bit there. That's just the way it is. It's the nature of the sport.

Q. (No microphone.)

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I think we had a pretty good baseline to start. We just rolled off from there. You know, so, you always have a little bit of a concern when you don't test at the track and some others do, that you're going to roll off... But, yeah, started off, had a good baseline.

Q. Ryan, for those of us who saw you dominate the Indy 500 and a few other races, kind of shocked to see you're 13th in the standings. How do you assess your whole season, just the way it's gone?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: It's been really frustrating, you know. Guys talk about bad luck all the time. You look at our season, there's been a lot of it. Just unfortunate circumstances, electrical problems. You know, Indy, whatever that was. Just been one thing after another.

But we've had some good performances. Been on the podium a couple times. Had some strong races. The pace has been there at times. Hopefully we can roll this weekend into one of those.

THE MODERATOR: We'll welcome in Josef Newgarden, who finished second fastest today in practice.

Josef, you had some very strong performances on permanent road courses this season so far, winning at Barber, finishing second at Road America. Your thoughts on today's practice session and your goals heading into the weekend?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I mean, I think we had a pretty good session. Fun driving the PPG car. My first time driving it. Simon had a lot of good luck in it last year. I think he won three races in this car. I'm excited to drive it. Looks good. Feels fast.

We were quick in the first session, too. We ended up seventh. But this track is such a game of when you run, you know, where in the tire life you are at what stage of the session.

Track just keeps getting quicker and quicker as you run. You got to kind of be the last man standing here almost. I think that's going to be the case tomorrow in qualifying. You got to try and time everything as best you can, be the last person across the line.

For us, yeah, I think we've had some good success this year on road courses. We probably could have had even more success at a couple other places that didn't fully materialize. But I think we're there, thereabouts.

I think the whole group at Team Penske is fast. We have to make sure to stay on top of it as always and not let something good slip away. We have good cars this weekend. We have to try to capitalize on that.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: There's times I like it. I think, for sure, when you're changing teams, it's probably come at a good time for me. I'm trying to learn Team Penske and the way they operate. It's been helpful trying to figure things out. We haven't qualified super well on road or street courses, at least not getting poles. I think it's been helpful to try to learn their philosophies.

There's other times where you don't really want it because people are far behind. You don't want them to catch up. That's how I felt in the past.

I guess I'm kind of mixed on it. In some cases it helps, in some cases you don't want it.

Q. Ryan, what would it mean to get a win here, not just for you but for all of Andretti?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: It would mean a lot, obviously, for sure. With all the frustration of the season, it would be really nice to have that, you know, kind of momentum, season changer.

Last year was the first time in my career I didn't win a race in a season. We definitely want to get back to it. That's the only reason why we're in business. Goes without saying, I think.

Q. How does your speed in practice translate into qualifying? How important is qualifying at a track like this?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: This place, like Josef mentioned, it's always going faster. If you're staying at your performance from Friday, you're going to be behind on Saturday. You have to keep pushing. You have to keep evolving the racecar. It's going to go faster.

What we did today is not going to be good enough for tomorrow. Like a brand-new, clean sheet of paper tomorrow. Everybody starts all over again. The series is so tight that if you don't continue to move forward on setup, on your driving, you're going to fall behind tomorrow.

Q. Josef, how do you guard against, particularly here, an ill-timed yellow? How do you plan for that?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't know. I mean, it depends on where you qualify, right? I think that changes your strategy. Maybe that helps you or hurts you. I think in Toronto, it was probably a blessing qualifying seventh because, you know, our strategy was to come in early. We just happened to catch a yellow at the right point. I still think we had good potential without it. But that always just makes your day a lot easier.

So I don't know. I don't think there's really a good recipe for it. You either get lucky on the right days or you don't. You qualify first up here, it is always good to qualify on the pole. Maybe you just catch a bad yellow. Qualifying 10th was right thing that day. But I have no idea how you guard against it.

It's definitely been an interesting topic. It would be nice -- I think definitely in the past, I've always preferred having the yellows because it gives you an opportunity if you're not strong one weekend. I think definitely when I suffered more inconsistently from track to track with performance, it was nice to be able to rely on potential yellows to help you.

Now it feels like this year we're more consistently just fast everywhere, so you don't really want them. I think there's a different opinion whether you're at the front or back of the grid.

It would be cool if we could go back to open pit scenario somehow. The rules are what they are right now. How you safeguard against them, I don't think you can. You're either lucky or you're not.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I knew when I saw Tony I did. I didn't know when I was in the pits. Tim all of a sudden got real quiet, real qualm. He was like, Hey, everybody, take your time.

What are you talking about, man?

We needed to have a good pit stops, a good out lap. He got quiet or calm.

I was kind of confused. I came out of the pits and saw Tony. I was like, Okay, this is going to be good.

Yeah, it's nice when it happens, for sure.

Q. Josef, lately has it gotten to be a big surprise every time you show up at the shop because this week now Ryan Blaney is a teammate, team is going to have three Cup cars, you have a sports car program going on? Is it almost like the changes that are going on back at the shop are almost a big surprise to you to keep up with?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't know if it's a surprise. But you're right, there's a lot going on. I go in there pretty much every day. I spend a lot of time with the pit crews, NASCAR and IndyCar. You always hear what's going on on both sides of the shop. It's never ending. With the sports cars, now NASCAR expanding to three cars, what they're doing with the Wood Brothers, it's non-stop action at the shop.

I don't know if it's a surprise, but it's fun to be a part of it. It's definitely cool being a part of Team Penske and everything they've got going on.

Q. Ryan, you're as no nonsense as they come. How have you been able to enhance your calm or stay cool even though it's been a frustrating time the last few years?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: We had a really frustrating beginning to '15. That was the first time in my career, I felt like I was in a really good car, but we were upside down, you know what I mean? Setup is everything. Changing over with the aero kit. It was a horrible weekend. Three-quarters of the season was absolutely terrible just to keep my head in line. Then we went out and won two races before the end of the season.

That year taught me a lot. Just trying to stay with it. I know when we have the right package, I'll be there, I'll be ready for it. I'll be right at the front. It's just, you know, we've had the right package this year and things have just kept us...

What are you going to do about Indy? I knew I had a great car to compete for the win, but two years in a row where it was taken out of our control. What are you going to do? It's racing. You keep on.

I feel like one of the luckiest people in the world that I

get to do this for a living. I'm not going to get down in the dumps about everything. Every weekend I come out and do this again. I feel like a kid. I feel like I get to do the best thing in the world. It's a dream job.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: New Zealand (laughter).

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: What is he, 37? I think he's extremely underappreciated. I think he's a legend for what he is he's accomplished. I don't want to say that too much because I'm racing against him every weekend.

It's been amazing what he's been able to do. And through the eras of IndyCar racing, this is the tightest it's ever been. The data shows that. From P1 to P last, whatever that may be, this is the tightest IndyCar has ever been. To be consistent nowadays, it seems to be even harder.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I mean, you think of him as a threat in a good way for him. You know, there's certain people within the series that you go, Well, they're always a threat. Whether they're fast or they're not fast on a weekend, they're always a threat. He's one of those guys. He's always going to be a threat. If he's P10 on the charts in practice, he's still going to be a threat. He's just one of those phenomenal drivers you can't count out.

Q. Josef, Simon needed a year to really assimilate to Penske. You've already won two races. What's happened for you this year jumping into the Penske car?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think we're still learning. Just us on the 2 car, we're figuring things out. We haven't had a perfect year by no means, but we've had a good very good year, for sure. We've had races where I feel confident that we can absolutely win, and we've done that a couple times.

The good thing about it is, every weekend we show up for, I feel like we can win the race. Doesn't matter if it's a road course, street course, oval, just always feel confident we're going to be able to win the race.

I think that speaks volumes to where we're at as a group, Team Penske as a whole, then the 2 car in general, with me coming in, being a new addition.

We're still gelling, though. There's been weekends, moments where inexperience together has hurt us. It only seems to get better week in and week out. I hope that bodes well for the future. If we keep up the momentum we have, and even get better, I hope that's going to be the case the rest of this year and into further seasons.