

IndyCar Media Conference

Sunday July 30, 2017

Josef Newgarden

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with our Verizon IndyCar Series post-race press conference. Joined by the winner of the Honda Indy Toronto -- well, also the winner of the Honda Indy Toronto.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Not inaccurate.

THE MODERATOR: But also the Honda Indy 200 at Mid-Ohio sports car course. Josef, congratulations. Back-to-back wins for you on the Verizon IndyCar Series schedule.

First of all, take us through that pass of your teammate Will Power on lap 13 as you were challenging for the win.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I felt like we were a little stronger at the start. Will was good, and we had a decent gap to Takuna, I think. We were holding fairly steady. I think Will was struggling a little more than me, and I just didn't want to wait behind him. We were either going to pass him on track in a straight-up pass or pass him on the pit cycle. That was our plan. I didn't want to wait until the pits. I felt like I had an opportunity, so I just tried to time something and pull a move on him.

He gave me a lot of racing room like a great teammate. I think he knew we were a little bit quicker. So he gave me good room, and once we got past him, I thought we were really fast.

It was a good day. Pretty smooth, for the most part. Still stressful. It's always stressful, even when the car's fast. It seemed like the car was working on reds, blacks, didn't really matter. It just got better throughout the race and as the track gripped up.

Only real drama was the restart, felt like we were on the wrong tire again, kind of like Road America. Fortunately, we had a bit of a buffer, even with the car in between. Even there, I thought Gutierrez was going to run into us on Turn 4 for a second, but we seemed to skate through.

Once we got the tires cleaned up from all the marbles, it seemed to be pretty good.

THE MODERATOR: As you said, you passed Will Power and really broke out to a nice lead. What were you thinking when you saw the full course yellow come

out late in the race?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Just the wrong time. It was kind of like Road America, there wasn't much time to build temperature on the blacks. We had a discussion what tires we wanted to use. I felt like we had -- we had like a ten-second gap. I said, if we maintain this gap to the pit stop, let's go to black tires again. I think that was the right call. Then the caution just falls at the wrong point.

If it falls halfway through a stint, it's a little bit easier because the reds don't come on as strong as the beginning, but when reds are brand new and we're brand new blacks, it's really difficult on the restarts.

The problem I had was I had so much pickup on that caution period, I was just trying to clear the tires off coming to the restart zone, and like they were -- I've never seen chunks of rubber just fly off the tires like they did. It was unbelievable. It was like my tires were raining in reverse style. It was nuts. So I was like, well, that's not good.

Then we got going, and I couldn't turn. I just could not -- I got all the low speed stuff. Turn 5, the car would not turn. It was just flat sliding. There was no grip. It was really difficult to get going those first three laps. As soon as that cleaned up and the tire came in, the car was very fast again. It was just getting through that pickup period where we cleaned off the tires. Once they cleaned off and they came to, it was fine after that.

So it was a little anxiety for sure, but luckily, there was no incident on the restart, and we were able to build a gap and just kind of manage it from there. That was really the key.

THE MODERATOR: I know you just found out this information a few minutes ago, but you have the points lead now heading into the last four races of the season.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I did hear that, yes.

THE MODERATOR: What are your thoughts being in that position as the season is coming to a close?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think it's great. You know, we've got to keep building the gap hopefully. And maintaining it is certainly the number one key, but if we can keep building the gap and increase it, that's going to only help for Sonoma. So I think that will be our goal

not to have any bad races, try to build the gap, and it's going to come down to Sonoma regardless of what happens. It's always going to be the case with double points.

So we've just got to be as strong and as steady as we can and make sure that we can decide our own destiny going into Sonoma. It's tough when you're like 50 points behind and you have to have someone else finishing a certain position. I would like to be in a position where the winner of Sonoma wins the championship. You know, that's a good position to be in. So if we can do that, I'll be pretty happy.

Q. At Toronto, you said it would be nice to win a race in a place you hadn't won it before. Well, you finally did that here. So what's it like winning in a new place?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's good. We've been close -- I think I've been close here before, certainly with CFH Racing and ECR. Getting my years mixed up. There's a lot of different names in there. But we've been close before here. I feel like we've always found speed. It certainly wasn't missing with Team Penske. They have great cars. I think all four of us went fast this weekend.

But we've been good at other places this year. I really felt like we could have won Road America. That's been a good track for us. I feel like Phoenix should have been a better place for us. I don't feel like we were lacking in too many places we haven't won, but it's just nice to get something in a track I haven't had a previous history of winning the race. That was nice. I liked it for the 2 car guys. That was fun for me and fun for them. It was fun.

Q. I'm sure that Jim Campbell is not going to let you accept this, but you've swept all of the Honda races this year.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: That is wonderful. That's wonderful. That's what we want to do with Chevy power. We'd like to sweep in the backyard of Honda.

It's funny you bring this up. We were getting introduced on stage, and they had all of the Honda execs and Art, and I just really wanted to promote Chevrolet in that moment so hard. I kind of wussed out, and I didn't say anything about Chevrolet on the intros. And I told Art, and I said, I was going to take you down, and he wasn't happy about it. No, it was okay. I actually really like -- Art's a great guy.

They're obviously a wonderful manufacturer. Obviously, they've been doing very well this year. They're hard to beat. I've been on that side before. I've done a lot of races with Honda engines and the Honda people. So they're very good at what they do.

But it's nice being at Chevrolet. All of my IndyCar wins have come with Chevy power, their reliability and their fuel mileage. I have nothing but excellent things to say

about Chevrolet. It's always good when you're on a Chevy team and you win a Honda race. I think Jim and the Chevy boys can be very happy and proud of that.

Q. Do you leave here feeling like you just had a dominant victory? This seems about as dominant a win as you can have in this current state of IndyCars. What's your sense as you leave here in that regard?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I never get too invested in comments or anything like -- anything that's said in the press, but I just -- I feel like no one can take anything away from this win. With this team on the 2 car side, I feel like we really did a great job today. There was no luck involved in that. We went out and won the race. So no one can take anything away from those guys and the 2 car.

A lot of people thought we won the race in the yellow at Toronto. That's not untrue, but I felt like we had a winning car too. It's good for those guys. They know they can win a race straight up, no problem, and they have the pace and the ability to do it. I've got all the faith in the world in that team. They know how to win championships and races. I feel like I'm with the best group out there, and I feel good about being able to have a day like this with them. It makes everyone feel good about what we're doing, I think.

Q. Were you surprised that Gutierrez took a shot? What was just your reaction to that? Excuse me. I wasn't talking into this, but you could hear me.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I got you. I wasn't surprised, I guess. I figured -- Tim even said something. Tim was like, hey, you need to watch out. Gutierrez is on red tires. He's probably going to try and be a hero getting his lap back here, which was not the thing to do, I don't think, in that situation when you're on the last stint. I mean, you're not going to really be able to do much getting your lap back.

So I was talking to the guys. I talked to Rahal and Will about it. It's probably something we need to address again. We've had this discussion about lap cars before. We probably need to have a discussion about how we handle it again with just the procedure. Per the rules, he has every right to actually try and pass me. It's not against the rules. It's not against what we do right now in IndyCar. So there's really nothing wrong that he did, but is that the right procedure to have? I don't know anymore.

It's easy winning the race saying, well, we need to change this because we're running up front. But I feel like there's a common sense amongst the paddock that we probably need to have another discussion about it. It didn't end bad. It was all fine. He's a talented driver. He's been in a lot of series. I think he handled it fine, and there's nothing that bad that came out of it. Fortunately, we don't have to talk about something like that.

Q. So, of course, naturally, my followup is about that. But you've raced him before, I feel like, in maybe GP3 in the past and kind of know him a little bit. Were you expecting him to race you like that? How new is he in this IndyCar world, where it's only his sixth or seventh race or something?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: That's why I felt he would do it because he's so new here. I thought he would do something like that, where he's going to try to get his lap back. I tried to get as good a jump as I could and just watched him. I saw him locked up in my mirror, and I thought, I can't really go anywhere. I left a little bit of room on the inside, not a lot, but I left a little bit just to give him some space. I was just waiting. I was like, he's either going to hit me or he's not. And he didn't. Once we got to the corner, it was just fine.

But I was expecting it. I was expecting something like that. After we got through that, it actually kind of helped me a little bit going after Will. It was probably a good thing after we got to the start.

Q. Josef, second time this year I've got to say this, as someone from Tennessee, congratulations. You've done the Volunteer State proud again.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Thank you.

Q. Three wins this year, career best. Being a championship leader carries a lot of pressure. Are you worried at all about Gateway being the only track coming up at which you don't have experience?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Probably not. I actually like tracks that I don't have experience at. Not a lot of guys will. Guys have experience -- some guys have experience from old Gateway with old car, but it's completely different now with this new car, DW12, that no one's run there with. I feel actually really good about that. I think it's an advantage to come out of the box stronger than everyone. It provides an advantage for us at Team Penske to do a better job than everybody. I'm not worried about it. I'm really excited about Gateway. I think it will be strong for us.

It's more the tracks like Pocono. Pocono could be tough for us. Watkins could be potentially tough for us too, when you look at the nature of the track and the way Honda and Chevrolet have been battling, where their strengths and weaknesses are. Gateway is not a place I worry about. I think Pocono and Watkins are more concerns, specifically Pocono.

Q. Speaking of concerns, let's just pretend Esteban's not there. Do you still think you've got Will Power covered?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Tough to say, you know. I was on the wrong tire for sure, at least on the start. You know, I think, as the stint went on, when we have the ten-second gap, I'd have picked the blacks all day because we have a gap, and I know I'm going to be

better over the stint. But when you're just talking about the pure start, you don't want to be on those tires. It's the wrong thing to be on. So I was really concerned about where we were at.

I think we would have held Will off, but it's impossible to say. Maybe he would have gotten me. I have no idea. I was happy I had a buffer. Probably happy to have a buffer even with the concern that Esteban was new and might do something like that, but still happy to have that. I think it helped more than it hurt.

Q. How about the way this all shakes out with points? You've brought Scott Dixon back into a big group of drivers. You've got a slight lead albeit very small in the second place. How do you see this all shaking down?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: The lead's not been big for anybody all year. No one's really broken a gap. I think it's going to be like that until Sonoma. It was good day for us. The PPG car, it seems magical at Team Penske. I think we'll all be fighting who will get to drive this car. Simon was very jealous I got in this car this weekend -- in a friendly way, not in a bad way. It's a good thing for PPG. They have some type of rocket ship. I think I heard Juan had won at Pocono in this car as well.

So Juan's been good in it. Simon's been very good in it last year. It seems to work for us, and we've got it for a couple more races for the end of the year. Hopefully, it keeps working its magic. It's a good position to be in in the championship. I'd rather be leading than chasing. So I'm not going to be mad about that.

Q. Josef, heading to Pocono, you've never had a bad run there. Do you think you can somehow figure out a way to outpace the Hondas there.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I hope so. It's all possible. I think at Indy this year we could have done something potentially. We actually showed a lot of speed in the race. Helio, for sure. Everyone probably saw Helio's speed the best. But I think a lot of the other cars had speed. Juan was quick. I felt like we had a lot of speed. We drove to pretty much the top five in the race. We were yo-yoing back and forth.

I think we have enough speed to show. Is it going to be enough to top those guys? Hard to tell. They were tough at Indianapolis, and a couple of good cars went out, which made it easier. I think they're going to be tough, but we have to maintain striking distance. If we put ourselves in position to be there, we can capitalize on anything. I think it's absolutely possible to win.

Q. Josef, you were strong in the championship last year as well, now leading with just a handful of races left. Did you see this potentially happening, even with the switch to a new team, even though it is Team Penske?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think you always hope so.

From the outside, people look at it, you're going to arguably the best team in the paddock with the most history in IndyCar. You've got to look at it and say, you should be great now, right? I think that's what the perception is from the outside. There's parts of you that would hope that's true. You come to this group, and you would hope you find success pretty fast because everything's in order and working how it should. There's no one more polished than Team Penske.

But with the way the series works now, it's very difficult. It's not just, hey, hop in one of the best cars, and you're just going to kick everyone's butt if you've got the talent. That's not how it works. Every track is very individualized now in IndyCar. You almost, regardless of the team, you have to figure out a year of each track with the group.

Where we got very good at ECR was I'd been there for five years -- different iterations of the team, different personnel, but I'd been there five years. I knew where we went with setup and direction for every single track. Every year we went to a track, I knew where we were and where we're going for this year. Team Penske, I had none of that. Totally new setups. Completely different philosophies. So I had to like adjust myself to something I didn't actually like at the beginning of the year. I didn't really love it to start with. You just start molding it to yourself, figuring out how it works for you, and you just get better and better hopefully.

I think that's been the case this year. We've just been getting better and better as we have more time together. The more time Brian and me have, the more time I have with the team, I feel like we get stronger. If we've had success so far, then hopefully that means good things for the future. I hope we can have more and potentially better success. So that's my goal. That's my hope. We'll see how it shakes out.

Q. Josef, both Will and Graham had talked about how the series in general, the competition level is so good now, and Will's mentioned this before. He really doesn't think that the pits need to be closed. So I wondered what your feelings are about that because you can be, you know, at the wrong time, and you're supposed to come in there as a yellow, and you can end up instead of -- you could lose the lead.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I would agree. I think we had this discussion at Toronto. I made a comment that I think we should keep them open too. There was a time in the past when, me specifically, we weren't always consistent at every round. So it gives an opportunity, if you're having a bad weekend, to potentially win a race. But when you're always at the front, then you start looking at it differently. You go, well, you never want to be bit by this, right? So we should just get rid of it.

The more and more I look at it, the more penalizing, I

think it is for fast cars on race weekends. Yeah, I would like to reverse that. The reason we do it is for safety. There's got to be a way we can figure out safety and keep them open. I think that's the discussion amongst everyone. IndyCar, including the drivers, are going to try to potentially figure out different. I'm for keeping them open under caution and figure out how we can make that work safely, where we don't put anyone at risk. If we can do that, then I would be all for that procedure. So, yeah, I'm for it.

Thank you guys.