

IndyCar Media Conference

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Josef Newgarden Press Conference



ARNI SRIBHEN: Welcome, everyone, to today's IndyCar media teleconference. Our guest today is the current Verizon IndyCar Series point leader and is a driver shooting for his third consecutive win at this weekend's ABC Supply 500 at Pocono Raceway. Josef Newgarden of Team Penske, welcome to today's call.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Thanks for having me. Good to be here.

ARNI SRIBHEN: Josef will be driving the No. 2 Fitzgerald Glider Kit Chevrolet this weekend and holds a seven-point lead over Team Penske teammate Helio Castroneves, with four-time champion Scott Dixon, defending series champion Simon Pagenaud, 2014 champion Will Power, and Graham Rahal all within 58 points of Newgarden's lead. Josef, you're the first American points holder or points leader since 2014; does that mean anything extra special to you to be leading the points for the first time?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Not particularly to be honest. You know, I've always loved about IndyCar that we have some of the best talent from around the world, whether that's from the driving side or the team side with all our engineers, mechanics, ownership. So I love that diversity and think that that's what makes IndyCar so great is we have the best of the best from around the world.

You know, I never put too much stock into my nationality with it, but there was always a little bit of pride, I guess, in being American in a predominantly North American championship, and I think maybe driving for Team Penske certainly makes that a little bit more special. Again, overall, I don't think about it too much, but I think it's a little bit more special this year being a part of Team Penske and everything they've done with American talent here in the IndyCar Series.

ARNI SRIBHEN: As I mentioned, you lead by seven points over Helio, eight points over Dixon, Graham is in sixth; he's 58 points back. That span of 58 points was the span from first to second at this point last year, so knowing that the title rivals are all within striking distance of you with four races to go and a double-points race sitting at the end of the season, does that change the way you're going to approach racing the last four?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't think it really does. I don't think it does if you're in a large points lead like Pagenaud was last year like you referenced there, this gap between first and sixth is 58 points. If that's first to second or if that's first to sixth, I think you approach it the same way. You still have to have solid race weekends without any errors or problems. I think you need to be having solid points finishes.

And I think for us, if we can capitalize on more wins, we'll do that. If we have a car capable, if we're as a team of winning the race, then we'll try and still do that. If not, then we'll try and secure as many points as possible.

For me I don't really approach it differently regardless of the situation, but for sure it is a very close fight, and we'll most likely with the way it's been shaking up will come down to Sonoma. So just trying to stay as close to the lead or extend the lead as much as possible. It's only going to help at the end of the day when you get to Sonoma.

ARNI SRIBHEN: Finally, this weekend's race is a 500-mile race at Pocono Raceway, the Tricky Triangle. You've been really strong there in the past; you have three top-5 finishes in your four previous starts. What about that track suits your style so well, and what kind of race do you expect?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I don't know what it is. I wish I had more consistent finishes at Indianapolis. I think it's definitely different than Indianapolis, but there's some characteristics that are very similar. It's really the only other track that we go to that has the sort of length that Pocono and Indy has, a two-and-a-half-mile track. They're superspeedways, so they share commonality with that, and there's certain corners that favors Indy type setups, but then you have also a mix between very different corners, so 1, 2 and 3, it's difficult to try and find a compromise, and maybe that's sort of what's helped me in the past is just trying to find a better compromise with my race setup, and maybe I've just been able to be more comfortable with that and having a compromise whereas as other tracks you don't need that as much. Pocono it's very important that you're able to live with a compromise between the corners and the car not working perfectly in one compared to another. I think that's really what sets Pocono apart, and it's what you have to be good at there.

Q. Do you prefer -- the fact that you're out in front, do you prefer that, being the hunted, or do you prefer being the hunter? Do you prefer chasing down the driver ahead of you or the fact that you have a little bit of a points gap to Helio, is that kind of helpful in the way you approach a race weekend, or are you just like, I'm glad to be out here at the moment and it just depends on where I finish up at the end of the season?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: You know, I think with the way I view it, I always prefer to be in the lead. I don't know why you ever wouldn't want to be the leader. If you can be in a position where you're leading the championship, I always think it's better than having a deficit because to me, I don't really approach a race weekend different if I'm leading or if I'm trying to catch up.

I always prefer -- I would prefer the lead. I think it's good. I think for us it'll be hard to hold on to it because everyone is so close, so you have one little mistake or one little mess-up in the next race and it's very easy to slip back. So we've just got to try and stay out front if we can, and like I was saying before, the more that we can build a points gap, that only helps to Sonoma, so if we can't do that, I think we need to just stay at least in touch with the lead as much as possible and make sure that we have a shot at winning the championship on our own terms when we go to Sonoma.

Q. The fact that your teammates are in the hunt for the championship, as well, how is the feeling within the team in that kind of situation? Do you find it a bit awkward, or is it okay? Do you think it's fine, we're just sharing information as we normally would, or are you a little bit more secretive now that we're coming towards the end of the season, or is it still an open book policy within the team?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: You know, so far it's been fine. It's been very similar to how the whole year has gone. I haven't really noticed much difference. I think we all want to be the best within the team, but it's very clear on the way that we work that we work together. We try and help the whole group be better, and if it's not me winning a race or winning the championship, then we focus on trying to get at least one of the Penske cars to do that. You always hope it's you. You want to be the best within the team. But at the end of the day, we've got to have one of the Team Penske cars succeeding, and that's what we all work for.

So it hasn't changed, and we have an open book. We all try and help each other as much as possible, kind of ebbs and flows a little bit. Sometimes it helps me more weekends, and sometimes what I'm doing helps the other guys more on race weekends. So I think it goes back and forth, and you certainly get your fair share of help throughout the year.

Q. When you look at the championship battle between you and your teammates, have you talked

to any of them about kind of where they were when they were first battling for a title with Team Penske and kind of what the mental state is for them? And then is there anyone you would draw on for advice to keep you sharp and in the right focus or frame of mind?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, that's an interesting question. I haven't really spoken much to the other teammates specifically about their mindset or where it was at or where the team was at with regard to the championship. It's actually kind of oddly quiet. You know, it's almost like we're just expected to be able to do our job. It's not that we don't get spoken to by various people within the teams to make sure we have what we need or make sure we understand what the game plan is, it's just most of the big broad brush strokes, I think they're just -- for them they view it as it should be understood by us. We're all pretty experienced within the series, and I think everyone that's come into Team Penske has always had some level of experience.

I think they expect for you to do the right thing. Penske wants us to work well together. They allow us to race. They allow us to do whatever we want to try and beat each other, but it's just most important that we work together and take care of each other at the end of the day.

As far as anything further than that, things are pretty quiet. I think they just expect us to go out and do a good job and make sure we represent the group appropriately.

Q. You look at where you're at in the series, sixth year, contending for a championship, but you would be kind of the first under-30 champion in almost a decade if you pull it off. Have you thought about that at all, or were you kind of expected, hey, now that I'm here, I was hoping to be in championship position in the first place?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I mean, I definitely think I hoped I would be in a championship position. How could you not? When joining Team Penske, I think you hope you're going to just dominate. Everyone would love to do that. I think in any situation that you're in in IndyCar, you would hope to be able to do that. That would be the best-case scenario.

I didn't know how the championship was going to unfold. I knew that we were going to have work in front of us. I knew we would need time to gel. I still think we are. I'm a believer in IndyCar Series that you have to build up kind of a book for the year and that you have to understand for each specific team what you're doing for each track, and I kind of had that book already written up on everywhere we went for ECR and I understood everything that we were doing and why we were doing it, and at Penske we don't have that. They have their notebook, but I don't have a personal one with them.

I feel like we're still gelling, we're still learning. So I'm a little bit surprised at how quickly we've hit the ground running, but I guess there's also been moments where we could have been better and I could have been better and maybe as a team we could have been better, and I think with experience that will come.

Q. What has been your highlight this season to date, being with a new team and being with Penske? Has it been any of your wins that stand out or is it just the season as a whole?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, I think probably Mid-Ohio stands out the best because it's probably the best victory we've had throughout the year. I think there's been other moments where we could have won races or finished better and they didn't materialize, but it's hard to go against Mid-Ohio at this point just because it was I think our best weekend put together. There's still small areas where we could have been better over the weekend, but overall, it was the best weekend we put together, and I think it was a very strong victory for us as a team. Like we did a great job in executing that day.

That one to me felt the most complete for the year.

Q. Three straight weekends coming up here, three completely different kinds of tracks you're going to go to. How do you individually and as a team approach that much difference in the next few weeks?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, I see it as an opportunity. I always think whenever we have something that can appear to be a difficulty within the calendar, whether you're back and forth between three different types of circuits in a row, some I think look at it as a difficult thing to do, but I always see it as an opportunity to try and be better at getting on top of those challenges and switching back and forth better than everyone, because it is a challenge. It's a challenge going from one circuit that's very specific with the setup and a driving style and then having to go to a completely different circuit, re-learn and re-change your style and setup and then having to do it again afterwards for a third time.

It's a challenge. I mean, I find that the most challenging and the most fun part about IndyCar, as far as us preparing for what we need to do is try and be ahead of that as many weeks as possible. This last couple weeks off we had we tried to put in as much work as we could to just be ahead of this next four weeks before the season finale so we could hit the ground running, and I think just being prepared is the best thing you can do.

Q. Is there any one of those three tracks coming up that you consider more of a challenge for you than the others?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think Pocono will probably be our biggest challenge. I think with regards to our

competition at Honda, I think they've been very strong on superspeedways. I think we have the ability with Chevy to be better than them. We've been working closer together this year than any other year in IndyCar. So I think if we get it right, we have the ability to beat them, but Pocono is going to be our toughest challenge against them, and I think we'll have a little bit easier time at Gateway and certainly have what we need at Watkins Glen, and then Sonoma you never really know what you're going to have there. It can always get mixed up. We've got to try and capitalize everywhere, but I think Pocono will be our toughest challenge.

Q. What is the advantage from Chevy to Honda in the final leg of the championship?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, I think the advantage to being with team Chevy is you feel comfortable in the reliability that we've had throughout many years at IndyCar, specifically the last couple years. I think we feel very comfortable with what Chevrolet brings from a reliability standpoint. We never have issues.

And if you're struggling with those things it can be a concern when you come down to the last couple races for the championship. You don't want something to go wrong that's out of your control. That brings us a lot of comfort. Whenever we have a race that runs into a fuel mileage situation, we generally seem to be quite strong at team Chevy, and we can produce the fuel mileage we need for any given weekend. That to me brings some comfort, too.

And then I think the last thing I would say is our aero kit, Chevy just did a phenomenal job on that part, that part of the equation when they came out with the manufacturer aero kits, and we've been very strong with it for the last couple years, and it hasn't really let up this year.

There's a lot of things that give us confidence, but at the same time, we can't discount Honda. You can't turn an eye to them. You have to make sure you're watching them at all points and respecting what they can bring to the table because they're a very strong manufacturer and they've won races and they've won Indy 500s, and they're very capable of taking it from you if you don't watch that closely. They're a challenge for us with Pocono being their biggest strength, but I feel confident with Chevy that we have a chance to win the championship.

Q. You mentioned the aero kit; how is the new aero kit? Have you had time to test it, or what have you heard about it? What do you expect from that for next year?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, I'm really excited about it. I think it's going to make the cars drive quite a bit differently. I haven't tested it because it's still in IndyCar's hands right now. They're finishing up the final testing phase with the kit before they release it to

teams individually, so they've been working with both manufacturers and the series has been carefully monitoring that and making sure that we get every detail correct so that we have a strong product next year.

But I think compared to this season, it's going to change the handling dynamic of the car. You're going to have to drive differently than now. It's going to have less downforce. It should be cleaner downforce so that the following should be more easy to do. It should be easier to complete a pass hopefully. It should change the way that we race on road and street courses and ovals, and I just think you're going to have to hustle the car more. I think everything I've heard from Juan Pablo Montoya that's gotten to test the car, he says to me that you have to hustle the car more, and that should be more fun to drive and more in the drivers' hands, and that's what we want.

Q. Which of the final four races are you most looking forward to?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: You know, I hate to say this answer, but I always look forward to all of them. I don't know if there's one in particular I look forward to. It's kind of -- I don't really have a favorite track anymore, either. I always feel confident we can win anywhere we go, so I get very locked in on each specific weekend. I'm still looking ahead to the other races, but I'm really locked in on Pocono right now, and I feel like it's going to be an uphill battle to some degree but I feel like we can win the race. If we do everything right, we can win the race. I'm excited about Gateway just because it's a new track for us. I enjoy going to new racetracks, and with the pavement work that they've done there, I'm real excited to see how that race unfolds. Short tracks are usually fun. In a roundabout way I'm excited about all of them. I don't have one track I'm looking forward to. You've got to be good everywhere. Feeling like you can win at every racetrack, I think that allows you to like everywhere that you go.

ARNI SRIBHEN: That will wrap up our teleconference today with Josef Newgarden. We appreciate everyone joining in.