

IndyCar Media

Conference

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Takuma Sato

Simon Pagenaud

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Joined now by Simon Pagenaud. Thought we might see you in a P1 position. You were just a little bit shy.

SIMON PAGENAUD: A bit short, yeah. But it was a very good event, very good qualifying for us. The car has been strong all day. Ben, my engineer, just nailed the gearing, the balance on the car. That was the best we could do.

I'm quite satisfied. Front row start is really good, our best start here in Pocono. A 500-mile race, so a lot can happen.

Today was pretty much ego day trying to get that pole position. For us it would have been nice to get another point. But overall I think we did our best and we'll go to bed pretty satisfied with today. Tonight we're just going to work again on the racecar and try to find even more balance in it to be good in traffic.

But I was pretty satisfied already this morning.

THE MODERATOR: This track is so much about compromise. Which was your best corner, the corner you were struggling a little bit in?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, the car was really good. In those case, it feels comfortable, but if something goes wrong, it's uncomfortable very quick. That's how it goes on an oval when the car feels good.

I would say turn one has been a good corner all day for us. The car has been decent there, stable. Turn three has been more difficult with some gust of wind and those (indiscernible) now are starting to lose grip. When you cross the (indiscernible), it makes the rear a little edgy. Overall it was a pretty straightforward qualifying for us.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Marco was talking about how Andretti Autosport had struggled to kind of like follow the conditions changing on the track. That being the case, how useful is this evening's session for what happens tomorrow?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, it's a good point. I mean, every car is very sensitive to temperature, especially



the tarmac temperature. You see it in Indy. It's something we all struggle with, I think. The hottest days you race there, that's usually when you have the least amount of grip.

This evening's session is good so you can check your car in traffic, see how it behaves in the wake. But I think, you know, you're still going to have to think about the race and the conditions being different, what to do on the racecar to compensate for it.

Q. (No microphone.)

SIMON PAGENAUD: That's the thing. Like I said for us, turn one has not been an issue. Turn three was more difficult. Last year was the other way. And the wind was in a different direction.

That's something we definitely look at a lot.

Q. It looks like the speeds, minimal difference. Do you think overtaking could be difficult tomorrow? For the afternoon session coming up now, do you have something in the pipeline to make your car even faster?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Tomorrow, we're not going to be as fast as this because this is trim-out conditions, trying to go as fast as possible over two laps. Those are not the setups. The tires don't last in those conditions.

For the race, completely different story. You know, it's a 500-mile race. There's a lot of riding around, trying to balance your car for the end of the race. Trying to find the right level of downforce during the race is key as well. So you make a lot of adjustments, pit stops, get ready for the shootout, the last 60 laps really.

For us, that's going to be the plan. First goals were to be in the top five in qualifying. We were there. That's checked. Now we need to run around in the front all day and be there to strike at the end.

There's also the fact that we're playing for a championship here, so we have to be smart at the end.

Q. A couple road courses to go, a short oval next week, and championship contenders sprinkled all through this field. Really a roll of the dice when you have six guys within 58 points.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, the championship is a lot more exciting for you guys this year. I think it's the beauty of IndyCar. We go on superspeedway, short oval next week, then completely different in two weeks,

then Sonoma, which is a beautiful venue to finish the season.

You know, that's the beauty of this racing series, which I really love, because you have to show skills in every condition, every different aspect of track. So I'm very excited about it.

If you can show strength in the last four, you deserve the championship, for sure.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about what it's like standing there on pit road, knowing you're one car away from the pole, and that guy takes it from you, what that range of emotion is like.

SIMON PAGENAUD: The word going through my mind and I'm not going to say it (laughter).

Disappointing, of course. You can taste the win, and that's what we're all about. We're racers. We want to win. I'm here to win, to be first, not to be second.

In the meantime it's a really good starting position. At the time it's like gambling. You're in the game and you feel like you could win, so it's very exciting. That's the rollercoaster of racing in your life as a racer. It's up and down, up and down your whole career. These moments are why I race. It's happiness, satisfaction of doing the job.

Q. Simon, I don't think I've ever really gotten close enough to turn one. As drivers you disappear. You're on the outside of turn one tomorrow for the start. Can you talk about whether you have a good shoot at taking the lead on the first lap. Also the tires, on this type of track surface, will they wear out? Are we going to see degradation tomorrow?

SIMON PAGENAUD: There's always some degradation, although Firestone has brought a different left rear tire, which is a bit more robust. This morning I didn't see much degradation. I think there will be some tomorrow, especially if the heat comes up. And being in traffic, you always damage the tires more.

Being second is actually a good thing, I think, because I'm going to benefit from the draft from Sato right away. That could be an advantage.

I don't have a game plan yet, to be honest with you. It's only the first corner in a 500-mile race. I have to be smart, for sure. But the pack is going to come really quickly behind. You know, with that draft for everybody, you end up going into turn one really fast, you could be seven abreast. I'm going to try to make sure we avoid that, and that's really my game plan (laughter).

Q. Looking specifically at the conditions today, how much did they change from morning practice to afternoon qualifying, and even during the afternoon qualifying itself, who went out early and those that went out a little bit later?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, you know, sometimes that's the difficulty of the drawing. You draw your position to qualify. Sometimes you're lucky, you start at the end of the group, of the line, and that's better because the track is better with more rubber. Sometimes you start at the front, like I did in Iowa. That's hang on to dear life for two laps. You have very little chance to get the pole.

It's a bit of a game, an opportunity. But there's definitely an advantage to starting later. You also have time to see what your teammates do so they can help you with your car. You can adjust your car before that.

The conditions are always changing. That's the key. You got to make sure you got a car that can be good in every condition. That's how you can win a 500-mile race.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Simon.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, Indianapolis 500 champion and pole winner here at Pocono Raceway. Last on the qualifying order, but first on the speed chart. Welcome and congratulations.

TAKUMA SATO: Thank you. Thank you. I'm really happy. I always enjoy the track in the past years. Didn't have a win all the time here. Had a difficult experience. But I always enjoy it. That's why putting down on pole here is something very special, especially after Indy 500, coming to another 500 race, with entire crew from the 26 did an outstanding job. Have to say big thank you to Michael and all Andretti Autosport. I am very happy.

THE MODERATOR: Seventh pole of your career, second this season, you got one in Detroit. Another point in the championship hunt. You're still pretty much in the thick of things.

TAKUMA SATO: Yes, I think it's mathematically still possible to challenge the championship, although it's a little bit unrealistic to challenge the winning. But as I said, mathematically it's possible.

We try to get the great points coming out here because I think superspeedway, Andretti Autosport have great history, great start. There's certainly no reason why challenging for the winning tomorrow's race. I don't want to think about too much for the double 500 win. 500 race, it's so long. As you seen today's qualify, anything can happen. I think not only my teammates, but also other drivers have challenging issues today, because of wind direction, because we trim so much.

We see Ryan's moment. Really made my nervous because he was just in front of me. We share a lot of parts and philosophy on the car. So it's directly

expecting what he has is what I have.

Alexander came me before the qualifying, he give me what he felt in lap one to lap two, turn one to turn three. Because here it's a lot of downshift. We had to deal with the weight jackers, had to really work on that. Everything was proactive.

I was able to put down a great lap, and I really have to say thank you to all my team.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. I know you were just talking about how nervous you were. Were you holding your breath during Ryan's run? Then turn one on the second lap, a couple inches from the wall.

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, a couple inches. I get used to that from Indy (laughter). This time it didn't hit, so...

No, I mean, it was actually good. Nice and tidy, and very smooth. But then there are times of tire degradation because, as I said, we are extremely trimming. The car got slide. Into turn one on the second lap, although I did (indiscernible), the car just couldn't make it, so I had to lift a couple of times, quick lift, then manage it, just manage it.

Still I think we kept reasonably good momentum, so I think the second lap was still very fast. I think the car worked really well. I think I'm very fortunate situation.

Q. It looks like your teammate Marco was struggling with speed. Is there any help from your side that he can improve in the practice later on and maybe tomorrow? Also, normally it's not so good to qualify as the last driver. In your personal situation it was maybe an advantage.

TAKUMA SATO: The teammates definitely helping. This is one of the I think the biggest strengths in Andretti Autosport, four guys, in Indianapolis six, as everybody knows. We working all together, not only for the engineering side, but we working as a group. We share a lot of feeling, for the driver's feeling, that's very important.

So Marco had a great run this morning. Alex had a good qualify before us, and he gave me a good explanation. Vice versa, when I had Indy, I think I gave tips. So it's kind of working together.

Really unfortunate for Ryan. I really don't know what happened to him. But seems to be there is some little issue on the turn three.

Other than that, I think the team working extremely well. I think teammates definitely helping.

Going to tomorrow, on pole definitely helping. I don't think this is kind of extra pressure. I'm just enjoying the moment, of course. And one point, you know, for that,

that's very valuable. Most importantly, obviously, how you finish tomorrow evening, that's what count.

As I said, 500-mile race, anything can happen. But nothing is impossible, too. So I try to challenge the win, of course. But we'll see. I just want have a good, fun race so the fans enjoy it and good for the series and good for us.

Q. Many of the reporters here haven't heard from you directly since the Indianapolis 500. I don't know if this has been a life-changing couple months for you, but you've been to Japan, honored in your home country, in Europe.

TAKUMA SATO: It is big life-change moment. I think is significant moment in my life, for sure. Every single day at Indy 500, I was somewhere, flying all over the place, promoting for the weekend, celebrating the victory. So many people came down to congrats. One nice thing, when I go to restaurant, even I didn't order, they get me the milk. The people knows about it. That's so fun.

So we went to the Japan for the victory tour, and that was massive things. As I'm doing helping for the Japan charity, because many of you still remember of course 2011, the massive tsunami and the massive earthquake. Still 200,000 people living outside in the temporary house. It's still massively, how can I say, struggling on the way to recover. We need a lot of support.

This kind of international good news is definitely helping because the last week I awarded from prime minister Shinzo Abe, that was only 33 award in history. I was first guy to receive this in motorsports. The auto racing business definitely great help, great news, spreading all over Japan, helping in terms of the sponsorship, a lot of charity work, motivation.

I personally very pleased to be able to challenge in this kind of great opportunity because really IndyCar made me happen like this. So I'm very happy to sitting on pole today. Not only for that, in entire season, is very special for me 2017.

Q. You mentioned in your opening how you like this place, but you haven't really had the results to show that. What do you need to do tomorrow to have either a win or a good result here?

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, just make sure there is no bad luck first. You know, which is okay, I think the team prepare everything they could. Nothing we can control from that point of view. You just need to survive, to last.

Two years ago I was leading the race till maybe five laps or something. A lot of things happen. I finish fifth or sixth, which was still good. But in the last corner, one little lifting or something, it made you a couple places drop off.

It's a very challenging track, a very fun track for the racing. You never know what's happening till very last lap. So hopefully we are controlling the race on tomorrow, like Indianapolis. Hopefully we are racing in front so if anything happens you can always be better and faster. Make precise way take us to the (indiscernible).

Q. When a driver before you crashes, how do you put that moment behind you and worry about your car and your qualifying laps?

TAKUMA SATO: Yes, it made me nervous. As I said, Ryan and I share a lot of philosophy and setup. What's happen to him is what could happen to me, too. It sounds like he dropped a wheel to the inside of the yellow line in turn three, made the car upset. What made him to do so, I don't know.

Alex commented same story, turn three for him, he was fine, there was no challenge in turn one.

But I don't know. I really need to ask what Ryan say. But anyway, what happened, most important thing, it's not failure, it's not something coming from nowhere, so basically the engineer just go through the maximum data as possible at that particular moment and maybe we back off little bit front wing to little bit secure the rear. That's what we did. The rest of it, we have to adjust.

Q. You went out and had an amazing warmup lap that was 218 something. I think only six cars were faster.

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah.

Q. Did you just have the feeling of the car? Also at Indy when you qualify, you do four laps. What would it be like to do four laps here?

TAKUMA SATO: I think Indy was a little bit more intense in terms of the, how can I say, more nervous because there is four corners and four laps. Here three corners in two laps.

But having said that, yes, while the team cleaning up the track, I had to really feel out the car. Everybody seen second lap is a little bit off the pace because degradation. To make it consistent speed, you have to go relatively conservative in the warmup lap, which is you can't feel the car because basically you down speed and you conserve the tire, and that means you don't know what's happening on that lap.

I did basically kind of draw those line and balance. I need to challenge on the warmup lap, feel out the car. If I can really pull out the big lap on lap one, if I was able to do that, keep going, it's only three corners to go anyway after lap one. I felt that way.

That's why in the second lap in turn one, I didn't make it, I had to lift, not flat. That's maybe because I was

pushing so hard on the warmup lap, because the warmup I push so hard. It's always balance.

I don't know what's the best way to describe, but that's how I feel it. That's everything behind, what happened to Ryan, before I get into the green flag, was a little bit nervous. Once I get in the car, once I driving, I didn't think about anything for that.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.

TAKUMA SATO: Thank you very much.